

Moving Mountains

Mk 11:20-23

Most of Mark's Gospel flows from story to story. And we're up to the second day after Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. But every once in a while, Jesus lays down a puzzle or a challenge. You just have to stop and think about it, pray about it, search the scriptures. I thought this next sermon was going to cover Jesus' teaching on faith, prayer and forgiveness in one sitting. But it's going to take two. Moving Mountains is going to challenge our faith. It's worth it to take extra care to understand what Jesus means as it connects to the rest of the story and the rest of God's word. We begin with a little review of what happened the day before.

Early Monday morning the group had begun it's walk from Bethany to Jerusalem. Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree showing signs of fruit and walked over to relieve his hunger. He found nothing but leaves. Instead of moving on, Jesus cursed the tree in front of the disciples. A hint about God's rejection of a bigger fruitless tree.

At the temple, they reached the outer courts and found much activity, but not the kind that pleased God. No worship. This was supposed to be an area set aside for people from other

nations (Gentiles) to pray to God. Instead it was occupied with the task of selling and distributing lambs and doves for the annual Passover sacrifice at the end of the week. Jesus sprang into action. He must have had a commanding physicality and voice because people just dropped things and moved back. The bible says He drove them out. He overturned their tables and benches - coins spilling everywhere. Yet He did not strike anyone. Instead he taught them. People stayed to listen. What did he teach? **Read 11:17.**

Instead of making this temple a sacred place for all peoples to seek a right relationship with God, it had become a place where robbers felt safe. The phrase 'den of robbers' comes from Jeremiah 7:11. When King Nebuchadnezzar was making his way to Judah, God sent Jeremiah to warn the people of Jerusalem that He saw how they entered the temple thinking they were safe...while their hearts were far from God. Outside the temple, there was stealing, murder, adultery, perjury, idolatry and the oppression of foreigners, fatherless and widows. They had fooled themselves into thinking that as long as they went to the temple with God's name on it and paid tribute...they

could get away with sinning the rest of the time. Jeremiah warned that if they didn't repent in their hearts to God, they would be thrust from His presence and the temple would be destroyed. And just in case they thought God was bluffing, He reminded them of what happened in Shiloh (hill country of Ephraim Judges 21:19) when the Philistines defeated them and took away their place of worship.

Jeremiah's cry was to have faith in God, not their temple system.

Sadly, the people of Jerusalem did not heed God's warning: the temple was destroyed and they were taken into captivity for 70 years.

So when Jesus disrupted the temple business on one of the busiest days of the year to pronounce judgement using the same words as Jeremiah, you could probably have heard a pin drop. Jesus had caught them red handed. The Sanhedrin especially. They were trusting the temple system to make them right with God instead of making Him Lord of their hearts. Some must have been wondering, "Is God going to destroy this Temple too?"

In God's eyes the Temple had become false advertising. Nothing but leaves. Jesus had already exposed the sinful hearts of the religious leaders (3:4, 3:29, 7:6, 8:12-15, 10:5) and He will continue to do so. The Sanhedrin hated Him. The longer

sin is covered up, the harder it is to deal with it, right?

God wants us to trust in Him. To love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. May the chapel never degenerate into a place where people attend just to look religious. Jesus tells us that the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks (Jn 4:23).

So now it's Tuesday morning and they are headed right back to the place that Jesus sent a shockwave. But Before we tackle Jesus' next challenge, let's **pray**.

Read v20-21 How did you do it?

Every time I come back to study this passage again, I get a new sense of irony. It's quite humorous and yet serious. Peter finally responds directly to one of Jesus' miracles over nature. He's fed thousands, stilled the sea storm, walked on water and now when He makes one little fig tree die...Peter wants to know how it's done. In Matthew it says: the disciples saw this and were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked (Matt 21:20).

Maybe this was a small enough miracle they could get their heads around. A bit more manageable than telling a storm to be quiet. We'd be standing there with our mouths open too. People are prone to be drawn in

by the effects. When people see something amazing – unnatural, they are drawn to it. People make a living creating effects for show. A good example in the NT is Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8). When Jesus fed the 5000 in John’s account, the crowds searched Him out again. But it wasn’t a hunger for God...just another food miracle (Jn 6:26-27). Satan knows this too. The Bible says that Satan is a deceiver and the father of lies (Jn 8:44), appearing as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). Back when Israel was still in Egypt, the Pharaoh’s magicians imitated (to a lesser degree) God’s miracles by their secret arts (Ex 7:8-12). The Bible says that in the future - during the tribulation, the Antichrist will deceive many with his displays of Satan-powered signs and wonders (2 Thes 2:9, Matt 24:24). God’s miracles line up with God’s Word.

Instead of seeking signs and wonders, seek after God. Jesus puts it this way...

Read v22 Faith in God

Jesus is concerned His disciples who will later become the apostles to lead the church will place their trust rightly. Not in signs, religious systems or impressive structures of worship with God’s name on it.

The preaching ministry of Jesus began with a call to faith in God. “The time has come. God is on the move right now...repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15) The disciples must have

heard this hundreds of times. And they probably preached it when they were sent out (6:7-12). Isn’t this just a little basic? Yes and no.

What kind of faith? What kind of God? Maybe we have wimpy faith, maybe our idea of God is too small.

We cannot depend on feelings...they come and go. Our own ideas about existence, significance, a higher being, a higher order...all fall short. Our minds are not pure enough nor big enough to think up God. God is already on record. Active from the beginning. And His Word is so powerful...it reads us. Heb 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

That’s why sometimes people tremble within when they hear it.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

So is our God, the God of the Bible...or just a tiny piece? Worse yet...a God pieced together to our own liking? That seems to be the most popular way of thinking now. A little of this religion. A little of that philosophy.

The internet is a very tricky place to get your information from.

The more we know God through His Word, the more our confidence in Him is strengthened. Jesus teaches faith in God before faith in the promise of an answered prayer.

How do we come to trust someone? First it's by family relationship. Parent – child. Then it's by authority:

Teacher-student. And by testing over time: friend/mentor. By seeking to know God, we will find all three ways to trust. For God is a three in One. He is our heavenly Father, our Counsellor (Spirit) and our Risen Savior Friend.

In these final few days before giving up His life as a ransom, Jesus is concerned for His disciples' **relationship with God**. That when the going gets tough, they will hold onto God's truth rather than the effects of their fears. And when power is made available to them, they will be motivated by their love for Him and not pride or revenge.

Another good reason to remind the disciples to stay focused on God is they are headed into a hornet's nest - the day after Jesus' Temple action. We never know what a day will bring.

Start with faith in God in the morning. Now we will turn our attention more particularly to our measure of faith.

Read v23 Startling Promise

I don't know about you, but my faith-o-meter reading is looking pretty wimpy right now. We're being schooled by Jesus.

Why do we want to put all kinds of caution tape around this passage? Because we doubt. And because maybe we're embarrassed it's a Jesus quote that sounds kind of crazy. Like trying to pull a camel through the eye of a needle.

It's supposed to sound impossible. It's also impossible for people to save their own souls. We're supposed to be remembering where we've placed our faith: the God who created the universe by His words, flooded the earth, parted the sea, held the sun still, stopped the rain, raised the dead and at His appointed time - will do away with heaven and earth to form a new one altogether (Rev 21-22). Here's some more crazy true talk. The largest star we know of so far is called VY Canis Majoris – 4,892 light years away. Its circumference is 5.46 billion miles (2000 x larger than our sun). God spoke and that came out.

God's ability is not the problem. It's the thought that God would be willing to let us be involved in directing His work. Especially heavy lifting. Can even an apostle be so tuned into God's purposes?

By His Spirit, God revealed His plan of salvation to the Apostles...and Paul

was able to say that they had the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:10-16). The apostles laid a foundation as God's fellow workers (we have the NT). We are God's field and God's building (1 Cor 3:9). We are not limited by a structure built with human hands that will crumble and fall. But built on the sure foundation laid by Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:10). We are God's temple with His Spirit living in us (1 Cor 3:16). When our whole being is open and exposed to receive God's mighty influence, we are filled with the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16, Eph 1:13, Gal 3:2). The Spirit is given at the moment of salvation to confirm eternal life (2 Cor 1:22, Eph 4:30).

So as His vessels (clay vessels), God is working out His plans and receiving honor. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Eph 2:10

Our mountains...things impossible for us...are God's projects that we get to be a part of.

Do you think Peter and the disciples got this right away? Neither do I. This is the same one Jesus rebuked, "you don't have in mind the concerns of God". But let us never forget Peter left all to obey Christ. He did have faith...faith that saved Him. The disciples finally understood Jesus teaching about God's activity through them after they received the Holy

Spirit. And now we have God's promise in our hands.

Want to exercise faith and get into the action?

It begins with simple obedience. Jesus admired the innocent faith of a child – completely dependent on the parents for food and trusting their voice. We cannot enter the Kingdom of God without that dependant trusting faith in God (10:15).

When we're faced with the impossible, how do we cast out doubt?

Naturally, we want something tangible, something emotional that we can feel. We would rather have Jesus appear, put His arm around us and say something about how everything will be all right. But overcoming doubt is about getting back into faith that only comes from the Word of God. *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.* Rom 10:17

When Jesus uses an extreme to make a point – there's truth behind it. The colossal structure they were walking toward – the temple mount would be turned to rubble 40 years later. And the whole temple system ended.

How can I make my faith stronger?

One of the hardest obstacles we'll ever face is the stubborn heart of a prideful person.

And what will soften such a heart?
Love.

But what does that have to do with
building faith in God's miracles
through us?

Faith is only real when it is put to the
test.

Read James 1:2-4

We can sit up on Red Rock for weeks
building confidence in God's action
through us...but God wants to be
involved in the world. There is faith,
hope and love. But the greatest of
these is love.

Read 1 Cor 13:1-4

Husbands and wives, I have a word for
you. The greatest love is lay down
your life for another person. That is
what Jesus did for you. The best way
to express your thanks to Christ in
your marriage is to continue inviting
one another to faith in Him. Stay in
the word together. Pray together.
Fellowship with other believers
together. Dream and do ministry
together. Spur one another on to love
and good works.

But if we focus on what the other is
not doing or doing, we will not
experience the abundant life. We
cannot expect another human to
complete us like Christ. Instead, if we
draw from the completeness we have
in Christ, God will give us the love we
need to make a great marriage. A

marriage that will honor God and
encourage those around us.

Church, the Lord is looking for good
fruit. May He find us faith vessels for
His great work in Christ.

Next week we will explore the second
half of this passage about Prayer.