

# Standing in the Way

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## I) Mark 11:12-26

### II) Introduction

#### A) *Holy Week*

- 1) If you were a disciple following Jesus on Palm Sunday, you would have probably felt like you were on top of the world. The entrance into Jerusalem was impressive to say the least. Of course, the religious leaders were crossing their arms in disgust at the spectacle but the people practically crowned Jesus king by force.
- 2) But then on Monday, it had to look like Jesus simply lost it. His anger was out of character, his powers were used for curses rather than blessings, his actions were violent rather than peaceful. Maybe it was the stress. Maybe they didn't know him as well as they thought. Or maybe, just maybe they didn't see the situation for what it really was.

#### B) *Powerful prayer*

- 1) At the end of the day, the disciples, including you and me, will discover the kind of prayer that unleashes the power of heaven on the most insurmountable obstacles that stand in the way of God's Kingdom on earth.

### III) Three Stories

#### A) *ABA*

- 1) Chapter 11 of Mark begins by telling us the story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and then makes a radical shift as he describes how on Monday Jesus approached a leafy fig tree because he was hungry. When he didn't find any fruit the disciples heard him say, "No one will ever eat fruit from you again."
- 2) Then Mark changed the scene again to later in the day when Jesus rampaged through the Gentile's court of the Temple and violently threw out the money changers and overturned the tables of the animal merchants.
- 3) Then once more Mark abruptly changed scenes back to the next morning when they were all returning to the city, Peter noticed that the tree Jesus cursed the day before had completely withered and died from the roots up.
  - (a) It was at this point that Jesus took the moment to teach them one of their most important lessons about prayer.
    - (1) *The power of God is unleashed when God's people pray believing that nothing can stand in the way of God's ultimate objective of reconciling the world to himself.*
- 4) And finally, at the end of the chapter, Mark said that Jesus and the disciples re-entered Jerusalem and went back to the Temple where the chief priest, teachers of the law and elders confronted him about what authority he had to do what he did?

- 5) I want us to see how Mark intentionally folded the story of the cleansing of the temple in between the beginning and end of the story of the fig tree. He did this because Jesus wanted to emphasize the gravity of his teaching on prayer through the example of his actions. Do you understand where I am going?

#### **B) Fig Tree**

- 1) So was Jesus losing it? How was it that the one who controlled the wind and waves by his word, who healed the sick with his touch and raised the dead did not know that a fig tree in spring would not have fruit on it. Everyone knew that this was not the season for figs. There are not even any buds on this tree for a harvest in June. This fig tree was nothing but leaves, nothing but show.

#### **C) Temple**

- 1) Jesus screamed out at the religious leaders of the temple who had permitted profiteering by quoting Isaiah,  
(a) *"My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it 'a den of robbers."*
- 2) The parallel is clear. The worship of God's people had become as fruitless as a fig tree that shows nothing but leaves.
- 3) Like Jesus on that day, God is hungry to find the fruit of righteousness and true worship in his people. The holy ground of prayer had been violated by a self-serving, self-indulgent nation that God had no choice but to curse it as Jesus had cursed the fig tree.  
(a) *The empty worship of the nation of Israel and all of its sinful practices had become an obstacle to the Kingdom of God.*

#### **D) Jesus teaching**

- 1) In verse 22, when Peter pointed out that the fig tree was dead, Mark said that Jesus answered a question that Peter didn't even ask. Jesus said, **"Have faith in God."**
- 2) Now this is where it gets good. I've heard the next statement about prayer by Jesus since I was a kid and it created a very powerful image in my mind as to what he meant. See if you have the same image in yours. Jesus said,
- 3) **"Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and do not doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you."**
- 4) I don't know about you, but I can't imagine a scenario in life where it would be necessary to throw a mountain like that into the sea through the power of prayer but wow!, that would really be cool.
- 5) Here's the thing, Jesus was not pointing to the Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps, he was pointing to the Holy Mountain in Jerusalem upon which stood the one of the wonders of the ancient world, Herod's Temple.

(a) *As Jesus and the disciples stood on the Mount of Olives just a few hundred yards from the base of the Temple Mount the object lesson was clear - God would not let an obstacle stand in his way. The dead fig tree represented the dead religion practiced in the Temple. It was a mountain that had to be removed.*

- 6) That's exactly what happened about 40 years later. The nation of Judah withered and died from the roots up. And just like the fig tree, the Temple was destroyed.

#### **E) Believing Prayer**

- 1) Do not misunderstand. Jesus is not telling us that we have the power to do magic tricks like levitating mountains and chucking them into the ocean.
- 2) Rather, we have the authority in prayer, when we believe God at his word, to stand in the way of every evil, injustice, immorality, hypocrisy, heresy, and anything that wars against the kingdom of God on earth.

(a) *Some insurmountable obstacles may not move in our lifetime, but if we believe God, one day it will be removed.*

#### **F) Whatever you ask for**

- 1) Then Jesus "got-down-to-it" and got "in-your-face" with the disciples about what was actually within their authority in prayer.

(a) *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

- 2) The danger when we read this is that we may think of Believing Prayer as a way of forcing God into granting us three wishes or something. If we only believe hard enough, God will bend to do what we want him to do.

(a) *But isn't that what it says, "whatever you ask for in prayer believing, will be yours?"*

- 3) Yes BUT, answers to prayer does not happen because you and I are strong and powerful. It does not happen because we are righteous or holy. It does not happen because we pray really hard to convince God to do what we think he should do.

- 4) Mountains are thrown into the sea when people pray **because God told them first what he was going to do**, and then they humble themselves in the cleansing fountain of forgiveness. They believe that God will do what he said he will do.

(a) *Believing prayer not simply praying believing that God can do anything we can imagine.*

(b) *Believing prayer is believing God at his word no matter how outrageous it might seem because God will not be stopped by any obstacle to his purpose, not even a mountain.*

#### **IV) Believing Prayer**

- 1) Let me give you 4 principles of Believing Prayer modeled after Jesus actions and teaching in Mark 11.

**B) First, investigate and evaluate.**

- 1) The verse just before the scripture that Pastor Craig read is something that I have never really seen as significant before. I'm sure that I have read that verse many times but for some reason I just tossed it into the pile of what I might have thought of as "insignificant" narrative transitions. Kinda like saying, "Meanwhile, back at the ranch" or something like that.
- 2) Following the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, Mark said in verse 11,
  - (a) *Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.<sup>1</sup>*
- 3) It should not be surprising that the first thing Jesus did once he entered the city was to go to the Temple, the center of Jewish life and religion. What **is** surprising to me is Mark's statement about what he did in light of what was coming next. Mark said,
  - (a) *"He looked around at everything."*
- 4) I think we can assume on that Sunday afternoon, Jesus investigated what was going on. He was looking for the fruit of spiritual life in the Temple much as he looked for figs on the leafy tree.
  - (a) *He likely saw the money changers making deals and taking their profits.*
  - (b) *He saw the priests going through the motions of Temple life, performing the sacrifices and various rituals without giving much thought to God.*
  - (c) *He saw the scribes and pharisees strutting around looking righteous and holy on the outside but knowing they were nothing more than rotting tombs on the inside.*
- 5) Jesus looked around and saw everything. In other words, he investigated.
  - (a) *Then Mark said, "but since it was late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve."*
- 6) After Jesus **investigated** what was really going on in the Temple he walked less than 2 miles to the village of Bethany where he stayed the night. He took the evening to **evaluate** his findings and concluded that the religious leaders, priests and profiteers had turned God's House of Prayer into a Den of Thieves. His investigation and evaluation led him to take dramatic action! The one who calmed the storm was about to create one!
- 7) According to Jesus' example, praying a Believing Prayer is not a knee jerk reaction. Before Jesus took action he discerned where the battle lines were drawn with evil and corruption. He did not fly off the handle in the Temple and upset innocent people who just didn't know any better.
- 8) On the contrary, his actions the next day in the temple was a surgical strike aimed at the heart of what broke the heart of God and stood in the way of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 11:11

- 9) Think about how, through investigation and evaluation we might pray differently for:
    - (a) *Our government, our city, our schools, or our neighborhood.*
    - (b) *Think about how, after investigating and evaluating, spiritual discernment would change how you pray for the salvation of a friend or loved one.*
    - (c) *Think about how different your prayers will be for someone caught in addiction or someone victimized by injustice.*
  - 10) Take time to look at everything. Investigate and evaluate.
- c) The second principle, pray with authority.**
- 1) Believing prayer activates the authority of Christ in us. Praying with authority is not a request, it is a command. We do not command God to do anything but rather, in Jesus name we take authority and command the forces that stand against the Kingdom of God. When we pray with authority we dare to speak directly to the obstacle that stands in the way of God's will.
    - (a) *Too often, our prayers are powerless because we are passive and don't claim the authority we have been given in Jesus name.*
    - (b) *When there's a mountain of evil in the way that you know God wants to have moved, command the mountain to move.*
    - (c) *If God has impressed upon you that a spirit from the kingdom of darkness is binding, oppressing or seeking to destroy, take a stand and say directly to that spirit, "in the name of Jesus, be quiet, be bound, go to wherever Jesus sends you."*
  - 2) The second principle is to pray with authority.
- d) The third principle of believing prayer is to believe without doubting.**
- 1) We have to be very careful here to understand what it means to believe without doubting.
    - (a) *Fifteen years ago a good friend of mine was dying of cancer. He had a strong faith in God but in the last stage of his illness, he refused to let anyone visit him who had any doubt that he would be completely healed.*
    - (b) *Unfortunately, my friend's faith was not in the sovereignty of God but in his own ability to manipulate God to do what he desperately wanted God to do. He died thinking that God had failed to keep his promise.*
  - 2) To believe without doubting is to fully submit to whatever God allows even if it is not your will. That's what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. By submitting to the will of his Father, the world was saved even though it meant that he had to lose his own life.
  - 3) To believe without doubting is believing that God may or may not do a miracle. Either way, we believe.
    - (a) *Don't be intimidated by powerful people, institutions or governments that stand in the way of God's purposes. Don't doubt in the darkness what God has shown you in the light.*
  - 4) The first principle of believing prayer is **Investigate and Evaluate**, the second, **Pray with Authority**, the third is to **Believe without Doubting**.

**E) The fourth principle to believing prayer is to Forgive and be Forgiven.**

- 1) Have you noticed that in every kind of prayer we have explored over the last 2 months forgiveness is a common principle in all of them. (sarcastically) Do you think it might be significant? You bet.
- 2) Over and over Jesus emphasized that forgiveness is essential to effective and powerful prayers. Even though the principle of forgiveness here was at the end of Jesus teaching it is one of the first steps we must take for effective prayer.
- 3) In other words, get clean! Don't come to God in prayer with a filthy mind, divided heart, corrupted motives, or diseased value system. Get cleaned up first. Make sure that you have forgiven others and sought forgiveness from others. Come to God with a repentant heart and submissive will.
  - (a) *If you are unforgiving of others, Jesus said, God will not forgive you and your prayers will be ineffective.*
  - (b) *Forgiveness removes the footholds that the kingdom of darkness has in your life. Without those footholds, the devil cannot accuse you of anything that prevents you from taking the authority of Christ to remove obstacles to God's will and purpose.*

**F) Review**

- 1) The first principle of Believing prayer is Investigate and Evaluate.
- 2) Second, pray with the authority given you by Jesus.
- 3) Third, believe without doubting.
- 4) Forth, forgive and be forgiven.

**G) *At the end of the day this is what we must learn, believing prayer unleashes the power of heaven on the most insurmountable obstacles that stand in the way of God's Kingdom on earth.***

**V) Prayer**

**A) *Bow your heads with me.***

- 1) What are the obstacles standing in the way of God's will and purpose that you need to stand against?
- 2) As I name these obstacles to the Kingdom of God, listen for God to speak to your heart.

**B) *Prayer***

- 1) Lord Jesus, as your people we humble ourselves before you and seek you in prayer believing that you are going to do what you say you are going to do. We pray that you forgive us of our sins as we forgive anyone who has sinned against us. Don't let us move on until all footholds of the kingdom of darkness have been removed by the blood of Jesus.
- 2) We take a bold stand now against the obstacles that stand in the way of your kingdom.
  - (a) *Obstacles of luke-warm faith in a world that is frigid to God.*
  - (b) *Obstacles of Christian worship that looks and sounds good but is nothing but decorative leaves and bears no fruit.*

- (c) *Obstacles of a divided heart between what I think and what I actually do.*
  - (d) *Obstacles of putting the worry of money ahead of obedience to you.*
  - (e) *Obstacles of unforgiveness, anger, resentment, or bitterness towards another person.*
  - (f) *Obstacles of pride that prevents humility.*
  - (g) *Obstacles of prejudice that blocks unity in the body of Christ.*
  - (h) *Obstacles of education, resources, or missed opportunities.*
  - (i) *Obstacles of evil agendas of individuals, organizations, systems or governments that are contrary to the word of God.*
  - (j) *Obstacles of the kingdom of darkness that lies, manipulates and twists the truth in order to destroy God's people.*
  - (k) *We stand against all obstacles, O God that get in the way of what you want to do.*
- 3) Would you please stand with me.
  - 4) In the name of Jesus, we stand in the way of anything that is an obstacle to the Kingdom of God.
    - (a) *Go jump in the sea, you mountains of disbelief.*
    - (b) *Wither and die you leafy tree of religious practices, empty of eternal fruit.*
    - (c) *Be healed, be restored, be transformed you ruins of the cancer of sin.*
  - 5) It is by the power of the blood of Jesus that we pray these things believing O God, that you will accomplish through us what you intend to do.
  - 6) We pray this in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.
  - 7) We will close now continuing in prayer. As the song plays, if you need someone to pray with you, to stand with you against obstacles in your life, the Prayer Companions will be standing along both walls to pray with you. I also encourage you to pray with a person or people around you.
  - 8) If everyone prays and no one sings, that would be just fine. Let us pray Believing Prayers that mountains would be thrown into the sea.

**VI) Song: In Christ Alone (video)**

**VII) Benediction**

- 1) By the authority of Christ in you, go and heal the sick, bind the brokenhearted, cast out the evil one and remove every obstacle to the Kingdom of God believing in the power of the cross. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.