

Sermon Title: Israel, Figs, and Prayer
Scripture Text: Mark 11:19-26

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 7-7-19

We come back to Mark Chapter 11 today. I have studied and practiced and taught "homiletics" for a long time; that's the art, the craft, of putting together sermons and delivering them. And I would gladly take a manuscript or a transcription or a recording of the one that you're about to hear, and I could use it in one of my homiletics classes. I would put it near the *beginning* and say, "This is the 'before' version"—now, let me show you how to do it *right*, because I'm going to start, I think, an uplifting and joyful sermon, but I'm not going to finish it, and I don't really have a nice wrap-up for it. So, prepare yourself for a sudden stop; but we will finish it, and I think you will be blessed for what we glean from God's Word.

Today in our journey through Mark, it's going to bring us to something that you probably aren't expecting. In the midst of these pictures of profound judgment on the apostate system of Judaism, and on the temple itself, comes a lesson on prayer which, in a sense, you could lift from its very context, put it almost anywhere else in the New Testament, and it would stand just fine. So it's going to take a little bit of thinking to see *why* this lesson on prayer is here where it is, but it will be a great blessing to you when you understand what Jesus taught His disciples.

Now, it's very important in this portion of Mark, or any of the other Gospels, to remember the sequence of events. We're up to the last week of Jesus's life; the first three and a half years [of His ministry] took ten chapters, and now the last week takes six chapters, because it's very important. Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday—some say Monday; that doesn't really make any difference...it could be Sunday, could be Monday; either way, it works out. But He came in to this so-called Triumphal Entry—people shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9, 15; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)—"We're worshipping the Savior; we're talking about the King, the Messiah who has come." Then, He went into the temple, He looked around and then He left; and that night, He went to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany on the other side of the Mount of Olives, where He spent the nights during that week.

On the way into town the next day, He cursed a fig tree—remember that? And I said, "Save that for later, because we're going to come back to it today." After cursing the fig tree, He went in and He cleared the temple; and those two are very much related—they're both pictures of God's utter judgment on the apostasy of His beloved people Israel. After the clearing out of the Outer Court of the temple, Jesus did several things in the temple that afternoon, and maybe even into that evening, and Mark doesn't record those. But then, they went back to Bethany again. The next morning, when they passed by that fig tree that He had cursed, Peter commented on it. And right then, they stopped, and Jesus gave a lesson on faith and prayer that we will see in a few moments, and that's where we're going to come today.

Now, we're going to be moving ahead—a new day, some parables have been spoken; He's encountered opposition in the temple; He has declared His authority, etc. But when He did that, Jesus said something that was very, very strong. Matthew records it, because Matthew is the one who wrote mainly for the Jews. I want to read you what Jesus had said, probably the afternoon or night before what we're going to see today. Try to imagine what you would have understood this to mean if you were one of the Twelve. As you came into town that day, you

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saw Jesus curse a fig tree, and *instantly*, the tree went from beautiful green leaves to ready-to-be-burned. No transition—just instant, total destruction. Then you've seen Jesus walk in, and you've seen Him clear out the Outer Court of the temple—a picture of the coming judgment. You've seen Jesus stand up to challenge after challenge from the relentless but spiritually bankrupt leaders of the Jews, who were not only *not* glad that Jesus had arrived—they were scurrying off to their little dark corners to continue to hone their plan to murder Him.

So the context has a lot to do with God's plans for Israel. The Messiah has been announced—when He entered into Jerusalem, the city where He will one day reign (Rev. 20:4-6, 9' cf. Zech. 14:4, 16). Matthew has recorded more of what this is than what Mark had done; but after the clearing of the temple and all of that, I want you to see what Jesus said the night before what we're going to see today: Matthew 21, Verses 42 through 44—"Jesus said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures?'"—You don't want the Son of God starting a question with, "Did you never read?"; you're probably about to get a Bible lesson that you would rather not hear, but that's what He says. "Did you never read in the Scriptures"—and then He quotes from Psalm 118—"The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." Is there any doubt that He was talking about judgment—the clearing of the temple, the cursing of the fig tree, and all the other things that He had done?

You see, fruit is always an indicator of salvation and of genuine faith (see Matt. 3:8, 10; 7:19; Jn. 15:2, 8; cf. Titus 1:16; 1 Jn. 2:3-5; Rev. 14:12; 17:14); and He says, "Look, I'm ripping away from you what you think you have, and I'm giving it to the ones who *will* produce the fruit." That's a pretty strong word. Months earlier, He had described, in the Parable of the Soils, how the good soil is proven to be good by the fact that it bears fruit, it yields a crop; and He went on to explain that the good soil is the person in whom the seed of God's Word takes root and grows (Mk. 4:20). So He says, "Didn't you ever read your Bible? Don't you understand this? I'm talking about *you*!"

It'll only be two days later—after the lesson of the fig tree—Jesus will sit around the table with His men after the Passover meal, and He will say to them, among other things, another metaphor on the same theme: "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). The fig tree, the vine—they are both shown to be good by the fruit that they bear. And so this fig tree is illustrating several truths about Israel and about believers. Cursing the tree and cleansing the temple—they are linked, and they are both obviously for our edification, because they are reported forever in God's Word (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

So as I said last Lord's Day: We need to put together this complete passage, even though we haven't fit it into one sermon. He cursed the fig tree; He went into the temple and cleared it out; He did some other things; He came back. Then, the next morning, He taught a lesson about the fig tree, and we're trying to put all that together...And I'm going to swing and miss again on actually finishing this.

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But here's where we're going: It's about Israel, Figs, and Prayer. Remember last time, I said, "Remember this for later?" Well, this time, we begin with: "Remember Yesterday?"—verses 19 through 21. And then, the lesson: "Is Your Faith Strong?"

So, let's start out with Jesus saying, in essence: "Remember Yesterday?" Now, you're a more advanced group than the disciples, so I trust that you really can remember all the way back—not just yesterday, but to seven days ago, when we saw what Jesus did on His way into Jerusalem on the morning after the Triumphal Entry. But, somebody may have forgotten, so let's look at it: Mark 11, Verses 12 to 14—"On the next day"—the day after the Triumphal Entry—"when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again!' And His disciples were listening."

Now, I explained to you that fig trees, I understand, produce figs and leaves simultaneously. Most fruit trees blossom and then they leaf out and then comes the fruit. Figs come simultaneously; even though it's not the season for figs—to harvest the plump, ripe figs—you can still get the fruit of the immature figs, and it's edible; you can pluck from it and eat it. No fruit on this tree—nothing but leaves—and so Jesus says, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again! And His disciples were listening." It doesn't say it in the text, but they *had* to be thinking: "Why is He talking to a tree? Jesus doesn't talk to trees! What's going on here?" Well, Matthew is the one who includes the detail that, not only were they listening, but the fig tree withered completely *at once*—in an instant—no slow dying, no time to say, "Eh, it's looking a little brown around the edges of the leaves..." All the leaves are gone, and the tree is ready to be burned.

That's a pretty dramatic visual aid. And the disciples see the fig tree cursed; they're hearing what Jesus said, and I'll bet they're thinking, "Okay, what do You want us to learn from that?"—and Jesus is heading down the path, walking off into Jerusalem, no explanation! They've had all day and all night to think about it before the next morning. They've seen Him go into Jerusalem; they've seen Him start overturning the tables of the money changers, letting out the animals that were being sold for exorbitant prices to rip off the people who had come for the Passover—it was all a matter of money-making on the part of the corrupt priesthood and those that they sold the franchises to. They heard Him say, "You're turning My house, which is supposed to be a house of prayer, into a robbers' den"—He quoted from Jeremiah; He quoted from Isaiah. It had been quite a momentous day.

Now we're told what happens next. Mark, remember, put it in sequence: curse the tree, clear the temple, come back the next morning and talk about the tree; Matthew doesn't do it that way. Mark 11:19 through 21—we pick it up where we left off: "When evening came, they would go out of the city." So He didn't spend the nights in the city; He spent the nights at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. "As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.' " Now, he knew that—Peter knew that, Jesus knew that; they had all seen the fig tree withered in a moment. But Peter is saying, "Okay, Lord, there has to be more here."

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Now, there's a lot of symbolism connected with that tree. That fig tree had many leaves; it looked beautiful from afar; it looked promising—that's a picture of Israel as a nation that had this impressive display of religion and all of the priesthood and all the sacrifices and all of that, and the beautiful temple...but no spiritual fruit. That fig tree had no fruit, so it was picturing no spiritual fruit coming from the leaders of the Jews. That fig tree was barren. Their religion had become barren; it was *far* from the Scriptures (see Mk. 7:8-9). It was as bad as any cult or false religion anywhere. As a matter of fact, it was *worse*—because it was empty, done in the name of the true God.

So as the fig tree was cursed, so was the nation. God was picturing, through what Jesus did there, that He is turning away from His beloved Israel for her unbelief. That became apparent; Jesus illustrated it again when He cleared out the temple. And ultimately, it was fulfilled in the coming days and years which took all the way until A.D. 70, when the temple would be destroyed and the Jews scattered until 1948 A.D.

That fig tree had withered "from the roots." That's a picture of the fact that Jesus is saying, "What you are doing is *all* corrupt! We're not here to prune and trim and fertilize—we are here to uproot, judge, and replace" (see Matt. 9:16-17). And from that moment—after Jesus went to the Cross three days after this when He was crucified; then He was buried; He was resurrected; eventually, He ascended to the Father—with Jesus's death, everything that took place in that sacrificial system in that temple, from that moment on was *irrelevant*. It was being replaced with something brand new.

The fig tree is cursed. The nation of Israel is cursed. Ah, but in the great faithfulness of God, even though that whole system has been cursed and uprooted and replaced, God has preserved His people Israel. Why? Because He has promises yet to fulfill to them, and their curse will be reversed. God will restore Israel spiritually; she will one day embrace her Messiah and her Savior (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:25-27)—but, just not now.

Now, it's pretty easy for us to sit in our ivory towers 20 centuries later, and say, "Oh, how awful they were!" And I think we would be remiss if we didn't say, "Lord, what's here for me? How can I make this personal?" Does the fig tree in any way picture *you*? Obviously—ask the people who are seeing what we're doing this morning, they would say: "You're religious! Why, you get up on Sunday morning; you make yourself look presentable; you go to church—you have all the external marks of the people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. There's even a cross on the building in which you worship." Well, that tree was also full of leaves, and nothing good was being produced by it.

Is there *fruit* in our lives to match our outward appearance? We would be silly if we didn't ask that question. Do we hate our sin profoundly, and run to our Savior daily? Do we fight the good fight of the faith by standing up for truth when it is assaulted? Do we do battle to remain moral in an immoral world that wants to take us down? Do we make hard decisions, moment by moment, to conform our lives to the fruit of the Spirit? If you read that list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians Chapter 5, that's not some mystical, magical, hyper-spiritual thing; when you read: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

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gentleness, self-control" (vs. 22), listen: You have a choice *every moment of every day* to bear that fruit—by the power of the Holy Spirit, which that passage promises you will be enabled to do—or, you can ignore it (Gal. 5:16; cf. Gen. 4:7; Matt. 26:41). It's our choice. It's *your* choice.

I can give you a personal and perhaps not too deep illustration. A couple of years ago this month, I slipped and fell on a steep hill and I injured my leg. The doctors told me, "Well, the good news is that there will be a full recovery. The bad news is, this is just about the worst thing you can do a leg, and still recover from it. And I remember sitting in that doctor's office, and I was thinking about all the things I was going to do: I planned to baptize some people three days later. I planned to preach. I had a trip planned. I had a lot of things I was planning to do, and I was looking at that leg, with my kneecap down about an inch and a half lower than it belonged, and hearing about the surgery and the four months [of recovery], and I just started thinking of *all these things*—and in God's wonderful grace, I began to think of the fruit of the Spirit: "Love, joy, peace...*patience*"—I got down to Number 4 and I thought, "You know, this is going to take a lot of patience." And I prayed right there: "Lord, teach me to walk in Your patience." There's nothing quite as spiritually uplifting as requiring 20 minutes to get dressed, and usually a helper. That's teaching you patience.

But, you have a *choice*! You can choose to act patiently, *or*—you can get all frazzled about it; in which case, you're miserable and everybody around you is miserable, and you're just as bad off as you were, except you wasted time. Do you understand that? You can make a choice to exercise the joy that belongs to you in the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:1; 4:4), *or*—you can whine, complain, mope, and make yourself miserable. You have a choice—in *every* relationship, with *every* person you see, *every* time—whether you will practice love, or not. It's your momentary decision, whether to practice self-control, or not. Do you understand: People have a right to look at the tree that is you—to collectively look at the tree that is us—and say, "Where's the fruit?"

This is a strong passage—very strong message about fruit and lack of it, about phony faith. But, embedded right in the middle of this, is this remarkably refreshing lesson on faith and prayer. So I want you to join me for a breath of fresh air; it is in the midst of all the lingering smells and the settling dust from the Outer Court of the temple, where Jesus has just cleaned things up. But I want us to move along in our text. So, "Remember Yesterday?"—the cursing of the fig tree. Today: "Is Your Faith Strong?" We come to this other subject, this personal lesson from the miraculous death of that tree.

It's next morning. Come with me to Verses 20 and 21 again; we just saw them: "As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Being reminded, Peter said to Him"—when they're all together, Peter's almost always the one who's flapping his jaws. Peter spoke on behalf of the 12 of them: "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." And I can imagine Peter saying that to Jesus and then grabbing His sleeve and saying, "Don't walk away this time. We want to know about this tree!" They saw it wither in an instant—and nothing said.

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Now, like I said—it's not, at first, really obvious *why* you find this teaching on prayer at this point. It's right in the middle of apostasy and judgment. God is turning His back, temporarily, on Israel; and that's a big deal. So, why do You stop for a lesson on faith and prayer? We're in the midst of unfolding prophecy; later this night, probably, is when Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives and spoke the Olivet Discourse, all about the things to come, and referencing the Book of Daniel and His Second Coming and what's going to lead up to that and what's going to follow immediately after that. And we've already seen the Messianic stuff in the words spoken at the Triumphal Entry. Why, now, this lesson on prayer?

Well, I suggest to you: It's for the benefit of the disciples. This, and the Olivet Discourse, and the stuff around the table, was Jesus alone with the Twelve. Everything else was very public. This is private; this is just for them. Now, obviously, it's for us, too, because it's recorded in the Scriptures (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). But remember that, for about the year leading up to this, Jesus has been concentrating on training the Twelve for the ministries that He's going to entrust to them after His death and resurrection and ascension. It's going to be profoundly different for them to carry on without Jesus present; *therein* lies the reason for this lesson on prayer, and He's going to reinforce it that night after the Passover meal as well.

You're probably familiar with the words of Second Corinthians 5:6 and 7; the context of talking about us either being present in this body or absent from this body and present with the Lord. It says: "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord"—here's the key phrase—"for we walk by faith, not by sight." If you will, the disciples had been able to walk by *sight*; they had Jesus in their sights! It didn't take a lot of faith...Well, it *did* take faith; I'm not saying they had no faith, but I'm saying: they had Jesus present (cf. Heb. 11:1). For three-plus years, they had been with Him almost nonstop, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But soon, He's going away. They needed to learn to trust Him in a *totally different way*. No longer could they just blurt out their questions while they were walking along. No longer could they have a lively discussion around the meal of the day. They would no longer be able to watch Him do spectacular miracles. That's why Jesus inserts this lesson on faith and prayer at this point.

As they walk along, they see the tree; it's withered. Peter speaks up: "Lord, hey, see that tree? It withered." And I'm sure he's saying, "What's up with that? Come on—tell us, Jesus." You can imagine the Twelve had probably talked about the tree after they saw it instantly wither. As I say, I picture the scene in my mind: Jesus says, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you" (Matt. 21:19), and suddenly the tree is completely brown and dead; and I can just see Peter saying, "Well, Lord, what's the significance...Lord? *Lord?*"—as Jesus is walking away! It had to be baffling for them! They probably discussed it. Probably, they figured out: *that* was probably connected with clearing out the temple. Surely they must have thought that, but, what else?

Now, they were familiar with prayer. As a matter of fact, praying several times a day was part of the normal, regular life of any devout Jew. Jesus had taught a lot about prayer during His ministry; we read a lot of it in the Sermon on the Mount, and in several of His parables as well. But, you've got to admit: being in the presence of Jesus must have restrained the sense of

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urgency for their prayer lives, during those times that they were with Him. But in a matter of days, they're going to go from having Jesus present all the time to not present at all. They need to learn to live like believers in all the generations to come would have to live: "by faith, not by sight" (cf. Jn. 20:29; 1 Pet. 1:8). They're going to have to trust what God has given them. They're going to need to depend solely on prayer to access God's power to provide for their needs. So that's the connection we need to make.

They had seen the tree wither; that was a demonstration of the power of God in judgment. They saw Jesus clear the temple. Like everything else He had done, He did that by the power of the Holy Spirit who enabled Him for all things (Acts 10:38). Surely they realized that, if any one of *them* had tried to do what Jesus did in the temple, they would have been arrested! They probably would have been stoned! Jesus did it with such power, with such authority, nobody stopped Him (cf. Jn. 7:45-46; 8:20). They wanted to know how to display the kind of power that God wanted them to display. "How do we access that?"

So I want you to look at the text, and then I want to start to show you the amazing and powerful lessons that you can draw from Jesus's words here. And I'm going to leave you hanging right in the middle of it; but you can pray, and we will pick it up next time. Mark 11:22 through 25—that's the main body of this section here: "And Jesus answered saying to them"—answered what? Answered right after Peter said, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." Now, in the words about to come out of Jesus's mouth, I would expect to hear things like "leaves," "branches," "figs"—something like that. But, "Jesus answered saying to them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.' " There's some great stuff there.

Before we dive into it, though, let me comment on the next verse. Notice, in the New American Standard, it is in brackets; that means something. Mark 11:26 says: "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions." Putting it in brackets means that there's something squirrely about the text from which that is taken. If you have the New International Version, and I say, "Mark 11:26," you're looking at your Bible and saying, "What? Don't have one!" All you have is a footnote at the end of Verse 25 that says: "Some manuscripts add words similar to Matthew 6:15." If you have the old American Standard Version—I doubt anyone does; the most literal translation ever done in English—it has it in italics; that was their version of putting it in brackets, meaning: there's not a Greek text to back that up. If you have the King James Version, it includes it without any comment, just as part of the text. If you have the New King James Version, it includes Verse 26, but it puts a footnote on it that says some manuscripts omit it. Now, that's with a presupposition behind it: "It should be there, but somebody took it out!" The ESV—the growing-in-popularity English Standard Version—ends Verse 25 with a footnote that says: "Some manuscripts add Verse 26." What's going on there?

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This is a classic example of the value of the discipline we call "Textual Criticism." Textual Criticism does *not* mean that you "criticize" the words of the Bible. Textual Criticism is the area of study—almost a hundred percent dedicated to the New Testament—devoted to comparing and evaluating the thousands of manuscripts that we have of all, or parts of, the New Testament. Now, the Old Testament text was very well protected, guarded, superintended—it was only among the Jews. But the New Testament was written over a span of a few decades—several different authors writing in different places—and it was distributed, different books differently; some books sent off this way, some sent off that way, some sent off there, some carried over here...copied there and sent to a different place after it had been copied.

So, you might be rooting around in Northern Egypt and you find a manuscript of a book of the New Testament. I might be rooting around in Italy, and I find a manuscript of that same book. Somebody else might be rooting around somewhere in Iraq and find a place that hasn't been bombed to smithereens, and you find a manuscript of that same book. And we get together and we say: "This is incredible! They agree more than 99 percent!" That's true of *all* the manuscripts; it's that *little* percentage. What about when they *disagree*; and you're reading through yours, and you have Verse 26, and the other two of us don't. Majority Rule, right? Two don't, one does—we win! That's not necessarily the way it goes. But when there is variation between manuscripts, there are principles for helping you decide what the original most likely said.

One of those principles is: Older is better than newer. If your manuscript was copied in the Third Century, and my manuscript was copied in the 12th Century—that's 900 years of it passing through many, many hands and being copied many times. So, everything else being the same, take the older vs. the newer.

But, sometimes that's not the only factor. Another logical way to take it is: Shorter is better than longer. Why is that? Well, no scribe would ever intentionally or knowingly omit anything, but he could add something by way of clarification. We even know cases where we have a manuscript that has just these words; and then later on, we find a manuscript that has these words with a marginal note; and then, we later find a manuscript that has the original words, with the marginal note now having been subsumed into the text. That's called "conflation"—things get added together.

The King James Version is a very, very good translation of the Bible. Sometimes when I say I'm not a fan of the King James, people think I'm sub-spiritual. That's not the issue. I don't happen to speak in Elizabethan pronouns and verb forms, and I don't think you do either, so let's use something that's more close to us. But, if you read something like the New King James, why would they say some manuscripts omit this? Well, they're making the presupposition that the manuscript that was used for the King James in the New Testament is *the* one and only best one! But it's actually a very *late* one, and it has a number of confluents. So, to some people who think the King James is *the thing*, if you don't have something [that is in the King James Version] and you omitted it, you're tampering with and altering the Word of God! That's not the case.

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Older is better than newer. Shorter is better than longer. Here's another one for you: Difficult is better than easy. Really? Why is that? Well, again: no scribe would ever knowingly make something more difficult to understand; it's far easier to understand why they would add something to simplify or modify something to sound more natural. There are other specific guidelines, but trust me: even though I talk about Textual Criticism, we have about 99 percent agreement on everything *anyway*; and then, when you apply sound principles of Textual Criticism, we know, with *spectacular certainty*, what the inspired words of the New Testament are—same with the Old Testament.

So, why is Verse 26 here? Well, Verse 25 is almost identical to Matthew 6:14, which was very well-known; it was part of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew was written before Mark. You'll hear a lot of people say Mark was written before Matthew, and that is absolutely true—as long as you don't pay attention to any *evidence*! Matthew was written first; Mark was written after Matthew, and a lot of people already knew Matthew—they loved the Sermon on the Mount; they knew what Jesus taught about prayer. So, since Mark 11:25 is virtually identical to Matthew 6:14, it's not at all surprising that what's in Matthew 6:15 came to be written as Mark 11:26. There's not *anything* theologically wrong with Mark 11:26—it just doesn't belong there.

Look again how it starts, Verses 22 through 25—"And Jesus answered, saying to them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.' " Now, you wouldn't believe how much ink and bandwidth has been wasted on which mountain and which sea. *Duh!* They're standing on the Mount of Olives—"this mountain"! "The sea"—well, what sea? Now, *that's* a really difficult theological issue. If you're on the top of the Mount of Olives and you have a clear view, you can see all away to the Dead Sea; so He could be talking about the Dead Sea. Ah, but if you turn around—from certain places around Jerusalem, you can see all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, on one of those spectacularly clear days.

And you know what? It doesn't matter what mountain and it doesn't matter what sea, because *it's a figure of speech*! What He's saying is *hyperbole*. "Hyperbole" is where you overstate something to make a point; you say something absurd to make a point, like: "I told you a *million times*, don't exaggerate!" You get it; you understand what hyperbole is. It's like a proverbial statement. What does throwing a mountain into the sea picture? Something impossible! Only one Person could pick up a mountain and throw it into the sea; and He never did, because He didn't do silly miracles just for the sake of doing something without any purpose to it. Ancient Jewish literature uses the phrase "Rooter-up of mountains" as a metaphor for a great spiritual leader, or a great teacher. In other literature, moving mountains is a metaphor for the action of people who accomplish feats or who solve problems that seem to be impossible. So what Jesus is saying is: "I want you to know that you have power available to you through faith in Me. If you sincerely believe what I say, without doubting, you will see the great power of God at work." So, "mountain-moving faith" (see 1 Cor. 13:2) is when you believe exactly what God says, and you *unselfishly want* what God wills, so that when it's done, He gets the glory. You have mountain-moving faith when you realize that God is not limited by your sin; He's not limited by the silliness of man.

Sermon Title: Israel, Figs, and Prayer
Scripture Text: Mark 11:19-26

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 7-7-19

So, the obvious qualifier here on answered prayer is: believe. "Have faith in God." You can ask for anything you want. Now, understand: God is not obligate it to grant your every wish (see Jas. 4:3). He's not a genie that leaps out of His bottle and says, "Yes, my master, what can I do for you?" No, He's God—we're not.

Another way I've described it is that, God is not a cosmic vending machine. Aren't vending machines great inventions? I mean, you don't have to have a store open. You don't need to have somebody there. You can walk up to the vending machine *anytime*. You put in the right amount of money and you push the right buttons, and you get what you want! I mean, you put in the right amount of money and you push C-22, and it's a Snickers! C-23, that's a Milky Way! D-19 is Doritos! You can get whatever you want if you just do the right combination of things with the right amount of money. Well, a lot of people think of prayer like that. "Well, the Bible says, if I believe, ask anything I want, and I'll get it! I asked for anything I want, and I didn't get it! Must have pushed a button wrong." That's not it. Next time, we'll see about what *is* "it" when it doesn't happen the way you want.

But to believe—to have faith—is to put all your trust in God. Make sure that you are desiring what God wants to do. The disciples had already seen the impossible. Remember the day Peter walked on water? The demons had been made subject to them, when Jesus made it so. The blind were seeing. The lame leaped for joy. The mute ones spoke, and praised God. He says: "Believe in God. Have faith in God. Ask, believing." "Believing" means: wanting what God wants, for His glory. It means you don't give up in despair when you don't see immediate results. It means you keep on praying fervently, trusting God to get Himself glory in the manner that He answers your prayer.

Now, listen: I have no qualms about praying for a sick person to get well. I don't like my friends being sick! I have no problems asking God to spare the life of someone who has received a terminal diagnosis—I have no problem with that whatsoever. And you know what? Sometimes the sick *don't* get well. Sometimes they *get* well in a *spectacular* way! People still die. Does that mean that you define God by whether He did *your* bidding or not?

He says, "Have faith in God. Trust *Him*!" The prayer of faith is not motivated by selfish or sinful desires, and it never wants to put God to the test. True faith asks for what God wants (see Rom. 1:10; Jas. 4:15). Therefore, our prayers—our being part of that—that's part of the process of doing anything that God chooses to do, even if it seems impossible. There is a qualification here, attached to getting positive answers to prayer: it's believing. You're asking for what God wants. And we have a really good idea what God wants: things that are true, lovely, right, beautiful, just, holy. Adjust your prayers that way, other than: "Lord, this hurts! Make it go away! I don't like this! Fix it!" Humble yourself before God.

There are other places in the Bible, in the New Testament, that tell you that there are certain things that will accompany praying with genuine faith. It is prayer that is according to God's will (1 Jn. 5:14)—so that means, we need to search the Scriptures to know what God's will is.

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It is prayer that is in Jesus' name (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23). By the way—"in Jesus' name" is not a code phrase for, "Signing off now!" It means: asking according to the wonderful, matchless name of Jesus—all that He is and all that He stands for and all that He wants. That's praying "in Jesus' name," whether you say the words or not. Oh, and by the way: it's not a flippant thing. Go look at Matthew Chapter 6; it's asking, seeking, knocking—in other words, continuing steadfastly. It's also, in other ways that Jesus described it: persisting (see Lk. 18:1). Because, you know what? Do you remember those two spiritual laws? 1—God is God. 2—I'm not. I don't always know in advance, what God intends to do. A friend told me years ago that, when he was a brand new believer, one of the first things he was convicted about was his own kind of disorganized, haphazard way of doing things; and he knew it was affecting his job, and he wanted be a good testimony, so he prayed: "Lord, help me to get organized!" He got up the next morning, went to work, and his secretary quit! Well, you know what? I guess that wasn't the right one to help him be organized! Maybe *he* needed to do something about it. Prayer is the lesser one asking the greater One for help.

"Have faith in God." There's no power in your faith; the power is in your God. I'll pick up and launch into that one a little more next time. And we have a lot more from this text, about how to pray in genuine faith.

Let's pray now:

Father, I thank You for Your faithfulness. I trust that You fill in, in our minds, around and beyond what has been said by this faltering mouth today. But Father, teach us to pray. We know that, that includes praying that "Your kingdom come," praying that "Your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven," praying that we each would walk in spiritual wisdom and understanding, praying that we would cast all of our cares upon You because we know that You care for us; praying always, because there is never a time not appropriate for prayer; praying in the midst of every circumstance, and all things that might happen to us; praying in spite of those things that happen to us, to turn our hearts toward You. So have Your way with us, we pray. Teach us to pray, for that matter. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.