

HAVE FAITH IN GOD!

Ever hear this saying: “**Give** a man a fish and you feed him for a day; **teach** a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Many of us have heard it before, but what does it **mean**?

It means that “it is more worthwhile to **teach someone** to do something (for themselves) than to **do it for them** (on an ongoing basis).” (On-line *Wiktionary*)

That truth can be applied to **more than just fishing**, of course!

--One good application would be **reading**. **Reading to your children** when they are young is a wonderful thing—but **teaching them** to read is even better!

--Another would be **preparing food**. **Preparing meals for children** is a necessity when they are little, but there comes a point when young people should **stop depending on Mom or Dad** to make all the meals and they should learn how to **do that for themselves**—or at least help.

--Still another would be **cleaning up the house**. When your children are young, often times moms—and/or dads—are the ones who do the **majority of the housework**. As the children get older, however, they need to be taught to be **participants**—not just spectators—when it comes to keeping **the house** (or yard) clean!

Not surprisingly, the same **holds true for me as your pastor**. It is important...and necessary...and worthwhile that I **teach you how to do certain things** rather than me always doing them **for you!**

--One is reading...and studying...and teaching **you the Bible**. If the only “spiritual food” you take in is **what you get from me** on Sundays and Wednesdays, **we’re both** missing the boat! Either **I haven’t stressed enough** that you need to read the Word of God outside of church—or **you haven’t listened** when I stressed it—or a combination of both! Part of **growing** as a Christian is **you being able to turn to the Word of God** for yourself to find answers to problems that you are facing in your life.

--Another thing that would be good for me to teach you is how to **share the message of salvation** with unbelievers. Jesus taught His followers to be “fishers of men”—and that the men “they caught” **needed to be taught** how to fish for men!

--And yet a third thing that I need to teach you how to do **is pray**.

E.M. Bounds—the great pray-er and writer on prayer—wrote: “It was claimed for Augustus Caesar that he found Rome a city of wood, and left it a city of marble. The pastor who succeeds in **changing his people** from a **prayerless** to a **prayerful people**, has done a greater work than did Augustus....” (*The Necessity of Prayer*, pg 26). I obviously can’t change you into pray-ers, but I certainly can teach you the importance of prayer!

And so last week we **looked at prayer** in the life of “The Model Mom who Made up Her Mind.” She had a problem that was beyond human help, didn’t she? What was her solution, her plan? It **wasn’t** a 5-step plan—it was a 5-**word** plan! Do you remember what it was? **Bring her problems to Jesus!**

She certainly did that, didn’t she? In spite of Jesus seeming **not to care**—and the disciples being **annoyed with her**—she was determined to **keep bringing her need** to Jesus until her need was met—or until Jesus permanently said “no!”

Did her persistence pay off? Yes—and **no!** **What** did Jesus commend her for? Her **faith!** **Mt 15:28** “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is **thy faith**: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.” So she was commended for **her faith!**

Faith and persistence go hand in hand, don’t they? Faith starts you praying and keeps you praying; persistence proves that you have faith.

Last week I emphasized **persistence** in prayer; this week I felt led to expand more on the **faith** aspect. Please turn to Mark 11; follow along as I read vs 12-14. Now jump over to vs 20 and follow along as I read through vs 24. Title of my message this morning is simply this: *Have Faith in God!*

1. A working definition of faith. The word “faith” carries several different meanings in the Bible. It comes from the Greek word “pis-tis” which occurs 243 times in the Greek NT. Can’t spend a lot of time on this, but here are several meanings paraphrased from Thayer’s Greek Lexicon:

a) A belief in the existence of God and that He is the creator.

Heb 11:3 “Through **faith** we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

b) A belief in Jesus as the One who saves us from the penalty of our sins.

Rom 5:1 “Therefore being justified **by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

Gal 2:16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but **by the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified **by the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

c) The body of truth that is believed by Christians.

Jude 3 “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.”

d) Trust or confidence in someone or something. We saw that last week when Jesus said to the “model mom,” “O woman, great is thy **faith**.”

And that is how it is being used here in Mark 11:22. “Have confidence—have trust—in God.”

Second, let’s consider...**2. The wrong objects of faith**

Are there **wrong** objects of faith? In other words, can we put our faith in the **wrong** things? Yes, we can! **How do we know** we can put our faith in the wrong thing—or person?

Because “Have faith in God” in the Greek is in the form of a **command**. Why is that significant?

--Because—to the best of my knowledge—God never **commands us** to do the things we naturally want to do!

--So if we are **commanded to do something**, it means we naturally want to do **something else** instead.

--And if there is something we **want to do instead**, we obviously have **a choice** of different options!

Stated another way, by Jesus saying, “Have faith in God,” He is implying that we can have confidence in—we can rely on—**other things!** Let’s think about some of the other things—or people—that we can **wrongly trust in** instead of God.

A. Do not have faith in yourself!

Do we sometimes trust ourselves? Way more often than **we should**—and way more often than we **care to admit!** Mark your spot here in Mark 11 but turn now to Jeremiah 17.

--Vs 5. “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.”

--If you are trusting in yourself, you are trusting in man—**even if you are a woman!**

--“Making flesh his arm” means depending on human strength—his own or someone else’s—for protection and support.

Why shouldn’t we trust in ourselves? There are a number of reasons; here are three.

1) Reason #1: Because God says you will be cursed; you will be punished! We see that in vs 5: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man...” That means instead of being **blessed by God**, you will be opposed by Him. You will have chastening and resistance from God instead of **His assistance**.

2) Reason #2: Because our heart is deceitful. We see that in vs 9. **We think we know** the right way—**we think we know** what is best—but if our thinking doesn’t line up **with what God has told us** in His Word, we are deceived!

3) Because the help of man is often not helpful!

Ps 60:11; Ps 108:12 “Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.”

How do we trust in ourselves—or other people?

1) We trust in our efforts to change people; to “fix” them.

2) We trust in our wisdom to solve things.

Prov 3:7 “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.”

3) The worst error, though—the most damning...and damaging...and eternal in consequences—is to **trust in our righteousness**—to trust in our own goodness—to **get us into heaven!** Do people **trust in themselves** when it comes to **obtaining forgiveness** of sins and a home in heaven? They certainly do!

Luke 18:9 “And He [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which **trusted in themselves** that they were righteous, and despised others:”

Not only should we not have faith **in ourselves**...

B. Do not have faith in your prayers!

Do not have faith in **your prayers**—have faith **in God!** Please take your Bibles and turn to where we were last week—Mt 15. Let’s notice again this mom’s persistence.

--Vs 22. “Have mercy on me, O Lord...”

--Vs 25. “Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.”

And after Jesus told her in vs 26 that His priority was the Jews, she said in vs 27 “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Although she is **not taking “no”** for an answer, **her trust** is not in how **persistent she is in asking**. Her trust is in **Who** she is **praying to**—not how long or well she is praying!

I’ve shared this with you before, but I believe it is a good thing to be reminded of from time to time. When the thief on the cross said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,” it was **not his prayer** that brought him forgiveness and salvation.

It was **his faith**—his belief—that Jesus **would save him** that led him to pray in the first place! It was his belief that he himself **was a sinner that needed forgiveness**—and that Jesus had not done anything wrong. It was his belief that Jesus **was going to His kingdom after He died**—and that Jesus had the authority to allow others into His kingdom with Him. So the thief on the cross—in his heart—**placed his trust** in Jesus. And before **he could even get the words of his heart out**, he was accepted...and forgiven...and received by Jesus!

So how do you as an individual **know** whether you are trusting in a prayer—or in Jesus?

Here, in my mind, is a simple test.

--If you are worried about whether or not you “said the right words,” then it seems to me that you are counting on **your prayer!**

--If, on the other hand, **you know** that you asked Jesus to forgive you and save you—and you are **depending on His death** on the cross to pay for your sins—then your faith is obviously in Him!

--And we can have **assurance of forgiveness** and salvation if we **believe what He says!**

John 6:37 “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me **I will in no wise** [way] **cast out.**”

Romans 10:13 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord **shall be saved.**”

I John 5:12-13 “He that **hath the Son hath life**; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. ¹³These things have I written unto you that **believe on the name** of the Son of God; that **ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Let’s turn back to where we started: Mark 11. What are the wrong objects of our faith? **First**, having faith in ourselves. **Second**, having faith in our prayers. **Third**... C. Do not have faith in your faith

What do I mean by having “faith in your faith?” John R. Rice in his book, “Prayer—Asking and Receiving” shared a story about a woman who did that very thing. She wrote to him saying she had asked God for **a baby girl**—and felt that she had **“perfect faith”** so that God would give her a girl!

But—as you have already probably guessed—she had **a baby boy instead!** God **had not promised her a girl**—and it was obviously **not wrong for God** to give her a baby boy. Her “confidence” that she was going to have a **girl was not faith in God**, though. It was faith in **her faith**—or faith in **her prayers**.

Brother Rice then wrote: “Possibly she had prayed and prayed until she felt, ‘Well, surely now that I have begged God so much, He will have to send me a girl. I am going to **believe it and expect it.**” (163-164)

Faith is not conjuring up enough feelings to convince yourself that something is going to happen. And yet—as we look at the passage before us—Jesus certainly **seems to be** saying that!

--vs 23 “For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and **shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe** that those things which he saith shall come to pass; **he shall have whatsoever** he saith.”

How is this different from, ‘Whatever woman shall say unto her body, Have a baby girl, and shall not doubt in her heart but shall believe that those things which she saith shall come to pass; she shall have whatsoever she saith?’

--Or—vs 24—‘Therefore I say unto you, If you desire a baby girl, when ye pray, believe that ye receive her, and ye shall have her.’

--How is it different? Not sure about you, but **moving a mountain** is much more miraculous—and takes a **lot more faith**—than it does to ask God to give you a baby girl!

So how do we properly understand—and apply—verses 23 and 24? We have to keep in mind that they are **conditional**. That means they are not a “blank check;” there are certain conditions **that limit** how we apply them. What are those conditions? What determines **what we should ask for**—and what we should **believe we will receive**? The answer is in verse 22: “Have faith in God.”

So...3. **The right object of your faith has to be God!**

It can’t be **yourself**—or someone else! And it can’t be your **prayers**—or even your **faith!** The object of your faith has to be **God!** “Have faith **in God!**”

How does “faith in God” affect how we pray? On the one hand, it **encourages us to pray big**. Why?

Because... A. God is a remover of mountains

Can God move—and remove—mountains? He certainly can! We see that here in vs 23! God made them, so He can obviously move them! There is **nothing too hard for Him**; He is the God of the impossible (Jer 32:17; Mt 19:26; Lk 1:37). Based on vs 23, does God want us to ask Him to move mountains? **Yes...and no!**

There are certainly times that **our unbelief hinders** the work of God. The Bible says as much!

Mt 13:58 “And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

Mk 6:5-6a “And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. ⁶And He marvelled because of their unbelief...”

And yet, I’ve never heard—or read—of any born-again believers who **work road construction** in the mountains and pray for mountains to be moved—**unless they use dynamite!** So my take on vs 23 is simply this: God can do the impossible—but the “mountain moving” God usually does is in the **spiritual realm!**

There is 2nd way that having faith in God affects verses 23-24. Instead of making “the sky the limit,” though, it actually puts **a spending cap** on “the blank check!” Please know that my goal is **not to discourage your faith**, but we need to understand that God is not a “genie in a bottle” that you can get anything you want from!

Having faith in God is not just about what God **can do**—it is also about **Who** God is; what He is like! How do we know what God is like? How do we know what to pray for—and what not to pray for?

We go to the Bible, right? Why? Because God has told us about Himself there! B. God is a revealer to men

Aren’t you glad God has given us His Word—and has revealed to us what to pray for and what not to pray for? God also tells us **why** our prayers are not answered sometimes. Why does God not answer our prayers sometimes?

1) Unconfessed sin. Ps 66:18 “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:”

Does that mean we have to be perfect to get our prayers answered? Obviously not!

But it does mean if God has pointed out something in our life that He wants us to **get rid of**—and we insist on **hanging onto it**—we can't expect Him to answer our prayers!

2) We ask for the wrong things. James 1:3 "Ye ask, and receive not, because **ye ask amiss**, that ye may **consume it upon your lusts.**" Simply put, our prayers are sometimes not answered because we ask for the wrong things—or for the wrong reasons—or both!

So how can we know what kind of things God wants us **to ask for?** He has revealed that to us, too!

I John 5:14-15 "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing **according to His will**, He heareth us: ¹⁵ And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, **we know that we have the petitions** that we desired of Him."

What's the key? Asking according to His will! How do we know what is His will? Through His Word!

Our faith—and what we pray for—needs to be based on what God says about Himself!

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, be honest regarding who—or what—you trust in to get to heaven!

--If you are trusting in your baptism—regardless of how old you were—you are not trusting in God!

--If you are trusting on being a good person...or being a member of a church...or praying a certain way—you are not trusting in God!

--If you are trusting in doing just enough good things to outweigh the bad things—you are not trusting in God!

God has told us how to get into His heaven—and it is through Jesus only.

He that hath the Son hath life.

Do you have the Son?

2. Second, we have other needs besides salvation, don't we?

--We have financial needs...and health needs...and the need for wisdom

Don't trust in yourself to have those needs met—Have faith in God!

--Faith in God will get you to praying—and keep you praying!

--It will also get you into His Word so you can learn how to pray for the right things!