

JESUS OF NAZARETH IS PASSING BY

An Opportunity to Test Our Faith

I. Is my faith in God's Word or my own reason?

II. Is my faith built on God's Promises or my desires?

Mark 11:12-14, 19-26

TEXT: *The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. ... When evening came, they went out of the city. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 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 him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Why did Jesus say such a thing? *I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* It sounds too amazing to be true even though Jesus emphasizes: *I tell you the truth!*

Ah but He adds this caveat: *and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen...* Here He pits faith against reason. Reason says that only God can move a mountain, but not just because I ask Him to do it. There must be a good and holy purpose that faith sets in to palm of God's hand. God will move mountains and part the waters of the sea to save His people. The Lord parted the Red Sea for Moses and Israel. He stopped the sun in its tracks and the entire universe with it, at Joshua's request.

But what about me? How are we to consider these words of our Savior? We take them as a test of our faith. I. Is my faith in God's Word or my own reason? II. Is my faith built on God's Promises or my desires?

I. People often fail to equate God and His Word. Somehow they think that they can believe in God while separating him from His Word. This is a form of idolatry. The teaching of evolution violates the opening words of God's own account of the creation where all things were created by the power of God's Word. But the godless intellectual elites set aside the Word of God and elevate their own intellectual powers, using reason to explain how we are only a highly developed species of apes. Do you understand now the Scriptural truth that says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* Ps 14? But it doesn't stop there. Paul reminds of the downward spiral of this sin: *Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the*

immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ... Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Ro 1 Let us be careful lest we find ourselves acting like godless fools for not making this equation, that God and His Word are the same.

Scripture does not separate God from His Word. It is identified in John 1 as Jesus Himself: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.* John 1 It was Monday morning of Holy Week when the Creating Word Made Flesh, was on His way to Jerusalem. The Bible says: *The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. ...* Purposefully our Lord does this so that His disciples hear him plainly. Then, Scripture says: *When evening came, they went out of the city. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" "Have faith in God," Jesus answered.* Here is lesson! Jesus is God. Jesus is our Creator. He curses a tree and it dies. His Word is all that is important whether it stands up to reason or not.

Consider what is first of all the most important thing our Lord God Jesus Christ has declared: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Mt 5 Reason says that Jesus has to be kidding. Who can be as good as God? But this same Jesus created man *in His own image*. So when man sinned, death entered the world. Now no one is perfect like God who also has declared: *The soul who sins is the one who will die.* Eze 18 Reason now correctly says: All die, therefore all have sinned; all have sinned, so all will die. *There is no one who is righteous, not even one!* Ro 3 Yet there is something in God that defies all human reason and all comprehension: *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Jn 3 Here is the test: Does my faith rest on my reason or on the Word of God? God's Law demands obedience and reason must finally submit to that truth as death takes every one of us one by one. God's promise of forgiveness, life and salvation through Jesus, the Word made flesh trumps Law and faith rejoices in this saving Word.

Jesus of Nazareth is passing by in front of us today with this portion of Scripture that truly challenges our faith. If your faith rests on God's Word rather than reason, then here is another test of faith: how do you explain what Jesus said next?

II. As they studied the dried up fruit tree Jesus declared: *I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* Jesus clearly emphasizes this with the words: *I tell you the truth* ... How has

prayer been working for you? Reason would tell me, "Oh, I won't test God by asking Him to move a mountain into the sea," (all the while thinking that it won't work anyway). Jesus counters: ***and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.*** So how is your prayer-life coming along? Have you given up because God doesn't seem to stand behind this amazing assurance? Have you gotten lazy in this hard work of trusting God and in believing His Word?

Faith in God and His Word does not mean that reason must cease. Reason is one of those divine gifts that separates us from all other creatures He has made. But reason guided by faith in God's Word will not overlook what Jesus also says: ***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 him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*** All is based on the forgiveness of sins, mine and my heart of faith that stands ready always to forgive others. That heart of faith is a heart that knows how to be reasonable in regard to praying with such boldness and confidence.

Maybe you've not had to move a mountain, yet. Maybe you've not had to part the Red Sea to save God's people. So believers don't pray for that. But what happens when your paycheck stops? It might not be "moving a mountain" per se, unless it is YOUR job that has vanished and YOUR life in the balance. And it's not just losing a job. What happens if God gives you a longer life than the savings you have for retirement? What about healthcare and all the horror stories that are making the news today? Are these not mountains on the shoulders of many people today? Does not the One who redeemed us with His own suffering and death teach us to pray: Give us this day our daily bread? Is not God's promise given to us in writing: ***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*** He 13 Based on God's promises, use your God-given reason to pray to Him in regard to those mountains that He would have you climb during your traveling through this life.

It is a fine test of our faith! Amen