

Praying in Faith (Part 1)  
Mark 11:22-24

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Intro

We have been talking about prayer. To be a real New Testament church, prayer is essential and foundational. Jesus said, *“My house shall be called a house of prayer....”*<sup>1</sup> This is the missing element in today’s church. People interact with people; but are they genuinely interacting with God? We cannot spend 95% of our time with other activities; then tack on a religious prayer for good measure—and call that New Testament Christianity. The engine that drives a New Testament church is prayer. Do you want to solve the mess we have in America? Begin in 2Chron.7:14 *“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray....”* Let me approach that statement this way. “If my people do all kinds of other things (they are friendly and pass out free bottles of water, they have a very talented band, they are socially responsible, they are good citizens, they vote and get involved in the political process)—but they don’t pray—it won’t work! It might build a local gathering of people for social interaction; but it won’t transform lives.

So why don’t Christians pray? Perhaps they tried it, but did not seem to get any results. They’re too polite to say that. But if you repeatedly do something and it repeatedly gets no results, at some point the brain says, “This is not working.” My elderly parents live in Texas. A few years ago I gave them a computer. I had to come back to Missouri when I took it to them, so I had very little time to show them how it works. They fumbled around with it for a few weeks; and then gave it away. The computer did not work for them, because they did not know how to use it. That’s why new computers come with an instruction manual.

For the last few weeks, we have been looking at the instruction manual for prayer. The Bible reveals some conditions that must be met for prayer to be effective. I won’t rehearse what has been said over the last six weeks. I will say that today’s message needs to be understood in connection with those previous messages. There are things we have already covered that I won’t even have time to mention this morning.

Today’s message is entitled “Praying in Faith.” Jesus often explained unanswered prayer as a problem of unbelief. In Matthew 17 the disciples had tried to cast a demon out of a boy. It didn’t work. Nothing happened in answer to their prayers. The father came to Jesus and asked Him to pray for the boy; and Jesus was delivered. The disciples could not understand why their prayers didn’t work. So they asked Jesus why their prayers were not answered. Jesus gave them the reason in verse 20. *“So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”* If we are to operate in effective prayer, we must deal with the issue of faith.

There were also times when Jesus connected answered prayer with the person’s faith. In Mark 5 the woman with the issue of blood was asking to be healed. Jesus said to her, verse 34, *“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”* He said similar words to Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:52). In Matthew’s account Jesus said to the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 21:13 quoting from Isaiah 56:7. All Scripture quotes in this sermon are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

blind men, “*According to your faith, let it be to you*” (Matt. 9:29). Some people in the Word Movement thought every unanswered prayer was due to unbelief. That is not true; and a lot of people were hurt because of that error. On the other hand, faith is a major factor in getting prayer answered. So today we deal with that issue of prayer. I want to share five propositions on the subject.

### **I. Faith is essential for effective prayer.**

Without faith it is impossible to please God.<sup>2</sup> Paul tells us in Rom. 14:23 “...*whatever is not from faith is sin.*”

I want to suggest that there is a difference between “saying prayers” and “praying.” Praying is real interaction with God. “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24) The Amplified says in “*reality.*” The Pharisees were very good at “saying prayers.” Their motive was not right, and they were not actually communicating with God. They were simply going through the mechanics of a religious activity. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us to avoid doing what they did. Matt 6:5-8 “*And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 “Therefore do not be like them....”*”

Jesus is focusing here on the issue of their motives; but notice that they were praying *vain* prayers. They were just repeating words. They thought God might hear them if they said it enough times. But genuine faith in the goodness of God was not being exercised. They were just “saying prayers.” When we pray, especially in public, we need to talk to God, not to people. We may phrase it where they can understand and agree with us in prayer. But the basic purpose of prayer is to talk with God. We are looking to Him for an answer. We are not performing for people; and we are not just satisfying a religious duty.

Prayer is more than a duty; it is a privilege. It is an opportunity to get help. We may have to exercise some discipline to get our bodies to pray and our minds to focus; but we must go beyond just fulfilling a duty. We must come to God believing that He is and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). For our prayers to be effective there must be this element of expectation. For “...*without faith it is impossible to please Him....*”

I. Faith is essential for effective prayer.

### **II. Faith relies on our relationship with God through Christ.**

This is why Jesus taught us to begin with these words, “*Our Father....*”<sup>3</sup> You’re not just talking to a distant Despot somewhere out there in space. You are coming to your Father in Heaven. You are coming to someone who loves you so much that He sent His Only Begotten Son to die on the cross for you. He is not stingy with His love; and He is not stingy with His answers to prayer. It is His good pleasure to give you the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> So Jesus says to us,

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:6 says, “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for He who comes to God must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*”

<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:2

<sup>4</sup> Luke 12:32

“...ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you.” Then Jesus reasons with us this way. “Luke 11:11-13 *“If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”*”

This is Prayer 101. It is the undergirding of praying in faith. I must understand who I am talking to. I must understand the relationship I have with Him through Christ. And I must understand His willingness to give me the kingdom.

So instead of just jumping in and telling God everything I need from Him, I begin with “*Our Father...*” I allow the revelation of that relationship to cultivate faith in my heart. I believe God will answer my prayer because of who He is and what my relationship with Him is. Cultivating faith in the heart is based on truth as revealed in God’s word. It’s not that I just “try” to have faith. I inform my heart of this reality and allow that truth to build confidence and expectation.

In John 14:13-14 Jesus said, “*And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.*” What does it mean to ask in Jesus’ name? Is that a magic incantation we tack on the end of our prayers to make it work? No, Jesus is saying that we come to the Father on the basis of what He has done for us. On the grounds of the legal claim to inheritance that He graciously shares with us, we ask. We do not ask on the grounds of how nice we were last week. That’s filthy rags compared to what Jesus has done in our behalf. The cross of Christ has brought us into the family of God. We are joint heirs with Christ.<sup>5</sup> As God’s sons we are expected to behave responsibly in submission to the Father. But we have also been granted privilege as signers on His eternal bank account. We can ask and receive because we are authorized by our relationship with Him to do that. It happens because of Jesus.

We said first that faith is essential to effective prayer. But that raises the question of how do we operate in this faith so that our prayers are answered. Part of the answer is understanding and resting in this second proposition: Faith relies upon our relationship with God through Christ. In order to do that, we must (1) know what our relationship with God is, based on Scripture (2) then ponder those facts in our hearts so that faith is cultivated based on those truths (3) come to God in prayer expecting to receive out of His goodness.

II. Faith relies upon our relationship with God through Christ.

### **III. Faith must be rooted in the heart.**

Turn with me to Mark 11.

On their way from Bethany to Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. In the distance He could see a green fig tree. Fig trees first form their fruit, then the leaves.<sup>6</sup> So He had every reason to expect figs on the tree. But when He got to the tree there were no figs. Jesus spoke a curse over the

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:15-17

<sup>6</sup> New Spirit Filled Life Bible, Jack W. Hayford, Exec. Ed. (Thomas Nelson Bibles, 2002) p. 1329: note at Matt. 21:19.

tree. We won't take time to explain why He did that.<sup>7</sup> They went on into Jerusalem; and Jesus drove the money changers out of the Temple. The next morning, Jesus and the disciples are walking back to Bethany when they pass the fig tree again.

Peter is shocked to see that Jesus' prayer is already answered. The tree has dried up and withered. Then Jesus gave this instruction concerning prayer.

Mark 11:22-24 *"So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."*

(1) In verse 22 Jesus tells us where our faith must be placed: *"Have faith in God."* It doesn't say, "Have faith in faith." It doesn't say "Have faith in all the principles of faith you have learned." The faith must be placed in a Person. That Person has the right to decide what He will do. He's not a divine vending machine that you place your faith coins in, pull the lever, and get your answers. Prayer is not just a matter of operating in the right principles. Prayer is a relationship with a Person. We are teaching principles in this series. It helps to understand some principles that God has revealed in His word. But when you pray, you are relating to a person who will interact with you as His child. In the Word Movement,<sup>8</sup> there were some helpful, valid principles taught. But there was a tendency when people learned those principles to put their faith in the operation of the principles rather than in God Himself.

(2) Note the phrase in verse 23, *"...and does not doubt in his heart...."* The heart is where the real action is! We will talk in a few minutes about our words. Our words matter; but they must proceed from the heart. Faith is something more complicated than just talking positive. It goes deeper than positive thinking, although there is a value in thinking and talking positive.

Earlier we talked about pondering truth in our hearts as a way to cultivate and nurture faith. God is my Father and it is His good pleasure to give me the kingdom. I need to know that fact intellectually before I can go further with it. But I need to go further with that truth. I need to meditate on that truth. I need to ponder its importance for me. I need to let it soak in deeply so that it's no longer just an intellectual fact. It is real in my heart. I am relying on its validity. I am even delighting in its reality. I am believing God is hearing me when I pray, because in my heart—in my heart—I know who I am in Christ and what my relationship is with God.

It's not that I focus on "not doubting." Trying to "not doubt" is like trying to not think about a pink elephant. When I think about not thinking about it, I find myself thinking about it. Faith does not come by trying to not doubt. Faith comes by knowing what God has said and letting that reality permeate our hearts. The more I know down deep that God loves me, the more expectant I am that He will answer my requests. The more intimate my relationship with Him, the better I know Him. The better I know Him, the more expectant I am that He will do what He has said He will do. The point I'm making right now is that it all flows from the heart.

Rom 10:8-10

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. This was a prophetic picture of the judgement that had come on Israel for the nation's unfruitful profession of faith.

<sup>8</sup> Like any movement, the Word Movement had both strengths and weaknesses. Our aim is to simply learn from past experience.

*“But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

Praying in faith involves the mouth; it involves the mind; but at a deeper level it involves the heart. The heart is difficult to define. The term is used various ways in Scripture. Perhaps an alternative term would be your “innermost being.” Vine’s Expository Dictionary says, “The seat of desire, inclination, or will can be indicated by “heart”.”<sup>9</sup> When we talk about faith we have to go deeper than intellectual knowledge and mouthing words.

(3) Verse 23 goes on to say, “...but believes that those things he says will be done....”

Believes from the heart, not just in the head! For that to happen we need revelation from God. Usually, revelation comes as we relate to God, as we commune with Him in our hearts. The revelation is always rooted in what God has said in His word. But we can’t know that word through natural means alone.

Paul talked about that in the first couple of chapters of 1 Corinthians.

1 Cor 2:6-12

*“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

*10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*

Paul is saying:

(1) The things of God cannot be known if all you’re using is your 5 natural senses. *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man....”* Truth cannot enter the heart (the deepest part of us) through natural perception alone. The real kernel of truth must come via revelation. Later in verse 14 Paul says, *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* This is why intelligent people who can teach theology in universities may not know God at all. This is why a person may know a lot of Scripture intellectually and really not benefit from it spiritually, if the heart is not open to its influence. The spiritual benefit comes only through revelation.

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<sup>9</sup> HEART O.T. Word (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

Sadly most Christians stop reading right there and miss the next point Paul is making.

(2) vs 10 "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit...." The natural man can't discern it or know it; but the inner man that is open to God can receive it. Receive what? A revelation of "*The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" What has God prepared for you? Let me bring it down to the here and now. There is an inheritance in heaven prepared for us. It's good to know that is there. It fills us with hope even in the face of death. But what has God prepared for you in the here and now? When a revelation of a piece of that hits your heart, you have faith to "*believe that you receive them*" (Mk 11:24). You are empowered from the heart to expect the answer without question. This is why time with God is so important. Usually the revelation comes through intimacy with God.

Verse 12 "*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*" Once you know in your heart that a thing is freely given to you; then you can pray *believing you receive it*. Then you're not trying to make yourself believe—you believe because of what you have heard in the Spirit.

#### **IV. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).**

The hearing needs to happen in the heart. Just hearing in the ears is not enough. That is normally the preparation for hearing it at a deeper level. So what can we do to receive the word of the Lord in the heart?

(1) We can choose to open our hearts to God. This is a matter of the will. The Bible says Pharaoh hardened his heart—another way of saying he closed his heart to the Lord. He heard what Moses said at a natural level; but refused to allow it to touch him at a deeper level of the will.

(2) We can take the word of God into our minds just as you are doing this morning. Paul asked the question in Rom 10:14 "*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*"<sup>10</sup> but on the whole people need to hear truth in their natural ears and minds before they can embrace it in their hearts. So the more we take in the Scripture the better.

(3) When we read a promise in Scripture we can choose to take God at His word. If God has said it in His word, then He will honor it in your life. That choice opens the heart to further revelation. To read a promise and choose to not believe, closes the heart. In Zephaniah 1:12 God said that He would punish the men "*...Who are settled in complacency, Who say in their heart, 'The LORD will not do good, Nor will He do evil.'*" In other words, these men had chosen to not believe that God would do anything. We want to do the opposite of that. As Paul put it in 2 Cor 1:20 "*For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen...*" (KJV).

(4) We can put more confidence in what God says than in what our natural senses tell us.

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<sup>10</sup> I heard the testimony of a former Muslim who came to Christ through a supernatural dream; but this is rare.

Come back with me to the fig tree that Jesus cursed. What happened when Jesus said that prayer? Nothing visible happened. Matthew doesn't give the time detail and just says the tree immediately withered away (21:19). But Mark tells us more specifically how it happened.

The day after Jesus cursed the fig tree they were on their way back to Bethany from Jerusalem. Peter saw the tree and was surprised that it had withered. That tells me that the withering was not evident the day before when Jesus spoke the curse over it; it looked no different at all. If you're going only by what you can see, you would conclude the prayer didn't get answered. But Mark tells us that the tree dried up "*from the roots.*" The moment Jesus spoke that prayer things began to happen, under the surface. But the visible evidence of the answer was not until the next morning.

This is very often the way it works when we pray. The visible evidence of answered prayer usually does not immediately manifest. If we don't understand this principle, we can abort our answers because of unbelief. If we are relying upon our natural senses to tell us whether God is answering our prayers or not, we will often abort the answer while it is taking place. God will be drying up the problem at the roots; we will be looking and seeing no change; we will assume nothing happened and stop believing—which will abort the process. Jesus speaks the curse over the tree, walks on knowing in His heart that the Father is answering His prayer, proceeds with His other responsibilities, comes back by the next day and sees the manifestation of the answer.

I have seen instant manifestations of answered prayer. I have seen instant miracles and many of you have as well. But those have been by far the minority compared to the many answers to prayer that didn't manifest immediately. If you ask the Father, and you see no immediate manifestation of the answer; will you continue to trust God is working the answer out in your behalf? Will you continue to believe even when your natural senses can't see any difference?

Will you take God at His word?

#### **V. Faith must be accompanied by appropriate actions.**

(1) Our works must be consistent with what we choose to believe. James 2:26 says "...*faith without works is dead...*" He is not comparing a works system of salvation to a faith system of salvation. He is saying that faith is more than an inner conviction. It begins there in the heart. But if it's the real deal, a person's action will follow in accordance with that conviction. If I believe God is going to give me a job, then I will get up off the couch and apply for a job. I will act in accordance with what I believe.

(2) Our words must also be consistent with what we choose to believe. I don't think we have to be real showy about that or religious about it. But we do need to confess God's faithfulness and not talk ourselves out of the blessing. Words are powerful. God spoke the universe into existence. In Mark 11:23 Jesus said, "*For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea...*" Words are an important part of the process. It was even important in your salvation experience. Rom 10:9 "...*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart...*" I talked a lot about believing in the heart; I don't have time to talk much about confessing with the mouth. But that is also important.

I. Faith is essential for effective prayer. We have to address this factor in our study of prayer.

II. Faith relies upon our relationship with God through Christ.

III. Faith must proceed from the heart.

IV. Faith comes by hearing the word of God.

V. Faith must be accompanied by appropriate actions and words.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Since much of the latter half of this message was not covered in the oral delivery, it will be dealt with in Part 2 on January 10, 2016.