

The Look of a Disciple

I. "Prayer: Hope or Belief"

Mark 11: 12-14, 20-26



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¹²The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³Seeing 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. ¹⁴Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

²⁰In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" ²²"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³"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. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

We are starting a series today entitled "The Look of a Disciple." I think many of us really don't know what a true disciple of Jesus Christ looks like in the world today. When you join this community of faith you make a promise to uphold it by your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service. That is what a true disciple of Jesus Christ looks like and I want to discuss each of those qualities over the next few weeks in addition to a few other ideas.

In the scripture today we are going to look at the power of prayer. Here we find Jesus and His disciples are winding their way back over the Mount of Olives most likely taken the same path back they had traveled the day before in going to Jerusalem. They passed that same fig tree Jesus had cursed for not bearing fruit and the disciples saw it withered and dead. Now there is so much we can learn from the fig tree itself but that is not where I want to focus today. I want to focus on the reaction of the disciples and the response of Jesus to his disciples.

Isn't it just like one of the disciples and one of us, to be astounded and amazed at the power of Jesus. No matter how many times we see and or experience the power of our living God we react with astonishment. How often do we "hope" that God will work in our life but never fully believe that He will? However, when we are asked about our faith, or offering advice to others about faith, we seem to be so strong. "Well, just have faith and God will come through for you." Or, "If you have faith you can do all things through Jesus Christ." Boy, that's not much comfort when it seems the mountains of problems are crashing in on you. That is where the response of Jesus comes in. Look at the passage again...²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

We have three responsibilities in praying to God:

1) **Your first responsibility is that your prayers must be filled with Faith.**

The phrase about moving mountains was a very common Jewish phrase about *removing difficulties*. The interpretation of the phrase means that if we have real faith, prayer is a power which can solve any problem and make us able to deal with any difficulty. Now, that sounds simple. “Just have faith!” But having that powerful faith means two things:

A) Take your problems to God. We should be willing to take our problems and difficulties to God. That in itself is a pretty real test. I am guilty myself of asking God to answer my prayers with just the answer I want. The problem is that the world often wishes to obtain something it should not really desire or to be able to do something that it shouldn't be doing in the first place.

B) Be ready to accept and follow his guidance and direction.

Having that powerful faith also means to be ready and willing to accept God's guidance when he gives it. The most common problem with prayer is that people ask God for guidance, wisdom and answers and really all they want is permission or approval for some action they are determined to take.

We have three responsibilities in praying to God:

2) Your second responsibility is that your prayers must be filled with belief.

Why would you pray with any other expectation but belief? Do you go to the doctor's office with the belief in mind that they will do nothing for you? Do you go on vacation with the expectation that you will have a rotten time? Do you enter into a relationship with only the hope that you might find someone who will not ever listen to you and not support you? The way we approach so many circumstances in life is the same way we should approach God. We should approach Him with the belief that He is going to hear us and give us His answer. *“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. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

Now did you hear me when I said that He will give us *His* answer? **When you pray, God will give you HIS answer.** I firmly believe that God always answers my prayers. Always and without any doubt, He answers my prayers. Are they always the answers I want to hear? No. Do they disappoint my worldly desires? Sometimes. Are they always logical in my mind? No. Do they steer me in the direction of God's will? Yes – If I trust and obey. But, are they His answers? Yes.

Somewhere I either read or saw a movie where two scholarly people were discussing their thoughts on prayer and they began to tell a story of two men walking on a sidewalk and one walked under a ladder. As he did so and came out on the other side he raised and tipped his hat in following one of the many superstitious customs when walking under a ladder. His friend exclaimed, “It is impossible that you should believe such nonsense!” The man in question here replied, “No, I don't exactly believe in it, but I never throw away a chance.” The response of the discussion was this: “I think, sir, that most people pray on my friend's principle – they don't exactly believe in it, but they never throw away a chance.”

I believe there is a whole bunch of truth in that – don't you? Prayer should be filled with the burning expectation of belief, not a self-righteous ritual or disgraceful hope.

We have three responsibilities in praying to God:

3) Your third responsibility is that your prayers must be filled with intimacy.

Now intimacy does not mean that you have to get all outwardly emotional, teary-eyed, and begin to wail your prayers to the heavens. Intimacy simply means that you have a relationship of closeness with our Lord.

Just as there are so many ways people express emotions and love to one other there are just that many ways to express your love to God. You have to have a connection with God, a bond, a relationship before you can have that intimacy we just discussed. Imagine walking into a bank and asking a loan officer, a total stranger, for \$15,000. They don't know you from Adam and most likely will be cold hearted and send you away. But, if you have a long standing relationship with a banker, who you can call a friend, who you have known for years and knows you family, will probably answer your request without any hassle. At least that is my experience in life with my financial institution. The same goes for my relationship with God. When I have that longstanding relationship with Him and communicate regularly with Him I find that my conversations with Him seem much easier. I feel that my lines of communication are more open and that I am freer with Him. But there is one emotion that can get in the way of your relationship with God, and hinder your prayers, is bitterness. Look at the final verse of our study today: *“²⁵And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

Just like that banker relationship, if I have not taken care of my business and cleared my name of bad debts and outstanding obligations, then that banker isn't going to be able to help me as easily. **Take care of your business in forgiveness.** With God, I have take care of my business, to have my name cleared, my obligations taken care of and not hold anything against anyone before He can fully answer me. The principle of God is love, for He is love. IF the ruling principle in our heart is bitterness then we have erected a wall a barrier between ourselves and God. We must forgive and ask to be forgiven before we can openly communicate with God and He can openly communicate with us.

Your prayers must be filled with Faith. Take your problems to Him and be ready to accept and carry out his direction.

Your prayers must be filled with belief. Expect to hear His answer.

Your prayers must be filled with intimacy. Tear down the barriers which hinder your prayers. Give up the bitterness and get closer to God.