

**Have Faith in God**  
Harmony M.B.C., Nov. 4, 2012  
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**Mark 11:22** And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

**Mark 11:23** 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.

**Mark 11:24** Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.

Christ's message to His disciples speaks to an issue that challenges the Lord's people in all generations. We can't help but notice the spiritually elevated lesson taught by Him in these verses. But, at the same time, we are struck with how far below the bar set by Him both our expectations and our outcomes fall. We want to find the place where the mighty things He speaks of come true in our lives, and we want to discover the level of faith that He describes. But, we are always faced with the reality that we fall so far short of this that the very failure itself seems to stand like a brick wall that we hit.

Today, we want to ask some questions about the way we may look at this great teaching, and trust that God, the Holy Spirit will help us understand Jesus' lesson better, and come away with a better understanding about how to approach the Lord, having faith when we do.

Let me say here that Christ is talking about an aspect of faith in this lesson that we sometimes fail to see. We are all to prone to think of faith in terms of trusting the Lord for salvation, and that is part of it. But, in the Lord's teaching here, He is talking about that confidence and trust in God related to how He wields His power...how He acts. So, Jesus is saying, "Be confident concerning God acting in your behalf and based on your positive approach to Him about some matter."

I. "Have faith in God." If we say we have faith in God, is it then an act of not having faith to pray that He will change the direction of events? In other words, if we really have trust and confidence in God, is there any reason to ask for change? I want to give you a kind of rule to use when you start thinking about this. Rule: remember that God does everything perfectly; everything is in balance; but creation is not in balance, and everything in creation is not running like a well-oiled clock.

- Let's relate this question to something in real life. We are just now going through a horror in our country where we recognize that the general and spiritual welfare of this nation will literally be decided by this upcoming election.
  - Some of us are asking God to change things and steer us back to a place where He can bless us again. We are asking Him to intervene to rid us of wicked men who hate Him, some of them pretend to serve Him, while at the same time promote things that He hates, things that are an abomination to him, and things that He has always brought judgment on a nation because of.
  - Now, within the framework of our present situation, let's test our Savior's teaching here by looking at how we should see His lesson.

- Having faith in God is about trusting that he will do the right thing for His people and His creation. Right?
  - So, do we simply sit back and say, “there’s no need to talk to God about it, to ask God for a certain outcome; to ask for a change; let’s just sit back and let him do as He pleases?”
  - I want to answer the question and help us examine whether this kind of attitude is right or not by looking at some facts about Jesus teaching and by looking at examples where people of God came to such a place as this. We want to see what they did and see if just sitting back is right, or see if trusting God to do the right thing is more than that.
  - First, what about the facts surrounding Jesus statement and promise.
  - Notice that the instruction to have faith in God is **inseparably connected with exercising an action born of that faith.**
    - ✓ That is to say, He doesn’t say, “Have faith in God, and the way you do that is to just sit still, be quiet, don’t go to God to pray about changing anything.”
    - ✓ What He does say is, “Have faith in God. And, truly I tell you that **if you BELIEVE** certain impossible things will come to pass, **then they will.** And, **when you pray** for something, go with this attitude of having **faith** in God, and **you will have** what you desire.”
    - ✓ This connection Jesus made between having faith in God, and with that trust and confidence, going ahead and believing in and asking some impossible things makes **a connection between faith and asking with believing** (have faith in God). This should make us all realize that He is teaching us a very specific lesson:
      - That lesson: The kind of faith He is talking about is that complete confidence in God concerning approaching Him with our wishes. (Granted, there are some things about faith that causes us to just be quiet and let God act, but here, in this lesson, **it is about using faith to approach God about things we desire, and having those things.**)
- Now, let’s look at some examples that strengthen this idea. I will use two: Example One: See **Exodus 32:10-14**
- It appears God’s intent is to destroy Israel
  - The intercession of Moses should be seen as an act of having faith in God (that is, confidence and trust that he can ask and have)
  - Moses knew God would do the right thing; but among the right things of God I believe there are options with Him.
  - It would have been right for God to destroy Israel
  - It was right for God to spare Israel
  - Are the two possibilities contradictory? No.
  - Having faith in God allows us to be interactive with God in determining outcomes - this is a precept of faith, and we should never let our knowledge that God is omnipotent, sovereign, and immutable (all powerful, does as He pleases, and does not change) get in the way of calling upon Him...in faith...asking Him to take an action that can glorify him and bless His people
    - ✓ Note here: We sometimes get so hung up on the unchangeableness of God that we

forget that these things like Moses was pleading for do not change God...they change the things that are operational in creation and time. God changed creation when He said "let there be light." He changed creation when he made man. And when He stoops to change the direction things are going in among men, He remains unchanged.

- Example Two: See **Acts 12:1-11**
- What do we see here?
- God had permitted that Peter be locked up.
- It was in Herod's heart to kill him (he had seen how it pleased his citizens to kill James, so he was planning the same thing for Peter)
- What must the church have been praying?
  - We don't have in information about the specifics of the praying, but I can tell you by understanding God what they were praying for.
  - They were praying for Peter's release. The only element in this situation that is the variable (from our perspective) was the praying of the church (we knew the prison was secure; the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison; we knew Herod had every intent of keeping him imprisoned until he could have him killed)
- So now, back to the fact about faith in God and the answer to the question we asked. Now, we want to base our answer on these two examples: Having faith in God is about trusting that he will do the right thing for His people and His creation. Right?
- So, do we simply sit back and say, "there's no need to talk to God about it to ask God for a certain outcome; let's just sit back and let him do as He pleases?"
- Based on what Jesus is teaching, and what our two examples teach, the answer is "no."
- It is one thing to be satisfied with everything going on around us, because don't want anything to change; it is another thing to be passive when we have longings for the Lord to change something, but neglect to go to Him having faith.

### **BEGIN NOVEMBER 11, 2012**

Last week we looked at a question that comes up when we say we have faith in God. The question: if we have faith in God, and we ask Him to do something to help our situation, or to improve circumstances, are we showing lack of faith by asking such things? (Remember that having faith in God means we trust Him to do the right thing. So, if He's going to do the right thing, why ask Him for things?)

Our answer to that was that according to God's own record, He desires and commands us to pray and ask for things. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee." (**Jer. 33:3**); "Pray without ceasing." (**1 Thess. 5:17**); "Ask and it shall be given you...." (**Mat. 7:7**) "...men ought always to pray, and not to faint." (**Luke 18:1**).

Further, we pointed out that God co-ops with his people to bring to pass things He has decreed (Joshua prayed and caused the sun to stand still; Elijah prayed and it did not rain; then prayed and it rained; the Jerusalem church prayed and Peter was snatched from prison).

Illustrate: A man decides to build a house; he has the lumber, the spot to build it on, the foundation is laid, so what does he do? He picks up a hammer and saw, and starts to work. The man has just made himself and that hammer and saw a cooperative combination to get that house

built. Picture the hammer and saw as the prayers of the saints, the carpenter as God...there you have the way God builds a “house.” It is not the hammer or saw that builds the house, nor the hammer and saw that have the power to accomplish the building...but they are an integral part of the house building project. That builder has channeled his building efforts through that hammer and saw. Just so, our prayers are an integral part of God’s doings in many matters.

We can figure out from bible accounts that God does this in relation to many things that affect mankind. So, both the Lord’s command to pray and the fact that He interweaves the prayers of believers with the doing of things rules out the idea that it is lack of faith to ask for something to change.

II. Now, concerning having faith in God, what should we demand of ourselves when we have that faith? How should this go forward?

- Having faith in God helps us to be specific in our requests to the Lord.
  - Back to Moses begging about the children of Israel; he was specific, (**Exodus 32:32**) “Yet now, if thou wilt **forgive their sin**--; and **if not, blot me**, I pray thee, **out of thy book** which thou hast written.”
- Having faith in God should encourage us to expect great things of God. God is larger than our highest possible imaginations!
  - Joshua expected that God could and would make the sun stand still while he fought God’s battle (**Josh. 10:13**).
  - Peter expected that the Lord could and would suspend the natural laws of physics when he stepped out of that ship (**Mat. 14:28**)
  - Peter and John expected that the Lord could and would mend dysfunctional legs when they declared to the lame man that in the name of Jesus Christ he could stand and walk (**Acts 3:6**)
  - Notice (**Mk.11:23-24**-our text) how large our expectations should be: “...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. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.”

III. We need to now deal with the issue of our own disappointment when we have prayed, thinking that we were in the right spiritual condition...that we had faith in God...but the prayers went unanswered. This is a huge issue, and probably always has been.

- First, we have to give our faith (and asking by faith) the acid test: (remember that faith in this context means confidence, trust in the Lord for that which we are expecting)
  - First test it with the rule related to motive - why are we asking for something?
    - See Jas. 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.
  - Second, test it using the Jesus test (from our text): “**What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.**”

- This may be the hardest part of praying in faith. We find every reason for why we should not be granted what we ask for; we sometimes think we find reasons why God CANNOT grant them
- But the thing that gets in the way most of all is simply doubt that it is going to happen. So let's examine the root of that doubting, because if we can understand how that doubting comes about, then we may find the key from the Lord as to how to avoid it and see ourselves KNOWING we have what we ask, even as we ask it.
- We need to look at Peter walking on water again to help us understand (see **Mat. 14:24-31**).
  - Look for the Lord to confirm that it is Him you are coming to
  - Note that when Peter started out, he obviously had exactly the spiritual attitude right for having what he desired
  - Notice now, that the attitude changed and he stopped getting what he desired
  - Notice what changed his attitude - external things and things that are of this world
    - ✓ If we measure the Lord's willingness and ability against the forces of the world, we are in danger of feeling defeated and overcome.
- Third, (and related to the illustration Peter gives us) we must examine our true spiritual state, not to see if we are worthy to ask, but to see if we have set ourselves apart for the task and challenge of approaching God with the kind of confidence our text is about.
  - In **Exodus 19**, God was planning to reveal Himself to the children of Israel; he told Moses to go and sanctify the people for two days and He would appear on the third day. Does this mean 2 days of some kind of ceremony of sanctification before we can hope to ask in a state of faith? No. This is symbolic of the seriousness of commitment to setting ourselves apart for such prayer.
  - Much of the time, we don't take enough care to truly sanctify our persons, our minds or hearts for the labor of drawing near to God with boldness and assurance.

IV. Last, we want to deal with the issue of being satisfied with the outcome of God, despite the fact that it may be the very thing we had petitioned the Lord not to let happen.

- Moses asked God a number of times to let him go over into Canaan after the "hitting the rock" incident. God said no...don't speak to me about this again (**Deut. 3:23-26**). Further records in the bible suggest to us that Moses submitted to that final verdict.
- Samuel mourned before God for Saul after God had said he would oust him from being king. But, we read in **1Sam.16:1** that God told Samuel to stop it and go anoint another king: "And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons." We don't hear any more about Samuel being dissatisfied with God's decision; rather, he goes on with his duty, and is very approving of David, the new king-to-be.
- Paul asked God 3 times to remove a thorn in the flesh; the Lord said no, and informed Paul that His grace was going to be sufficient for him to put up with the thorn; Paul turns that decision into glorying in the Lord's behalf (**2Cor. 12:9**).
- All of us could tell stories about things we have asked God for, only to have what to us

seemed like the exact opposite to happen.

- The question is, did we respond like Moses, Samuel, and Paul to the outcome?
- If we didn't, the difference is having faith in God...trusting in Him, having confidence in Him, that His solution was the best one... also trusting that the outcome we were looking for must have had some flaw in it; either flawed belief about it happening, flawed asking born of some selfish reason, or flawed insight about the purpose and plan of God.
- In closing, I want us all to notice that when things don't turn out the way we wanted them to, the root of the disappointment or disillusionment lies in each of us. It has its source in how we approached the Lord with our desire. It also may have a root in an over-inflated estimate of ourselves and our own judgment...that is, "I thought it was supposed to happen like this or that."