

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark

Message 44

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Prayer on the Mount of Olives by Duccio di Buoninsegna Cir 1308-11

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Mark
Message Forty-Four

JESUS TEACHES FORGIVENESS AND EVIL UNBELIEF

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Jesus and the Pharisees by Jacob Jordaens Cir 1593-1678

JESUS TEACHES ON FAITH, FORGIVENESS AND HIS AUTHORITY

Mark 11:20-33

²⁰ And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. ²¹ And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. ²² And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. 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.

²⁴ Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. ²⁵ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have [a grudge] against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

²⁷ And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, ²⁸ and say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? ²⁹ And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. ³¹ And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? ³² But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. ³³ And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And

Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things (KJV).

A LESSON ON FAITH AND PRAYER WITH THE WITHERED FIG TREE

Mark 11:20-23

²⁰ And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. ²¹ And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. ²² And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. 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 (KJV).

The morning after the incident of Jesus cursing the fig tree Peter noticed that it had *withered away*. It is important to know why Jesus did this. The apostles knew that Jesus did it but seemed to want to know how. Whereas after Jesus rose from the dead His power was no longer a mystery to them but the question remains not how He did it but why? Spiritually dead Israel was the central issue both in the religious authorities and the Temple administrators and activities they endorsed and promoted. There is a parallel here between the two activities, Temple cleansing and the fig tree. Jesus will explain that for our prayers to be effective we must have faith and also we must forgive others. There was a greater punishment coming on the nation Israel in 70 AD with the destruction of the Temple because of their sins. The ruling Jews at that time were not relying in faith on God for their provisions. They also had no forgiveness of others. Both of these are essential for a relationship with God and others. The ruling Jews were primarily interested in the establishment of the Kingdom and not the principles upon which it will be founded. Demonstrating to them that the fig tree withered because of what He asked God to do in prayer they could do too. Faith in God and steadfast trust in God revealed His power and unfailing goodness. To demonstrate this He spoke of moving the Mount of Olives as a hyperbole (gross exaggeration) to demonstrate that it could be sent into the Dead Sea. He was not referring to the actual moving of the mountain but through faith and confidence in God's providence they could face mountains of opposition if they trusted God and relied upon His timing. Finally Jesus wanted them to have faith so strong that they would consider their requests as having already been granted. Faith is leaning on Him, committing one's way to the Lord, trusting in him, knowing that he will do whatever is best. It is also demonstrated as receiving the rule of God as a little child acknowledges adult authority. Finally it embodies being sure of what we hope for, and being convinced of what we do not see.

THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS

Mark 11:24-26

²⁴ Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. ²⁵ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have [a grudge] against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not

forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

While this verse might seem to imply that anything they wanted would be granted the actual meaning is anything that in accordance with God's nature. To be granted the requests must be in harmony with the kingdom principles (Mark 14:36; Matthew 6:9–10; John 14:13–14; 15:7; 16:23–24; 1 John 5:14–15). Faithful and obedient believers will receive the answers God gives. No situation is too difficult for God to accomplish for His children. The stronger our faith the more likely our prayers will be answered. However the person who prays must be willing and ready to forgive. If not then we have no right to believe that our sins are forgiven. Forgiveness or the lack of it can be a determining factor in prayer petition answers. God only asks us to forgive the people who harm us. He does not ask us to keep ourselves in a vulnerable position in harm's way. We can forgive others their sins against us without allowing them to harm us again. The burden of holding a grudge against others will cause us to be at spiritual unrest and restrain effective communication with God. All people are sinners and we only have access to Him because of what Christ has done for us. It is through His mercy that we have been forgiven. God does not listen to us when we are unforgiving of other sinners. We can speak the truth in love to others but still forgive them for what they have done to us. It is our Father in heaven that forgives us therefore we must identify with His principles and forgive others without reservation. In this way our prayers will not be hindered. Another reason for our prayers to be hindered is given by the apostle Peter.

I Peter 3:7

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (ESV).

Living in unconfessed sin will also hinder our prayers as well as stop our sanctification until confession has been made to God for our wrongdoing. R.A. Torrey gave a comprehensive teaching on the Biblical reasons God hinders our prayers.

Hindrances to Prayer; or, Why Many Prayers are Not Answered

(1) Jas. 4:3, R. V.—“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures.”

FIRST PROPOSITION: Prayer is often unanswered because it is offered from a selfish purpose.

The chief purpose in prayer should be that God may be glorified in the answer. If we ask merely that we may receive for use in our pleasures, or for our own gratification in one way or another, we “ask amiss,” and need not expect to receive what we ask. This explains why many prayers remain unanswered.

(2) Is. 59:1, 2—“Behold the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But *your iniquities* have separated between you and your God, and *your sins* have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

SECOND PROPOSITION: Prayer is unanswered because sin separates between the one who prays and the God to whom he prays. (Compare Deut. 1:43–45.)

If we ask God for anything and do not get it, we should not conclude necessarily that it is not God's will to give the thing we have asked. We should rather ask if there is any sin in our outward or inward lives that is separating us from God and closing His ear to our cry. So long as we hold on to sin or have any controversy with God, we cannot expect Him to heed our prayers.

(3) Ezek. 14:3, R. V.—“Saying, Son of man, these men have *taken their idols into their heart*, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?”

THIRD PROPOSITION: Prayer is unanswered when the one who prays takes idols into his heart.

Many professedly Christian men and women have idols in their hearts as truly as the ancient Israelites. They do not recognize these things as idols, but they are. Anything upon which we have set our heart, and would not give up for Christ's sake, is an idol and hinders prayer. God often calls our attention to the fact that we have an idol by not answering our prayer, and thus leading us to ask why our prayer is not answered. Thus we discover the idol, put it away and God hears our prayer.

(4) Mark 11:25, 26—“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

FOURTH PROPOSITION: Prayer is unanswered because we do not forgive those against whom we have something.

This is one of the commonest hindrances to prayer. Far more common than we think. Prayer is answered on the basis that our sins are forgiven, but God cannot deal with us on the basis of forgiveness while we are harboring ill-will against those who have wronged us. Anyone who is harboring a grudge against another has fast closed the ear of God against his own cry.

(5) Jas. 1:5-7, R. V.—“But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”

FIFTH PROPOSITION: Prayers are unanswered because of our unbelief—i. e., because we question whether we shall receive that which God has promised.

God demands that we shall believe His Word absolutely To question it is to make Him a liar. Many do this when they plead his promises, and it is no wonder that their prayers are not answered.

(6) 1 Pet. 3:6, 7—“Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement, likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

SIXTH PROPOSITION: The prayers of husbands are hindered because they do not render to their wives that considerate regard which is their due.

It is doubtless also true that the prayers of wives are hindered because of their failure in duty toward their husbands. If husbands and wives should seek diligently for the cause

of their unanswered prayers, they would often find it in their relations to one another and actions toward one another as husband and wife.¹

JESUS' AUTHORITY IS CHALLENGED

Mark 11:27-33

²⁷ And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, ²⁸ and say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? ²⁹ And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. ³¹ And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? ³² But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. ³³ And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things (KJV).

This was Tuesday of the last week before His crucifixion and He had again come to the Temple. It was just yesterday that He overturned the tables of the moneychangers. The Chief Priests, the Scribes and the Elders (Sanhedrin) in a hostile confrontation approached him. The religious leaders wanted to kill Him but were cautious in the manner in which they would carry out their plot. They genuinely viewed their position as the guardians of Israel's religious life and they were indignant that He was usurping their authority. Jesus was safe in the open and very public area of the Court of the Gentiles with the common people that followed Him. The authorities could not directly accuse Him of anything yet but were looking for something to charge Him with. He was so vastly popular because of His miracles and healings that they sought to discredit Him in a logistical trap. They being the sitting authorities asked for His credentials and through whom did this authority to carry out His ministry activities come. Since this was just one day since he upset the activities in the Temple Court they were referring to His purging of the Temple the previous day. In other words they wanted to know who told Him He could do these things in "their Temple." Because of the nature of their questions it is clear that Jesus had not yet openly certified that He was the Messiah of Israel. Avoiding the trap Jesus answers their question with a question. The answer of which will depend upon whether He will answer their questions. If Jesus directly answered their question with the truth that His authority came from God then He would be admitting to being their Messiah. In which case they were not going to believe Him but would charge Him with blasphemy according to the Mosaic Law. In this case of blasphemy God Himself pronounced the sentence, capital punishment by stoning (1 Kings 21:10, 13; Matthew 26:65–66; Acts 6:11–15; 7:54–58). Leviticus by and illustration teaches the outcome of blasphemy.

¹ Torrey, R. A. (1898). *What the Bible teaches a thorough and comprehensive study of what the Bible has to say concerning the great doctrines of which it treats* (pp. 452–454). New York, Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company.

Leviticus 24:10-23

¹⁰And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and the son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp: ¹¹and the son of the Israelitish woman blasphemed the Name, and cursed; and they brought him unto Moses. And his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan. ¹²And they put him in ward, that it might be declared unto them at the mouth of Jehovah. ¹³And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, ¹⁴Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. ¹⁵And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. ¹⁶And he that blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the sojourner, as the home-born, when he blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, shall be put to death. ¹⁷And he that smiteth any man mortally shall surely be put to death. ¹⁸And he that smiteth a beast mortally shall make it good, life for life. ¹⁹And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him: ²⁰breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be rendered unto him. ²¹And he that killeth a beast shall make it good: and he that killeth a man shall be put to death. ²²Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the sojourner, as for the home-born: for I am Jehovah your God. ²³And Moses spake to the children of Israel; and they brought forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stoned him with stones. And the children of Israel did as Jehovah commanded Moses (ASV 1901).

Conversely if Jesus said that the power and authority came from Himself he would be cast as a radical or a fanatic and this would discredit Him publicly. If they could expose Him in this manner then their hope was to turn the tide of public opinion against Him and renew the people's allegiance to them as the genuine authorities in Israel. So Jesus sets out to expose their real motives by asking them a question for the question they asked Him. He sets out to reverse the trap. Initially the question seemed unrelated but it had to do with authority and it stopped them from continuing with their questioning. He asked them if *the baptism of John*, "was it from heaven, or of men?" Jesus knew that their attitude toward John the Baptist would reveal their attitude toward Him. He asked them if John's authority came from Heaven or was it just humanly originated. They then conferred amongst themselves to arrive at the best political answer. On the one hand if they say from Heaven *He will say, Why then did ye not believe him?* They did not listen to John and were complicit in his execution. Jesus implied that His own authority came from the same source as John's, which indicates there was a bond between them. Everyone knew that John was a prophet. If they accepted John's authority (baptism) then they would have to admit that Jesus had divine authority. The leaders' conclusion about John would reveal their conclusion about Him. If they said from Heaven then they had to admit that Jesus was their Messiah and had come from Heaven with authority to carry out the activities for which He entered the world. And if they say from men then *they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed.* They did not want the people to turn on them. They wanted to people to turn on Jesus. Luke adds "*But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet*" (Luke 20:6). So

they reasoned among themselves to arrive at a trap that Jesus set for them and simply answered that *We cannot tell*. Since they would not admit to the truth Jesus was not going to tell them either. His opponents did not want the truth. Their hearts were hardened and were against the truth. We can see that the religious leaders of His day refused to submit to His will. Today is no different. The reason why many people know so little about Jesus and the blessed promises of living for Christ is their refusal to submit to His will. Only by increasing our knowledge of divine truth can we see the necessity of placing ourselves in humble submission to God's will.

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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