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Faith Makes the Difference; Matt 21:18-22
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Introduction – In v18 we have now entered Monday of the week of Passion. In just 4 days Jesus will be condemned and executed by crucifixion. The events of Sunday reaffirmed and reinforced that Jesus is truly the Messiah, the Son of God from heaven in the man Jesus. In these final days of Jesus' ministry two dominant themes emerge. First, there is an escalation of confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. Their aggravation will turn to detest and finally end with a plot to kill Him. Second, Jesus begins to pour as much training into the disciples as possible. He teaches them over and over again so that they will be prepared to continue the gospel kingdom ministry that He has begun.

Today's text is one of those final, crucial lessons. From now until Jesus walks the road to calvary, these are the words and lessons that His disciples must hear. In that light, these lessons are every bit as crucial and essential for us as His disciples today. For it is now our awesome privilege and responsibility to continue to advance the kingdom through gospel ministry.

It really is no surprise then that one of these final lessons would be concerning faith. After all, that is where new life in Christ begins and it is also how the Christian life proceeds. We live by faith. We minister and serve and grow and witness by faith. Faith is to the believer as oxygen is to the lungs. The faith is the doctrines of Scripture that we cherish and hold and upon which our salvation rests. Having faith is how we put the faith into practice in our everyday lives. The faith refers to content – what we believe. Having faith refers to living out the doctrines that we hold dear. Content and practice. It is the latter definition of faith which Jesus teaches in this text.

- I. Faith and Figs
 - a. Jesus curses a figless fig tree. He's hungry. The fig tree appears to have fruit but has none, so Jesus causes it to wither for appearing to have what it does not have. From now on that fig tree won't deceive anyone else. The hungry will not go to its branches ever again seeking sustenance only to come away still empty.

- b. You might think, “Wow, is Jesus that temperamental? Is He still angry over the temple? Should you walk on egg shells around Jesus, fearing that any moment you might step out of line and find yourself receiving the same response as this fig tree?”
- c. Well, the answer to those questions of course is no. Jesus is in complete control of His emotions. He doesn’t have outbursts of anger and rage. In the temple He was confronting sin. With the fig tree He is providing an vivid illustration that the disciples would not forget.
- d. Just as He taught in parables, conveying spiritual truth with earthly word pictures, He always taught spiritual truth in His miracles. And this event was miraculous. He simply spoke to the fig tree and it withered immediately.
- e. Jesus used this event to press upon His disciples the urgent necessity of faith if one is to live for the kingdom, for the gospel, in this world. Serving God and living for God in this life will require us to live by faith.

II. Faith and Mountains

- a. Seven hills or mountains surround Jerusalem, so Jesus could have been pointing to any of them when He gave this object lesson to the disciples. But what exactly does Jesus mean by this?
- b. Does God call us and save us and indwell us with His Spirit so that we can curse trees and relocate mountains? Is the essence and height of the Christian life having the ability to be earth movers? I don’t think kingdom work involves reshaping our geographical landscape.
- c. I think it means something greater. The mountain here represents an immovable object and the removal of it then is an impossibility.
- d. In this life, and especially living for the Lord in the Christian life, we will encounter obstacles that are humanly impossible to move. It may be people coming against us, thoughts that bombard us, circumstances that prevent us from following God’s direction, tragedies that send us reeling, lies that once told cannot be reversed, addictions that cannot be conquered, relationships that can’t be reconciled, sinful desires and selfish pride that will not give way, hurts and heartaches that never diminish – there are hundreds of

immovable obstacles that seem impossible to remove and cast aside that we will face in this life, in this world, as we live for Jesus.

- e. So what are we to do? Live in misery and defeat and anger? Give up. Settle. Decide this must be God's will or God must be against me. No. Jesus says, "Take another look at the fig tree. Believe. Have faith and do not doubt. That immovable object to your ministry, that immovable object to your calling, that immovable object to your growth in the Lord and service to the Lord can be moved – but it requires faith. Faith is what makes the difference!"

III. Faith and Prayer

- a. But it's not only in the Christian life where faith makes the difference, it's also in the great activity of the Christian life where faith makes the difference. I believe Jesus goes straight from mountains to prayer because when we face mountains, we should go straight to prayer. It's in the solitude of prayer where the battle rages, and the battle lines are drawn with faith.
- b. By taking us to prayer, Jesus is giving us the direction for our faith. We don't aim faith at the mountain; we aim faith to God. Whatever you ask – whatever immovable mountain needs to be removed, whatever impossibility needs to be made possible – whatever you ask in prayer... Before you speak to the mountain, speak to God.
- c. Which means we're asking God to do the very thing that we know is beyond us to do. Right there, right there on that spot is where faith is absolutely necessary but often honestly absent. That's precisely where the battle rages and is won in the prayer closet.
- d. If it is apparent that this mountain is impossible to move – we've tried, we've cried, we've prayed, we've read, we've been counseled, we've heard sermons, we've memorized Scripture, we've ignored it, we've hoped it would go away on its own, we've done everything we know to do and this mountain just won't move. So even when we pray about it, there's that little voice of doubt whispering – it's not going anywhere. The battle is between what we know we can do and what we trust God can do.
- e. Where our faith fails in prayer is when we think God has no more resources than we do. When we impose our experience of the impossible with God's ability to do the impossible.

- f. So many times before we pray about moving mountains, we need to pray that God may open our hearts to believe in Him and trust Him.
Mark 9:20-26
- g. So Jesus says, “Believe when you pray to God. Have faith when you pray to God, and He will do what was impossible for you to do!”

IV. What is Faith?

- a. This leads us to a better understanding of faith, and in our day, we desperately need to understand what faith is. The word faith is tossed around so much that we’ve lost its Christian meaning. Much like the word love has lost its meaning.
- b. People say just have faith, all it takes it faith, just believe, even worse people say have faith in yourself, believe in yourself. We speak of faith even in the church as if faith itself is the answer. Our language replaces God and Christ with faith as if we just need to have faith in faith.
- c. So what is faith? Hebrews 11:1
 - i. The assurance of things hoped for – what God has promised
 - ii. The conviction of things not seen – what God has said
 - iii. God is able to do the impossible
 - 1. Faith is the unswerving certainty that what God says in His Word is absolutely true in spite of what we see and God is able to do the impossible. Faith is trusting God.
- d. So the reason why we pray about those mountains is because God is the ultimate cause of their removal and the reason why we must have faith when we ask Him is because faith is the instrumental cause. In other words, God moves the mountains, but He does so through the faith of His people.
- e. Matt 19:25-26
 - i. Being saved – that’s a mountain you can’t move – that’s impossible for you to do
 - ii. But that mountain of unbelief is not impossible for God to remove, that heart of stone is not impossible for God to replace, that veil of blindness is not impossible for God to wipe away

- iii. Therefore whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
For we are saved by grace, through faith, it is not are own
doing but is the work of God.

Conclusion – he’s already moved the Everest of your unbelief, there is not a mountain in your life He can move! That thing in your life today that seems impossible – that’s just a fig tree compared to the mountain of spiritual death!