

Mountain Moving Prayer

by Tim Conway

Tim Conway's sermon emphasizes the power of prayer and faith, illustrated through Jesus' actions with the fig tree and His teachings on forgiveness.

Duration: 51:34

Scripture: Mark 11:12

Topics: "Faith And Prayer", "Kingdom Of God"

Description

This sermon delves into the significance of faith in God and the power of prayer in overcoming obstacles, drawing parallels between the withered fig tree and moving mountains as symbols of hindrances to the Kingdom of Christ. Jesus emphasizes the need for unwavering faith in God and the importance of forgiveness in prayer. The message challenges believers to pray with faith, trust in God's power, and maintain a forgiving spirit to see mountains moved and obstacles removed in advancing the Kingdom of Christ.

Transcript

I'd like to have you turn in your Bibles to Mark, Mark's Gospel, chapter 11. I want to pick up reading in verse 11, Mark 11, 11. And he, that being Jesus, entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

Now right before this, you may recognize, is the account of the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ, riding on the back of a donkey, just like the prophet had foretold, into Jerusalem. All the people are crying out, there's great expectation, what's going to happen? They're crying out, Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. And in verse 11, the reason I pick up here is because verse 11, for one, shows us where Jesus goes.

It gives us a little bit of information that pertains to what I want to deal with today. Verse 11, He entered Jerusalem, went into the temple, and you'll notice, the day of the triumphal entry, He looked around at everything. The very next day, He would cleanse the temple.

But it's late. I don't know if the money changers were still there, or whether they'd gone, because it was late in the day, maybe they were packing up and going home. But He comes in and it's late.

And as it was already late, He went out to Bethany. Bethany is about two miles away from Jerusalem. And of course, His friends, Lazarus and Martha and Mary, were in Bethany.

And He was pretty regular at their house. He went to Bethany with the Twelve. Verse 12, On the following day, when they came from Bethany, He was hungry.

And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, He went to see if He could find anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And He said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again.

And His disciples heard it. And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple.

And He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. You can imagine, I mean, just put yourself there.

Jesus is not allowing anyone, only Mark gives us this detail. He's not allowing anything to be carried at all through the temple. You can imagine what that looked like.

If somebody tried to carry something, He prevented it. Say, how? He doesn't tell us. Verbally, physically, we know He turned the tables over physically.

Which shows that He was willing to show physical force to stop the temple from being desecrated. And He was teaching them and saying to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called the house of prayer for all the nations? But you've made it a den of robbers. And the chief priests and the scribes heard it.

And were seeking a way to destroy Him, for they feared Him. Because all the crowd was astonished at His teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.

We pick up in verse 20. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to Him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that You cursed has withered.

Jesus answered them, Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, And does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, It will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, And I want you to see that.

This is about prayer. We're going into a week of prayer and fasting. I'm talking to you from these verses because they deal with prayer.

Verse 24, Therefore I tell you, Therefore, that means everything that goes before here applies to this. He set up a picture. He set up teaching.

He set up instruction. There is something happening here that lends itself to prayer. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, Believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Again, he speaks about prayer in verse 25. And whenever you stand praying, Forgive, if you have anything against anyone, So that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. Now, about three and a half years ago, I preached a sermon from this account of Jesus cursing the fig tree.

Only I took my text back then from Matthew 21. I called that sermon, Fig Trees and Faith. I feel like I could almost preach that sermon again.

It would be applicable. It would be good. But I've been studying my own private devotions.

I've been studying through Mark. So now, three and a half years later, I want to look at this account again. Only this time, I want to examine it from Mark's vantage point.

Mark and Matthew are the only two Gospels that have this account. And although Mark is the shorter Gospel, it may surprise you. If you study Mark, you'll notice, Some of the accounts that Mark gives to us are actually the longest.

He gives us accounts that are longer than those that are found in the other Gospels. He doesn't deal with as many things, but sometimes when he deals with things, he deals with them in more detail. And that's what we have here in this account.

Mark actually gives us a more extended version. Now, I'm drawn to this, because our Lord looks His disciples in the eyes, and He says, Guys, at the end of this account, He looks at them and He says, Guys, you want to move mountains? Here's how. That's why I want us to look at this.

I am interested in having this church pray in ways that can move mountains. My sermon is called, Mountain Moving Prayer. That's where He's headed.

This whole sermon is heading to verses 24 and 25. They are about prayer. There's a scene that is set up for us here, because it is instructive.

It teaches us. It sets the groundwork for what He's going to teach to us in verses 24 and 25. So, overview.

Let's just do a quick overview. First thing I want you to notice is how this account gets split up. I don't know if you have a Bible that has section headings, but if it does, even if it doesn't, you can see that this is going on here.

This account of the fig tree gets split right in half by Jesus cleansing the temple. Matthew doesn't do that. When you look at Matthew's account, you have no idea that this whole episode with the fig tree, Matthew gives you no indication that it happened over two days.

Mark gives us that. Now, I want us to jump in right here. Verses 12-14.

This is the first part of this episode. You basically have this. Jesus sees the tree.

Jesus goes to the tree. Jesus curses the tree. And then in verse 15, Mark leaves the fig tree behind, at least for the moment.

He entirely turns our attention to Jesus cleansing the temple. And this is interesting because Mark has quite a bit more to say to us. Jesus has quite a bit more to say to us about the fig tree.

But it's just interesting how our Lord does something that is meant to be a lesson to His disciples. And He doesn't take them into the classroom right there. He sets the foundation for it and then they go on their way.

And He's not going to actually do His teaching on this thing until the next day. Notice the sequence here. In verse 11, we know that day He rides into Jerusalem.

He enters the city, we see in verse 11. Goes into the temple. We talked about this already.

Late in the day. And He departs. He goes to Bethany with the twelve.

And then in verse 12, the following day, they came from Bethany. He's hungry. We have this fig tree account.

In verse 15, we see that after the fig tree deal, they go into the city, into Jerusalem. He enters the temple. In verse 19, after that day in cleansing the temple, they went out of the city.

Now it doesn't say they went back to Bethany. But it's very likely that that's where they went because that's where they had friends. Not only is it likely for that reason, but we know for certainty that the very next morning they were on the same road passing the same tree.

Probably gives us good indication they were coming from the same place. Now look at verse 20. As they pass by in the morning, this is the second morning, they see that fig tree again.

They see it wither away to the roots. Just traveling the same road, past the same tree. All of this heading towards verses 24 and 25.

Now, first part of this, verses 12 through 14, three primary players. You see them. You've got Jesus.

You've got a fig tree. And there's a gang of disciples. So let's pick up in verse 12.

On the following day. Following what? Well, the morning after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He's coming in there as the King of Israel.

Can you imagine? All these people, they were cheering Him coming in. Massive anticipation. Especially for His disciples.

They're thinking, I mean, they've been persuaded. You are the Christ. You are the Son of the Living God.

That's what Peter said. Eleven of them are confirmed in this. They know.

I mean, it's like, they expect Him to overthrow Rome, seat Himself. There is anticipation. That's what happened the following day.

Or that's what happened the previous day. Now it's the following day. This is the morning after this happened.

Jesus had inspected the temple the night before, or late in the day. Being late. You know what He did that night before? He just faded off into the darkness.

I mean, there were no street lights. Two miles to Bethany. Just disappeared into the night.

Into that two-mile stretch of road to Bethany. We're not told if He went to Lazarus, Martha, Mary's house. Did He stay there? We don't know.

Probably. But on the following day, when they came from Bethany, He was hungry. What does that tell us? It doesn't appear that our Lord ate breakfast.

He was hungry. He was on His way to cleanse the temple. Now, I think about this.

He looked at the temple the day before. I have a feeling that He spent that night burning with some zeal. I have a feeling He saw things in that temple that aroused His zeal.

So that when He went there the next day, I don't think He looked in and there was nothing to see. No problems. Nothing going on.

No sign of the money changers. He just came in the morning and He found them unexpectedly and cleansed it. I have a feeling late in the day, He saw signs of this.

Whether they were packing up, being late in the day, I don't know. It doesn't tell us. I have a feeling He spent that night in prayer.

Because whatever happened, He had good hosts in Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. It's not likely they're just going to send Him off without eating unless He's just on a mission. But now it's the next day.

He's headed back to the temple. He has unfinished business there. Verse 13, seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if He could find anything on it.

When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. Now, don't you love that? Say what? Mark is pointing out Jesus' humanity to us in stark illustration here. Notice, Jesus is hungry.

But not only that, Jesus actually goes to the tree. He went to see if He could find anything on the tree. No supernatural perception going on here.

Brethren, I'll tell you this. When our Lord Jesus Christ could perceive things, you have to recognize there were times the prophets could perceive things. How did that happen? Do you remember? I believe it was the Syrian king said, do we have a traitor in our midst? And somebody came to him and said, no, they have a prophet over there in Israel.

You remember that? He knows your thoughts. He knows what you're doing in your bedroom at night. That's what he told him.

Brethren, I'll tell you this. The prophets knew things that nobody else could know. And how did they know it? The Spirit of God.

A lot of times we have this idea Jesus just casts off His humanity, breaks forth in His deity, and could read men's thoughts, and He could do all this. I'll tell you, that's not what happened. God worked through Jesus.

When Jesus laid aside His glory, the glory that He had with His Father before the foundation of the world, you have to recognize this. This was the temptation that the devil brought Him to. Turn that stone into bread.

Nope. I'm submitted to my Father. When Jesus did the works He did, it was God working through Him.

Even in supernatural perception. We know on another occasion, Jesus said, the time of my coming? I don't know it. Only the Father knows it.

You see, in His humanity, the supernatural things that He did, He did because the fullness of the Spirit was upon Him. We could look much more at this. I could prove this to you in many different ways.

But we have to get rid of this idea that Jesus walked around all the time manifesting deity, that it was breaking through all the time in ways that He knew everything all the time with this infinite mind of God. Listen, I don't know how to explain Christ being fully God and fully man at the same time, but Scripture absolutely teaches it. How He can be fully God and somehow robe His deity to be perfect human.

To be the perfect man. What Mark is showing here is He wants us to see One who is made like us, just like the author of Hebrews says, like us in every respect. Mark shows us Jesus with a man's hunger.

Jesus is hungry. Mark wants us to see Jesus has needs. He has man's needs to put food in His mouth and chew it up to get sustenance from it.

Dependent upon His Father. That's what He's showing us here. Mark wants us to see that He has man's eyes.

That He can see a tree. He can see this vivid, bright green in early spring coming off of a tree with new leaves on it and He can perceive it. He can see it.

He can wonder like a man does whether there might be something on that tree to satisfy his appetite. Actually walks to the tree with human legs. Looks at the tree with human eyes.

With a human brain that's evaluating whether or not there is actually fruit on that tree looking at it, not breaking forth in some kind of divine moment where He's able to perceive it without actually going through all these motions. I mean, He's hoping for breakfast. He does not know if there's fruit on that tree or not until He goes over and inspects the tree for Himself.

What we need to recognize is this, Jesus subjected Himself to the same limitations of humanity that you and I have. He even talks to the tree. I mean, here's an inanimate tree and He talks to it like we would.

You ever talk to something inanimate? Brethren, what jumps out at me here is this is precisely what you want to know to be true about Jesus Christ right before He turns to you and says that you and your prayers can be just as powerful as His. You see, if He comes to you and He says to you, I'm just like you. I trust My Father in Heaven just like you have to, and that's how I cursed that tree and this happened, and mountains can be moved because I'm trusting Him.

I'm laying hold on Him. I spent the night out there on the mountainside in prayer and I called upon Him and He enabled me to do that. And guys, you can do it too.

You see, if He just looks at you and says, I'm God. I can do what you can't do, something's kind of lost in all this. But if He looks and He says, I'm just like you and just the same way that I do this, you can do this too.

If Jesus just throws off His humanity here and stands there in like stark deity and unleashes His own divine wrath upon that fig tree by hurling a bolt of lightning at it, you can just say, nope, we can't do that. The whole point of the section of Scripture is that we're moving towards verses 24 and 25 where Jesus says that we think about this, that we in all our weakness and all our dependency upon God, we can accomplish the same impossible things that Jesus accomplishes. Who just like us, trusted His Father to help Him, uphold Him, empower Him.

Now back to the text. Verse 13, And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, He went to see if He could find anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

I have two fig trees in my yard. Here's the deal with fig trees. You've got to understand this.

When the leaves break out on a fig tree in spring, figs break out at the same time. I have a peach tree in my yard. Peach trees are not like that.

Peach trees have leaves. I have a lemon tree in my yard. Thanks, Scott.

It actually is bearing heavily. It has leaves first, fruit comes later. My peach tree, leaves first, peaches come later.

That's not how figs are. Figs throw out the fruit right as they throw out the leaves. Here's the thing.

It was not yet time for figs, which means it wasn't a time when the fig trees were even coming to leaf because leaves and fruit came together. And the fact is, he saw this. It was early.

I read somebody lived in the area of Jerusalem and right at, we know when Christ was crucified, it was at Passover, and they said at Passover, it was very rare that you would ever see a fig tree with fruit that early in the year. And so that's the issue. It's not season yet, and he sees one that out of season is actually throwing forth leaves, and that gives him an expectation.

And it should give you an expectation. If my fig trees have leaves on them, the figs are coming out. That's going to happen in a few weeks from now here in Texas.

So that's what's going on. It's not the season for the leaves to be on the tree either, let alone the fruit. But he sees the leaves.

That makes him hope that there's fruit. Held forth promise of having it. Jesus is hungry.

The tree looks promising. And his hunger is disappointed. And watch how Jesus reacts.

In Mark 11.14, Peter says it's a curse. In the second half of this. May no one ever eat fruit from you again.

Now look, think with me. It's like Jesus is having a conversation with a morally responsible person who has done wrong and must now suffer the consequences for its sin. I'm hungry? You're a fig tree.

You're a fig tree in leaf. Fig trees in leaf are supposed to have figs. Such a promise of getting breakfast from you.

I brought my hunger to you. You failed me. Therefore, you're cursed.

No fig is ever going to be found on you again. Notice verse 14. And his disciples heard it.

That's interesting. This is the first time in this account that the disciples are brought forward. They heard it.

Nothing more is said here. This sets us up for the second half of this. They heard it.

Think about it. You're walking down the road. He sees it off in the distance, but Matthew tells us it's right there on the wayside.

It's right next to the road. So Jesus sees it in the distance, but it's on the road to Jerusalem. And so you can imagine, He comes right up to it.

He looks at it. It's right at the wayside. He doesn't have to go off the road at all.

Very little if at all. They're walking with Him. He goes over there.

We don't get a lot of conversation other than the fact He says, let no fig ever be found on you again. You can imagine, they're walking with Him. They see Him go over to the tree.

I don't know if they got breakfast. I don't know if they were hungry. I don't know if they had some anticipation.

He just walked over. He said what they said. And undoubtedly, they didn't skip a beat and on their way to Jerusalem they went.

It happened very fast. But Mark wants us to know they heard it. He said it audibly.

He said it loud. He said it loud enough for them to hear. And I have to just think that if you're one of His disciples, that was probably weird.

Because I started thinking, I think, you know what? There was a time when He turned water into wine. There was a time when He took a few little fish and loaves and turned them in enough. A couple times He did this.

Feed thousands of people. There was another time, remember? You go fishing to catch fish because people eat fish. Peter was a fisherman.

Peter was in the food business. He went out fishing. Remember, they didn't catch anything during the whole night? Jesus said, let down your nets in the deep.

And they caught an unprecedented haul of fish in a place where the night before they hadn't caught any. When it comes to food, Jesus was a provider. When it came to food, Jesus made food supernaturally.

Could Jesus have made food supernaturally on that tree? He could have. I mean, I have to think that was odd to those guys. Wow! That's kind of unusual for Him.

But anyway, it just happened. It's over. On their way they go, quickly.

He just went to the tree. He looked at it close. He cursed it.

The disciples heard it. Probably sounded a little bit odd. It was over and done.

On their way they went. I'm sure they all forgot. Of course they forgot.

You know why? You know what happened? You're going to forget too. I mean, look, if you're walking through the parking lot and you see a dent in somebody's car, oh, that's interesting. And then you're walking with somebody else and you walk in here and that somebody else that you're with just starts throwing tables over.

You forgot about the dent in the car out there. That's the kind of thing that happened here. They forgot about that tree.

In fact, nothing unusual, other than the fact that Jesus spoke those words, there's no evidence of anything that they beheld visibly right at that moment. They heard the words, and on their way they went. And when they got into the city, I mean, He walks in there and He starts cleansing that temple, and everybody that defiles His zeals coming out, overturning tables, scattering money, bearing fig tree back on the road is forgotten.

Guarantee that. But then, v. 19, the day's over. Evening came.

They went out of the city. Now notice, it's evening, which means evening is dark. I'm suspecting they went back to Bethany along the same road, passed by that tree, that withered tree that was sitting there.

The problem was it was dark and they walked right by it. It didn't catch their attention. They took no notice of it.

But then the fresh new morning is at hand. Sun up. V. 20, as they passed by in the morning, again, same road, same tree.

Sun's up. They see the fig tree. They saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

Now, you can imagine, day before, Jesus causes a major stir in the temple. Day before that, He rode in on the back of a donkey with everybody hailing Him the King of Israel. That's what's happened over the last 48 hours.

You think they've got things to think about and talk about as they're walking along? They're not thinking about this fig tree. That's out of their mind. What happens? They're headed back to Jerusalem.

I'm sure they're full of anticipation. What's going to happen today? Then suddenly, they behold the sight that grabs their attention. V. 21 says they were reminded.

Peter remembered. In other words, he wasn't thinking about it before. It comes back.

It's something packed back there in the memory. And he remembers. It registers in their minds that this fig tree is the same one Jesus cursed yesterday and the thing has withered to its roots.

They make the obvious connection. He spoke to it. It's withered.

Jesus really did curse it. Something has happened to this tree as a direct result of Jesus' words. Jesus' words destroyed this tree.

Peter breaks out with this in v. 21. Rabbi, look. It's almost like they all noticed, Peter noticed, whether Jesus was looking over there or not.

We're not told, but Peter certainly wants to grab his attention. Look! Look over there! The fig tree that you cursed has withered. Jesus, you need to check this out.

All you did yesterday was speak to that tree. You didn't chop it down with an ax. You just spoke to it.

Look, it's withered. Matthew's account, he says they marveled. They're amazed.

And you know what? It's as though Jesus says, perfect. The classroom is ready. He was constantly teaching these guys.

But this is what this is all about. I have the full attention of my pupils now and the teacher has something to teach the students. And here's the lesson.

Mark 11.22 Jesus answered them, have faith in God. There's nothing about figs, nothing about hunger, nothing about trees. All this has to do with a valuable lesson about God.

Have faith in Him. Have faith in God. What kind of answer is that? Have faith in God.

Wait. You cursed that tree yesterday. You were hungry.

We're talking about fig trees. You're going to have a sit down and you're going to go to teaching and you're going to say, have faith in God. Well, that's precisely the kind of answer that you give to somebody when you want to shake them with the reality that they're not simply spectators themselves.

In other words, have faith in God means you are not a spectator in this. I expect you to be cursing fig trees. I expect you to be removing mountains.

You are the ones to have faith in God. They need to get into the game as well. Look, if Jesus would have simply answered, I have faith in God, well, see, that might make sense to us.

Oh, look, oh Lord, the tree you cursed yesterday, it's withered. Yeah, I have faith in God. Well, see, that's the kind of answer that we expect.

But when He says, you are to have faith in God, that's to jolt them with the reality that the thing He did trusting His Father, they too can do if they trust their Father. That's exactly where He's headed with this. Look at verses 23 and 24.

Truly I say to you, it kind of gets past fig trees. Matthew's account, he deals with cursing fig trees as well as moving mountains. But he says, if I say to you, whoever says to the mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt, that goes back to verse 22, have faith in God.

If you're not doubting God, if you're trusting God, see, God is the mountain mover. We're not. God is.

All our prayers do is lay hold on Him. And He is pleased that it should be that way. He's designed His kingdom to advance that way by us laying hold on Him by our prayers that He might move the mountains.

If you don't doubt God in your heart, but believes that what He says will come to pass, it will be done for Him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours. Mark just moves from the withered fig tree right into throwing mountains into the sea.

Here's the thing that I'm asking myself. What's the common thread here? How does he just move from, Lord, look! Fig tree! You cursed it! It's withered! To have faith in God, you can say to mountains, what's the common thread between fig trees and mountains? I mean, what is that? Well, you know what jumps out at me about this fig tree? It did not satisfy the Messiah's hunger. It wasn't useful to Him.

It wasn't useful to the kingdom. It wasn't useful to Christ. It was a hindrance.

Mountains? Look, when you hear about mountains, you don't want to think about this beautiful, majestic, massive mountain there against this backdrop of sunset. That's not what he's talking about. In his mind, he says, you can say to this mountain, let me tell you where they were.

They were just off the east side of Jerusalem. You know what stands between them and Bethany where they just came from? The Mount of Olives. You know what that mountain is? It's an obstruction.

It's an obstacle. It's in the way. That's what he brings up mountains for.

Mountains here are not to be viewed any way, but as an obstruction. Something that is a hindrance. Something that is blocking our way.

A fig tree. It withholds breakfast from a Messiah. And a mountain.

They're both impediments to the kingdom of Christ. That's the idea. Both obstacles.

Jesus says, whoever says to this mountain, this Mount of Olives probably, but obviously, why in the world would you ever want a mountain to be thrown away into the sea? To get it out of your way. That's the idea. To remove it.

To have it cleared out. The Mount of Olives was an obstacle that stood between Jerusalem and Bethany. It's in the way.

You say to mountains, be taken up and thrown into the sea when you want it, gone. The barren fig tree, what was that all about? It just presented a false hope. It didn't aid the cause of the Gospel.

It didn't aid the cause of Christ. It was just in the way. It was a distraction.

It was a hindrance. It failed to aid our Lord. Both of these are obstructions.

And the thing is, whether you curse it... Look, getting a fig tree out of the way. I've taken trees down before, but I've never done it with a word. I've never just said, be dead.

That's what Jesus did. He did something that's impossible for us to do. And then He moves up the line of impossibility to this idea of moving mountains.

Just try to say to the mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea. Both of them are saying, Jesus spoke to the tree. Jesus is talking here about saying to the mountain.

He's not saying, well, if you pray hard enough, you can go get a shovel and you can actually exert the effort yourself and eventually make that mountain move. That's not what He's talking about here. He's talking about saying to it.

He's talking about prayer here. He's talking about looking to God the Father to do these things. Both of these things are absolutely impossible without God's intervention.

Brethren, that's what we're facing. We're facing 2015. You think about it.

2015. There are obstacles in the way. What obstacles? How about people's lostness? We are struggling against flesh.

We are struggling against an enemy that is fierce and powerful. We are struggling against the world. There are many obstacles.

Have you ever read in the Bible that when we preach the Gospel, there's a devil who is like a bird and he comes in here and he plucks up the seed? Have you ever read in 2 Corinthians 4 that we know that people are kept from seeing the glory of the Gospel? Why? Because the devil blinds the eyes of unbelievers. Have you ever read in Scripture that Paul feared for the Corinthians lest the devil lead them away from the simplicity of Christ? Do you know that there is a devil who is trying to keep people lost? Who is trying to thwart our efforts at propagating the Gospel? Do you know that there is a devil who wants to pull us away from simplicity in Christ? Get our eyes off Christ? Why? Because Christ is our strength. If we abide in Him, we are able to be fruitful.

You are not going to be fruitful if you're not abiding in Him. Listen, there are obstacles all over the place. These are not literal.

Turn very quickly to Matthew 17. I find no record that Jesus' apostles ever moved physical mountains. So if Jesus is not referring to literal mountains, what kind of mountains is He referring to? Well, just what I was saying.

I mean, I'm talking about the obstacles that we encounter. If you look at Matthew 17, I would just have you go down to verse 19. This is the occasion right after the Mount of Transfiguration.

They came down. What was Jesus confronted with? Probably the nine other apostles besides the three that He took up on the mountain with Him. They're there.

There's a man there. He's got a son. They're trying to cast the demon out of the son and they can't do it.

Jesus gave them power to cast out demons and they can't do it. Why? He gave them power to do it. Why can't they do it? Well, verse 19, then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, why could we not cast it out? He said to them, because of your little faith.

Remember what He's talking about in Mark 11? You need to have faith in God. For truly I say to you, if you have faith like the grain of 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. What kind of mountains does He have in mind? Demons! I mean, I'm talking about when it comes to withering fig trees and moving mountains, He's talking about the obstacles that stand in the way of the Kingdom of Christ.

He's speaking about the enemies. He's speaking about that which opposes. That which is not for Him.

That which is against us. He's speaking about how we advance. And He's saying, guys, He's looking them right between their eyes.

He's looking them in the eyes. Looking them straight in the face. And He's saying, guys, the very same way I curse this tree, you need to get it into your heads.

You guys, I expect you guys to go on living when I'm gone, this kind of life. Where you are praying the obstacles out of your way. Where you are laying hold upon God and God is casting down these mountains and removing the barriers.

And He does not say that prayers are impotent to this cause. He says they are absolutely necessary. This is the life He's calling us to live, Grace Community Church.

This is it. This is a battle. We come into this.

This is not something you want to take with a lackadaisical attitude. Well, you know, they're going to pray. What's the good of all that? I think I'll go to the movies.

I'm going to start a new exercising regime because I got fat over the holidays. Listen, we need to be trimmed soldiers for Christ, but it's got a lot more to do with how we eat. It's got to do with how we pray.

You want to be a soldier for the cross? You've heard the missionary that we support in China? He says he comes back here to the states and he says we're over there and we're laboring, but he says the battle will be won here by all of you on your knees. That's what happens. We pray through these things.

We are able to bring down these mighty fortresses. 2 Corinthians 10, verse 4, the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We read that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

Look, our Lord is shriveling fig trees and talking about moving mountains because He wants to know that our prayers are mighty through God. That's the faith. One of the great evidences that you lack faith is that you don't pray.

Because if you really have faith in a prayer-hearing God, you are going to run to Him. I mean, if you really believe that your prayers are going to make the difference. I'll tell you, this same missionary that is laboring over in China, he one time preached a message on corporate prayer.

All of us getting together in prayer meetings or special meetings where we do nothing but pray. We come together to pray. And he said, it's like Moses up on that hilltop, that mountaintop with the staff of God raised in His hand.

And when the staff was held high, Israel advanced. They overcame Amalek. When his arm got weary and it came down, Amalek prevailed.

Listen, that missionary says that's just like prayer. When we're praying, the forces of Christ advance. When the people of God get weary and they stop praying, the enemy advances.

And you say, is that real? That's what Jesus is telling us. He's telling us that there are obstacles that can be removed by your prayers that would not be removed if you did not pray. I mean, look, He's telling us.

You want prayer that moves mountains? He describes it two ways. He says it needs to have faith. You need to be trusting God.

And God can move these things. But it's more than that. I don't think we have a problem with really recognizing God can do that.

I think what we really need to come to grips with and where our faith needs to be challenged is that our prayers are instrumental in that. I think that's where our faith needs to be stirred. That we really have that important of a part to play in the advance of this thing.

Whether you pray or not, it's just like whether Moses kept up that staff or not. You can say, God can certainly cause Israel to win. Does it really matter whether Moses' arm stays extended up with the staff of God? Yeah, absolutely it mattered! I mean, God all over the place is painting pictures like this for us.

Jesus is getting ready. I mean, this is the week Jesus Christ is going to go to the cross. He's about done walking this earth with these disciples.

This last week, when He sits them down, opens up Classroom, Teacher begins to teach His pupils. He's giving them those things essential for them to walk in this life. When He's gone.

When He's ascended to His Father. He's leaving them. And He's preparing them by the things that He's teaching them.

And He says you need to believe. You need to have faith in God. And you need forgiveness.

V. 25, whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in Heaven may forgive you for your trespasses. You know what? We must pray as one who is forgiven. You say, wait, that's not what it says.

It doesn't say we need to pray as one who is forgiven. It says that we have to pray forgiving others. Yeah, but how do we forgive others? You know how you forgive others? Recognizing you are forgiving yourself.

How is it that you come to not hold grudges and be bitter towards other people when they wrong you to think about how much you wronged God and He forgave you for? That is the attitude. Because you know what? When we hold grudges, it says we're owed something. See, that's not the posture Jesus wants you to take when you pray.

Because that's not a posture that prevails with God. When you think you're owed something, this is a picture of praying for power to remove mountains and destroy the obstacles that are in front of us, but also recognizing we're nothing and we're unworthy and we're just grateful God has forgiven us and we're not holding grudges against other people. Your prayers will be absolutely ineffectual this week if you've got unresolved matters with other brethren.

If you've got unresolved matters with people, your praying will not be effective. Guaranteed. Peter kind of draws on this and says, men, your prayers will be hindered if you're not living with your wife in an understanding way.

This is a reality. God is not pleased when we hold matters, when we're unforgiving. I mean, if there's anybody in this church, and I would say this right here at the beginning of this week of prayer and fasting, you really want to prevail with God this week, then do an inventory before you walk out of here today.

If you've got an issue with anybody, I was just meeting with a brother two weeks ago and he told me there was a misunderstanding of something that happened between us probably a year ago. And he said that there was something there. And when we were sitting and talking and it came out, he recognized what he thought was true wasn't even true.

We've got to resolve. And the way to resolve things is communication. Don't leave here.

If you've got any issues with other people, resolve those matters. We need to go into this week as a people who are not holding things against others, trusting the Lord, trusting that our prayers really do

matter. And they really do.

Brethren, I would just ask you, as we complete this, think about this. If Jesus is encouraging His disciples to pray this way, you tell me, what kind of life do you think He is calling us to live if that's the kind of instruction He wants to leave with His disciples right before He's going to leave? That they need to be praying mountains out of the way? You think you might get the feeling He wants us to look outside these doors at a world that is lost and perishing? A world that we are supposed to be salt and light in the midst of? A world, by the way, that He told us, go out into those nations. I'm going to be with you to the end of the world.

Go out there. And you are going to come up against formidable obstacles. You're going to come up against governments.

You're going to come up against hordes of demons. You're going to come up against heresies and false teaching. You are going to come up against men's hearts that are just dug in deep against God.

They are hard! What hope? What hope? Have you ever tried to even soften the heart of your hard-hearted child? You are impotent. Ichabod Spencer's church prayed for souls. And they saw people saved.

They prayed for souls. What obstacles do you think have to be removed for a soul to surrender to Christ? Oh, there are obstacles that are so much stronger than you and me. What kind of life do you think He's calling us to live? He's calling us to live the kind of life where we're going to come face-to-face with the devil.

The devil is going to be angry and against us and fight us and seek to hinder us. Brethren, let us pray for the advance of the Kingdom of Christ forward against the enemies. There are formidable obstacles out there.

Impossible enemies. We're just enwrapped in impossible weakness. All manner of impossible obstacles.

But He's saying, oh, if you pray with faith, you pray with forgiveness, you will blast through those obstacles. You will have victory. You will see them cast away.

Brethren, for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, may God help us, brethren. May God help us to do this. We must not fail to pray in this manner.

I'll tell you, if we fail to pray, it's not because there aren't things to pray for. It's not because there aren't obstacles in the way that we need to pray against. It's not because we haven't been bidden by our Lord to pray.

If we fail to pray, especially here as Americans with our money and our cars and our homes and everything, the problem is typically with us. It isn't that the battle isn't out there and the obstacles aren't there and there aren't things to be prayed out of the way. It's typically the problem is we sleep, we relax, we take it easy, we just become distracted by the stuff.

You know, the service is over and somebody's planning on, you know, they're going to go watch this week. Put those things... Look, you're saying those are sinful? I'm saying this. Take this week serious.

Put things out of your life that might be lawful, but they're just a hindrance and they will hinder you from praying this week the way you ought to pray. Pray militantly. Pray with purpose.

Pray in light of these verses. Beware of faith killing things. Listen, things that grieve the Spirit are faith killing.

The Spirit makes our faith lively and strong. Don't grieve Him. Beware of harboring grudges.

Cut the throat of your own ability to pray just by being distracted and by harboring things and being worldly. Brethren, we only get one round at this. I mean, we live once.

We live once. And if Jesus is calling His disciples aside and saying these things to them, you know the kind of life He wants us to live. You know the kind.

Not easy. Not full of rest and amusement and entertainment and softness. He's calling us to face the obstacles and win.

That's what He's calling us to. Let's pray that way. Father, we ask You to help us, encourage us, move upon us, make these things real to us.

I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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