

Mark 11:20-33

“Jesus Knows If You Really Want To Know”

As we make our way in to the middle of this chapter Jesus has *come* to Jerusalem, *cursed* a fig tree and *cleansed* the temple. and Though when stated in that fashion they seem to be rather random acts, the fact is they're all closely connected. Jesus came to Jerusalem on Sunday, but it wasn't just *any* day, it wasn't just a random day that He happened to make His way into the city. It was a very specific day that had been ordained from before the foundations of the earth upon which the Messiah would reveal Himself to Israel. It was on a day that had been prophesied *to* the day that He would be there and He made His way into the city in the *manner* of which it was prophesied (that is riding on a donkey's colt). It was a grand and glorious occasion, people praising and lifting their voices to the Lord, “Save now, Save now! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” The Messiah was manifesting Himself but as we mentioned last week they missed it. They were saying the right things but what they were implying by those things was something completely different than what Jesus had come to do. On Sunday people are shouting, “Save Now, Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!” In less than a week people will be shouting, “We have no king but Caesar, His blood be upon us and upon our children...Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

However none of that changes the fact that Messiah had manifested Himself to the people openly in Jerusalem on that day. and As the Messiah He came to make His final assessment of the *situation* there in Jerusalem, He could see what was happening in reality, but He was looking deeper, down into the actuality. He saw the activity, the people going through right motions of sacrifice and service, paying their temple taxes. Honoring God with their lips, worshiping with their mouths, however their hearts were far from Him. He found the foliage, but no fruit, a façade, no real faith (not in the religious leaders anyway, those who were to represent the heart of God to the people).

And so the next day He made an object lesson of the fig tree that had the appearance of being fruitful from a distance, but upon closer inspection it was completely barren. Just like Israel, and just like so many in the church today. Things looking so good outwardly, but inwardly things are barren, there's a façade but no faith, no fruit. and Jesus was sending the message; “judgment is coming.” “I'm the Vine, My Father is the Vinedresser, and finding no fruit on you you're about to be taken away, cut off.” The Lord is looking for fruit in our lives (we talked about that last week we won't go over it again, if you weren't here I'd encourage you to pick up a copy of that study).

So He comes to the temple and commences to overturn the tables of the moneychangers, to drive out those who bought and sold. This wasn't a place of ministry, it was a place of making money, making merchandise of the people of God. and Where were they doing this? In the court of the Gentiles; if you weren't a Jew you could only have access to one area of the temple grounds. and Yet that area was like a swap meet and a stockyard all rolled up into one.

You weren't going to find a place to pray, and meditate and get before the Lord to focus on the Lord. It was like an overcrowded flea market in there. and In Vs 17 Jesus said

Vs17

“You're not ministering, you're merchandising! This is to be a place where people can come, pray and commune with God, yet you've become religious racketeers, seeking to profit from the people.”

and In that statement we should note the importance of corporate worship to the Lord. This was to be a place where people from every tribe, tongue and nation could come and assemble together to pray and seek the Lord. It's true that we can worship the Lord individually, and we need time personally with the Lord, but God has called us to assemble collectively as a body as well. That we might worship and seek Him together, agree with one another in prayer; there is a strength that God has ordained in agreement, there is an anointing that He has established in corporate body life that you just don't get when you're trying to fly solo. Jesus wants us to come together and seek after Him, grow in our knowledge and understanding *of* Him, becoming one heart and one mind *in* Him.

Well, Jesus cleaned house (just like He wants to do in you and in me) and as we might expect the religious leaders didn't appreciate that. Jesus was bad for business; so we read in Vs 18.

Vs18-21

It's been a week for us it was only a day for them; and here as they pass by that fig tree again Peter notices it. and What he sees blows his mind because that tree that looked so full and lush yesterday is completely withered and dried up today. and We note in Vs 20 that attention is drawn to the fact that it's dried up *from the roots*. Why? Because the roots are what's “beneath the surface,” we've spoken about what's above ground, what people can see, the way things appear outwardly. But when a problem arises, when a person begins to wither, when they fail to produce fruit, invariably those things are only symptomatic of a deeper issue, a “root” issue. They're drying up from the roots. Deep, nurtured roots will make for an abundance of fruit, but if there's a problem at the root level the fruit will never be made manifest. Jesus said that a bad tree can't produce good fruit, and if your roots aren't been watered in the word of God, cultivated, and nurtured in prayer and fellowship with the Lord and other believers, you'll start drying out. If there is some unrepentant sin in your life, you're not giving heed to the clear instruction of God's word, you'll start drying out. and It never starts outwardly, it starts inwardly, it's a slow decay at the root level.

Peter says, “Jesus that tree that You cursed, check it out! It's totally withered away!”

Vs22-24

Wow! We've just been issued a blank check in prayer, all we have to do is fill in the amount! What a seemingly broad and open ended promise for the Lord to lay out before you and me. and It is, but remember the 3 essential rules when it comes to our interpretation and application of scripture. #1 Context, #2 Context, and #3 (any guesses) Context.

and You would've thought that Jesus would've seized the opportunity to teach His disciples regarding the object lesson of the fig tree, the fact that He's looking for fruit; that He's not into the façade, that this was the spiritual condition of the nation and all of that. But He

didn't; instead He points to the fact that there is power in prayer, and that when you position yourself in harmony with the *heart* of God, incredible things will happen to the *glory* of God.

and You can almost see Peter and the boys just eyes wide, mouths open, they're legitimately stunned and staggered by this (as we would all be). and Jesus says to them, "Have faith in God." Boy that's a word to tuck away and let permeate deep down into our hearts isn't it? We could almost roll up shop and go home now with hearts filled to the overflow with all that's packed away into that simple statement "Have faith in God." You might want to underline that statement in your bible. By the way, in the way that's phrased Jesus issues it as a command. It's imperative, essential, it's a non-option, have faith in God.

Something else you should know about this phrase is that it's in the active voice, and the present tense, meaning that you should constantly, continually with out exception always be completely and totally dependant upon God. Faith isn't something we're to set into action in time of crisis or when there's a need and so we get our faith off the shelf and kick it into high gear. It's to be a continual, never ending dependence.

and Of course we've already emphasized the object of our faith, but for the record we need to state it. We're to have faith *in God*, we don't just believe in some mystical force out there that causes everything to work out in the end. We don't subscribe to karma, or if we just "believe" it'll all work out. There is a definite object in which we're to place our faith, and our faith is only as good as the object receiving it. and The object of our faith is God, the Creator of all the universe, the maker of mankind. Jesus makes it very clear we don't look to the things of this world, we don't trust in the stock market, job security, our next pay check, it's not our best friend or spouse we depend on, we look to and trust in the Lord, our faith is in God.

and It would seem that there's a 2 fold application to the statement. Because it does apply to Peter's comment, Peter draws attention to the withered tree, the dried out roots and Jesus draws attention to the need to maintain active faith in God. It's as though Jesus is saying, "If you want to have a fruitful life, not have a spiritual life that's dry and withered from the roots, you need to be consistently continually dependant upon God. You have to *abide* in the vine via faith. But at the same time Jesus makes this segue here from a fruitful life to a powerful prayer life both of which demand faith in God as an essential element.

Now, let's consider this incredible comment here in Vs 23-24. Jesus says (as He's there at the Mt of olives) whoever says to this Mt, 'be removed and be cast into the sea' and does not doubt in his heart (notice it always comes back to the heart) but believes it'll be done, he'll have whatever he says. So whatever you ask for when you pray, believe that you receive it and you'll have it.

So the question that would seem to obviously confront us is, "Are the prosperity teachers right then?" "Can I believe God for a Bugatti Veyron (a 1.2 million dollar car) and expect one to come pulling up in my drive way with the title in my name?" and I would have to say that if this were the only passage that dealt with prayer, the only statement ever said by Jesus that pertained to prayer we might begin to consider that. However it's not and we err to take apart, apart from the whole, we can't take a single statement and lift it out of the totality of the whole counsel of the word of God and create doctrine with it. That's how you make the word of God dangerous, you can make it say whatever you want to say, that's why context is key.

1 Thing we need to realize right away is who it is that Jesus is speaking to. Is He speaking to the multitudes generally? No, He's speaking to His disciples specifically, and there are prerequisites to being a disciple, or a follower of Jesus. For instance Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* Luke 9:23 The very 1st thing on the list that I have to submit to in being a disciple of Christ is self denial... Well, that pretty much rules out the 1.2 million dollar ride...

So then when it comes to prayer if I'm not supposed to be seeking my own will, who's am I supposed to be seeking? The Lord's. Remember when the disciples said, "Lord teach us to pray." and Jesus said, *"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven."* Matt 6:9-10 Jesus also said, *"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"* John 14:13-14 What are the words that qualify that particular promise? He says them twice, if you ask, "In My name." In the name of Jesus, what does that mean?

It doesn't mean using the words "In Jesus name" at the end of our prayers like it's a postage stamp that delivers our prayer requests to heaven. To pray in the *name* of Jesus is to pray in a character consistent with His, seeking things in like manner, interceding for the things that are on His heart, being true to His nature (which is all giving, never self seeking, self sacrificing, looking to bless and build up others, encourage and edify, give wisdom and understanding, spiritual strength in the inner man), to pray in Jesus' name is to pray in a manner that's consistent with His character.

John said, *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."* 1 John 5:14-15 He said, *"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."* 1 John 3:22

So to qualify the context here; when it comes to having a powerful prayer life, if you're coming to God in prayer through faith, denying yourself, seeking His will to be done, in a character consistent with that of Christ, leading a life that's obedient to His word, then you can rest assured that God is going to be moving in powerful ways through your prayer life. The element that Jesus emphasizes in this particular passage is that of faith; *have faith in God*. Don't doubt Him, trust *in* Him, is there anything too hard for Him? Do you really believe that there isn't? Really?

and When Jesus talks about moving mountains though it can apply literally, the reference more accurately is to those things that are mountains in our lives. That big deal that's just right in your face, seems impossible to overcome, that addiction, that unsaved person that you've been pleading for but just seems hopeless; trust in the Lord, don't doubt. The bible says, *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* Heb 11:6 James said, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,"* James 1:5-6 He went on to say that if you doubt the Lord, don't expect to receive anything *from* the Lord. So whether it's wisdom *from* God or a work *of* God that you're seeking, believe Him for it, He can do it. Get on

your face *before* Him, seek to line yourself up *with* Him and the desires of His heart, and He's going to move. Prayer isn't about getting our will done in heaven anyway, it's about getting His will done on earth.

So *faith* is an essential element for the person who would have a powerful prayer life. There's 1 more that Jesus highlights for us, notice.

Vs25-26

Ouch! The 2 elements that Jesus highlights for us in this passage that are essential to a powerful prayer life: #1 Faith in God, #2 Forgiveness toward others; faith and forgiveness. There is both a vertical and horizontal aspect to powerful prayer, I need to have a right attitude toward both God and man, faith toward God, and forgiveness toward others. A bitter and unforgiving spirit in your life will short circuit the power of your prayers. That's what Jesus is saying...

Now what you need to understand is that what He's *not* saying is that if you can't forgive you won't be forgiven in the sense that you won't be saved. Again context is key; He's speaking to His disciples, guys already saved. Salvation is based upon God's grace through faith, it's not something we can earn by forgiving someone, or that God is going to dock you of because you're struggling with that. Salvation is a no strings attached gift, the bible is clear about that, you place your faith in Christ, you're saved, period. The reference is to a fruitful, effective prayer life. and An unforgiving spirit will impede and obstruct your prayer life.

Why? Because it's sin, and sin separates us from God. Remember this verse? *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."* Isa 59:1-2 When it comes to having a weak and anemic prayer life believe me when I tell you the problem isn't on God's end, it's on ours. Peter tells us that when things aren't right in our marriages, if we're not treating our wives right, that our prayers will be hindered (1 Pet3:7) (and don't think it's only on the husbands, wives ;o) I'm sure there's some mutual application there. If you're treating your husband like dirt don't think that won't impact your prayers either). What does the bible say? *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."* Ps 66:18 Let's go back to that model prayer, "and forgive us our trespasses (what) as we forgive those who trespass against us...it's conditional.

The bottom line in the heart of God is this. If He's forgiven you your major offense, then He *expects* that you should forgive your brother, or your sister their minor (by comparison) offense. and It's like if we have the audacity to plead for mercy, beg for forgiveness, and then turn around and withhold forgiveness from another; it's like God is saying, "Don't even talk to Me, I don't want to hear it, I don't want you to come to Me like everything is ok and think that I'll turn a blind eye to the fact that it's not ok." Now don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that we should come to God, pour our hearts out to God even if we're struggling forgiving someone. But at the same time don't think that God overlooks your hard heart or embittered spirit in the midst of it and pretends it's not a problem. Eph 4:32, *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* Again, Col 3:12-13, *"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."* What's the

standard, to what degree am I to forgive my brother, my sister who's offended me? To the degree that Christ forgave you. "But he's really offended me, she's really wounded me." Do you think your sin offended Christ, last I checked Christ was wounded *deeply* because of my sin, yet He forgave me totally. Now who am I to withhold forgiveness from another?

Where is the love of God in that? Yet Paul tells us in Gal Ch 5 that faith works *through* love, so if I'm unforgiving the power of faith is short-circuited in my life. Want an effective prayer life? Faith, and forgiveness are imperative.

Vs27-28

Or to understand that another way the high and mighty religious muckety mucks came to Jesus and said, "Who do You think You are saying what You're saying and doing what You're doing?" "By what authority are You acting?" and To be fair it's a legitimate question, in one respect it was their job to make sure what took place there was kept within the confines of scripture. Yet in another respect we know that the genuine well being of the people wasn't their motive for confrontation, but rather the fact that Jesus made them look bad, and they just wanted Him gone.

However if we were to be honest we'd have to confess that there's a bit of this attitude in each of us. Oh we may not say it out loud but how often the Lord will quicken us in an area, we realize there's sin in our lives, or an ungodly attitude that Jesus is confronting us about. But we rear up and cop an attitude with the Lord. "Wait a minute, I'm not sure I *want* to change that, or repent *of* that, who do You think You are telling me what to do? I know it's wrong, but quite frankly I don't think I'm really *willing* or *ready* to change right now, and what gives You the authority to tell me otherwise?" Oh we may not verbalize it that way, but that's the testimony of our unrepentant position isn't it?

Vs29-30

You know, you would think that by now these guys would've learned to quit challenging Jesus. But they just keep hoping to somehow derail Him only to have it backfire on themselves. Jesus says, "Alright, I'll answer you if you answer Me. The baptism/ministry of John was it from heaven (that is ordained and anointed of God) or from men (that is was he just doing something on his own and God never called him)?"

and Now they're between the proverbial rock and a hard place, because if they say, "From heaven" Jesus will say, "Then why don't you believe him?" Because John had one mission in his ministry didn't he? He said that he was going *before* the Messiah to make ready the way *of* the Messiah, and when Jesus came on the scene John pointed Him out over and over again *as* the Messiah. So if they agree that John was sent and called by God, then they have to concede Jesus is the Messiah and acting on the authority of God. (and They know that). This is the time when they should've humbled themselves, repented of their sin and begged His forgiveness. But they don't *want* to do that. Yet if they say John was never called of God they'll cause a riot because the people perceived him as a prophet (and rightly so). So what are they going to do? Let's listen in.

Vs31-33

They plead the 5th, they refuse to answer on the basis of the fact that it would incriminate them. They say, "You know, we don't know." and Jesus says, "Then you *won't* know." Here's the point; if you *don't know*, then you *won't* know. What are you saying Jeff? Listen, what I'm

saying is that Jesus can see through the insincerity of a person's heart. If you don't really want to know who Jesus is, then He won't reveal Himself to you. If you *really want to know*, if you're legitimately seeking the truth, Jesus will reveal to you who He is. True truth seekers Jesus took time with, answered their questions, delicately dealt with them so as to reveal Himself to them. But the insincere skeptic who was just looking to discredit Him, or score debate points against Him He wouldn't give the time of day. Jesus isn't into playing games along those lines.

He's searching your heart, do you *really want to know*? If you do, then you will because Jesus can discern the difference between the snide/spiteful skeptic Vs the one who's truly hungry, truly desperate and desiring the truth.

and If we ask Jesus for answers we're going to have to deal in a right way with the truth that's already revealed. These guys knew that John said that Jesus was the Messiah, they weren't willing to deal with that, Jesus took them back to that. If you won't accurately weigh in the balance and consider honestly what's already revealed about Jesus, then why should He entertain your whims of wanting to know more? He knows the motive and the intent of our heart, be it to justify our own position, or to want to know Him more deeply, more intimately, or maybe to quit playing games and come to Him for the very 1st time legitimately. As much of Jesus as you want, He's ready and waiting to give; do you *really want to know*?

Prayer Points:

Lord, You're searching our hearts, and we can put smoke and mirrors up before men, but You see into our heart, You know the truth *about* us, the tendencies found *in* us, yet You love us and want to do a great work in and through us. Would You remove the debris that gets in the way of that work. Increase our faith, remove our doubts, give us hearts of tenderness and forgiveness. Help us to remember the truth of Your forgiveness toward us that we might humble ourselves, repent of our bitter hearts and forgive one another. If we have the faith to move mountains and yet have not love, we're nothing. Fill us with Your love.

If you've never surrendered to Jesus you should know that He wants to fill *you* with His love as well. He wants to reveal Himself and make Himself real to you, He wants to forgive you of your sin and make you brand new. You have questions, that's ok. The Lord will spend time *with* you, minister *to* you, you just need to humble yourself before Him and surrender your heart, your life to Him.