

Text: Matthew 21:18-22
Lent 2; March 1 & 2, 2015

I Tell You the Truth . . . Faith Can Move Mountains

¹⁸ Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. ²⁰ When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. ²¹ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

The Walmart parking lot was jammed full, bumper-to-bumper. Increasingly frustrated because there wasn't a single, vacant parking stall, John kept circling . . . and circling . . . and circling. Just when he thought he found the perfect spot, only four stalls from the front door, he begins to turn into the spot, only to find that it is occupied by a motorcycle. Desperate to save his legs a long walk in the cold, John angrily uttered a prayer, "Lord, if you give me a parking spot, I'll donate an extra \$1000 to church." Boom! Just like that, John saw the white reverse lights flick on to his right. He slammed on the brakes to reserve the coveted spot. Rejoicing as he watched the car backing out in front of him, John turned on his directional signal. As he is turning into the coveted spot, he says: *"Forget it, God, I just found a space."*

You may have heard a story like that before. Yet, isn't that how we sometimes view prayer. Prayer is that last resort when all else seems to fail. As we pray, we may not always trust that God will really answer that prayer. Or when something does happen in our lives, we chalk it up to coincidence instead of God's answer to our prayer. Today, as we continue to take a look at Jesus' "I Tell you the Truth" let us see **Faith that can Move Mountains**.

"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Wow, what a promise! If you believe, you will receive! If you don't doubt, it will be done! Really? How could Jesus make such a statement? Let's consider the context in which he said it.

It was the early part of Holy Week. He had spent the night in Bethany, not far outside of Jerusalem. He and His disciples were now heading back into Jerusalem. It was early in the morning. They came upon a fig tree in full bloom. As Jesus reached up to the tree to pick some fruit, he saw that there was no fruit. (Typically, if a fig tree has leaves, it has fruit.) So Jesus said, **"May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately, the tree withered.**

Can you imagine the look on the disciples face as they saw the tree wither? Perhaps, their minds quickly went back to the time they had been in a boat in a storm, and all Jesus had to say was to be quiet and the storm stopped. Back to the shores where they saw a little boy's lunch that fed thousands. Here once again they see Jesus' limitless power.

As you're staring at the fig tree with eyes wide open and thinking about what you had just seen happen, Jesus says: *"You think that's amazing. Look at those mountains. As tall as they are, as solid and strong as they are, if you have faith, if you don't doubt, they can fall into that sea 4,000 feet below and behind you."* If you are one of the disciples, you wouldn't doubt these words of Jesus at all. You've seen what he can do!

That's the key when it comes to unlocking the beauty and comfort of Jesus' **"I tell you the truth"** statement before us today. All too often when we hear those words, we hear: **IF YOU** have faith and **IF YOU** believe, **IF YOU** don't doubt. We think of ourselves. When we emphasize the **"IF YOU,"** we look at it from the wrong perspective. We think it is the power of OUR faith that moves the mountain into the sea. We think about ourselves. We think of our role in this action. Is it my faith that causes the mountain to fall? It's the power of Jesus who makes the promise. It's His power and His promise that makes our prayers effective. It's His promises that makes our faith powerful. It's not about whether I believe strong enough or not. Moving a mountain doesn't depend on me, it depends on the one who makes the promise.

How important that is for us to remember in this season of Lent. During this time of year in which our hymn tunes are more somber and our "Alleluias" are temporarily missing, we are led to think about the seriousness of our sin. It is good for us to

have a season of the church year devoted to that. It is one of the reasons that I thought it would be good for us to not just remind ourselves of that during our midweek services, but for us to also think about that hear on the Sundays in Lent as well. It was our hands, our words and our thought that caused the nails to be driven through Jesus' hands.

We look at the sins that we have committed in our lives and we begin to think: *"What kind of believer am I?" "What kind of faith do I have?"* Satan would love us to put the validity of OUR faith on ourselves. He would love to have us to put the power of our prayers on OUR shoulders. *"I prayed that Grandpa would get better, but he didn't."* *"My faith must not have been good enough."* *"I prayed that our marriage would have survived, but it didn't."* *"I must not have prayed hard enough."* *"I believed that I could have done that job, but I never got the offer."* *"I must have doubted God."*

With our faith shaken, we start to wonder, *"Do I really believe?" Or, "Do I believe enough in Jesus?" "Do I have that mountain moving faith?"* Maybe we begin to think about Jesus: *"Can we trust him when he says, 'I tell you the truth . . . faith can move mountains?'"* I've never seen a mountain fall into the sea. Have you?

But Jesus' point on this section is not whether or not he made mountains fall into the heart of the sea. The disciples never saw Jesus move mountains into the heart of the sea. None of the disciples were ever able to move mountains into the sea. The point is not WHETHER he moved mountains. The point is that he CAN! He invites the disciples to tap into that power.

Jesus knew his disciple would need that strength and power that only he can offer. In a few days they were going to see Jesus go to the cross. Their faith would be shaken as they would stand back and watch all these events unfold. They would be reminded that Jesus didn't die out of weakness or because he was out-smarted by the Jewish leaders. He died because he wanted to. He died to carry out his Father's will.

Would they always remember this? No. Peter would deny knowing Jesus as he would be cornered by a servant girl. They would be hiding behind locked doors when Jesus would appear to them after his resurrection. But no matter how they felt or how they acted, Jesus' statement remained, **"I tell you the truth, you tell this mountain to fall into the sea, and it will be done!"**

The same goes for us as well. We have a Savior who will crush Satan's head. We have a Savior who would cry out: **"It is Finished!"** We see a Savior who has died for us. We see a Savior who sits at the right hand of God. We have a Savior who invites us to tap into that power through our prayers. Not as a last resort or a desperate plea, but as a primary blessing he's reserved for you and me.

Oh, I'm not saying we won't forget that. At times, we will question God. There will be days that we will hide behind our fears. Our fears don't change the facts. No matter how weak we feel, the fact remains, **"I tell you the truth . . . your faith can move mountains,"** because your faith depends on the One who has tree-withering, death-defying, sin-erasing, Satan-squelching power. Like the disciples, may that lead us to be amazed. May that lead us to pray. Amen.