

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Mark 11:22-25

The Lord Jesus has just pronounced closure on the temple established by God himself.. All the activities of the Jerusalem temple, this third building to have been set up on the site, the one instigated by Herod over fifty years earlier, have now reached their soon to be end. The sacrificial system is finished; the priests and levites had all better start looking for other jobs. The financial system of the temple and its taxes are bankrupt. It is all over.

This action of Jesus in going into the Court of the Gentiles and bringing the activities of the temple to an end by turning over the tables of the money- changers, and driving out the worshippers and the temple staff, and stopping any more deliveries of wood and water and clean clothes was the most revolutionary act of Christ that the Twelve had witnessed.

What were they thinking? I don't know.

These were only the early days of the most extraordinary week in the history of the world but Jesus turned to them and he said , "Have faith in God" (v.22).

There is something more to this exhortation. In our text Jesus is describing what from now on is going to characterize the real temple, a mindset and a lifestyle which had been conspicuously absent from the temple made of stone.

The Sermon on the Mount is going to be alive in the lives of His people. His radical call to discipleship is going to be known throughout the world beginning in Jerusalem on Pentecost.

Primarily it's going to be a living faith in God that will characterize the new temple, the people indwelt by God, and Jesus is describing the life of this real temple throughout our text. In other words, these words are setting before us the essence of New Covenant Christian living . Here the Lord Jesus describes real Christianity. He is saying

that henceforth there would be a believing community of both men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, without walls of division. All its disciples would be characterized by a praying and forgiving spirit. That is the theme of these verses in Jesus' counsel to these men, no matter what else occurs - have faith in God.

Today every denomination and religion gravely intones about 'having faith in God.' Christians and Moslems and Hindus all agree about the importance of having faith in God. The cults too, the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses - they all have faith in God. The Pharisees and the high priests who ran the temple had faith in God. What was the Lord Jesus talking about when he urged his disciples to have faith in God? Surely he was not encouraging some vague faith in some vague god? No. He was encouraging faith in the one he knew as his own Father, and in himself as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Soon he would tell them, "I and my Father are one," he claimed. He was encouraging them to believe that he was the way and the truth and the life and that no man came to the Father but by him. That is the faith he was commending. He had come from the Father into the world to give his life a ransom for many

The gospel is not about faith, the gospel is about Jesus Christ. Christian faith is unambiguously, unremittingly, Christ-centered and a gift from God. Once given it is to be utilized.

The Lord is not talking here to the super-Christian who has learned the techniques of prayer so that he always gets what he asks. There is no such person. He is addressing every limping staggering believer - the mere Christian. You see his encouraging promise to us all? "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him" (v.23). Can this be true?

Let us start here: the Savior is talking about the need for us to believe that "what he says will happen." Who does this refer to?

Some Jewish texts speak of “removing mountains” as an infinitely long or virtually impossible task, accomplished only by the most pious (the rabbis applied it to mastering studies that appeared humanly impossible to master). Thus Jesus is saying that nothing will be too hard for the person of faith. The image of God’s Spirit bringing down a mountain before a faithful servant also appears in Zechariah 4:6-7 (where the faithful one is the anointed king). The promise of one’s commands coming to pass probably presupposes Spirit -inspired speech (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 2:21-22; 4:3-7, 41-44; Lam 3:37; Acts 3:6, 16. Standing (often with uplifted hands) was the normal posture for prayer; kneeling was much rarer.

Consider the words again: "and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him" (v.23). The man praying is to believe that what he says will happen. It may well be that this he is referring to God, and the best interpretation always has to bring in the will of God, praying according to what God says. We always have to go back to God's will to correctly interpret this verse. We have this faith as Christians that what God says will most definitely happen, and that is to end my doubts as I pray.

Certainly Jesus cannot be saying that whenever any Christian can work up enough faith to believe that what he has asked for is really going to happen then it will happen.

The Word Faith and Positive confession movements are dead wrong .

It is not faith in yourself or faith in your faith here - or anywhere else in the Bible, it is faith in the will of God that is the foundation of this comforting verse. The Lord is talking about the interface of his promise and our praying, and that is our trust. People in the true temple know that God's promises are not fickle; they are yes and Amen. What God has said will be done. That is the basis of our worship and peace with God. When we pray we are to believe that, not thinking "maybe this will happen, maybe not." We are not to think of prayer as some last ditch effort, "I've tried everything else and so I may as well now say a prayer." No. I am to go to God and I am trusting all that God has said in his word. I am not to doubt at all in my heart what God says is going to

Believing the gospel is the most wonderful and blessed experience. There is no experience like the experience of being found by God. But this is merely the beginning of a life of knowing the faithfulness of God. Morning by morning new mercies we see; new mountain ranges are traversed, and again and again we are more than conquerors through God's wonderful love. We sometimes are amazed at the answers to our prayers, or are astonished by what God does. There are times when our hearts burst with love in the presence of God.

This will come to us through the Word, I mean, as the Bible is preached to us week by week, and constantly applied to us in every stage of our pilgrimage. This is the means of strengthening faith and educating our faith in Jesus Christ, and so the individuals and families and groups of people attached to our church will not be counseling groups or therapy groups. They will be men and women, young and old, whose lives all centre on the Bible and who articulate their faith in the God of the Bible in prayer meetings. The people who gather there don't doubt in their hearts but believe what God says is bound to happen, and indeed it is done for them. They rejoice in answers to prayer.

You know that there can be convinced faith that's grounded in error or nonsense and it is useless faith or dangerous faith. Think of the Book of Mormon and the lies and fantasies it contains, and how multitudes of young men give a year of their lives to spread its errors all over the world. Think of the Koran and how it denies that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross; it cuts at the heart of the Christian faith; it denies that Jesus rose from the dead. Yet many become suicide bombers who believe that error.

In Luke 17:5&6 when the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord increase our faith," He didn't give them the latest best-selling book to come from America on the technique of living the Christian life. He didn't send them away to do a course, or sing in tongues. He said these words, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." What an extraordinary answer. Faith in the truth brings great blessing. It is not how much faith

that matters in the end but it is the size of our God that matters. A little faith in a great God can subdue kingdoms and obtain his promises. God is moving mountains every day and we can rejoice in the great things done. This is the spirit you find in the true temple of God established in the world today.

You see what the Lord Jesus says next? "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (v.24). Again, it is crucial for you to understand what Jesus is talking about in our text, that its focus is on believing what God has said, and that his promises are always going to happen. Such things we are to take to God in prayer and long to see fulfilled, what God himself has promised. "Lord do these things for me, and for the family and friends, and my church, because you have promised you will. Work all things for their good. Give them the peace that passes all understanding. Supply all their needs. Make all grace always abound to them. Build your church and ensure the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Give them the blessing of being persecuted for righteousness sake. Make them more than conquerors through this." You pray believing that you and the whole church have already received God's guarantee that such things will happen. All such things are going to take place. That is what the Lord is talking about.

These words of our text cannot at all mean, "if we pray, and we don't doubt that whatever it is we happen to ask for is going to be given to us, and even cultivate a sense of assurance that we are going to get it, then that is going to happen." The Lord Christ is not talking about a particular technique in prayer. There is no technique that can achieve whatever we ask for in praying. Rather, believe what God has promised! Don't doubt his word! Ask him for such things, and you know you are going to get them, because he has promised them. We face many trials as Christians, and God has nowhere promised that they are all going to work out to our perfect convenience so that we live pain-free lives. He has not promised that I am going to pass all my exams, or that everyone I pray for is going to be converted, or that I am going to become a millionaire, or that I am going to get married, or that I am going to have children, or that I and my loved ones are going to be healed of all our diseases. There is no

technique of praying, including the greatest feelings and great assurance, that will guarantee that my life will be freed from sickness and pain and I'll always get what I ask in prayer.

Let's look at two examples of this in the Bible that confirm that this cannot be so. The first is of Christ in the garden, and he has received the cup from his Father. He has looked into it and he has seen the anathema and damnation that is in it, all the extreme pain, both physical and spiritual, that he would have to endure. He asks God concerning the possibility of another cup. Is there another cup he can drink besides this one? He asks his friends to pray with him. He has three sessions of prayer focused on this. He prays with deep earnestness; strong cryings and tears; his sweat is as if it were drops of blood. It is the most perfect and sublime prayer, made in faith, unmixed with sin. Yet God's answer is, No. No other cup. No other way. There is nothing wrong with the prayer at all; Jesus believes without doubting, he believes that he is going to receive the best answer from his Father, and the answer is No. There is no technique the Lord had failed to learn that could have made God's 'No' 'Yes.' So let's see how that praying of Jesus is illuminated by our text: "Whatever you ask for in prayer [that the Father's will might be another cup, nevertheless not Jesus' will but God's be done] believing that you have received it [Jesus knew that whatever the answer would be he would receive God's will], and it will be yours" (v.24).

The second example is Paul's three sessions of prayer that the thorn in the flesh might be removed from him. In all three Paul prays in faith, not doubting that God can remove the thorn. He believes that the answer he'll receive is going to be the will of God, yet the thorn in the flesh is not removed. God's will is that the thorn will remain but that the Lord Jesus' grace will be all sufficient for everything God wants Paul to do, even with the thorn in his flesh. Paul believed that however the Lord chose to answer his request that he would get God's will and so he rejoiced in his necessities and distresses. Paul knew that when he felt weak he was really at his strongest because then he was working with a consciousness that God must help him to get by hour by hour or else he would fail.

There is no technique in prayer that can deliver us from a cross. So we are to pray believing, and we are to pray anticipating what we get will be the will of God. Nothing can ever rob us of the will of God. Believe that you are going to receive the will of God whenever you pray - for you are! That is the praying of the true temple of God.

"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (v.25).

How often does Jesus speak of the need of his people to forgive those who have sinned against them? Very often. Always he mentions it in the context of our assurance that God has forgiven us. If we're not forgiving people then we've no reason to believe that God has forgiven us. We are still in our guilt. We are lost men if we are not forgiving men. Jesus teaches this in the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, pray saying, "forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us". The Lord makes the peril spectacularly clear, that if you forgive men when they sin against you your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you don't forgive men their sins your Father won't forgive you your sins. A man in Georgia said to John Wesley, "I never forgive." Wesley said to him, "I hope you never sin." The Lord Jesus in Matthew 18 told the parable of a man with a huge debt which was all kindly dismissed by his master, but that same man, leaving that scene of forgiveness, bumped into someone who owed him a small sum of money, and he had the culprit thrown into prison. Jesus said that when his master heard this he sent his soldiers to arrest that man and he handed him over to the tormentors until he had paid all the vast sum. Jesus brings the threat of eternal punishment to bear on his disciples in order to assist them in forgiving people.

How many times are we to forgive our brother? Seven times? No, limitlessly, said Jesus, seventy times seven. That is the spirit of the true temple of God. That is most challenging teaching isn't it? You need all the power of God to do that. But having access to that power you are able to forgive someone their worst sins. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. You understand that to forgive someone is

to make a certain commitment; "I will never hold your sins against you again."

Forgiveness is not a feeling; forgiveness is a promise. "I refuse to remember your sins to charge you with them."

You cannot say, 'If I feel like it I'll obey. So you can't beg off from Christ's commands regarding forgiveness by simply saying, 'When I get more faith I'll forgive him,' or by saying, 'When I feel like it, I'll forgive . . .'" (Jay Adams, "From Forgiven to Forgiving," Calvary Press, Amittyville, 1994, p.22).

There is a story of a policeman, Steven McDonald, who was working in New York in 1986. He was questioning three teenagers in Central Park when one of them pulled a gun on him and shot him, paralyzing him from the neck down. Steven had been married less than a year, and his wife Patti was two months pregnant. He was 29 years of age. Today he moves in a wheel chair and he's needed a tracheotomy to breathe. The teenager who shot him, Shavod Jones, was quickly arrested and convicted and sent to prison. Even when Steven was in hospital he found he couldn't hate the young man. He hated the circumstances that had brought the boy to Central Park that afternoon, and hated the handgun in his pocket, but not the lad himself. So he began to write letters to Shavod Jones, and at first the boy didn't reply, but then he began to write back to Steven. Those letters stopped only because Shavod Jones wanted parole and Steven wouldn't assist him to get out of jail quickly. The boy served nine years and then was released but three weeks later he was killed in a motorcycle accident..

Today Steven McDonald has a ten year old son he is never able to hug, but there is no bitterness. He is always having to fight back discouragement and there have been black times when he has battled with thoughts of suicide. He has a gentle demeanor and sparkling eyes. To begin with this forgiveness was a way of moving on. If you ask him if forgiveness was hard he would say, "No, it's a gift of God." He has himself been forgiven for his sins by God through the work of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of Christ in him has been his great enabler. Then Steve began to visit schools and speak to them about his experience, and now wherever he goes he teaches about these words of the



Savior, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (v.25). That is his great contribution to spreading the temple of Jesus Christ. He tells people as they pray at the end of every day and ask God to forgive their own sins that they add, "And I forgive that woman for saying that, and that man for doing that . . ." We live in a forgiving atmosphere.

We are living in a world full of bitterness; there are gangs of men dominated by hate who kidnap people they don't know and if they can't get what they want they'll cut their victims' heads off with video cameras recording what they have done. We are back in the dark ages. That is the reality of 21st century life and it will get little better. Men are faced with a choice: to love or to hate, to forgive or to condemn, to seek reconciliation or retribution. This is the world in which we are to plant the temple of God. It is a place of faith in Jesus Christ, and a place of prayer, and a place of forgiveness.

If I am understanding the teaching of the New Testament correctly there can be no exceptions, and it is in these tough cases that we are being tested, whether we have a forgiving spirit or not, whether we are full of wonder and love to the Lord for forgiving us our sins, or whether God's immense mercy bought with the blood of the Redeemer is something we don't really esteem but which we are taking in our stride on the way to self-fulfillment? Then we are lost men.