
Moving Your Mountain

By David Wilkerson

July 14, 2008 "As they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto (Jesus), Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

"For verily I say unto you, That *whosoever shall say unto this mountain*, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.... What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:20–24, my italics).

This well known passage is beloved in the church of Jesus Christ. As I read it recently, God would not let me pass over it without examining it further. Now I have found within it powerful spiritual truth I hadn't seen before.

Jesus was in his last days of ministry. He had just cleansed the temple, driving out the moneychangers. Now he was spending time with his disciples, to prepare them as the pillars of his future church. Yet at this point they were still faithless, "slow to believe," men of little faith. Jesus had chided them for their unbelief at various times, saying, "Can you not see?" He saw in their hearts a hindrance that had to be removed, or they would never come into the revelation necessary to lead the church.

As they passed by a barren fig tree, Jesus cursed it: "(He) said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it" (Mark 11:14). Later, as the group came by the fig tree again, Peter pointed out, "Lord, the fig tree you cursed has dried up." Jesus gave Peter an amazing response. Without offering an answer, he said simply, "Have faith in God."

We know from Jesus' response that the message to follow was all about faith. The withered fig tree was another of Christ's illustrated sermons. What did this dried-up plant represent? It signified God's rejection of the old religious system of works in Israel. That system was all about trying to earn salvation and God's favor by human effort and self-will.

Something new was about to be birthed in Israel: a church in which God's people would live totally by faith. Salvation and eternal life would come by faith alone. Indeed, walking daily with the Lord would be a matter of faith. Yet, to this point, God's people knew nothing of living by faith. Their religion had been all about performance: appearing for worship services, reading the Torah, keeping extensive sets of rules. Now Jesus was saying, "That old system is over, headed for judgment." A new day was dawning: the church of faith was being birthed.

The truth is, from the very beginning God had sought a people who would live before him without fear. He wanted his children to be at rest in body, soul and spirit by fully trusting in his promises. God called this "entering my rest." So he led his people into a barren wilderness, where there was no water, food or source of sustenance, giving them only his promise to keep them. His message to Israel was simply, "Have faith in me." He called them to place all their trust in him to do the impossible for them.

But according to the author of Hebrews, God's people at that time never entered his rest, because they didn't trust in his promises. We are then warned to beware, lest we also fail to enter God's rest due to unbelief.

The “mountain” before God’s people was, is and always will be unbelief. In the passage about the fig tree, Jesus refers to an unnamed mountain: “Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23).

We don’t know what mountain Jesus was talking about here. Scholars have given the mountain all kinds of names: the mountain of besetting sin, of poverty, of sickness, of fear, of discouragement. The point is, all of these things are birthed from unbelief. Jesus was saying to his disciples, as well as to us today: “Unbelief is like a hindering mountain in your heart that can’t be moved. It has to be cast out, or I cannot work with you.”

The fact is, Jesus was unable to perform miracles in a certain town because of the people’s unbelief: “He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). The same holds true for Christ’s church today: wherever there is unbelief, he is unable to work. Unbelief is always the mountain that hinders the fullness of God’s revelation and blessing. Jesus is telling us, in essence: “I cannot do any great work for you — I can’t do the impossible in your life situation — as long as a mountain of unbelief stands before you.”

Scripture makes clear God does not take unbelief lightly. The New Testament gives an example of this in the story of Zacharias. In Luke 1, God promised the aging priest a miracle child, a son who would be a forerunner to the Messiah. Zacharias was a godly, faithful servant who had prayed his whole life for the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, when he received this news, he was burning incense in the temple. The angel Gabriel appeared to him, saying, “Your prayer has been heard, Zacharias. You’ll have a son, and you will call him John.”

Zacharias knew he and his wife were well past the age of conceiving a child. Imagine his dilemma: in his eyes, this was a heavy promise. He had to wonder, “How can this be? My wife and I are stricken in years.” For him, it was a mountain of unbelief.

Yet God did not excuse Zacharias’ lack of faith. He had no pity for his age or his devoted service in the past. The fact is, God was not about to overlook unbelief in such a dedicated servant. Instead, the angel Gabriel told Zacharias, “Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season” (Luke 1:20).

What a grievous punishment. Zacharias’ own son was going to herald the coming of the Messiah, but the priest himself wouldn’t be able to celebrate the news for the duration of his wife’s pregnancy.

King Asa is another example of a faithful servant whose unbelief did not escape God’s displeasure. During his righteous reign in Judah, Asa wiped out idolatry, tearing down heathen temples and bringing revival to the land. Then, as the people enjoyed God’s blessing, a million-man army from Ethiopia invaded. Doing battle with such an army was a total impossibility for Judah. So Asa turned to the Lord, calling the people to prayer.

Against impossible odds, Asa’s army won a great victory over the invaders. It was one of the greatest miracles of faith in the history of God’s people. Scholars say the victory would have been talked about throughout the known world at that time.

On his way home after the victory, Asa was intercepted by a prophet. This man did not come to

congratulate Asa but to give him a warning. He told the king, "As long as you rely on the Lord, fully trusting him, you will be blessed. He will walk with you and give you victory after victory. But if you turn away from him, trusting in your flesh, you will have disorder and chaos in every area."

Asa took this message to heart, and he walked faithfully with the Lord for thirty-six years. During that time, Judah was greatly blessed by God. It was a wonderful, glorious time to live in that land. Then, after all those years, another crisis came. The backslidden king who ruled Israel (which had divided itself from Judah) launched an attack on Asa. He captured Ramah, a town just five miles from Judah's capital, Jerusalem, cutting off that vital trade route to the city. If something didn't happen quickly, Judah's entire economy would collapse.

This time, King Asa moved in fear. Instead of trusting the Lord, he turned to a notorious enemy, the king of Syria, for help. Unbelievably, Asa stripped Judah's treasury of all its wealth and offered it to the Syrians to deliver Judah. It was an act of absolute unbelief.

It is often said that the hardest part of faith is the last half hour. The fact is, God already had put into motion his plan to deliver Judah. But Asa aborted that plan by acting in fear and panic. Now a prophet came to Asa saying, "Because you didn't trust the Lord, from now on you will have wars." And so it was in Judah. Acting in unbelief always brings total disorder and chaos.

Jesus said it is possible for us to move the mountain before us. The mountainous hindrance of unbelief in our hearts can indeed be cast out, but only by faith. "Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:23).

Jesus is telling us our part here, and what a glorious promise he gives: whatever things we desire, when we pray, we are to believe we will receive them and we will have them. Can you believe it?

In my years in ministry, I have seen that few Christians believe such a supernatural work could occur. In fact, you may say, "I have tried this, and it didn't work for me. I prayed in faith, and I believed. But my prayer wasn't answered."

I think of a young pastor who came to me confessing his addiction to pornography. This young man loves God and loves his wife, and they enjoy a good marriage. But he got hooked on pornography and was unable to shake himself loose from it. Now it had begun to rob him of all his spiritual strength. He had prayed earnestly, but he hadn't been delivered.

As I explored the issue further with him, he told me something from his earlier years. As a young man, he had been given a wonderful promise from the Lord for his life. But that promise had never been fulfilled. The pastor told me, "God let me down. He made me a promise, but it never came to pass." He had become bitter toward the Lord about it. Now he couldn't stand before God with faith for any kind of deliverance.

This young man's problem wasn't just an addiction but unbelief. He did not accept that God answers prayer. And now his unbelief stood before him like a looming mountain, impassable and unmovable. It was hindering the fullness that is his in Christ.

My wife, Gwen, and I spent time with another couple in ministry. For a long time, these dear people had endured financial pressures and carried heavy burdens concerning their children. Things only

seemed to get darker. The wife confessed to us:

“Sometimes I believe I have a right to unbelief. I’ve done everything according to God’s Word, but our family continues to suffer. I’ve prayed, I’ve stood on God’s promises, I’ve been faithful to obey him in everything. Yet all my prayers have been in vain. I can’t believe he is at work for us, because I don’t see any evidence of it.”

Since these two conversations, God has moved wonderfully for both the young pastor and the couple in ministry. They have come through their storms and emerged in a wonderful place of faith in the Lord. Yet they are representative of many believers who struggle mightily because of unbelief.

Some Christians operate by faith for years, but when their “crisis of all crises” comes, they give in to unbelief. Even for such devoted believers, the mountain of unbelief has not been totally removed. How it grieves God when an overwhelming crisis wipes out an entire history of testimony about his miracle-working power. As I consider what Jesus says about the mountain of unbelief, I hear the Holy Spirit whispering to me:

“David, you don’t yet know how hurtful and grievous unbelief is to God’s heart. You don’t understand how his children have mistrusted him for so many centuries. God has yearned for a people who believe his faithfulness toward them in times of crisis. He has said he is touched by the feelings of your infirmities.

“Through the centuries, his people have experienced wonderful miracles and deliverances. They’ve testified that nothing is impossible for the Lord. Yet when the ‘mother of all crises’ comes, their speech is suddenly full of despair. Their words hurt him worse than any unbeliever’s. He does not take his children’s unbelief lightly.”

This is what happened with Peter. His bold faith enabled him to walk on water to get to Jesus on the sea. But when Peter saw the waves rising around him, he began to sink. Suddenly this fearless disciple panicked, crying out, “Lord, save me!”

Jesus caught Peter, saying to him, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). Make no mistake: Christ wasn’t winking or wearing a smile when he spoke these words to Peter. Jesus was grieved over his close friend’s unbelief. He was demanding, “Why did you doubt me, Peter? Am I not the Almighty Lord?”

Like Peter, we may move boldly in faith for years before a crisis comes that causes us to fix our eyes on our condition. As things grow worse, a sense of panic overtakes us, and we think we’re going to sink. Yet all the time, God is within our reach.

I have asked the Holy Spirit to show me how to move any mountains of unbelief out of my life, praying, “Lord, how do I cast this mountain out of my heart? How do I rid my soul of everything that hinders your miracle-working power?” He whispered to me: “If you want authority over every doubt and fear, there is a place you have to go.”

The answer is found in only one place: Gethsemane. Gethsemane was the garden where Jesus went to pray when his trial became crushing and his cup overwhelmed him. It was where he wept out his deepest sorrows before the Father. It was also where he won the battle over every evil principality and power. Gethsemane is the place where all mountains must obey his Word.

Some Christians today are saying, "Ours is not a generation of tears. We have been called to celebrate. And we are commanded to take everything by faith. All that is needed is for us to speak the Word, to say to our mountain, 'Go!' There's no need for tears, for crying from a crushed heart. We can simply meditate on God's goodness."

Such is the posture of the prosperous modern church. They don't want to sacrifice anything in intercession or tearful prayer. I agree that our God is a God of love, and yes, we are to celebrate before him. But there comes a time when our trials are so overwhelming, we can do nothing but cry before the Lord.

It happened to Jesus. Yet Christ never sinned in unbelief when he prayed at Gethsemane. On the contrary, he was demonstrating to his people how to obtain power and authority over all satanic forces. Think of it: when the disciples tried to cast out demons, those hellish spirits laughed at them. Only when Jesus came on the scene did the demons flee. The only authority they recognize is that of a contrite heart and broken spirit.

Now consider Jesus' prayers at Gethsemane:

- "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38). Here was a declaration saying, in essence, "This is beyond my understanding. And if it goes on, it will kill me."

- "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (26:39). Have you ever prayed in such agony, with hot tears streaking your face?

At Gethsemane, we find Jesus in a series of spiritual agonies. It is a passage full of tears, pleadings, intercessions, prayers, prostrations. Yet each is a spiritual episode that ultimately leads to a place of incredible revelation.

We know that as followers of Jesus we're going to experience the same things he did. And he is our example in such times of crisis. When those times come, we are to pray as he did: with faith, knowing God bottles all of our tears. Like him, we are to pray for release from our cup of pain. And we are to plead and ask God for a way out.

Of course, this is not a way of living, not a daily experience in our walk with the Lord. Rather, it is an encounter with him, a confrontation where we come to the end of something. In that moment, we stop looking at our circumstances and begin to pour out our soul before the Lord. And in the midst of it all, we believe, as Jesus did, that God loves us and is going to reveal something marvelous through our trial.

Jesus prayed a "breakthrough prayer" at Gethsemane. I think of Christ's breakthrough prayer as the "ultimate prayer." By ultimate I mean the end of a series. Think of it: by this point, everything had been tried. Now came the ultimate, or final, prayer, the one that would move mountains and shake hell. It is simply this: "Nevertheless not as I will, *but as thou wilt*" (Matthew 26:39, my italics).

Jesus gets up from pleading and says, in essence, "I have prayed, wept, fasted, done everything.

Now, Father, I unload my soul to you, in total trust. Your will be done.”

Have you ever prayed this “ultimate prayer” over a situation? “Lord, I have prayed, fasted and interceded over this matter. I have asked, knocked, sought and believed. Yet what is happening now is not what I want. In fact, I don’t think I can handle it. But you are the Almighty God, and I cast everything into your hands. Now, Father, do what *you* want to do, when *you* choose to do it. I rest in your promises to me.”

This is the rest that remains for God’s people today, the rest referred to in Hebrews. It is to come into the blessed promise of the New Covenant, in which God declares to us, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my child.”

Beloved, until you pray this ultimate prayer, you cannot move your mountain. But when you do, God will open your eyes to something amazing. You will no longer miss the answer to your prayer when it comes. Many believers, in fact, miss their answer when it is right in front of them.

I know a mother who fasted and prayed for a son involved in drugs and robberies. Over time the young man had become hardened. His mother prayed, “Oh, Lord, do what you have to do to reach him.” She was horrified when her son ended up with a long-term jail sentence. Yet it was there he found Christ, and today he is active in prison church. What seemed horrible at first was the beginning of her answer.

A number of years ago, my younger son Greg came to me with tears of brokenness. It was a meeting I’ll never forget. Greg described to me the burden he’d been given for young people. He feared an entire generation was being lost. I was so moved by his tears that I was dumbfounded. I could only pray with him, “Lord, do whatever it takes. Answer my son’s prayer.”

Soon after that, Greg entered the greatest trial of his life. He endured four years of incredible, excruciating pain. His physical endurance and, as a result, his faith were tested to the very limit. He spent years battling despair because God had not delivered him from his ongoing pain.

Now, in the past few months, God has been bringing my son out of his trial in a glorious way. Greg called me last week to say, “Dad, thank you for not giving up on me during those years.” I told him I never once doubted God was at work in him.

Have you prayed for a closer walk with Jesus? For more patience, more faithfulness? Dear saint, God went into action the moment you prayed. Perhaps afflictions followed quickly, along with rejections and hard times, things you’ve come to despise. Yet all along it has been God at work, bringing your answer.

I urge you, pray the ultimate prayer with faith. Soon the Lord is going to reveal that what you’ve been going through has been the very answer to your prayers. Hallelujah!