

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Mark 11:20-26

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again, we'll continue to read Mark chapter 11, verses 20-26.

Yesterday we read about Jesus cleansing the temple for the second time and declaring, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." In the Old Testament, the Israelites were considered God's chosen people, and the Jews took pride in this. They looked down on the Gentiles, referring to them as dogs. But when Jesus came, He was ushering in a new era. Through His earthly ministry, He would become the Savior of all people, including Jews and Gentiles. He established a new covenant with His blood, and anyone who is willing to believe and accept it not only receives the grace of redemption but also experiences rebirth, becoming children of God. Therefore, Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

The house of the Lord refers to the church of the New Covenant, which is meant to spread throughout all nations, and people from all over the world will come to the church to offer prayers. Upon hearing Jesus' declaration, the chief priests sought ways to get rid of Him.

The day before, Jesus, accompanied by His disciples, left Bethany. They came across a fig tree that didn't bear fruit. Jesus cursed the tree, saying, "From now on, no one will eat your fruit." Throughout the Bible, the fig tree has been a symbol of Israel, and because Israel failed to bear fruit, the entire nation would wither away.

Verse 20: "Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots."

The next morning, they proceeded from Bethany to Jerusalem just as they had done the day before. They walked along the same road and passed by the same place. As a result, they saw the fig tree that Jesus had cursed the day before, and they noticed that it had withered completely, even from the roots, after just one day.

Verse 21: "And Peter, remembering, said to Him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.'"

A tree typically takes some time to wither away, but for this tree to dry up in just one day was truly a miracle. Therefore, Peter was astonished and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." Following this miracle, Jesus would use it to teach His disciples a lesson about faith.

Before delving further into the passage, let's take a moment to reflect on the spiritual significance behind this miracle. Israel was God's chosen people under the Old Covenant, and Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth to first reach out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. However, the Israelites stubbornly refused to repent, even going so far as to crucify Jesus with the help of the Gentiles, openly declaring that they would bear the guilt for His blood upon themselves and their children. Jesus causing the fig tree to wither was, in fact, a prophecy. Approximately forty years later, in AD 70, the Roman army invaded Jerusalem, wreaking havoc by burning, killing, and plundering. They even set fire to the temple, resulting in not one stone being left upon another. The temple was completely destroyed, and the entire nation of Israel was scattered among the nations. Just like this fig tree, Israel withered away, even from its roots.

For nearly 1900 years since then, the Jewish people have been scattered across various countries and corners of the world, leading a life of displacement and upheaval. The nation of Israel seemed to have become a historical term. However, God is rich in mercy, and His calling is irrevocable. In Romans 11:17-24, Paul compares Israel to an olive tree, with the Gentiles as wild olive branches. Because of their unbelief, the Israelites were like branches broken off from the tree, while the Gentiles, through faith, were grafted into this good olive tree by God. Paul

states in verse 23, "And they (Israelites) also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." Then in verse 24, Paul says, "For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" Paul's prophecy was indeed fulfilled in 1948 when the miraculous reestablishment of the nation of Israel occurred. Here we see that human history is ultimately in God's hands.

Given this, in the vast flow of history, every individual's life is also governed by God. Faith is the means by which people can understand and follow the will of God. Through this event, Jesus taught His disciples a very important lesson: the lesson of praying with faith.

Verses 22-23: "So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.'"

Jesus' teaching in this passage is very fundamental, yet it is also very difficult in our experiences. He says, "Have faith in God," which is not a problem. Then He says, "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says."

This passage often resonates with many of us in our experiences. Faced with difficulties or situations that seem almost impossible to overcome, He says that if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will be done, it will be granted to you. In the course of our lives, we all encounter challenges to varying degrees. We hope that these challenges will be resolved, and we have an imagined solution in mind. So, what do we do? We pray to God for what we desire. However, if you are honest about your experiences, often times you pray for a long time without receiving an answer, or at least not the answer you were hoping for. It

seems like there is a discrepancy with what Jesus said. So, what is Jesus concluding? Let's continue to verse 24, where Jesus draws a conclusion. What is it?

Verse 24: "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

This passage emphasizes the importance of exercising faith and the lesson of prayer for each one of us. The key phrase to remember is, "believe that you receive them, and you will have them." Just like here, Jesus used the withering of the fig tree to teach His disciples the lesson of faith in prayer.

Many times, in the circumstances of our lives, God allows various things to happen to us so that we can learn the lesson of exercising faith in prayer. So, when things happen, we should definitely pray to God, bringing the matter before Him. And then, to what extent should we pray? We should pray to the extent that when you believe you receive them, you will have them. Jesus isn't saying that you'll get whatever you pray for just by praying; rather, you bring your requests before God to the point where you have absolute confidence in your faith, believing that you have already received them. It is only after you have received them in your faith that you will receive them in actual life.

Hebrews 11:1 gives the best definition of faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." When there is something that you desire to be accomplished, what is faith? It's the process of bringing that thing you hope for into fruition, or it's the basis of accomplishment. Faith? It's when you haven't seen it yet, but there is already evidence of it.

So, when you face difficulties, when you encounter a problem, you come before God in prayer. Naturally, we often pray to God according to what we want to accomplish. But remember, praying to God is not about commanding Him to do things; it's about God bringing us into a two-way communication with Him through these things. You share your thoughts with God, take some time to discern what His will is. When we fully open ourselves to God, He also opens His will to us. Slowly, you'll come to understand what God's guidance is in this matter. As you continue

to pray, reaching a point where what you desire aligns with what God is leading you towards, you develop a kind of faith. This is what it means to believe that you receive them. When you pray to a point where you are in agreement with God, your faith can materialize the matter, and ultimately, it naturally comes to fruition in your daily life.

Therefore, this principle of "believing that you receive them, and you will have them" is actually not in line with many teachings on faith today. Some churches teach believers to repeatedly come before God, continually seeking according to what they want, and then to constantly think about this matter in their daily lives, believing that it will come true in the end—this is what is often referred to as positive thinking in English. This is a teaching of modern psychology to encourage people to face everything optimistically, which may provide some emotional assistance, but it is not God's word.

A genuine prayer of faith is not about imposing our will onto God's will, forcing God to fulfill what we desire. Instead, it's about bringing ourselves before God and aligning our will with His. Eventually, the matter is accomplished according to God's will. This is also what the principle of "from faith to faith" refers to in the Book of Romans. Basically, we don't have faith on our own; our ability to believe in God is a mystery, it's God's "faith" that enters into us first, and then we can believe in God. So, the lesson of faith in prayer is also a learning process. By accepting God's "faith" into us first, and then through the process of prayer, our human reasoning gradually changes, ultimately allowing God's faith or, as Galatians says, the "faith of the Son of God," to become our own faith. This is what it means to go "from faith to faith."

This lesson of faith in prayer is a necessary lesson for every Christian's spiritual growth. Therefore, Jesus taught His disciples this crucial principle through this event: "Believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

Verse 25-26: "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your

trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

In this final example Jesus gives, it's a perfect illustration of what we've just discussed about "believe that you receive them, then you will have them." Jesus says that when you pray, the main focus of the prayer process is the two-way communication between you and God. If during this prayer process, God brings to mind someone who has offended you, you must forgive him. This isn't something you originally intended, but God puts this thought in your heart, and through your prayer with Him, He shows you that you harbor resentment about something, that someone has wronged you, and you cannot forgive him. What does Jesus say? "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." Even in the process of praying for forgiveness for our own mistakes, many times God will remind us of those whom we have not forgiven. The result? Jesus' teaching is that you must first forgive, and then you will receive the forgiveness of the Father. This is the best example of "believe you have and you will have".

Let's pray together: Lord, thank you for giving us this precious lesson, teaching us on our journey of learning faith-filled prayers, letting us know that "believe that we receive them, and we will have them." May we not be subjective, willing to bring all sorts of things before you. And we ask for your mercy, as many times we are not skilled, in our prayer process, make your will clear in our hearts, let us know what we should do, through our "believe then you shall have." Help me to examine today, if there is any place where I haven't forgiven others, and help me to have a forgiving heart, so that I can forgive others, and then there will be no obstacle between the Father and us, and the Father can abundantly bestow His grace upon me, let me have a peaceful and joyful day. Thank you, praying in the name of Jesus Christ.