

Today we're going to be talking about "praying in faith", and what it really means – to "pray in faith".

In a few weeks time, we're going to be in Mark 11, where Jesus says "**Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours**". And I don't want to go into that verse too much now (we'll save that for when we get to it), but based on a few verses like that one, some people come up with a very self-centred sort of approach to prayer, and they believe they have the spiritual formula for getting prayers answered...

And so, we often hear it being taught:

- "Just believe you've got it, and you'll have it..."
- When you ask for something, do not entertain any possibility that you're **not** going to get what you ask for, because that'd be a lack of faith
- And if your prayers aren't being answered – well, you've got a faith problem ...

And there's a whole self-centred language, that goes along with this kind of "prosperity theology"... It's a language that's not at all biblical (BTW), and it's a language that tends to put the outcome of prayer onto "self", rather than the answer of prayer, being in the domain God...

It's the language that says:

- "I'm believing for a miracle."
- I'm believing for you to have a good year
- I'm believing for a healing
- I'm believing for prosperity
- I'm believing for a healing of this relationship...

Some people **do** like to add God into the formula:

- I'm believing God for a miracle
- I'm believing God for a healing

You've heard it, haven't you....

- "I'm believing for this; or
- "I'm believing for that....

Now, tell me: In the Scriptures, what great man or woman of God used such language??? No one... In fact, you can type that phrase into a Bible search engine, "I'm believing for" and you'll very quickly discover, "It's not in the Bible"...

And yet very often, this is what we're being told "Praying in faith" means... – to be able to say "I'm believing for."... But, that's not a 'pray of faith' – It's more like 'wishful thinking'... And it's actually not a prayer at all...

Prayer, is where we seek God, and where we seek God's will... It's where we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and have every confidence that God'll take care of everything we need...

A prayer of faith, is a prayer of trust in God. And it's having confidence in the power of God – that He has the **ability**, to complete, what **is** His will (even if I don't know God's will is [& a lot of the time we won't]), (and even if God's will, is different to my will [& a lot of the time it will be different])....

A prayer of faith, is not a matter of:

- **me** knowing what **I** want;

- assuming that I'm so God-like, that that's what God wants too; and then
- believing that God's going to do it...

A prayer of faith, should never focus on **my** will. It is to seek the will of God, and to pray that **God's** will, will be done...

....

Righto, now I've given you the punchline, let's actually look at the reading.

Jesus and 3 of His disciples (Peter, James and John), are coming down from their Mountain-Top-Experience:

- they've just had this amazing encounter with God;
- with the transfiguration of Jesus; and
- Moses and Elijah making a guest appearance;
- hearing the voice of God out of the cloud...

But while they've been having this amazing mountain-top-experience, in Jesus' absence, the other disciples have been doing it a bit tough... And as Jesus comes down the mountain, He comes down to discover a big crowd around the other disciples and the Scribes (the religious heavy-weights) are arguing with them...

And Jesus wants to know: What's the problem? What's going on???

And a man in the crowd tells Jesus the story:

His son is possessed by a demon... He can't speak and he can't hear... And on top of that, his condition sounds a lot like epilepsy, but it's not – in this case, it's demon possession...

- The boy has seizures;
- He gets thrown down on the ground;
- He grinds his teeth;
- He foams at the mouth;
- He becomes rigid;
- Sometimes he gets thrown into the fire; or
- Into the water...

And when the boy with the demon **did** come in contact with Jesus, that's pretty much what happened. **It convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.**

And the man says:

"Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it [does all these nasty things] So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."

Isn't that interesting??? He brought his son to Jesus... But Jesus wasn't there, and so his disciples gave it a go, but couldn't do it...

And Jesus' answer to this, (and He **answered them**.) (Alright, He didn't just answer the father, and I don't think it was just talking to the disciples... I think he said this to everyone present, and probably for us today): **"O faithless**

generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

The problem here, wasn't a problem of "technique":

- It was a "faith" problem;
- it was a "source" problem; and
- it was a "prayer" problem...

1.

Let's begin with the faith problem:

The man said to Jesus: "But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

And Jesus calls him out on this: "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes..."

"If you can!!!!" How much power does God have??? If only that man knew, Who he was talking to... The power of God is limitless...

One commentary I read said that Jesus' reply:

*... does not mean that **faith** can accomplish anything, but that those who **have faith** "will set no limits to the power of God."ⁱ*

And I reckon that explains it pretty well:

The fact that **All things are possible for one who believes** does not mean that **faith** can accomplish anything [that we want], but that those who **have faith** "will set no limits to the power of God."ⁱⁱ (to accomplish His will).

You see, the man didn't have confidence that Jesus could do it...

- But God has enough power to do anything...
- Now, do **we** believe this???
- Do **we** believe, that there are no limits to the power of God???.
- And do our **prayers** reflect this???
- Do we ask for the big things? Or
- do we only ask for the little things?
- When we pray, do we pray with a God-sized faith, that God can and **will** do what He wills???

As I read today's reading, I was struck by the difference between this man's request, and the request of the leper right back in the 1st chapter of Mark ... The Leper said to Jesus,: "If you will, you **can** make me clean." That's a prayer of faith... "If it is your will,, I Know you can do this..."

A prayer of faith, acknowledges that God **has** the power, but it also humbly accepts the sovereignty of God, for **His** will to be done (not ours)...

I'm reminded of the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: King Nebuchadnezzar threatened that they would be thrown into the fiery furnace... And Nebuchadnezzar said: "And who is the god who will deliver you out of **my** hands?"ⁱⁱⁱ

And they replied:

Daniel 3:16 ... "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he **will** deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Alright, they testified, "God is able to save us out of the fiery furnace"... "But **if He doesn't**", alright if it's not God's will, and He doesn't save us,, we still won't bow down to another god... But they also had confidence that God **would** deliver them out of the hand of Nebuchadnezzar... Even if they died in the fire, they weren't subject to Nebuchadnezzar... Sometimes God delivers, through death and resurrection... Well actually, it's more than sometimes... That's the way it is...

I'm also reminded of the night of Jesus' betrayal, when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane:

³⁶ And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

That's a prayer of faith... Jesus is facing an excruciating death... And Jesus is praying, "Father, all things are possible for You... (I know you can do this) You **can** take this cup away from me.... But not my will... Your will..."

A prayer of faith, knows that God's power is **limitless**,, but it focuses on God's will.

And so, there was a faith problem – the man didn't believe that Jesus could do it...

And at this point, we encounter one of the most refreshingly honest statements – it's a statement that I can well identify with, and I suspect many of you can too:

"I believe. Help my unbelief."

I've got a little bit of faith, please help me to have some more faith...

Isn't that so honest??? And let me tell ya, that's a far-cry from the formula "I'm believing for; I'm believing for;"....

I'm torn... I believe... Help me with my unbelief...

So the first problem, was "faith"

2.

The second problem, was a problem of source – where does the power come from?.

Let's read from v25:

²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, **"You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."** ²⁶ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out,

and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

It seems like the disciples were focusing on technique... Why couldn't **we** do it? – what did **we** do wrong???

And there it is... When the man brought his son, he wanted to bring him to Jesus... And this is something that all of us need to be very aware of... As disciples of Jesus, those in need, don't need to come to us – they need to come to Jesus...

And I can think of a number of people, who over the years, have come to me for help:

- help with depression;
- help with anxiety;
- help with their relationships;
- help with direction in their life...

And you know what??? Those who are actually looking for Jesus – well, I can help them...

But those who aren't interested in Jesus, and

- they just want me to give them a few pointers; or
- to listen to their troubles; or
- to give them some kind of advice,

I can't really help them... But if they want to come to Jesus for help, **that's** when I can help them a lot... I can help them to find Jesus.

And this goes for you too... People might know you're a Christian, and come to you for help... But unless they're looking for Jesus, there's not much you can do for them.

But the disciples thought they must've done something wrong – that it was something to do with their technique...

You know, when some people pray, they sometimes think it's their technique that gets their prayers answered, especially when it comes to dealing with the demonic...

- Some people start praying louder, and with more authority;
- Some people command;
- Some people **demand**;
- Some people talk faster;
- Some people feel that by emphasising the first syllable of every word, their prayer will be answered
I **pray** in the name of **Jesus**, that you would make us **prosper**, and make us a **people of influence**...
- Some people pray as if it's all about the technique...

In the 1st Book of Kings, the Prophet Elijah was in opposition to all of the prophets of Baal, and they met on Mount Carmel... And there, the prophets of Baal, built their altar to Baal, and the Prophet Elijah, built an altar to YHWH... And they each killed their bull and put it on their altar... and then there was a bit of a competition to see which god could light their altar...

And the prophets of Baal:

- Prayed;
- Limped around the altar;

But nothing happened.

And I love this bit: Elijah starts mocking them:

- Try doing it a bit louder;
- Maybe Baal's thinking about it;
- Maybe he's gone off for a pee;
- Maybe he's on holidays;
- Maybe he's asleep and you've got to wake him up....

And so:

- They got louder;
- Cut themselves with swords & lances;
- They were bleeding all over; and
- They raved on and on, but no answer...

This is how Elijah prayed:

1 Kings 18:36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O YHWH, answer me, that this people may know that you, O YHWH, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

In prayer: getting louder, faster,, using many words when a few will do – well, that's the way of idolatry – it's the way of demon worship... A Godly prayer, is like when you talk to your dad, because He is – He's our Heavenly Father...

It's not about us... It's not about our technique...

When it comes to a ministry of any kind, there's 2 ways to do it:

- In our own strength, using our own talents and our own abilities; or
- in the power of God...

Now, there's some things we can do, pretty much in our own strength, but most things of significance that God calls us to, there's no way we can achieve it in our own strength... And of course, there was no way those disciples could drive that demon out with their own strength – that's something that only God can do...

Jesus, was the disciples' connection to God, and when Jesus wasn't there, the source of Spiritual power was missing – their connection with God was gone... So, how do we maintain our connection with the Lord??? Prayer...

3.

Jesus said: **"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."**

The third problem, was a prayer problem.

Prayer, shouldn't just be a matter of a few words to God when we need something, *like pulling up at the drive-thru, and saying "I'll have a Big Mac & Chips & a drink, thanks..."*

Prayer, should be like having God in the car with us, and we talk with Him through the day, and we're mindful of the presence of God, as He journeys with us through life...

Being close to God in prayer, is when we experience an ongoing, prayerful presence of God... And when we maintain this kind of 'life' of prayer, our focus shifts. It shifts from ourselves, to God... And the Lord leads us to start praying, for Kingdom matters – the bigger things.

Praying in faith, isn't a matter of naming what I want, and believing it's going to happen... It's maintaining a life of prayer, and in our life of prayer, we experience the presence of God, and as we get closer to God, we **do** begin to better recognise the heart of God, and the will of God...

And as we get to know God better, our faith grows, and it gets more natural to say it, and to mean it:

Lord, I know that you are powerful enough to do anything, yet not my will, but Your will be done.

A prayer of faith is a life of prayer, knowing the power of God, and trusting for God's will to be done.

Let's pray together how Jesus taught us.

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
As we forgive those who

sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are Yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

ⁱ Garland David E. The New Application Commentary – Mark. Zondervan: Grand Rapids. 1996. (p. 355), (Quoting AEJ Rawlinson, St Mark (Westminster Commentaries, London: Methuen & Co. 1931 (p.124)))

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ⁱⁱⁱ Daniel 3:8-30