

PRAYING IN FAITH

Jon Macon

Matthew 21:18-22 informs us of a fruitless fig tree that Jesus Christ made wither away, and the lesson he then taught his disciples about praying in faith. The passage says, “Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” It is important for us to learn what it means to make request of God in faith.

Praying in faith for what God has promised

God commands us to make our requests known to Him in every thing (Php 4:6). Jesus has taught us to make requests of our Heavenly Father (Matt 6:10-13; Luke 11:2-4). Asking is a condition of receiving. In Matthew 7:7-11, Christ says, “*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*” We will not receive if we do not ask (Jas 4:2). We must ask God even for the things He has promised. For example, Christ teaches us to ask God for our daily bread (Matt 6:11), and we have the Lord’s promise that he will give us our necessary food, drink, and clothing if we seek first his kingdom and righteousness (Matt 6:25-33). As another example, we are taught to ask God for wisdom, while being given a promise that it will be given (James 1:5). But we are commanded to ask for what God has promised us in faith. James 1:6-8 says, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” In the same manner, Jesus has commanded us to pray believing. In Matthew 21:22, the Lord says, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” This refers to “all things” God has promised us in his word,

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because faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom 10:17).

Therefore, anything God has promised us in his word, we must ask God for in faith with no doubt whatsoever that he will fulfill his promises. Without faith, it is *impossible* to please God, and one of things we *must* believe is that God will reward us for seeking Him (Heb 11:6). That is why it is essential for us not to doubt when asking God to fulfill His promises.

Seeking to please God, and asking according to God's will

But this principle of praying in faith does not apply in the same way to things God has not promised us in his word. For example, it is not true that if we ask God for a new car and really believe that he will give that to us and have no doubt whatsoever, then we will get that new car. Again, faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom 10:17). Therefore, to pray with faith requires our request to have a basis in God's word. But new cars are not part of God's promises. When asking for things which God has not promised, we must ask with the right motive. The right motive is to fulfill God's desires, not our own. We must seek to use every blessing God gives us to better serve Him, not ourselves. We will not receive what we pray for if we "ask amiss," to consume it on our own lusts (Jas 4:3). Requests for material things are typically made with selfish motives and we would be foolish to believe that we will receive such things. That is not at all what Jesus was teaching us to do in Matthew 21:22. A prayer which is "heard" is one in which the request is granted (1 John 5:14-15). When God hears our prayers, it is because we keep His commandments and please Him (1 John 3:22). It is not pleasing to him for us to ask for material things to consume on our own lusts. We need to pray with understanding (1 Cor 14:15). With proper understanding, we will not pray for things to fulfill our own desires. Finally, God hears us if we ask anything according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). Jesus prayed not according to His own will, but the Father's (Matt 26:39,42,44). When asking for things which God has not promised, we cannot ask with the same kind of faith as when asking for something God has promised. We still need to pray with faith that God is able to give what we are asking for and that he will hear the prayer *if it is His will*. The things we pray for which God has promised, we will receive if we ask in faith, while the things we pray for which God has not promised, we will receive if it is God's will.