

## Pray Big Prayers

Mark 11:20-25

- Jesus encourages us to pray big prayers.
- We covered this passage in our readings over the last week. In my devotional I talked about praying big prayers. I had a request that I speak more about that and flesh out what exactly I mean (and thereby what I believe Jesus means).
- I suppose that all of us feel that our prayers need work. What I see in this passage is not a procedural point – we need to say this bit or that bit differently – but a deeper approach to *what we are praying for*.
- What if God is hoping we'll go bigger in our praying – asking for deeper things, reaching out in faith, breaking new ground in the world through his power? Wouldn't you want to be a part of that?
  
- v. 22-23 – Jesus is talking about *faith* here. Have faith in God, does not doubt but believes. This might sound like Jesus is talking about the kinds of miraculous powers the apostles had – pulling up trees and such – but his next words make clear he is speaking generally about prayer.
- We are in the aftermath of the fig tree incident, which was actually a prayer (v. 14) and this request about the mountain is a prayer (v. 23).
- v. 24 – Ask, believe, receive.
- In this passage, Jesus is assuring us that prayer has a real impact on real life – trees and mountains, receiving what we ask. This is real.
- We could spend some time talking about the limitations of this – but why? Jesus is teaching us to pray big prayers.
- I want to spend some time exploring the kinds of big prayers we see Bible people praying – and prayers that we can pray today.

### 1) Salvation/softened hearts

- It's a big prayer to pray for someone else's salvation.
- Rom 9:1-3 – Paul's heart is broken for his people, the Israelites. They are God's chosen people, but they have rejected the Messiah. This gives Paul great sorrow and unceasing anguish. He knows that they cannot be saved as they are. So he prays about it.
- In fact, here he says (v. 3) he wishes he could switch places, a lot like Moses wanting God to forgive the Israelites at the risk of his own salvation. Of course, that's not actually possible or in line with what God is wanting.
- Rom 10:1-4 – Paul is clear that the Jews are *not right* the way they are, in their rejection. They need to be saved from the consequences of their sins. Yet he prays to God that they may be saved.
- Rom 11:11-16 – Paul is thinking aloud about his great hope and prayer – the restoration of the rejecting Jews. What a day that would be!
- v. 13-14 – I try to make them jealous and save them!
- This is Paul's big prayer. He understands that their salvation won't happen without their faith, so he prays for their jealousy, for their hearts to be softened and changed.
  
- I hope it goes without saying that we cannot actually pray that God save someone who refuses to repent of sin – for someone to be saved against their will. I think that is the thought behind

John's statement: *"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life – to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that"* (1 John 5:16).

- It is a big prayer to pray for someone's heart to be softened and changed so that they can accept the gospel. Sometimes that softening can even come through hard times:
- James 5:16-18 – This is what Elijah prayed: that God's recalcitrant people would suffer through a drought. After all, God promised that when his people reject him, he would make the skies like iron and the earth like bronze and devastate the land. Elijah prayed for God's people to suffer so they would hit rock bottom and turn back to him. It worked. That's a big, big prayer.
- Do you have someone in your life that seems like they will never obey the gospel? Never come back home? A friend that just won't do right? A co-worker that just seems uninterested? Pray about it.
- It is a big prayer to pray for hardship in hopes of saving souls – but it is a prayer Bible people prayed.

## 2) Circumstances

- Acts 12:5, 12 – The church is praying earnestly for Peter. It is no coincidence that *at that very moment they are gathered for prayer about Peter*. He is released bc they pray.
- What's particularly notable about this is that shortly before, James the apostle had been martyred. The church refuses to quit praying simply bc God didn't spare James. Just bc God doesn't radically change one circumstance doesn't mean he won't radically change another.
- I file under this category the big prayer of Joshua that the sun would stand still as he fought Israel's enemies – Paul's expectation that he would be released through the prayers of the Philippians – David's prayer to turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.
- There are circumstance that we cannot help – sometimes things that we would never imagine anything could be done about. God can do it.
- Maybe there are big prayers you need to pray about your circumstances. Financial rescue? Get out of a bad situation? Change in the government? Pray big prayers.

## 3) Health

- 2 Kings 20:1-6 – Hezekiah is not only sick. He gets a death sentence. So he prays. God heals him and spares him.
- James 5:13-16 – Pray about the sick. Let others know when you are sick. As you heal, thank God.
- Now, there are some limits to this. We need to understand that we're not going to live forever physically – and neither are those we love. There will be times when people we love get sick and don't get better – and those times will happen to us too.
- But Bible people knew that too – and they still prayed. James encourages us to pray big prayers about our health.
- Do you know someone facing a frightening diagnosis? Saddled with long-term health problems? Pray big prayers.

## 4) Something to build

- Neh 1:1-3 – Nehemiah hears that Jerusalem's walls have been destroyed

- So Nehemiah has the idea that he will build Jerusalem's walls. He will use his position as cupbearer to the king to speak directly to the king. He will be the one to plan and lead and execute the wall.
- So he prays: 1:11, 2:4
- Of course God grants him favor before the king – God grants him safe passage – God blesses him as he rallies the people, fights off enemies, builds the wall.
- This is a big prayer of a different dimension. Nehemiah sees something essential that needs to be done for God. He looks at his position and considers how his position could be used to bless others. He looks at God's will. And as he formulates his vision, he asks God's help.
- Do you have something to build for God? People with whom you have a particular influence? A work to which you are particularly well-suited? A dream to bless others? Something God wants that you see not happening? Pray big prayers.

## 5) Blessing

- 1 Sam 1:9-11 – Hannah has been wanting this for a long time – it has been a great distress to her. She simply asks the LORD to bless her with a child.
- 1 Sam 1:27-28 – For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition.
- I should point out that the blessing here is tied to Hannah giving him to the LORD – this is not just for her. If God grants this, it will glorify him and bless the child.
- Is there some great thing God could give you? Not something silly and materialistic – something meaningful or helpful or spiritually enriching? Perhaps not even something you *need*, but something you *want for good reasons*? Pray big prayers.
- I have some big prayers. I'm tempted to tell you some of them, but that would not only be quite embarrassing but also counterproductive. You see, some of my big prayers involve you. Others involve people whose hearts must be softened. Others are for things I'm building as we speak. But they are all a stretch for me – and *that* is what I believe Jesus is after.

### As you pray big prayers,

#### 1) Think through why

- As you look through some of the prayers we've discussed, there is a thread of these things having something to do with God.
- Paul wants Jews to be saved because *that's what God wants*. Nehemiah wants to build the wall *to help complete God's promise to bring his people back*. Hannah wants a child to *give him to the LORD*.
- When my children ask me for something big, my first question would be "why do you want it?". It has helped me to think through what my request has to do with God, his will, and his great plan for the redemption of mankind.
- Spare this person's life bc he needs to obey gospel, has kids to influence, more good to do. Help this brother bc he's trying to obey your will. Give this so that I can use it to your glory.

#### 2) Don't give up

- Jesus speaks repeatedly about *persistence* in prayer. Sometimes the word *feroent* is used. Sometimes it is *effective* or *earnest*. Don't quit when you don't immediately get what you're seeking.

- Remember Elijah, who prayed fervently. Remember Hannah, who prayed fervently for years. Remember the Jerusalem church that prayed *after* God didn't spare James.
- We learn something when we have to persist in prayer. We demonstrate just how powerfully we believe in God's power. We show just how much we want what we seek.

### 3) **Do what you can**

- Prayer is not an excuse for action on our part. Nehemiah still needed to plan and actually build the wall. Paul still had to preach the gospel to the Jews, make them jealous. Prayer is not there so that we can neglect and abuse our bodies, then ask God to rescue us over and over again.
- But in my life, prayer awakens me to the way everyday life connects to my dreams. If I'm praying for someone, I can call them. I can mention something gospel-oriented. When opportunities come up, I seize them.
- But when I get what I've prayed for, I thank God.
  
- Pray big prayers. What are your mountains you need God to move? Let's pray.