

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

November 22, 1998

Scripture: **Matthew 21:18-22**

Sermon: ***If You Have Faith***

I want you to take a trip with me. Most of you are aware that businesses and groups have written out a mission statement. A mission statement tells why a group or a business exists and how it is going to go about accomplishing its goal. This is the trip I want you to take. I want you to expand your imagination and think that you and I are going to heaven. When we are there, what we want to ask is: what is the mission statement of God for those who believe in Him? What is God's primary purpose in our lives and how is He going to go about accomplishing it? Amazingly, that mission statement is written in the Bible. In the book of Ephesians, chapter 1:15, He says, "This is what I am trying to do in your life. One: that you would know me better. Number two: that you would know the hope of my calling on your life. Number three: that you would know the riches of your inheritance that you now have as one of my children. Number four: that you would know the power that is available unto you. When you put these four together, you are aware that you are on an eternity-long adventure with God, that He would develop you and grow you, help you to become more than you can even imagine today. Throughout all of this life He is trying to develop and grow you; and even when you go to live with Him in heaven, it will be an eternity-long development process.

Once you understand that is God's mission purpose, you will realize, when you read incidences in the Gospels, what Jesus is

trying to do with His disciples. You will read in the New Testament incident after incident where He placed them in particular circumstances so that He could help them become more than they dreamed. For example, one day He put them in a boat and a storm came up around them. One day they were on top of a mountain and they didn't have any food, and Jesus turned to them and said, "Where are we going to get food?" One day a little boy who had emotional and physical problems was brought to them, and the question was, "What are you going to do about it?" They stood sometimes in the midst of cynics who would ask questions, and Jesus was in essence saying, "How are you going to answer them?"

The incident we are reading today is one of those incidences where Jesus is trying to expand their faith by asking them the question, "How are you going to handle this?" Before we read it, it is important for you to understand a basic thesis of Jesus's life. *Jesus believed that ordinary people, empowered by God, could do extraordinary things.* If you had been picking the twelve disciples, you wouldn't have picked these. You would have gone to somebody wealthier, you would have gone to somebody with education, you would have gone to somebody who had formal training; these were just ordinary folk. Jesus believed that ordinary folk—people like you and me—when empowered by God, can do extraordinary things. That ought to help you—knowing that God has always taken the poor and the weak, those without great ability, and empowered them so that when extraordinary things were done by them, other people said, "Look. What a great God they had." In this passage of Scripture Jesus has them again in one of His post-graduate courses on how to develop your faith. It says, "*Early in the morning, as He was on His way back to the city, He was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, He went up and found nothing on it except leaves. He then said to the tree, 'May you never bare fruit again!' Immediately the tree*

withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. 'How did the fig tree wither so quickly?' they asked. Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what is done to the fig tree but you will say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.'"

When I have read this story through the years, I thought the disciples asked the wrong question. I thought they should have said, "Why did you kill a fig tree?" Jesus didn't go around killing trees. "Why did you kill the fig tree?" Well, that answer is pretty clear. The fig tree was one of the symbols of the nation that He was in. The fig tree had a lot of leaves but no fruit, and what He was saying to them is, "You have made a lot of promises, you have had a lot of potential, that you haven't fulfilled. Now this is an act of judgment against you to say that no longer are you going to have a part in my kingdom and in my work." That is why He did it. That is not what they asked. They said, "How did you do it?" The amazing thing was Jesus said to them, "I want to tell you so that you can do the same thing. I want to give you the key to the power that I have so that you will be able to perform like miracles. The little phrase "...take a mountain and throw it into the sea..." was a common phrase in Jesus's day, and what it means is that whatever difficulty, whatever barrier, whatever obstacle is in your way, that barrier, that obstacle, that difficulty is removed. Jesus said, "What I want to give you the key to is this: whenever in life you come to barriers, obstacles, difficulties, that which you say is impossible to get around, I want to tell you how you can continue on."

Everybody in this room faces deep difficulties. All of you have come to your mountains, all of you wonder how you are going to get past them. In the first service, I glanced over

one side of this auditorium. There was a lady there who had just gotten back from a time in the hospital. She has cancer. On the other side was a family I had dealt with a couple of weeks ago, trying to help their aging parents. All of you, if I gave you time, could share with us great mountains and difficulties you are facing. Listen to what Jesus said, "I want to tell you how you can meet that obstacle and get beyond it." Most of us think that circumstances determine our lives. Most of us think that circumstances sometimes are so big and so high that we are always going to have to live in a valley. Somebody said that circumstances are kind of like mattresses, good to be on top of, but suffocating to be under. One man was talking to another and he said, "How are you doing?" He replied, "Pretty good, under the circumstances." The first man said, "What are you doing under there?"

Most of us feel like we are under the circumstances. How are we going to get beyond this? Many of you are here today, frustrated and defeated and hemmed in and looking at the mountain and saying, "There is no way I can get beyond this." What the world will tell you is that deep within you there are reservoirs of power and that if you unleash them, you can meet anything. It is true that we are far stronger than most of us think we are, but that is not what Jesus said. I hate to tell you that what you have been told all of your life-- you can be anything you want to be--sounds good but is not so. I love the little girl who came home from school on career day. The mother said, "How did career day go?" "Wonderful." "Well, dear, did you get an ideal of what you want to do with your life?" "Yes, I want to be a nurse." The modern mom said, "You don't have to be a nurse, you can be a doctor. You can be a brain surgeon,

you can be head of the whole hospital. You can be anything you want.” “I can be anything I want?” “Yes.” “I want to be a horse.”

Can you be anything you want? No, but what Jesus said is if you can have faith-- not just in yourself and not just faith in faith—“If you can have faith in Me, I can help you to be more than you ever dreamed and I can give you a power that will enable you to face every mountain and say to it, ‘Get out of the way. You will not defeat me, you will not overcome me; I will overcome you.’” You say to me, “I wish I had faith like that.” Do you remember what Jesus said? If you have faith as big as a two-ton truck, you can pull it off? What did He say? *Faith as a mustard seed*. Mustard seed is the smallest seed in the world. *It is not the size of the faith, it is the size of God*. He is not asking you to carry around a big faith. He is asking you to let a big God carry you around. He says to you, “If you can put your faith in Me, fig trees are small potatoes. You can move mountains.” I wandered, when this passage got on my heart, if I could say that to folks. Can I?

A fellow came to me just a while ago. He just got back from the country of Belarus . Belarus is one of the old parts of the Soviet Union. The reason the government of Belarus called him is that a man from Belarus came to Richmond and this man helped him. What he didn't know was that the man was a high government official. The high government official said, “Why did you help me?” He said, “I helped you because of Jesus.” The high government has now opened the door for this man and his organization to go to Belarus, and they are turning over the orphanage care of the children in Belarus to this man and his organization. He just came back, and standing right here he said, “I am a proud poppa.” I said, “What do you mean?” “I just inherited one

hundred and twenty kids last week. By the end of the year, I am going to have two thousand kids. I have a mountain.” Can I look a man like that in the face and say, “Listen. God is bigger than that mountain,”? I didn't have to tell him. He told me.

Chris and Michelle, whom we met a moment ago--Chris just flew in from Honduras. He said he was walking out in the country and met a farmer who had had seven and one-half acres and raised all kinds of small crops. That is how he made his living. It was in a beautiful valley, mountains all around it, but when all the rain came water came down in the valley, and the man's seven and one-half acres are gone. It is not that he can go back to farming, he doesn't have any ground to put his seed in anymore. Chris turned to him and said, “I want you to know I will pray for you,” and the man reached in his pocket and pulled out a Gideon New Testament that was all falling apart, and he said, “This is all I have. It tells me that it is enough.”

Is there a faith that is bigger than a mountain? Jesus says there is. Whatever difficulties, whatever barriers, whatever mountains, Jesus says you can get above them. Faith will excite your imagination. Faith will give you a new perspective. Faith will give you a persistence. Faith will give you a spirit of expectancy that God is going to do something. Somehow when we begin to have that sort of spirit of Jesus, then fig trees and mountains can be moved.

A fellow helped me one day: he said, “I have prayed that God would remove my mountain.” He said, “He didn't do it.” I said , “Oh? He didn't do it?” But he said , “Do you know what He did? He gave me the power to climb the mountain.” I got to thinking about the apostle Paul. Paul had a thorn in the flesh; the word that he used is *a spear*. He said, “A spear keeps sticking in me and I keep hurting all the time.

I prayed to God and I said, ‘God remove the spear.’ God said, ‘I am not going to remove it, but what I am going to give you is power that is bigger than the spear.’” This passage of Scripture doesn't say that God is just going to give you a carefree life and you won't have to face difficulties. Sometimes the mountain is gone; but if the mountain isn't gone, He is going to give you a power to get up over it. I can say to you that Jesus would say that whatever is there you can look it in the face and say, “My God is bigger than you are.” Some of you here need to walk out of this building today with that assurance and that faith. Your God is bigger than your difficulty. You need to understand that whatever is out there, there is a God who is going to walk beside you, who is going to make it possible to endure it. Someone has said faith is seeing the invisible, believing the incredible, and receiving the impossible. God says to you, this is how to do it: you need to identify what the mountain is, and then you look it in the face and you say, “I want to say to you in the name of God, God is going to make me bigger than you.” After you say it, you turn to Him and ask, “Dear God, provide me the resources that I need.” God says you can be sure that He will answer that prayer. God has been trying to lead all of us in a post-graduate course of faith. Some of us, when we look at difficulties, say, “This is too much.” He wants to say, “No, you are too much for the problem.” He wants to give you a power that is beyond your own that enables you to meet it. I hope that today some of you would, maybe with just mustard seed faith, reach up to God and say, “That is all I can bring.” God says that is all you need. You will be able to find in Him the strength that you need for every circumstance.

There is a last message for some who are present today. The last question is: when? When did this happen? It happened on Monday, and Jesus was going to be dead on Friday. He turned to the fig tree and said, “Lots of promises, no fruit. Now

people that I have come towards, the day of opportunity is over.” Some of you keep saying, “I am going to do for God next week, I am going to do for God next month, when I get this done, when I get that done.” The message of the fig tree is that sometime the door closes. Don't keep presuming, don't keep waiting. Whatever you are going to do for God, you need to do it and you need to do it now.