Mark - Commentaries by Alexander Hume Rule

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 2, Faith and Prayer in Connection With the Difficulties of God's People, The Power of

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The Lord cursed the fruitless fig tree, and the next morning as they passed by they found it “withered,” “dried up from the roots.” Peter calls the Lord’s attention to it, evidently wondering at what had been done; and the Lord seizes the opportunity to give instruction to Peter — instruction, I believe, of very great importance to us all, in connection with difficulties too great for human power to grapple with.

I desire to notice the principle that underlies the passage, applicable at all times, not the special application of the passage to Israel.

There are three things: Faith, the prayer of faith, and the spirit of grace in forgiving.

“Have faith in God.” More literally, it is “Have faith of God.” It is the faith that is emphasized rather than its object. It is faith that takes its character from the divine object in which it rests, God Himself. That is the kind of faith for great difficulties. In other words, it is faith that has its rest in God, and that brings Him into the difficulty.

Suppose you have a difficulty as great as the highest mountain; have you confidence in God? Can you bring Him into the difficulty? Well, He is greater than the difficulty — greater than the greatest mountain. What is a mountain to Him “who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance” (Isa. 40:12)? “Have faith in God. For verily, I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which He saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever He saith.” It is a simple question of confidence in God.

I need hardly say, however, that this involves the knowledge of God, and communion with Him. If we are living practically at a distance from Him, this confidence is impossible. We cannot know what would be suitable to Him. “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel” (Psa. 103:7). It is not said that Israel knew His ways. They knew His acts, but Moses knew His ways. This is much more than to know His acts. His acts may be seen afar off, but His ways are learned in the secret of His presence. Moses was one with whom Jehovah spoke face to face; and in the intimacy of communion with Him he learned His ways.

When Israel sinned in the matter of the golden calf, Moses knew how to act in a way suited to Jehovah. He maintained His truth both in judgment and in grace. He burned the calf in the fire, ground it to powder, strewed it on the water, and made the children of Israel drink it. He also stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me.” And then he commanded the the sons of Levi, who had gathered to him, to gird on their swords, and to go in and out from gate to gate, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. All this was judgment.

But there was a question of Jehovah’s glory also, of the accomplishment of His purposes, and the fulfillment of His promises to the fathers in blessing the people, and bringing them into the land. And now Moses goes up to the Lord, and falls on his face forty days and forty nights in intercession for Israel. This was the energy of faith that counted on the goodness of God in that dreadful hour. How could he have persevered those forty days and forty nights, if he had not known Jehovah? It was the knowledge of Jehovah he had acquired that gave him confidence, and this knowledge was the secret spring of his whole action.

The difficulty was like a great mountain. Israel had been put under the law as a covenant of works; they had broken the law, and a breach of that law was death. On the other hand, Jehovah had sworn to the fathers that He would give them the land, and bless the seed of Abraham. The people have sinned, and are the subjects of deserved judgment; but if Jehovah consumes them, as He had threatened to do, what will become of His word, His oath, His name? Moses had the knowledge of God and is full of faith — faith that has had its growth in the secret of Jehovah’s presence; and he falls on his face and pleads the word and name of Jehovah. He brings Jehovah into the difficulty. Will the difficulty prove too great for Him? or will He deny Himself? He cannot bless the people because of what they are; but He falls back on His own resources — His own absolute and sovereign grace — as a ground of action. He shows grace to whom He will, mercy to whom He will — and pardons His guilty people. Christ is the true solution of this difficulty in respect of guilty man — Christ in whose Person on the cross grace and judgment were both maintained.

But what we see here is the faith of Moses acting in view of Israel’s fallen state, and the character of Jehovah’s great name. His intercession prevails, and the mountain is removed and is cast into the sea.

Now, if we would have this “faith of God” which renders us superior to all difficulties, we must also have this heart-acquaintance with Him by which we learn His thoughts and ways. There must be a habitual seeking of His face, so that our thoughts and desires may be formed in His presence. And is not this worth while? The right state of the soul depends on it. God’s presence is the atmosphere in which faith is formed, and has its growth. It is when we are near Him that confidence is developed in the heart. He searches the heart, and if the heart is uncovered before Him, and everything judged that is unsuited to Him, confidence is established. If, however, there is guile in the heart, we are not at ease; we cannot hide our real state from Him; our heart condemns us; and “if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:20-22). “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

We have to do with the Searcher of hearts, and our hearts must be in His presence without guile. There must be submission too, and keeping His commandments; and where there is submission to His will, the desires being formed in His presence, we ask according to His will, and have the confidence that He will give what we ask. When this is our state, our wills do not run counter to His will. We desire what He wills. He forms our hearts, and awakens desires within us; and He answers the desires which He Himself has awakened. We not only ask what He wills, but we ask what we will, and He answers, because our wills are His will. “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). Where there is this dependence — this abiding in Christ — and His words abiding in us, and forming our desires, we have communion with Him. We ask according to His will, but it is our will too, because His words have wrought desires in us, and He cannot refuse the requests He Himself has moved us to make.

This, then, is the great thing: to be in His presence without guile, and to have the heart open to Him, that He may fill us with His own thoughts and desires. This produces confidence and assurance. “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” There is no limit set to the power of believing prayer. Only, as we have seen, this faith will be in exercise only when we are in a state which is according to God. The next verse shows there must be the grace in the heart that forgives, in order to have such confidence in God: “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Here, of course, it is no question of eternal forgiveness of sins, or of being justified before God as guilty sinners. It is His governmental ways with those who are in relationship with Himself. Nor is it a question of going to one who has wronged us, and telling him, we forgive. In such a case the word would be, “if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17).

In the passage before us it is the state of the heart in the presence of God. If I am in His presence whose grace took me up when I was a guilty rebel, and has gone on with me ever since, keeping me day by day, or restoring me when I have fallen, how can I hold something in my heart against my brother? A brother says, “I cannot feel just right toward brother A.” What is at the bottom of such a remark? It is self. The feelings have been wounded in some way, and there is bitterness. Something is held in the heart against the brother. The heart is not formed by grace. Himself forgiven ten thousand talents, he holds the smallest thing against his brother. This is not the way of grace; nor is it the way God has acted toward us in Christ.

You have hard feelings toward some brother on account of some real, or supposed injury. This is no uncommon thing among the saints. Now, speaking with all reverence, can you conceive of God having “hard feelings” toward one of His children, or bitterness in His heart because of something that child has done? Instinctively you shrink back from the very thought, as utterly abhorrent to your soul, and as falsifying completely the revelations of God you have received in Christ. It is not that God makes light of evil in His children; but what we call “hard feelings,” or bitterness one toward another, is impossible to Him.

Now we must rise up to God’s thoughts; we need to get above ourselves and our feelings, judging in ourselves the spring of all bitter thoughts, of all hard feelings, in order to have confidence in His presence. Without this we have no power, and our prayers will be unanswered, and we ourselves will remain the subjects of God’s governmental dealings. “If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

How often have wars and conflicts arisen among the saints, which had their origin in some little root of bitterness, some lack of grace, or some nursing of feelings toward one or another! And how often the saints are apparently powerless in the presence of these things! Is there, then, no remedy? Thank God, there is; but it is not in anything that we can do, but in the faith that brings God into the difficulty. Is there one among the saints living so in the thoughts of God, that he has God’s mind in the matter, and can count on Him? God is able to solve the difficulty. But do you find yourself in His presence with an unforgiving spirit toward your brother? You must begin with yourself, then, instead of your brother, for until you do, God will not hear. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” When we have judged ourselves, so that the heart is free before Him, He forms the heart, and faith comes into activity, so that we can, with confidence, present our request, and the mountain is removed. When the grace of God gets to working in hearts, troubles and difficulties soon begin to disappear. They pass away like the morning clouds before the warm rays of the rising sun.

May the Lord give His beloved saints, amid the increasing difficulties of these last days, to know more of His own grace, and in the presence of that grace, to lay aside all questions of personal feelings one toward another; so that our hearts may be free in His presence, and that they may rise up to His thoughts of grace toward His own. Abiding in the sense of this grace, and acting in the spirit of grace in forgiving others in the heart before God, we have confidence before Him, and can count on that grace which never fails, bringing the God of all grace into the difficulties which beset His beloved people, and removing them out of the way, as mountains cast into the sea.

Christian Truth: Volume 37, Prayer

Mark 11:22-26

I have found Mark 11:22-26 to be of great benefit. Here we have:

FAITH-The "Faith of God;" that is, faith that takes its character and strength from God-faith that brings God into the difficulty. There is a mountain to be removed. Only God can lift a mountain up and throw it into the sea. But He is greater than the mountain, and if you can bring Him into the matter, the mountain must go.

Prayer is our proper attitude. Through it we express our dependence on God, but only the prayer of faith is effectual, although that may be feeble.

3. But this prayer of faith is also conditional on a certain state in us, and that is the spirit of forgiveness. "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any." It is not here going to one who has wronged you, and telling him you forgive him. In such a case the word is, "If he repent, forgive him." But here it is the state of our hearts toward our brethren when we are in the presence of God. Suppose I am praying to God who has forgiven me ten thousand talents in absolute grace, and am holding something against one who may have wronged me; God will

not hear me. I am not in communion; my state is wrong. I am not in the current of God's thoughts, and will not be able to exercise faith.

A person says, "I cannot feel right toward Mr. A." That is, he has hard feelings toward Mr. A. But can I think of God in this way? Can I speak of Him as having "hard" feelings toward anyone? Never. When we were enemies, He gave His Son. Now my heart is to be in the same state as His; that is, my feelings and desires are to be formed by what flows down in communion through the Word from His heart into mine. And if this is my state when I pray, I will forgive if I have anything against anyone, and my heart will be free in God's presence. However my brother may have erred, I will be able to seek his blessing and restoration. In case of personal difficulties among saints, if this state is reached in God's presence, it is

wonderful how soon difficulties melt away, because it is God Himself coming in to act in grace.

Christian Truth: Volume 21, Mark 11:22-26

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I have found this scripture of great benefit to myself and others in this connection. Here we have:

Faith -the "faith in God," that is, faith that takes its character and strength from God as its object-faith that brings God into the difficulty. There is a mountain to be removed. God only can lift a mountain up and throw it into the sea. But He is greater than the mountain; and if you can bring Him into the matter, the mountain must go.

Prayer is our proper attitude-what expresses our dependence on God—but the prayer of faith only is effectual.

3) There is a condition; that is, this prayer of faith is conditional on a certain

state in us, and that is the spirit of forgiveness. "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any." It is not here going to one who has wronged you, and telling him you forgive him. In such a case the word is, "If he repent, forgive him." But here it is the state of our hearts toward our brethren when we are in the presence of God. Suppose I am praying to God who has forgiven me ten thousand talents in absolute grace, and am holding something against one who may have wronged me, God will not hear me. I am not in communion, my state is wrong, I am not in the current of God's thoughts, and will not be able to exercise faith.

A person says: "I cannot feel right toward Mr. A." That is, he has hard feelings toward Mr. A. But can I think of God in this way? Can I speak of Him as having "hard feelings" to ward anyone? Never. When we were enemies, He gave His Son. Now my heart is to be in the same state as His; that is, my feelings and desires are to be formed by what flows down in communion through the Word from His heart into mine. And if this is my state when I pray, I will forgive, if I have anything against anyone; and my heart will be free in God's presence. And, however my brother may have erred, I will be able to seek his blessing and restoration.

In case of personal difficulties among saints, if this state is reached in God's presence, it is wonderful how soon difficulties melt away, because it is God Himself coming in to act in grace.

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