

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

When Your Mountain Doesn't Move

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Mark 11:22-25

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 11:22; that's on page 847 in your pew Bibles. Last week we covered this passage from the 10,000 foot level. We talked about how Jesus is the better temple. He is the new place where we go to get our sins forgiven and to offer our prayers to God. And Jesus promised that we would become powerful people of prayer. He said:

“Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark 11:22–25 ESV)

Jesus says, straight up in this passage my people will be **WORLD CHANGERS** and **MOUNTAIN MOVERS** through the power of believing prayer.

Now, obviously we want to take a second and make sure we are rightly understanding that expression. What does it mean precisely to move mountains in prayer? James Edwards says helpfully here:

Jesus illustrates the power of faith with Hebraic hyperbole about the moving of a mountain.¹

So scholars tell us here that this was a Hebraic expression – this was an idiom that people understood at the time. We have expressions like this. We say: “Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill”; meaning ‘don’t treat a little thing as if it is a really big thing’. That’s an expression that we understand – and this is an expression that they understood. It comes from the Old Testament. In Zechariah 4:6 for example we read:

“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. 7 Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. (Zechariah 4:6–7 ESV)

God promises here Zerubbabel will overcome GREAT OBSTACLES through the power of the Holy Spirit and through prayer – thanks be to God! That is what Jesus is saying here. His people will do great things and overcome great obstacles in the Spirit, by faith, through the power of prayer.

That’s what the passage means.

But here is the question I want to wrestle with today: what if your mountain doesn’t move?

What if there is a great obstacle in your life? What if you have a sick loved one or an unsaved child – what if you are leaning into that mountain in faith and through prayer and your mountain isn’t moving?

What then?

That’s what I want to talk about because if this passage was all you had to go on then that situation – that unmoving mountain – could literally crush your soul and steal your faith. If this passage was all you had to go on you could only come to 1 of 2 conclusions when your mountain doesn’t move.

¹James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 346–347.

Number 1 – you aren't a Christian – or at least, you aren't a very good Christian. Right? I mean if Jesus says – say to this mountain be cast into the sea – and your mountain just stands there looking at you and laughing at you then maybe you're the problem! You must not be a Christian. You must not have faith. That's the conclusion you would probably come to if this was the only passage you had access to.

Or you might come to the conclusion that this whole thing is bunk. There is no God. The universe is an accident and we are all hurtling towards calamity and extinction so what does it matter anyway? That is the attitude of nihilism and despair. And you might end up there if this was the only passage you had to go on.

But, thankfully, it is not. The Bible says a great deal about mountains that don't move and what we should do and what we should not do when we pray in faith and nothing happens. So let's talk about that and let's start with what we shouldn't do when our mountain doesn't move.

What Not To Do:

1. Connect the dots

As human beings we love to do this – we almost can't help ourselves. If we see human suffering we immediately attempt to identify causality and assign blame. We want to say: “this unrelieved suffering is due to that unrepented sin” – but Jesus tells us not to do that. In John 9:1-3 we read:

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:1-3 ESV)

It was neither this man's sin nor his parents – it was something else entirely! God was at work! God was doing something! God was working some plan and the disciples did not have access to the hidden counsel of God and therefore they spoke too much about things they did not understand.

And when we do that we have the potential to hurt people a great deal. When we try to ask those questions or connect those dots we can add shame to the burden of the suffering. That's what

Job's three friends did. They saw him covered in these nasty, maggoty boils and having suffered unspeakable tragedy and they could not help themselves from trying to connect the dots. They had simplistic – damnably simplistic theology! They looked at Job and they saw spectacular suffering and so they assumed spectacular sin. They accused him of horrible things. They said:

You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry... You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. (Job 22:7–9 ESV)

You must have done terrible things Job – that's why you are suffering.

That's what they said! Can you imagine that? But we do that all the time – we just tend to do it behind people's backs. Job's friends at least did it to his face – but they shouldn't have done it at all. When God showed up at the end he was MAD at those men and they only escaped punishment because Job prayed for them.

It is a dangerous and hurtful thing to attempt to connect the dots. That is way beyond our pay grade.

So don't do that.

2. Heap up phrases

Some of us become little pagans when our prayers are not answered. We pray for something in the normal way and then if that prayer isn't answered we become little pagans. Do you remember the pagans in 1 Kings 18? Elijah set up a showdown with the prophets of Baal and he told them to pray and then he would pray and then the people would see whose prayers God would answer. Do you remember how the pagans prayed? They:

called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. 27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. (1 Kings 18:26–28 ESV)

Do you remember that? It was madness! It was silliness! It was paganism – and yet, that’s exactly what we do when we don’t get what we ask for in prayer. We start going around in circles and shouting louder and louder. We pray:

“O Lord, please heal brother Bob! Brother Bob needs a HEALING Jesus and I am asking for that now. I’m asking for a HEALING! Heal that brother Bob! Heal him up good! Lift him up! Heal him Old School! Touch the brother Jesus! Heal him! I claim that healing right now! Thank you Lord! I see that now. I see Bob totally healed and I give you thanks in Jesus name. Heal our brother. Heal brother Bob. Brother Bob. Heal him.”

And we just keep dancing around in a circle, heaping up phrases, as if God has been taking a nap and maybe our noisy repetitions will wake him up.

Jesus said explicitly not to do that. He said:

when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:7–8 ESV)

We don’t pray like that. That’s paganism. Spurgeon didn’t pray like that either. He said:

“When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a bank clerk when I have [a] cheque to be cashed. I walk in, put the cheque down on the counter, and the clerk gives me my money, I take it up, and go about my business.”²

We don’t need to jump up and down, we don’t need to shout or dance or punish ourselves; we just walk up to the counter, present our credentials and make our requests known to God. You have a right to be there and Jesus has earned for you the right to be heard.

So don’t pray like a pagan when your mountain doesn’t move.

3. Accuse God

And don’t accuse God of being wrong or being mean or hateful because he didn’t answer your prayer.

² Charles Spurgeon as cited in John Piper, *A Camaraderie of Confidence* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 54.

In Job 36 Elihu is speaking and he is rebuking the shallow theology of the Job's three friends and also Job's perspective on God. Elihu represents the highest perspective of human wisdom when it comes to the matter of suffering. The first part of the book contains speeches back and forth between Job and his three friends as they try and figure out why Job is so sick and why so many bad things have happened to him. The friends say, you have hidden, unrepented sin in your life – that's the only explanation. Job says, no that's not it! I haven't done what you've accused me of – and Job is right! When God shows up at the end he says that Job hasn't done those things, he is blameless and his 3 friends are wrong. But before God shows up a young man – maybe some young guy who was tending the baggage, he says he can't hold it in anymore – he's been listening to these 4 old men discuss suffering and he hasn't heard real wisdom yet. He heard mean and wicked stupidity from the 3 friends and then he heard some exaggeration and even accusation from Job. Job was so sure of his own righteousness that he felt that his suffering was unjust and that God had become his enemy.

But that's not right! Elihu says. God is never our enemy when we suffer. He's never trying to destroy us; he's always doing something good even if we can't see it. Elihu reminds Job of that; he says:

“Behold, God is mighty, and does not despise any (Job 36:5 ESV)

God doesn't hate you, he's just doing something you don't understand.

Even though it doesn't feel like, suffering can be helpful. David understood that. He said in Psalm 119:71:

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. (Psalms 119:71 ESV)

David was helped by his suffering to see things he had never seen or understood before. That's exactly what Elihu says to Job. He says:

He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity... Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? (Job 36:15–22 ESV)

Don't turn on God Job; He isn't abandoning you, he doesn't hate you. He is playing a long game and he is preparing you for something good. Behold, God is exalted in his power, who is a teacher like him?

So when your mountain doesn't move, friend, don't turn on God. Don't pull back – lean in. Lean in to whatever good thing God is doing.

4. Pretend to be ok

Jesus didn't pretend to be ok. He WEPT at the funeral of his friend Lazarus – do you remember that? He didn't pretend to be ok and Job didn't pretend to be ok either. His friends were actually a little freaked out by the appearance of Job when they finally found him. He was sitting on an ash heap scraping his pussy, infected boils with a piece of broken pottery – he was a mess and it showed. He was not pretending that he was ok. When you are sitting outside on a mountain of ash scraping your scabs with a piece of pottery you are not ok and everyone knows it. Job defended his right to be not ok. He said:

Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass, or the ox low over his fodder? (Job 6:5 ESV)

Animals are allowed to react to things that make them happy and things that make them sad and so are we – Job says. Christians are allowed to cry. Christians are allowed to SOB and MOAN and SCREAM and WAIL when their child dies of cancer. Don't you EVER tell someone not to mourn in this church! We have as much right to our reactions as a donkey does! We can mourn in this church! We can come to church with our make up all smeared and our hair all tussled because we are DEVASTATED by loss and pain. Job SHAVED HIS HEAD and then he sat down in ashes and scraped his boils with a piece of garbage – he was not ok – and you don't have to be ok either. So don't pretend.

Then lastly – in terms of what not to do – don't cherish bitterness.

5. Cherish bitterness

Some of us go inside when our mountain doesn't move. We just paste on a smile and carry on with our business but inside we are mad, we are upset, we are bitter and that little root of bitterness can spread and ruin your soul. It can steal your faith and it can make it impossible for you to trust or to love or to laugh – it can take your whole life.

So don't do that. Elihu says to Job:

“The godless in heart cherish anger; they do not cry for help when he binds them. (Job 36:13 ESV)

Isn't that great? Don't you love this young man? He says to Job: “Don't be godless. Don't fill your heart with secret anger. Just cry out for help. Reach out. Reach out to God. Reach out to us. Don't turn in, reach out.”

My friends, let's be a church where we can bring our pain with us on Sunday morning. Let's be a church where it's ok to let it out. It's ok to CRY FOR HELP. And then let's be a church that responds to those cries. Let's be a church that helps and comforts and supports people who are being crushed by mountains that are not moving. That are not being cast into the sea. That are – for some reason – still in place and causing terrible pain.

Don't turn inward.

Let it out – cry for help - and let us in.

Now, let's talk about 5 things you should do when your mountain doesn't move.

What To Do:

1. Examine Yourself

In Mark 11:25 after telling them that they will be world changers through prayer, Jesus says:

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25 ESV)

As we said last week, we are channels only. The power is Jesus' power and it will flow through us provided we keep our pipes clean. So if your mountain doesn't move, the first thing you should do is look inside yourself for unforgiveness.

Now you might say, wait a second, you just said not to try and connect the dots – but now you are saying that our unforgiveness might be the reason our mountain isn't moving – what gives? That's a good question and it brings us to an important distinction. There is a big difference between connecting the dots and engaging in self reflection. One is outward focused and the other is inward focused. One is rebuked and one is commended.

Jesus rebukes the disciples for looking at a suffering person and trying to figure out whose sin was responsible for his suffering and yet Jesus said to a guy once in John 5:

“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” (John 5:14 ESV)

So obviously some suffering is due to sin and so it makes sense when you are suffering to look inside yourself for sin. But that's different than looking inside other people for sin. Looking inside yourself is always good and it is particularly good when you are suffering or when you are praying and your mountain isn't moving. First thing you do when that happens is look inside YOURSELF. Am I sinning? Am I withholding forgiveness? That's good! That cleans the pipes. Pointing the finger at other people, however, is not good.

So when your mountain doesn't move, look inside yourself.

2. Adjust Your Aim

Sometimes our prayers aren't answered because we are asking for the wrong things. James, the brother of Jesus said that. He said:

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:3 ESV)

Sometimes we pray for what we WANT rather than for what would glorify God. Jesus was very clear about WHY he was giving us power in prayer. He said:

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13 ESV)

THAT the Father may be glorified in the Son – that’s the reason we are given power in prayer – NOT so that we never have to suffer. Do you see that? That is so important to understand! Sometimes God has purposes related to his glory in Jesus that you are actually praying against. You have a loved one who is sick and you are asking for them to get healed – but what if God is working a different plan? What if God is allowing your loved one to be sick so that another loved one would be awakened to his or her own spiritual need such that they begin to open up and they eventually put their faith in Jesus Christ and are saved – what if that is the purpose that God is working through this illness? If you can’t see that then you might find yourself praying against the purpose of God!

Do you see that?

That’s why its NEVER a bad thing to pray: “Nevertheless Lord, not my will but thy will be done”. You go ahead and ask God for whatever you want, but you make it clear that what you want most of all is for God’s will to be done because he might be doing something bigger than you are able to see – so you pray for that and you will always get what you ask for.

So when your mountain doesn’t move, evaluate and if necessary change what you are aiming at.

3. Pray Again

Pray again! Don’t stop praying! Some mountains are worn down very slowly over time. We saw that last week when we celebrated the immigration of Vlad and Timor – we’ve been praying for that for 10 years. Sometimes mountains move quickly and sometimes they move very slowly and that’s why Jesus told us to persevere in prayer. He told that story about the persistent widow – do you remember that?

“In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ (Luke 18:2–3 ESV)

Day after day she came and made her request and finally, even though the judge was not a good man, he gave her what she asked for just so that she would go away. Jesus says, how much more then should you expect to see results from your persistence in prayer? You aren't praying to a bad man, you are praying to a good God! So if you asking for something good and you don't get it the first time you ask, come back again tomorrow and ask again. Sometimes mountains move one inch – one prayer at a time.

Fourthly, when your mountain doesn't move:

4. Receive help and comfort

Sometimes God allows you to go through an extended season of suffering and difficulty so that you can receive help and comfort which will then better prepare you to help and comfort other people who are suffering later. The Apostle Paul says that:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4 ESV)

Sometimes God ordains suffering for us so that we can receive help and comfort and then turn around and share those things with other people. You can't give what you have never received and we've got a world out there labouring under difficulty and suffering. They don't need a bright and shiny church that has been protected from illness and frailty and cancer and loss – they need a church with a PHD in those things! They need a church that has been pressed down AND RAISED UP, they need a church that has been trained in caring for people with cancer and caring for parents who've lost children – they NEED that kind of church because they live in that kind of world. So maybe your mountain is really about some other mountain. Maybe your pain is preparation. Maybe God has enrolled you in the School of Affliction. So learn. Take in whatever he's got for you and then look around and pray about where God wants you to spend what you have received.

5. Worship

And of course while you are doing all that, don't forget to worship.

Don't let suffering – don't let an unmoved mountain keep you from worshipping the Lord. You won't survive and you won't be any good to anybody if you let this mountain block your worship of God.

And it shouldn't.

God is EXALTED in the heavens – he is way higher than any obstacle you face down here on the earth. God is good when you have a job and God is good when you are unemployed. God is good when you are healthy and God is good when you have boils on every square inch of your body. God is good when your kids are alive and happy and flourishing and God is good when they are flying through the windshield of your car because you have been OBLITERATED by a drunk driver at 2 a.m. in the morning.

All of that happens down here.

In the sinful, broken, fallen world that we have made.

But none of that changes who God is in the heavens.

Job knew that. In his best moments he KNEW THAT.

When a hurricane knocked over the house that his kids were in and they all died he rose up and tore his robe and shaved his head and he fell on his face and he WORSHIPPED and he said:

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21 ESV)

That's faith.

That's faith when your mountain doesn't move.

That's faith when your mountain slides down and CRUSHES your whole family and grinds you into the dust and you still show up to worship.

That's incredible and that's where Job is at in chapter 1 – but he is fading a little bit – understandably - in chapter 36 so Elihu – that very wise young man – says this:

“Remember to extol his work, of which men have sung.” (Job 36:24 ESV)

Don't stop singing now Job! You've done so well! You've maintained your faith – you had a little slip when you thought God was out to get you – he wasn't – he's still God and he loves you and he is working a good plan and you should remember that. You should keep singing about who he is and what he has done.

He's a good God, even when times are bad. He's a good God, even when your mountain doesn't move. He's a good God, even when you are sick and you aren't getting any better. He's a good God, even when your kids are lying dead on the side of the road.

He is God and he has a plan to save people and to glorify himself through the person and power of Jesus Christ and he has a part for you to play in that plan. So you need to look up and you need to see him so that you can trust him and so that you can pray to him once again.

Because that's who you are – because that's why you're here and because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.