

“How You Can Grow in Faith”
(Mark 11:24)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

After Jesus entered Jerusalem –

Showing Himself to be Messiah –

After looking around,

He left for Bethany –

SE slope of Mount of Olives,

2 mi east of Jerusalem –

Next day, as leaving Bethany, was hungry.

Seeing a fig tree in distance in leaf –

Which meant there was hope of fruit –

He came to it, didn't find any –

Because it wasn't the right time for fruit.

And He cursed the tree:

“May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” (v. 14).

He then came into the Temple

And drove out the merchandisers and money-changers,

God's house of prayer for all nations –

This holy place to worship God –

But had been turned into a robber's den (v. 17).

Result was the chief priest and scribes wanted to kill Him,

But didn't yet for fear of people.

In the evening, they again left for Bethany.

But when they returned in the morning,

Seeing the fig tree Jesus cursed had withered

Peter pointed it out to Jesus:

At which point,

He told them, if they had faith,

They could not only do the same,

But if they told a mountain

To be taken up and cast into the sea,

And did not doubt, but believed,

It would be done.

What was this all about?

Mark tells us it wasn't the season for fruit –

Jesus knew He wouldn't find any.

Why did Jesus destroy a perfectly good tree?

It was an object lesson to teach them two things:

First:

That God was about to bring a curse on Israel:

Jesus came to this tree –

As He had come to His own –

But He didn't find any fruit:

Any glory for His Father –

His own didn't receive Him;

They wouldn't listen and repent –

The fact that He had to cleanse the Temple

Was another example of Israel's corruption –

And so He pronounced a curse on the tree –

Within the week, He would pronounce a curse on Israel

In Mark 13: The Olivet Discourse –

In His mercy,

He would send out His apostles

To gather His sheep in

Over the next forty years –

The time frame of Acts –

But then He would bring this curse

In His judgment in 70 AD.

Jesus warns us in John 15

That any branch in Him

That doesn't bear good fruit

Will eventually be cut off and cast out –

That's what He was about to do to Israel.

The same will eventually happen

To all who don't bear fruit out of love to God –

But that won't be true of us

If we have trusted Him.

B. Preview.

But He had another purpose for this tree:

It was an example of what believing prayer could do.

Jesus, “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you” (v. 24).

Jesus tells us:

We can pray for whatever we need,

And the Father will give it to us –

But there is a condition –

We must have faith;

We must believe

He will give us what we’ve asked;

That He’s already given it when we ask –

And it will be ours –

The devil doesn’t like this promise.

It means our prayers are a threat.

We can overcome him,

If we pray in faith,

And so he attacks.

He can’t take away prayer –

Though he can keep us from it –

And so he attacks our faith:

He can’t destroy it,

But he can weaken it,

To the point where we’re no longer a threat –

Which sadly he has done to a majority of the church.

Tonight,

Let's consider how he attacks faith,
And how we can overcome him.

II. Sermon.

It would be impossible to look
At all the ways he attacks in this brief time.

So let's consider this broadly.

Generally, he attacks on two fronts:

He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in our hearts –

Not by attacking Him,

But by attacking us –

Which weakens our faith –

And he tries to hide the object of our faith –

God, Jesus, and His promises –

To create doubt and weaken it further.

A. First, He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in two ways:

By keeping us from the things that strengthen it,

And by subjecting us to the things that weaken it.

1. The means of grace are what strengthen it –

Because this is how we have communion with God.

Think of the means of grace as a furnace,

And our hearts as iron placed in the fire.

Just as iron glows red when it's in the furnace,

But quickly begins to cool when it's removed;
So our hearts/affections become hot when we commune with God,
But begin to cool as soon as they're withdrawn.

The more time we spend with God in the Word,
The more with Him in prayer and in worship –
Which we should try to do at all times –
The hotter we will be –
The stronger our faith and zeal.

The hotter we are,
The more likely we'll also heat up each other.

When we come to public worship,
We're to be like so many small flames
That cause each other to burn hotter –

If we come cool or cold,
We're more likely to have the opposite effect.

That's why it's important
That we spend time privately with God
Before we meet together.

Not only will the devil try to keep us
From the things that heat up our affections,
He'll also do his best to expose us
To the things he knows will cool them:
Temptation and sin.

He's studied us long enough to know our weaknesses –

The things we're most likely to be tempted by and to fall to –

And he will exploit them as much as he can.

Paul admonished the Corinthians

To forgive their erring brother –

The one he told them about in 1 Corinthians 5,

That needed to be put out of the church for incest –

“So that,” he says, “no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11).

He knows unforgiveness quenches the Spirit,

As we saw in our reading.

He has many snares.

Thomas Brooks wrote his famous book,

Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices,

To help us recognize and escape these schemes.

If he can keep us from the fuel,

And get us instead to pour water on the fire,

He can weaken us to the point we won't be a threat to him.

Again, thankfully, he can't put the fire out entirely.

Bunyan reminds of this in *Pilgrim's Progress* –

In one of the rooms in Mister Interpreter's house

Where a man (the devil)

Is pouring water on a fire (the work of the Spirit in our hearts)

But it doesn't go out

Because it's secretly being fed from behind the wall (by Jesus).

It can't be extinguished,

But it can be weakened;

And as it is, so is our faith.

2. Satan also tries to weaken our faith

By hiding the object of faith –

To make us doubt.

It's the same thing he does

To try and keep unbelievers from coming to God in the first place:

By providing alternate explanations for what we see/Creation.

Paul tells us that God's revelation

Gets through to everyone –

No one has an excuse for their unbelief.

But he also tells us that sin moves men

To suppress/hide that revelation/knowledge (Rom. 1:18)

Because they don't want to live with it.

That's why we have evolutionary science,

And competing religions.

Now, if we have faith –

The faith the Spirit gives –

We know evolution isn't true,

And that these competing religions are false.

But we still have to admit

There are times when they trouble us,

Maybe even cause us to stumble.

That's because there's more going on

Behind these things than meets the eye:

Satan is using them to try and deceive us.

A careful examination of evolution

Shows that it falls by its own complete lack of evidence –

Watch the movie/documentary *Expelled* if you want to see a good example –

And yet the majority of colleges and universities

Teach it as though it's unquestionably true.

Why would they do this, if the argument for it is so weak?

Because of what Paul says in Romans 1 –

They hate God and don't want to be accountable to Him.

Paul goes on to say that false religion

Is the result of the same hatred:

“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen”
(Rom. 1:22-25).

Sometimes believers stumble at their arguments.

Satan will throw everything he can against us to weaken our faith,

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B. So what can we do to overcome his attacks?

We need to do the reverse of what we've just seen:

He's trying to keep us from getting fired up

By spending time with the Lord,

By using the means of grace:

We need to use them –

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One of the things that does this

More than just about anything else,

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A. First, He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in two ways:

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Think of the means of grace as a furnace,

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Just as iron glows red when it's in the furnace,

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Which sadly he has done to a majority of the church.

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II. Sermon.

It would be impossible to look
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Generally, he attacks on two fronts:

He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in our hearts –

Not by attacking Him,

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Which weakens our faith –

And he tries to hide the object of our faith –

God, Jesus, and His promises –

To create doubt and weaken it further.

A. First, He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in two ways:

By keeping us from the things that strengthen it,

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1. The means of grace are what strengthen it –

Because this is how we have communion with God.

Think of the means of grace as a furnace,

And our hearts as iron placed in the fire.

Just as iron glows red when it's in the furnace,

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So our hearts/affections become hot when we commune with God,
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The more time we spend with God in the Word,
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Which we should try to do at all times –
The hotter we will be –
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The hotter we are,
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When we come to public worship,
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If we come cool or cold,
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Not only will the devil try to keep us
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To the things he knows will cool them:
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He's studied us long enough to know our weaknesses –

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To forgive their erring brother –

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Remember, the condition to receiving is faith:

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He can’t take away prayer –

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Which sadly he has done to a majority of the church.

Tonight,

Let's consider how he attacks faith,
And how we can overcome him.

II. Sermon.

It would be impossible to look
At all the ways he attacks in this brief time.

So let's consider this broadly.

Generally, he attacks on two fronts:

He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in our hearts –

Not by attacking Him,

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Which weakens our faith –

And he tries to hide the object of our faith –

God, Jesus, and His promises –

To create doubt and weaken it further.

A. First, He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in two ways:

By keeping us from the things that strengthen it,

And by subjecting us to the things that weaken it.

1. The means of grace are what strengthen it –

Because this is how we have communion with God.

Think of the means of grace as a furnace,

And our hearts as iron placed in the fire.

Just as iron glows red when it's in the furnace,

But quickly begins to cool when it's removed;
So our hearts/affections become hot when we commune with God,
But begin to cool as soon as they're withdrawn.

The more time we spend with God in the Word,
The more with Him in prayer and in worship –
Which we should try to do at all times –
The hotter we will be –
The stronger our faith and zeal.

The hotter we are,
The more likely we'll also heat up each other.

When we come to public worship,
We're to be like so many small flames
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If we come cool or cold,
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That's why it's important
That we spend time privately with God
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Not only will the devil try to keep us
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Temptation and sin.

He's studied us long enough to know our weaknesses –

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Paul admonished the Corinthians

To forgive their erring brother –

The one he told them about in 1 Corinthians 5,

That needed to be put out of the church for incest –

“So that,” he says, “no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11).

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Thomas Brooks wrote his famous book,

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If he can keep us from the fuel,

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A. First, He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in two ways:

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Think of the means of grace as a furnace,

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Just as iron glows red when it's in the furnace,

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Mark tells us it wasn't the season for fruit –

Jesus knew He wouldn't find any.

Why did Jesus destroy a perfectly good tree?

It was an object lesson to teach them two things:

First:

That God was about to bring a curse on Israel:

Jesus came to this tree –

As He had come to His own –

But He didn't find any fruit:

Any glory for His Father –

His own didn't receive Him;

They wouldn't listen and repent –

The fact that He had to cleanse the Temple

Was another example of Israel's corruption –

And so He pronounced a curse on the tree –

Within the week, He would pronounce a curse on Israel

In Mark 13: The Olivet Discourse –

In His mercy,

He would send out His apostles

To gather His sheep in

Over the next forty years –

The time frame of Acts –

But then He would bring this curse

In His judgment in 70 AD.

Jesus warns us in John 15

That any branch in Him

That doesn't bear good fruit

Will eventually be cut off and cast out –

That's what He was about to do to Israel.

The same will eventually happen

To all who don't bear fruit out of love to God –

But that won't be true of us

If we have trusted Him.

B. Preview.

But He had another purpose for this tree:

It was an example of what believing prayer could do.

Jesus, “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you” (v. 24).

Jesus tells us:

We can pray for whatever we need,

And the Father will give it to us –

But there is a condition –

We must have faith;

We must believe

He will give us what we’ve asked;

That He’s already given it when we ask –

And it will be ours –

The devil doesn’t like this promise.

It means our prayers are a threat.

We can overcome him,

If we pray in faith,

And so he attacks.

He can’t take away prayer –

Though he can keep us from it –

And so he attacks our faith:

He can’t destroy it,

But he can weaken it,

To the point where we’re no longer a threat –

Which sadly he has done to a majority of the church.

Tonight,

Let's consider how he attacks faith,
 And how we can overcome him.

II. Sermon.

It would be impossible to look
 At all the ways he attacks in this brief time.

So let's consider this broadly.

Generally, he attacks on two fronts:

He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in our hearts –

Not by attacking Him,

But by attacking us –

Which weakens our faith –

And he tries to hide the object of our faith –

God, Jesus, and His promises –

To create doubt and weaken it further.

A. First, He tries to weaken the Spirit's influence in two ways:

By keeping us from the things that strengthen it,

And by subjecting us to the things that weaken it.

1. The means of grace are what strengthen it –

Because this is how we have communion with God.

Think of the means of grace as a furnace,

And our hearts as iron placed in the fire.

Just as iron glows red when it's in the furnace,

But quickly begins to cool when it's removed;
So our hearts/affections become hot when we commune with God,
But begin to cool as soon as they're withdrawn.

The more time we spend with God in the Word,
The more with Him in prayer and in worship –
Which we should try to do at all times –
The hotter we will be –
The stronger our faith and zeal.

The hotter we are,
The more likely we'll also heat up each other.

When we come to public worship,
We're to be like so many small flames
That cause each other to burn hotter –

If we come cool or cold,
We're more likely to have the opposite effect.

That's why it's important
That we spend time privately with God
Before we meet together.

Not only will the devil try to keep us
From the things that heat up our affections,
He'll also do his best to expose us
To the things he knows will cool them:
Temptation and sin.

He's studied us long enough to know our weaknesses –

The things we're most likely to be tempted by and to fall to –

And he will exploit them as much as he can.

Paul admonished the Corinthians

To forgive their erring brother –

The one he told them about in 1 Corinthians 5,

That needed to be put out of the church for incest –

“So that,” he says, “no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11).

He knows unforgiveness quenches the Spirit,

As we saw in our reading.

He has many snares.

Thomas Brooks wrote his famous book,

Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices,

To help us recognize and escape these schemes.

If he can keep us from the fuel,

And get us instead to pour water on the fire,

He can weaken us to the point we won't be a threat to him.

Again, thankfully, he can't put the fire out entirely.

Bunyan reminds of this in *Pilgrim's Progress* –

In one of the rooms in Mister Interpreter's house

Where a man (the devil)

Is pouring water on a fire (the work of the Spirit in our hearts)

But it doesn't go out

Because it's secretly being fed from behind the wall (by Jesus).

It can't be extinguished,

But it can be weakened;

And as it is, so is our faith.

2. Satan also tries to weaken our faith

By hiding the object of faith –

To make us doubt.

It's the same thing he does

To try and keep unbelievers from coming to God in the first place:

By providing alternate explanations for what we see/Creation.

Paul tells us that God's revelation

Gets through to everyone –

No one has an excuse for their unbelief.

But he also tells us that sin moves men

To suppress/hide that revelation/knowledge (Rom. 1:18)

Because they don't want to live with it.

That's why we have evolutionary science,

And competing religions.

Now, if we have faith –

The faith the Spirit gives –

We know evolution isn't true,

And that these competing religions are false.

But we still have to admit

There are times when they trouble us,

Maybe even cause us to stumble.

That's because there's more going on

Behind these things than meets the eye:

Satan is using them to try and deceive us.

A careful examination of evolution

Shows that it falls by its own complete lack of evidence –

Watch the movie/documentary *Expelled* if you want to see a good example –

And yet the majority of colleges and universities

Teach it as though it's unquestionably true.

Why would they do this, if the argument for it is so weak?

Because of what Paul says in Romans 1 –

They hate God and don't want to be accountable to Him.

Paul goes on to say that false religion

Is the result of the same hatred:

“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen”
(Rom. 1:22-25).

Sometimes believers stumble at their arguments.

Satan will throw everything he can against us to weaken our faith,

So that we won't be a threat to him.

B. So what can we do to overcome his attacks?

We need to do the reverse of what we've just seen:

He's trying to keep us from getting fired up

By spending time with the Lord,

By using the means of grace:

We need to use them –

We need to study the Bible and apply it;

To pray as we've been encouraged to pray;

And to be faithful in our private worship,

So that when we come together

We can fire each other up.

He's trying to expose us to the things

He knows are our weaknesses:

We need to stay away from the things that we know tempt us,

And turn away from of any sins we have fallen into,

Back into God's paths.

He's working to hide God's revelation

From the world and from us

Through evolutionary theory and false religion.

We need to open our eyes more

To what God shows us in the Creation –

Get outdoors more to see His glory;

Read books on natural theology:

Such as John Gerstner's *Reasons for Faith*,

Or the book he co-authored with RC Sproul and Art Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*.

There are many good books from a variety of perspectives

That can help us to see more clearly what God has shown us in nature.

Answers in Genesis, Creation Ministries International, Institute for Creation Research,

All have excellent resources.

There are also resources that refute false religion:

Such as Walter Martin's *Kingdom of the Cults*,

Or John Ankerberg's books on the cults.

These not only refute the enemy,

But strengthen our faith;

But having strengthened it,

We need to put it to use –

To exercise it.

One of the things that does this

More than just about anything else,

Is to ask the Lord for specific things

And see Him provide,

As Jesus tells us in our text:

“Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you” (v. 24).

We need to pray;

For specific needs.

We should begin small,

And as our faith grows,
Ask for greater things.

But when we pray,
We need to look for the Lord's answer:
As we see it,
Our faith will grow.
Maybe one day to the point
That George Mueller's did.

Remember, the condition to receiving is faith:
We need to ask for what God promised,
And we must believe He will give it
When we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

<http://www.gcmoesto.org>