

“The Fruitless Fig Tree”

Matthew 21:12-27

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November 6, 2021

Teaching Aim: To examine the relationship of the fig tree to the nation of Israel. To see how Jesus used a fruitless fig tree to illustrate the consequence of religious hypocrisy. To realize how important it is for us as Christians to be producing spiritual fruit in our own lives today. To recognize when our lives and prayers are focused on God and doing His will, incredible things happen and mountains will be moved!

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (BIBLE STUDY)

Part I: Jesus cleanses the temple for a second time (Matt. 21:12-17)

1. According to **Mark 11:12-18**, did Jesus cleanse the temple immediately after riding into the city of Jerusalem on Sunday, or did this event take place on Monday (**vs. 12**)? It is important to realize that this was the second time Jesus cleared the temple in Jerusalem from people who were misusing it. What were circumstances surrounding the first cleansing? (See **John 2:13-17**)

2. During the feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, all the male Jews who were old enough, healthy enough and close enough to Jerusalem were required to make the trip to attend the annual festivals. Bringing your own animals to sacrifice was difficult; as a result, many people chose to purchase their sacrificial animals when they arrived at the temple. The religious leaders refused to receive foreign currencies and required pilgrims to exchange their money into the local Jewish currency. Annas and the religious leaders were taking advantage of this and charging the pilgrims exorbitant exchange rates (**vs. 12**). If the former High Priest Annas and his sons were the ones running this money-making racket (as history indicates), how would the actions of Jesus have affected His relationship with Annas? How would this taint Annas’ view of Jesus?

3. What two Scriptures did Jesus refer to as He rebuked the religious leaders (**vs. 13**)? (See **Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:9-10**) The temple in Jerusalem had “*a court of the Gentiles*” where the Gentiles could gather and worship God. How had “*the court of the Gentiles*” become a “*den of robbers?*” Have many Christian churches become more focused on the money than the ministry today? If so, how? How do you think Jesus would react if He walked into some of these churches today?

4. After the chaos of clearing “*the court of the Gentiles*” was over, what did Jesus do while the religious leaders were still watching Him (**vs. 14**)? Does Jesus still heal the spiritually blind and lame today? If so, how? (See **John 3:3,5,16-17**; **Eph. 2:8-9**) How should the religious leaders have responded when the miraculous healings of Jesus were performed in front of them?

5. According to **verse 15**, how did the religious leaders respond to Jesus? How do some religious leaders respond today when they are called into account for their own sinful actions? What should every Christian do once he or she realizes they have sinned? (See **1 John 1:9**)

6. What was the meaning of the children’s cry, “*Hosanna to the Son of David*” (**vs. 15**)? How did the religious leaders respond as the children shouted? Who were these children? According to **verse 16**, did Jesus accept the children’s praise? What does this reveal about Jesus?

7. Did Jesus remain with the religious leaders overnight in Jerusalem or did He depart before nightfall and head somewhere else (**vs. 17**)? The religious leaders rejected their Messiah when He was right in front of them. There are few guarantees in life, but one of them is that we can have eternal life if we receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Have you repented of your sin and received the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord? How has coming to Christ changed your life?

Part II: Jesus curses a fruitless fig tree (Matt. 21:18-22)

1. According to **verse 17**, where did Jesus go to spend the night after leaving Jerusalem? Whose house did He most likely stay at? (See **John 12:1**) What happened on His return trip to Jerusalem the following morning (**vv. 18 & 19**)?

2. Figs were a staple part of the Jewish diet in ancient Israel and still are today. Fig trees grow to a height of about 20 feet and give lots of shade from the hot Israeli sun. In good times, fig trees were used as a symbol of God’s blessing on the nation (See **1 Kings 4:25**). In bad times, fig trees were used as a symbol of His curse (See **Jer. 5:17**). It is noteworthy that figs are mentioned over 50x in the Bible. What was wrong with the fig tree that Jesus came to in **verse 19**? The leaves should have indicated that fruit was on the tree, but what did Jesus find when He reached the tree? What did Jesus do as a result? Does this seem out of character? Why or why not?

3. The tree was deceiving in appearance, what curse did Jesus put on this unfruitful tree (**vs. 19**)? Matthew used the literary style of “*compression*” in his account of “*Passion Week*” while Mark followed the events chronologically. What differences do you find between **verse 19** and **Mark 11:19-22**? How can this be explained in light of “*biblical compression*”?

4. How did the disciples react to the quick death of the tree (**vs. 20**)? NOTE: This is the only time Jesus did a miracle that took a life instead of giving life. Did Jesus do this miracle in a rage of anger, or did He choose to use this fruitless tree as an object lesson for His disciples and the Jews? What was Jesus teaching the hypocritical religious leaders by using this illustration? Why would the religious leaders be judged so severely? How does this imagery relate to false teaching in our own day? Will false teachers be judged more strictly? (See **Jam. 3:1**)

5. In **verse 21**, Jesus moved away from the object lesson of an unfruitful fig tree to instructing His disciples on what is required to have a fruitful prayer life and ministry. What key word did Jesus use in **verse 21**? Was Jesus speaking literally or figuratively when He spoke of casting a mountain into the sea? What kind of mountains are you facing in your life right now? (See **Rom. 8:31b**; **Phil. 4:13**)

6. Was Jesus offering us a blank check when He said, “*And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive?*” Why or why not? What conditions must be met before God will answer our prayers? (See **Psa. 66:18**; **1 John 5:14-15**) What is meant by someone being “*on praying ground?*” (See **Matt. 6:33**)

Part III: The religious leaders question the authority of Jesus (Matt. 21:23-27)

1. According to **verse 23**, what happened when Jesus entered the temple area and began to teach? Why did they interrupt Him? What were the religious leaders referring to when they challenged Jesus saying, “*By what authority are You doing these things?*” With the Sanhedrin being the religious ruling council of the day, who would “*seem to*” have authority over anything done in Jerusalem?

2. Jesus realized the religious leaders were setting a trap for Him, if He claimed He was operating by the authority of His Father, they would cry “blasphemy.” If He claimed He operated by the authority of men, the Pharisees would claim their authority was greater than His (**vs. 23**). How did Jesus respond to the “baited” question found in **verses 24** and **25a**? Was His response a common tactic that Jesus used frequently? Should we use this tactic when our faith is challenged today?

3. Why do you think Jesus used “*the baptism of John*” to challenge the Jewish religious leaders (**vs. 25b**)? Had the Pharisees and Sadducees humbled themselves to be baptized by John? If not, why didn’t they? Did Jesus humble Himself to be baptized by John? (See **Matt. 3:13-17**; **Mark 1:9-11**; **Luke 3:21-23**) Why did Jesus submit to John’s baptism? (See **Matt. 3:15**) What did Jesus mean when He said, “*to fulfill all righteousness?*” Note: John’s baptism was “*a national baptism*” for the nation of Israel. It was a baptism for the remission of sins in preparation for the coming Messiah. In submitting to John’s baptism, Jesus identified Himself with the sin of national Israel and then was subsequently anointed as “*the Messiah*” by the Holy Spirit of God as directed by His Heavenly Father.

4. How did the hypocritical religious leaders respond to Jesus in **verses 25b** and **26**? Why did they refuse to say John’s baptism was from heaven? Why did they refuse to say it was from men (See **Luke 20:6**)? How much respect did the common Jews have for John? How much respect did the Jewish religious leaders have for him and the message he brought. (See **Luke 7:29-30**) How were the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ intertwined?

5. What cowardly course did the religious leaders take in **verse 27a**? Why? How did Jesus shut up the hypocritical leaders and frustrate the evil motivation in their hearts (**vs. 27b**)?

6. The word “*authority*” has another word within it, what is it? What can we learn about the authority of Jesus from His authorship found in **John 1:1-3**?

MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- Jesus cleared the temple for the second time in His ministry; this time the day after He arrived at Jerusalem!
- Jesus healed the blind and the lame that came to Him in the temple courtyards; He still heals the spiritually blind and lame who receive Him today!
- The Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus in spite of all the miracles He did in front of them; they were religious, but they were not true believers!
- Jesus did not kill the fig tree in a rage of anger, He killed it because it had the appearance of being fruitful but was not. He thus used this fig tree as an object lesson for religious hypocrisy and the consequences thereof.
- *"The "these things"* the religious leaders referred to when challenging the authority of Jesus were the triumphal entry, accepting praise from little children, the clearing out the temple, and His teaching on the temple grounds.
- Within the word *"authority,"* we find the word *"author."* It could be said, Jesus wrote the book when it came to creation, He is Immanuel (God with us); and therein lies His authority!