

35- The Withering of the Fig Tree Mark 11:12-26

Mark 11:12-26 *And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: 13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. 14 And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it. 15 And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; 16 And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. 17 And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. 18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. 19 And when even was come, he went out of the city. 20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. 22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. 23 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. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. 25 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. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

After Jesus presented Himself as Messiah to the world we are told in Mark that He looked around and departed for the day. Our narrative, in this session, takes place in the two following days. The triumph was short lived to say the least. It would be only a matter of hours before He upset the apple cart of the religious leaders to the point of no return for them.

I- Cursing of the Fig Tree:

Mark 11:12 *And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: 13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. 14 And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.*

The cursing of the fig tree had little to do with Jesus hunger nor selfishly wanted to be catered too. To fully grasp the meaning we have to understand the symbolism of the fig tree. Israel is pictured as the fig tree. Jeremiah said in **Jeremiah 8:13** *I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.*

Hosea 9:10 *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time...*

Now Jesus approached a fig tree that promised fruit by its leaves. The fig is unique in that it produces its fruit before its leaves. This fig tree stood out among all the others because it had leaves, leaves of promise.

Mark 11:13 *And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.*

"It was normal for the fig tree in the vicinity of Jerusalem to begin to put forth new leave in the latter part of March or early April, the time of the Passover. This tree was apparently fully leaved out, in which case it should have had ripened figs on it, although the time of ripe figs was in June." Wycliffe Bible Commentary p 162

Jesus used this occasion for one of His teaching moments with this acted-out parable. He was saying that He had searched for the fruit in Israel but found none. *"Taken symbolically, the fig tree incident stands for Israel's unfruitfulness and approaching doom." Layman's Bible Commentary p 92*

"The fig tree was punished not for being without fruit, but for proclaiming by the voice of those leaves that it had fruit; not for being barren, but for being false; and this was the guilt of Israel, so much deeper than the guilt of the nations" (Trench).

Jesus with these words was saying that Israel had been without fruit while claiming to be fruitful.

II- Cleansing of the Temple:

Some see this event wedged between the fig tree events as a separate incident. I think with the turning over of the religious system of the day and what it had become Jesus is showing another time the turning from Israel.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Mark 11:15 And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; **16** And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. **17** And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? But ye have made it a den of thieves. **18** And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. **19** And when even was come, he went out of the city.

This was not the first time that Jesus had cleaned the temple. He began His ministry with another one during another Passover. **John 2:14-15** And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: **15** And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

The temple was to be a place of worship. The money changers had invaded to the point that the worshipers were displaced. The pilgrims coming to worship could pay the temple tax only with Jewish money so they were at the mercy of the money changers. They had, as we often hear, a license to rob.

Layman Bible Commentary says, "With explosive force Jesus ended it all! His authoritative action, coupled with prophetic truth (Is 56:7; Jer 7:11), amazed the scribes and chief priest and struck fear in them. Jesus' attack was sudden, but it was not hit-and-run. He stayed and would not allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. (p 93)

Jesus stayed until the end of the day and departed again. He had given another picture of the unfruitfulness of the religious system of God become so perverted by the practice that God was sickened by it. He had hit them hard in their comfort zone and their pocketbooks.

III- Withering of the Fig Tree:

Mark 11:20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. **21** And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

The very next morning as they passed by the tree the leaves, so flourishing the day before, were not withered and dead. But not only the leaves were dead it was dead to the root.

Now before we journey forward we need to understand the whole cannon of Scripture. God was not casting off Israel forever but simply setting them aside for a period of time known as the Times of the Gentiles. Notice what it says in Romans 11.

Rom 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew...

Romans 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Romans 11:11-12 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. **12** Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

Romans 11:15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

Romans 11:23-24 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. **24** For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

So Israel is not finished but only set aside for a time. The fig tree will give forth fruit again in the time to come.

IV- Fruit Inspection Time:

One of the many lessons of Jesus during this time was one of faith in God. He also taught about looking at ourselves in what we do and the motive with which we do.

Mark 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. **23** 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. **24** Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. **25** 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. **26** But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

They were amazed that the tree had died but Jesus taught about asking God and believing. He taught about forgiveness as well. May I suggest it is fruit inspection time? Jesus said in **Matthew 7:16** Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

We are also to bring forth according to **Luke 3:8** Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance....