

THE WITHERED FIG TREE

Request: “Jesus cursed a fig tree and then taught a different lesson. I am having difficulty understanding the connection between a negative (cursing of fig tree) and positive (faith-prayer teaching).”

This incident is listed in both Matthew 21:18-21 and Mark 11:12-14, 20-26. It occurred 3 days before Passover and the Crucifixion.

Mark places the incident before and after the second cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:11-14) morning cursing fig tree; temple cleansing (11:15-19); next morning withered tree lesson (11:20-26).

This lesson will study 4 aspects of the Withered Fig Tree and clear up any misunderstanding about it.

1. The apparent lesson that Jesus intended to teach His disciples a parable on the hypocrisy of Pharisaical religion

WOE - “You are whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” (Matt.23:27)

The leaves on this fig tree were a sign of a healthy tree bearing fruit but in fact it was barren of fruit like Israel (Ps.105:33; Luke 20:16).

There is an interesting note given about the disciples when Jesus cursed the fig tree – “And His disciples were listening (akouo/ impf.a.ind).” (Mark 11:14)

The next morning Peter was amazed at the withering of the fig tree from its roots (11:20) and commented – “Rabbi. Behold, the fig tree which you cursed has withered.” (11:21)

Peter couldn’t understand such a radical change of such a healthy tree in such a short time. It appears that the disciples were more interested in the miracles than in the message connected with the cursing of the fig tree.

2. Apparently Jesus switched messages in order to meet the disciples spiritual appetite.

The disciples were too much part of the pharisaical thinking at the time to get them to understand the spiritual lesson with the curse as discipline upon the Israel.

This led Jesus to review two basic doctrines and their hindrances.

- The first basic doctrine was faith cycle and how doubt hinders it.
- The second basic doctrine was effective prayer and how unforgiving heart hinders it.

3. The first basic doctrine Jesus taught was the faith cycle and doubt as the big hindrance to its function. (11:22-23)

“Have (echo / p.a.impv.2pl) faith in God and do not doubt in your heart.”

Jesus used the famous Mt. Olive for a visual aid. This will be the Mt. from which Jesus will ascend and descend (Acts 1:9-11; Zech.14:4-8).

The miraculous power behind the withered fig tree was the exercise of the faith cycle in the life of Jesus.

- “Truly I say to you” – point of doctrine!
- The test of the faith cycle is to believe it completed before it is completed (11:23).

Hearing
(Rom.10: 17)

Completing
(James 2:22; Rom.4: 21)

Believing
(Heb.4: 2)

Applying
(2 Cor.5: 7)

There are 3 protasis (since) clauses and only one apodosis (then) – **whoever says (lego / a.a.subj) to this mountain.**

3 protasis (faith cycle procedure)

- Be taken (airo / a.p.impv) and cast (ballo / a.p.impv) into the sea.
- And does not doubt (me diakrino / a.p.subj) in his heart (James 1:6-8).
- But (alla / contrast to doubt) believes (pisteuo / p.a.subj) that what he says is going to happen.

1 apodosis (faith cycle promise) “It shall be granted (eimi/ f.m.ind) you.”

4. The second basic doctrine that Jesus taught was the effective prayer and how an unforgiving heart hinders it (11:25-25).

“Therefore (because of this / faith without doubt) I say to you” – another important basic doctrine that is related to the faith cycle.

Prayer procedure: pray (proseuchomai / p.m.ind), ask (aiteo / p.m.ind), believe (pisteuo / p.a.impv), and receive (lambano / a.a.ind).

Prayer promise: “And they shall be granted (eimi / f.m.ind) you.” (11:24)

Prayer problem: “And whenever you stand praying, forgive (aphiemi / p.a.impv.2pl), if (1cc) you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions.” (11:25) (Ps.66: 18; 1 John 1:9; Luke 18:9-14)