

**THE LORD JESUS AND PRAYER**

Mark 11:12-26

**Intro:** At this point in the Gospel of Mark we are in the last week of our Lord's life on earth before His terrible crucifixion. The first eleven verses which we considered together last Sunday, give us what has been called the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Actually it was only triumphal, or triumphant, because of what it pictured of the position that the Lord would eventually have, not only over Israel, but over the whole earth. It was an amazing event which was planned and carried out by the sovereign power of God working upon the hearts of the people who spread their garments on the back of the donkey colt, while others spread their garments for the donkey to walk upon as it carried the Lord into the city. Still others cut down branches from the trees, and spread them in the path that the donkey would take as it carried our Lord into the city. And what was most remarkable of all was that the people went before the Lord, and some followed, but they were all crying out, "Hosanna; blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." But it seems that none of the people, including the disciples, actually realized what was going on. No such homage had ever been given to the Lord during His entire time on earth up to that point. It was unplanned, unrehearsed, and over almost as quickly as it had started. God was moving upon the hearts of the people to give His Son the glory that so rightfully belonged to Him. It was truly one of the most amazing things that had ever happened in the history of the nation Israel. God the Father was the One Who had done it, displaying His omnipotence, as He moved upon the hearts of those Jewish people to do His will.

Today as we move on in Mark chapter 11, to verse 12 and on down through verse 26, it seems like we come to a series of events which, on the surface, do not seem to have much of a relationship to each other. But actually just the opposite is the case. These events are closely related to each other. And they had a very important message to the people of Israel in that day, and they have the same message for Jews and Gentiles living today. It was all a message designed for the particular understanding of the twelve disciples who became apostles.

Let me point out the division of this passage from verse 12 down through verse 26.

First, we have the Lord cursing the fig tree in verses 12 through 14. Then

we see the Lord cleansing the Temple of the money changers, as they sold animals and doves to the people to offer as sacrifices. This is in verses 15 through 19. Then beginning with verse 20 we have another reference to the fig tree which the Lord had cursed the day before. It was Peter who called attention to the fact that the fig tree was dead. This takes us down to verse 21. But then the Lord began to speak, as we can see in verse 22, and His words complete our text for today, running down through verse 26.

Let us consider first, then,

### **I. THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE (Mark 11:12-14).**

This was the day after the great display of the people toward the Lord which we read about in the first verses of this chapter. It was morning, and the Lord was hungry. This may mean that neither He nor His disciples had had breakfast. He saw this fig tree which had leaves, and He went over, obviously, to get some figs to eat. But He found nothing but leaves. And this was in spite of the fact “that the time of the figs was not yet.”

Now the Lord knew that it was not the time for figs to be on fig trees. But He went over to find whatever He could, and found nothing. This seems to have made Him mad, and so He spoke to the fig tree as though it was responsible for itself, and He cursed the tree. He said, “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever”! It sound like the Lord lost His temper, and that He exercised His right to judge in an entirely arbitrary manner. If this were the case, then it certainly must undermine to some extent the confidence that we are supposed to have in the Lord. Is it possible that the Lord could lose control of Himself and take it out on a fig tree which didn't have figs on it when even He knew that “the time of the figs was not yet”? What do you think about our Lord's behavior at this point? Probably none of the disciples would have gotten mad at the fig tree, and have spoken to it like the Lord did. I don't know that any of our Lord's enemies down through history ever took advantage of this situation to show that, after all, the Lord was just a human being like you and I show ourselves to be when we get mad at a door, or an automobile that won't start, or any other thing that sometimes provokes us to anger. How are we going to explain what was going on here.

Well, the first thing that I want to remind you of, is that the fig tree was

used by OT prophets to represent Israel. Take Joel 1:7 as an example of this. The Lord was speaking about a nation that had come upon the land of Israel, which God called “my land” in verse 6, and speaking of that nation as a person, the Lord said, “He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree.”

Then in Hosea 9:10 we read these words as Hosea also, as a prophet, spoke on behalf of the Lord:

I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-ripe in the fig tree at her first time; but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved.”

So at least in these two instances a fig tree not only represented Israel, but Israel at times when God was displeased with them.

Now let’s take that picture to our text and ask ourselves, could it be that this miracle was also a parable. Now the Lord really cursed the fig tree, and it died, but did He intend that this would be a message to the scribes and Pharisees, and to the people of Israel, and even to His disciples?

Now let’s talk about:

## **II. THE FIG TREE.**

Now I am not a horticulturist. I have had vegetable gardens. And I have planted flowers, and have particularly enjoyed raising roses. But I have never tried to raise figs. So what I am going to tell you now I have learned from reading. And I understand that in fig trees, the fruit comes out before the leaves do. So, when the Lord saw that this fig tree had leaves, He did like anyone else would do who was hungry, He went over to see if there were any figs on the tree. But “He found nothing but leaves.”

Now I don’t know how this happened, but I believe that if God could cause a crowd of Jews to put on the display for the Lord that they did the day before, He could sovereignly have a fig tree grow leaves without producing any fruit *because* He wanted His Son to perform a miracle that would be a wake-up message to His disciples especially.

Now what would you call a fig tree that had leaves but had no fruit. It

was pretending to have something that it did not have, and the word for that is *hypocrisy*! Any person who was in Jerusalem the day before, and had seen the display that was put on for the Lord would think *revival*! And moving ahead to the next event in our text, anyone who would have gone to the temple to see what was going on would also think *revival*! *But as we go on reading in verse 15 we find that when the Lord went into the temple, and saw what was going on, He overturned the tables and drove the moneychangers out of the temple. Why? Because they were desecrating the temple. He told them that they had made His house “a den of thieves.” There was a lot of activity going on, but it was all a sham.*

These were people who really did not need Christ. They thought they could worship God and at the same time reject Christ. They did not know that without Christ they could do nothing that was pleasing to God. It was all leaves, but no real fruit. The activity that was going on in the temple was an abomination to God. Our Lord said that His house was to be a house of prayer. He meant, a place where people pray. But the only prayers that reach heaven are prayers that are prayed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So this was a case where a miracle was also a parable. The Lord wanted His disciples to understand that that fig tree was a picture of Israel, a nation of profession but not of possession, a nation of leaves, but no fruit.

Now this was a message for the disciples to understand, but their work was not only to be with Israel, but later on with the church. And that is why this is a message for us, a message for us as a church, and for each one of us individually. Do our lives have a lot of leaves here and there, so that we try to give the impression to others that we really love the Lord, but the fruit is not there. Christian character is missing, and so our lives do not support what we profess to believe, of Whom we profess to know and believe. There is a lot of food for thought in this passage, and I hope that it makes all of us think. The Lord performed a miracle when He cursed the fig tree, but He was preaching a message also. I hope the message is as clear to us as the miracle is.

How can we be sure that this message will not be wasted on us? Well, this is where we need the concluding part of our text. Let's call it:

### **III. THE THIRD MORNING (Mark 11:20-26).**

The first day in this series is in verses 1 through 11, the day of the triumphal entry. The second day is in verses 12 through 19. The third day is in verses 20 through 26. Actually this third day continued on to the end of chapter 11, but we are just taking it down to verse 26 this morning.

Evidently the Lord and His disciples spent the nights in Bethany, and probably at the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus. But during the day they went into Jerusalem.

Well, on the way back into the city on this third morning, the Lord and His disciples passed by the fig tree, and they saw that it was really dead. And Peter, dear Peter, said to the Lord, “Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.” It died the day before, and it was still dead.

But I want you to note how Mark in writing all of this out, introduced our Lord’s response to what Peter said. He said that the Lord was *answering* Peter when He said, “Have faith in God,” and then He went on to speak of prayer.

The Jews in this ancient day did not know what it meant to trust God. They did not know what true prayer was. They had no idea of the greatness of God – His mercy, His love, His wisdom, His power. They trusted in themselves, and looked upon what they did as giving them their standing before God. Just as surely as we fail to trust the Lord, and as we fail to live by prayer, just as surely will we become hypocrites, producing leaves, but having no fruit.

It was Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, who said that “have faith in God” means, *hold the faithfulness of God*. You and I can measure the extent to which are trusting God by the place that prayer to God has in our lives. We are all to have our special times of prayer when we meet with the Lord alone, but we need also to be living by prayer. And the more we realize how helpless we are to do anything that is pleasing to the Lord in our own strength, the greater will be the place that prayer will have in our lives.

The Lord Jesus introduced His teaching on prayer at this time with the words, “Have faith in God.” Our faith is not to be in our prayers, but in God. God is the starting place. And God is our resting place. The Lord often brings circumstances into our lives that are more than we can handle

so we will understand how much we need the Lord. Trials cause us to pray, and through our trials the Lord teaches us to pray. Our Bibles teach us to pray. Look at our text.

Verse 22 is a command. If we are not trusting God, we are sinning. Verse 23 tells us about the omnipotence of God. My needs and your needs may never get so great that it is like moving a mountain, but if they do, it would be nothing for the Lord to take Mt. Hood and throw it out into the middle of the Pacific Ocean. That is how powerful our God is. He alone can take care of the big things. Nothing is too big or too difficult for Him. Verse 24 probably has to do with the little things. At least it includes them. When we know God and realize how great and how good He is, we know that nothing is too difficult for Him, nor is any need so small that He is not interested in it. Verses 25 and 26 teaches us that when we are trusting God, we are going to be like God. And one of the first ways that He works in us is to make us forgiving of those who in any way have sinned against us. When we realize how much and how often the Lord has forgiven us, the Lord will use that to have a forgiving attitude spirit toward those who have sinned against us. It is so good to be quick in forgiving others that when they come to ask for our forgiveness we can tell them that we already have forgiven them.

**Concl:** Let me encourage you to come back to this passage again soon. It is very important for all of us. The Lord was teaching His disciples to trust God, to pray to Him expecting Him to answer, and to know that in all of the circumstances of life, our God is also our Father, Who is pleased when we come to Him in prayer. Nothing is too hard for Him, and no need too insignificant for us to bring to Him. If it is a burden to us, He wants us to cast it upon Him believing that He cares for us.