

Sermon; The Fig Tree, Mark 11: 12-26

Introduction

Choosing a sermon topic often takes a lot of thought... you want it to be pertinent and meaningful...

A Pastor also wants the sermon to glorify God and be applicable to people's lives...

A Christian sermon should always include a gospel message...

Currently, Pastor Ray has been moving through a Sermon series titled Miracles and Controversies.

The Bible is packed with miracle stories and controversies, so choosing a passage is not difficult.

But recently, someone told me they really want to hear a sermon on Jesus Cursing the Fig Tree...

Well... what a great fit... Both a Miracle and a Controversy for certain

This Fig tree story is found in both the gospels of Matthew and Mark... I've chosen Mark... Ch. # 11

The Miracle is that Jesus verbally rebukes a healthy Fig tree which then, in a day, withers and dies...

The Controversy is... WHY?

Why does Jesus choose to destroy a lush, beautiful tree?

And how does killing a tree have anything to do with glorifying God or the gospel?

If you have your Bible, open it to Mark chapter 11.

We will be dealing with verses 12- 25... it is important to understand the setting of what is going on...

Jesus has recently entered Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, just prior to his arrest and crucifixion.

The chapter begins with Jesus being hailed as the Messiah of Israel... with crowds shouting praises...

"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

But then the chapter ends with his very identity and authority challenged by angry temple leaders...

Yet, between these two scenes, Mark records the Fig tree event and Jesus' outbursts at the Temple...

There are two kinds of parables found in the NT: spoken parables and active parables.

- We are most familiar with spoken parables...
 - These are written stories which depict life situations and teach important theological lessons...
- Active parables are historical events recorded in Scripture...
 - These are actual events which have occurred, and illustrate theological lessons or serve as prophecies for future events

The Fig Tree and the Temple scenes should be viewed as a prophetic active parable...

Both events are linked, and together, they preview the fateful judgement of Jerusalem.

Specifically, the destruction of the unfruitful Jerusalem Temple

The parable also teaches the need for the church, and each of us to exhibit true spiritual fruit...

The Fig Tree Parable has 3 episodes we will look at today:

- Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Fig tree; verses 11: 12 – 14
- Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Jerusalem Temple; 11: 15 – 18
- Jesus teaches that faith, prayer, and love are the source for true spiritual fruit; 11: 22-26

Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Fig tree; 11: 12 – 14 READ

So... Why does Jesus choose to destroy a beautiful tree for no obvious reason?

The answer might be simple for anyone reading the account for the first time...

He was hungry and he was angry with the tree for not having any fruit!!!

Do you easily get angry when you are very hungry? Or do you know anybody who does?

Hunger can bring out the worst in people... and it can bring out major misunderstandings...

There is the story of a man in a central Pa farm community who was down on his luck...

He lost his job... his wife left him... and he was evicted from his mobile home.

He was walking along a country road... uncertain of his future... and he was very hungry...

He stopped at a farmhouse and spoke to the lady of the house, telling of his circumstances...

He asked if there could be anything he could do around the farm for some food.

The lady at first was reluctant, but he persisted... and so she asked if he was skilled at painting...

He said yes... so she gave him a brush and a bucket of paint and told him to paint the porch out back.

The lady then went inside to prepare the man a meal...

It was not long after... that the man knocked on the door and said, "I'm finished."

The lady remarked that he did the work very quickly, asking "did you complete the job?"

He said, "Yes mam... But I thought you should also know that it is not a Porsche, It's a Volvo..."

Hunger can affect people's judgement...

But it is a misunderstanding to think hunger had anything to do with Jesus causing the Fig to die.

So... What was Jesus thinking? The tree was not even supposed to have figs...

Because as Mark says... *"it was not the season for Figs"*

Furthermore, the disciples heard him say *"May no one ever eat fruit from you again."*

Yet interestingly, they did not even question Jesus' condemnation...

Why? These are valid concerns...

The disciples simply left and moved on with Jesus toward Jerusalem...

Looking into this situation, I found out that in early spring, after Fig trees flush out with leaves,...

Attached at the base of the new leaf, is a small fruit-like outgrowth the size of an almond forms.

These outgrowths are precursors to the later formed fig fruit... and they are sweet and nourishing.

This small fruit falls off the tree right before the larger Fig fruit forms...

There are numerous OT references to this first fruit on Fig trees...

The one I like is found in Song of Songs chapter 2... *"Arise my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth... The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance..."*

Now, sometimes these small fruiting knobs are absent, even though the tree looks lush and healthy.

When this happens, it is a sure sign that the tree will not later ever produce figs for harvest.

In the gospel of Luke, there is a parable which refers to this kind of unfruitful Fig tree ... It reads...

"A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So, he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' Luke 13: 6-8

Sir, the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then I'll cut it down.'

So, our first point is that **Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Fig tree...**

But it is not because he was hungry or angry... there was something more significant going on...

The unfruitful fig tree becomes symbolic of the unfruitful nation of Israel Jesus was about to confront...

One commentator puts it well... *"Israel is pictured as a fig tree... and he came to the nation... His nation... expecting fruit. Leaves of religious formalism he found in abundance, but the fruit of holiness was lacking."*

This brings us to our 2nd point, where Jesus enters the Temple grounds.

Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Jerusalem Temple; 11: 15 – 18 READ

In this scene, Jesus is angry... And remember... He is still hungry as far as we know...

Jesus reacts with disgust and angry remarks at the lack of holiness found inside the Temple courts...

He physically clears the Temple courts of the money-changers, and causes a great disturbance...

His identity and authority as Lord is clearly presented... reciting the well-known Isaiah passage...

"My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (56: 7)

Loudly... he accuses the Temple leaders of desecrating the Temple...

"You have made {my house} a den of robbers."

Mark records that *"the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him..."*

Every day that week, Jesus returned to the Temple, teaching, and healing the blind and the lame...

During the week... The children were shouting in the Temple courts... *"Hosanna to the Son of David"*

The crowds who came to hear him were amazed at his teaching and hung on his every word...

In contrast, the corruption of the religious leaders stands out starkly...

They respond to Jesus' zeal for the sanctity of the Temple by deciding to kill him...

Their hateful actions and rhetoric declare their refusal to accept his identity and authority as Lord...

The Jewish leaders missed the most important event in human history...

They failed to recognize and embrace the identity and the authority of Jesus, their true Messiah...

The events of the passion week and crucifixion had to happen, but this broke the heart of God...

This is illustrated by Luke's gospel where he writes of Jesus' approach to Jerusalem...

... approaching Jerusalem, He wept... crying out... *"If you, even you, had only known what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes..."* Luke 19:42

Up to this point... we have seen how...

- Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Fig tree; verses 11: 12 – 14
- Jesus encounters and rebukes the unfruitful Jerusalem Temple; 11: 15 – 18

The morning after the scene at the Temple... Jesus again leaves Bethany for Jerusalem...

"As they went along... they saw the Fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, look! The Fig tree you cursed has withered!'" Mark 11: 20—21

This brings us to our final point... As Jesus and the disciples stood by the tree...

Jesus teaches that faith, prayer, and love are the source for true spiritual fruit; 11: 22-26 READ

It's astonishing that... Jesus never mentions the Fig tree as he speaks the disciples

Also, the disciples seem only interested in how Jesus made the tree wither... saying... How did you do it?

Their lack of concern for the Fig tree validates their understanding that some trees will never bear fruit...

We don't know, but they may have even discussed the symbolism of the withered tree with Jesus...

The demise of the Fig tree is clearly a symbolic fulfillment of many well-known messianic prophecies...

Our first reading from Jeremiah is just one of these...

"Why then have these people turned away? Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; So, they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished... says the Lord... I will take away their harvest... declares the Lord... There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither." Jer. 8: 5,12-13

So... Rather than recording any commentary on the Fig tree...

The gospel writers record Jesus' teaching 3 principles for living godly and fruitful lives....

First Principle... We need to "have faith in God..." Mark 11:22

Faith in God is a gift... for people who honestly and prayerfully seeks to know Him...

The most reliable source for seeking and knowing the truth about God is the Bible.

Through the Scriptures, and earnest prayer, the Spirit of God enables us to have faith...

By God's grace... seekers will come to embrace and believe what is written in the gospel of John...

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3: 16-17

Faith is critical for our salvation...

Second Principle... Prayer

Faith in God is also our conduit to the power of God... especially as we commune with God in prayer...

Jesus links faith in God with our ability to approach Him in prayer for all matters of life...

The way his teaching reads, it may seem as though any request we may have of God will be granted...

But at the end of Jesus' life, in the garden of Gethsemane, he modeled how faithful prayer looks...

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:42

Of course, the cup was not removed, but the Father sent an angel to strengthen him in his distress.

When we pray, we must pray in faith in the name and authority of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Our prayers should also always be in submission to the divine will and purpose of God...

Third Principle... Loving forgiveness

Finally, Jesus teaches us, through the power of faith, to have a heart of humility and love...

We need to commit to be loving and forgiving people...

not hateful and unforgiving like the Temple leaders...

Again, we see Jesus model this for us... as he hung on the cross, dying... saying *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* Luke 23:34

The take-aways from the study of this active parable of the Fig Tree are these points:

- Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come to seek, find, and save his people...
- Jesus also has come to guide his people to embrace faith...
 - pray in all circumstances...
 - and display love and forgiveness to the world

Faith, Prayer, and Loving Forgiveness... This is how we can live a life pleasing to God...

And living a life pleasing to God bears fruit... Good fruit...

Fruit that displays the love of God, draws seekers to find God, and to search His Holy Scriptures

The beginning of the book of Psalms beautifully presents this...

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the Law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of waters, which yields fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers..." Psalm 1: 1-3