

Day 76, Mark 11

by David Servant

Jesus' actions in cursing the fig tree and His subsequent teachings highlight the importance of faith in God and the need for fruitfulness in our lives.

Scripture: Mark 12:1

Topics: "Triumphal Entry", "Faith And Works"

Description

David Servant delves into the events surrounding Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, highlighting the disappointment of the crowds expecting an immediate kingdom and the symbolic significance of Jesus cursing the fig tree as a foreshadowing of Jerusalem's impending doom for fruitlessness. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, foreseeing its destruction in 70 A.D., emphasizing the importance of recognizing God's visitation. The parable of the landowner and the fig tree incident convey the message of producing fruit for the kingdom of God and the power of faith in God to move mountains when aligned with His will.

Transcript

It wasn't just Jesus' closest disciples who believed that He was about to set up His kingdom in Jerusalem (Luke 19:11). The crowds who lined His way from the Mount of Olives also believed it, and they gave Jesus a king's welcome. But His triumphal entry was anticlimactic. Jesus didn't overthrow the Jewish rulers or the Romans. He did, however, according to Matthew's account, overthrow the tables of the money changers. But He was soon on His way back to Bethany to lodge for the night. It must have been a major disappointment for many of Jesus' enthusiastic followers. I wonder how they would have reacted if they had been told that it would be at least 2,000 years before the messianic kingdom would begin?

The next morning, Jesus and the twelve walked back from Bethany to Jerusalem, which would have been crowded with Passover pilgrims. On the way there, Jesus cursed a fig tree, "finding nothing but leaves" (11:12). Mark informs us that "it was not the season for figs" (11:13).

Jesus wasn't expecting to find figs; nor does Mark say that He was. Rather, He "went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it" (11:13). Fully-formed figs would not appear on fig trees for another six weeks in Jerusalem. When fig leaves appear in late March, however, they are accompanied by small knobs known as taqsh, that drop off before the real figs are formed. Those taqsh are eaten by the poor and hungry. If leaves appear on a fig tree unaccompanied by taqsh, there will be no figs that year either. So Mark's report makes sense. Jesus was looking for taqsh, not figs.

Surely there was something more to this story than Jesus' anger at a fruitless fig tree! I suspect that His curse was symbolic of the divine curse that would come upon Jerusalem for its fruitlessness. Jesus later told a parable about a landowner who only wanted to receive his rightful fruit from those who tended his vineyard. The vine-growers would not give him what he was due, even killing his messengers and his son, and in the end, they were brought to an end (Mark 12:1-11). It was a foreshadowing of the doom that awaited fruitless Jerusalem, and according to Luke's account, Jesus wept as He anticipated the future holocaust of 70 A.D.:

When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace!...For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

Jesus summed up the message of the parable of the landowner by saying, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:43). God is looking for fruit in our lives as well (John 15:1-8).

The other message in this incident of the cursing of the fig tree is one about faith in God. Jesus said that whoever believes can move a mountain into the sea by his command. As I mentioned when we considered this same incident in Matthew's gospel, we can only have faith for what God has promised. Unless God reveals to you that it is His will for a certain mountain to be cast into the sea, your commanding it to do so would be ineffectual. (If you don't believe me, then I suggest that you try to command a dirty plate to fly from your table into your kitchen sink!) Nevertheless, there is no greater power available to us than that of faith in God. So Jesus promised, "All things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you" (11:24). Notice that He said, "Believe that you have received them," not, "Believe that you are going to receive them." There is a difference.

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