**Uniquely Jesus**  April 30, 17

Mark 11:12-25

The cursing of the fig tree, the temple cleansing and the withering of the fig tree following by teaching on prayer are all part of one teaching emphasis.

This is important for us to be clear on.

Otherwise we risk wrongly understanding and applying this truth to our lives.

By itself, Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree could potentially present Jesus as being vindictive or using his power for wrong means.

“Steve Wells, the author of *The Skeptics’ Annotated Bible*, labeled this story as an absurdity and said in a sarcastic tone: “Jesus kills a fig tree for not bearing figs, even though it was out of season. He did this to show the world just how much **God hates figs**” (2006, emp. added).

Louis Cable, another skeptic, responded to the story with this statement: “Now to curse a fig tree for not bearing fruit in March is not unlike kicking a dog because it cannot speak English thereby punishing it for it’s inability to do the impossible” “

http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1956

But that is not the case.

“ R.K. Harrison, writing in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, explains that various kinds of figs grew in Palestine during the first century.

One very important aspect of fig growth has to do with the relationship between the leaf and the fruit.

Harrison notes that the tiny figs, known to the Arabs as *taksh*, “appear simultaneously in the leaf axils” (1982, 2:302) This *taksh* is edible and “is often gathered for sale in the markets” (2:302).

Furthermore, the text notes: “When the young leaves are appearing in spring, every fertile fig will have some *taksh* on it.... But if a tree with leaves has no fruit, it will be barren for the entire season” (2:301-302). http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1956

It was Jesus’ practice to use parables when he taught.

What happened with the fig tree is a parable… acted out.

**v.11** – why do you think on Palm Sunday, that Jesus went into the temple and “looked around at everything?”

I can tell you he did not do so as a tourist.

He had been there many times – remember.

So, what was he looking for?

The parable of the fig tree answers that question.

Jesus was looking for… spiritual fruit.

The long-ago exile to Babylon, and the subsequent renewal of devotion to God when the people of Israel returned home to rebuild, had not lasted – it had, over time, morphed into a rigid formalism, that was fruitless.

The proof that this was the fact, was seen in the market that thrived within the court of the Gentiles.

When a person walked through the temple doors they immediately came into… “the court of the Gentiles,” where the business operations of the temple had been set up.

The issue for Jesus wasn’t that a service was provided for pilgrims.

The issue was that this market operated in the court of the Gentiles.

The fact that it did so, was the damning proof that the nation of Israel, like the fig tree, was fruitless.

Look at **Isaiah 56.**

Read verses 1-8.

You can do as you please in your house.

You can paint it any color you wish.

You can designate its rooms for any purpose that you desire, because…

it’s your house!

Whose house was the Temple? It was God’s.

The temple was the place where God said heaven and earth would intersect; where his presence would be made manifest.

And as the temple was his house, what he said his house was to be used for…

is what the temple was to be used for.

Jesus’ actions of clearing the temple, on behalf of his Father, was not done on the spur of the moment; on a whim.

More than a year earlier, Jesus had warned in a parable what would happen to the people of Israel if they did not return to God and repent of their hard hearts.

Look at **Luke 13:6-9**

The status of the fig tree which had no fruit, and its subsequent cursing by Jesus, and then its withering from the roots, was a visual illustration, meant to communicate that the temple and the worship that went on there was fruitless.

As Jesus drove out the money changers and animal sellers, he was foretelling what would happen to the temple forty years later.

The Roman armies would “chop down” a nation spiritually dead.

So how does v.22-25, fit into this greater teaching emphasis being made by Jesus?

Remember – it’s the next day.

They’re heading back to Jerusalem; to the temple.

As they pass the fig tree, Peter draws Jesus’ attention, along with everyone else’s, to the dead tree.

Yesterday, it had not fruit.

Today, it had no life.

This teaching emphasis impresses upon us that it matters to Jesus that the lives of his followers produce fruit.

He would come back again to this very theme when he shared the Passover meal with them.

Look at John 15 and as we read see how this lesson from the fig tree brings fresh understanding. Read verses 1-8.

> Why does the Father “prune” our lives?

That we might bear fruit.

> A life without fruit means what?

We are not connected to Jesus.

> Fruit in our life is because of what?

The life of Jesus in us.

> Asking in prayer is inseparable from what?

Remaining in Jesus and his words remaining in us.

> What gives glory to God and proves we are disciples of Jesus?

Bearing much fruit.

As they stood looking at the fig tree with the temple as the backdrop Jesus described the kind of fruit that will grow in the lives of his followers when they are rooted in him.

**First fruit – faith in God.**

> Faith that believes, as Hebrews 11:6 says, “that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

> Faith that trusts in Jesus as the One whose sacrifice makes us right with God.

In the beginning of our walk with Jesus, while our faith may be small, that faith will grow – not always rapidly or steadily, but in the person who is alive to God, there will be the fruit of faith.

Remember, the example of Peter when he tried to walk on water – Matthew 14:31? After he rescued him from drowning, Jesus said to him – “Why did you doubt?” Peter had his starts and stumbles – but the fruit of faith grew in him.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because without faith a person cannot know God.

**Second fruit – prayer (communication with God)** – that’s influenced and shaped and directed by one’s faith in God.

The God who reveals himself in Jesus is verbal – he listens and speaks with us, and he calls us to do the same with him.

Any healthy relationship is characterized by communication.

Remember the principle about interpreting Scripture with Scripture?

If you take verse 23-24, and lift them out of their context, and don’t place any other Scripture alongside of them, you can reach conclusions that would treat God like a cosmic cash machine; or a genie in a bottle; or as one’s personal concierge – who simply exists to do our bidding.

But that is not who God is.

He is our Father.

He gives to us the Holy Spirit which is his greatest gift, and through the Spirit he gives us good things, as he defines good things.

Neither is the truth that if God doesn’t answer a person’s prayer, then that’s indication that a person lacks faith.

Many times, God delays his answers to our prayer in order to build our relationship with him.

It is more important to God that you are rooted in him, then that you always get what you ask for.

The statement about throwing a mountain into the sea is hyperbole.

It is exaggerated speech for the sake of emphasis.

But as Jesus spoke with his disciples they all could see the mountain upon which the temple was built.

What was Jesus’ point?

Jesus will lead his people to do tough things.

If they weren’t tough, then we wouldn’t need him.

There will be requests which God will lay on the hearts of his people to ask of him, that seem impossible.

But if God lays it on our heart to ask something of him, then in faith we are to ask so that the incredible goodness of God’s person would be made known in the answer he provides. Even if we can’t see how he’ll answer.

**Third fruit – forgiveness**… towards others who have hurt us.

We can’t fellowship with the God who forgave us our sins, if we refuse to forgive others who have sinned against us.

Forgiveness extended to others is not optional…if we want God to forgive us.

This is incredibly challenging.

I’ve placed copies of a God story told by Wilma Derksen that describes her journey of faith and how God helped her to forgive when her daughter was brutally murdered.

Without being rooted in Jesus, forgiveness is a fruit that will not grow.

To follow Jesus is to live a radical life which produces fruit.

**Quiet Prayer**

= speak Lord, I am listening

= may your life and your words remain in me

= I choose to live for your glory

**Closing Song**

**The Blessing**

John 15:5 – If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

The second part of this story concerns the question that the disciples ask--how this was done, and not what it meant. Jesus’ answer draws upon his earlier teaching (17:20), that with faith all things are possible--even casting this mountain--probably the Mount of Olives on which they were standing--into the sea. This is a hyperbolic example of a miracle--whether what is to be done is great or small, faith is sufficient.

So based on this miracle and the disciples’ question, Jesus taught them on the power of believing prayer. The faith that he taught throughout his life was a genuine faith on the power of God and a developed discernment of his will. They should discover what the will of the Lord is, and then by faith pray for it to happen, not matter how impossible it might seem.

https://bible.org/seriespage/31-necessity-bearing-fruit-matthew-2118-46

Tim Keller explains.

“The story of the temple starts in the Garden of Eden - it was the place where the presence of God dwelled. It was a paradise...

But it became a paradise lost when the first human beings decided to build their lives on other things besides God; to look to these other things to give them their ultimate meaning and significance...

Adam and Eve were banished from the sanctuary of God. And to stop them from re-entering, God placed an angel ‘with a flaming sword flashing back and forth,’ (Genesis 3:24) that barred the way back into the presence of God...

Nobody can get back into the presence of God unless they face the sword...

But who can survive the sword? No one.

This is why God established a provisional solution - first through the tabernacle and then the temple. In the temple, there was a small space, covered by a thick curtain, that was there to protect the people from God’s presence.

Remember - God’s unshielded presence was fatal - no one could see him and live.

Just once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was allowed to go inside briefly - to present a blood sacrifice.

Why blood? Because there was no way back into the presence of God without going under the sword.

The blood of animals offered in sacrifice, itself was a symbolic act that waited for; that anticipated a lasting and greater solution - the life of a perfect and innocent person, who would, once and for all, deal with humanity’s guilt and sin that kept us from God.” King’s Cross, Tim Keller, p.

So, when Jesus declared that his father’s house was to be a place of prayer for the nations, code word for the Gentiles, people were amazed.

And yet this is what the prophets had spoken of repeatedly - that one day, the whole world would again become a holy of holies.

How had the temple become a den of robbers? See Jeremiah 7:9-11.

Did he say this because of the commerce going on in the temple?

The guardians of the temple were notorious for their rich lifestyle.

What was the mountain?

The temple mountain.