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## **God is Just and God is Love**

Mark 11:12-24

Throughout Jesus' ministry He has said many profound statements. The one that caused me to turn to Jesus for salvation was His claim, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26). He proved this statement to be true by rising from the dead. He has power over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). The evidence from personal accounts as recorded in the Bible all proves that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He was seen by over five hundred people **at the same time** (15:6). No one else in all of human history has ever made these claims and then proved it by rising from the dead. As Jesus approached His last week in Jerusalem, He began made shocking statements challenging people to rethink what they believed. As we have seen, Jesus told His disciples, "*How hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*" (Mark 10:24-25). The Jews were taught that rich people had an advantage in getting into heaven. Jesus told them just the opposite. Rich people tend to have a harder time getting into heaven because they tend to trust their riches and their own abilities instead of trusting God to save them. No one can save themselves. Only God through the work of Jesus Christ can save people. After **saying** many profound statements and shocking statements, now Jesus **does** something shocking. This seems totally out of character for Jesus, but it is not.

**Mark 11:12-13** "*Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.*" If you are keeping track, you have noticed that I have skipped some verse from last week. Also, if you are really keeping track, you will know that just a month ago was our celebration of Jesus' resurrection. The two Sundays before Easter I did preach using the scriptures I skipped concerning the events before Palm Sunday, and then Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. Now we are at the day after Palm Sunday in the life of Jesus. Remember, after the emotional event of entering into Jerusalem with all the people celebrating and calling on Jesus to save them NOW! Jesus eventually made it to the temple on that Sunday late in the afternoon. He went to check things out. He looked around and saw how corrupt the priesthood had become. He saw how corrupt the sacrificial system had become. He knew He had to do something but the hour was late (Mark 11:11). He knew He would have a greater impact if He did something in the morning. So,

Sunday evening Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem and went to Bethany. They probably spent the night at the family home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha (John 11:1). It was about a 3-mile walk. On Monday morning, Jesus wanted to be in the temple at its busiest time. It seems that Jesus did not eat breakfast before He and the disciples left Bethany for Jerusalem. As they approached Jerusalem Jesus was hungry. In the distance Jesus saw a fig tree that had leaves. There are two things to notice here. First, this is not a small fig tree. Even at a distance away, Jesus can see the tree thick with leaves. This is a large, mature fig tree. Second, this fig tree has leaves. Having leaves means it should have fruit. On a fig tree the leaves and fruit grow at the same time. This is not true of every fruit tree. But for a fig tree, since it is a large, mature fig tree with thick leaves, there should be some fruit on the tree.

When Jesus got to the tree, He was ready to have some figs for breakfast. Jesus was hoping to find some fruit on this tree, but there was no fruit at all. I am sure Jesus looked thoroughly over all the tree to find something, just one fig. He found nothing. All Jesus found on the tree were leaves. Then Mark records, *“For it was not the season for figs.”* What is Mark implying? Does he want us to have sympathy for the fig tree? No. He is just pointing out the uniqueness of this tree. No other fig tree had leaves so no other fig tree would have figs. Jesus would not expect any other fig tree to have figs, but He does expect this fig tree to have fruit. It should have fruit. What is the purpose of the fig tree? Just to produce leaves? If shade was all Jesus expected from this tree, His expectation was met. But the primary purpose of every fig tree is to produce figs. If it does not, it is worthless. Why grow a fig tree for figs when year after year, decade after decade it never produces any figs. Why keep the tree?

**Verse 14** *“In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ And His disciples heard it.”* **This is a shocking thing for Jesus to do.** It seems out of character. All that we have seen about Jesus in the gospels is love and compassion and concern for all humans. We have heard Him speak about judgment (Mark 9:42-48). He did call the Pharisees and scribes hypocrites (7:5-6). But to curse a fig tree because it has no fruit? Is there a reason? Is there a meaning behind this? There is a lesson on prayer that we will see. There is also a lesson behind this for the disciples. **The intended lesson behind this is on fruitlessness.** This cursing of the fig tree happened between Jesus seeing in the temple the corruption of the priesthood and the corruption of the sacrificial system, and the cleansing of the temple. The fig tree represents the nation of Israel. It is large and mature and producing something. But it is not producing what God intended. Because it is not producing what God intended, the nation is worthless. God will judge the nation. It will be destroyed. What was the purpose of Israel? The purpose of Israel was to be a holy nation, a special people (Deuteronomy 7:6). If they obeyed God, He would bless them. Their

blessings from God would attract all the other nations to turn away from their false gods and believe in and serve the One True Living God. The nation of Israel is the only nation God chose. It never fulfilled their purpose. They were to produce fruit. All they did was to produce leaves. The nation would be judged and destroyed. By A.D. 70 the temple would be completely destroyed not having been rebuilt yet. The people of Israel lost their nation until 1948 when God reestablished the nation of Israel. Is this teaching only for Israel?

Could this same thing happen to the church or to Christians? If churches and Christians forget our purpose and cease to produce the fruit God has called us to produce, would He bring judgment on us? We are told by Jesus *“You will know them by their fruits”* (Matthew 7:16, 20). What fruits is God looking for? I will tell you He is not looking for us to produce figs. We are not a fig tree. We are humans. He does expect to find certain fruits in our lives. John the Baptist called for people to *“bear fruits worthy of repentance”* (3:8). It is good to say and mean, *“I repent.”* Those words need to be followed by actions seen in a changed life. Then as a Christian we are *“created in Christ Jesus for good works”* (Ephesians 2:10). What is the fruit and good works of a Christian? It is the fruit of God’s Spirit living in us. *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23). As God’s children, these are the fruits we should be producing every day. Are these the only ones? No. There is also the fruit of righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9 / Philippians 1:11). Then there is *“the fruit of our lips”* which is giving thanks to God and the sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15). When things are not going our way, we still faithfully praise God for His involvement in our lives and His love for us.

**Verses 15-18** When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He went straight to the temple. *“He began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.”* Jesus just didn’t go into the temple and cause problems and then leave. No. He was there for some time. He disrupted the flow of traffic going through the court of the Gentiles. Jesus cried out so that everyone could hear Him, *“Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”* Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7. It was God’s intention that all nations would believe in and serve Him. The nation of Israel was that fig tree that was supposed to produce the fruit of the spirit and along with truth and righteousness. Instead, all they produce was leaves. As Jesus said next, *“But you have made it a den of thieves”* quoting Jeremiah 7:11. Jesus attempted to change the course of the nation of Israel. But the nation refused to believe. The scribes and chief priests *“sought how they might destroy”* Jesus. Eventually, God judged the nation for its unbelief. Would

God allow the church or Christians to be destroyed if we did not produce the fruit He expects from us? God gives us plenty of time, probably more than enough time to get things right and produce the fruit He expects from us. God is Judge of all.

**Verses 19-22** *“When evening had come, He went out of the city. Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.’ So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God.’”* Each evening Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem and returned to Bethany where they spent the night. In the mornings they would return to Jerusalem. As they returned to Jerusalem Peter noticed the fig tree. It had *“dried up from the roots.”* At this time, the nation of Israel would not receive any more nourishment from God. It was too corrupt. Jesus told Peter and the disciples, *“Have faith in God.”* Jesus is telling the disciples and us that no matter what happens to the nation of Israel, they are to trust God to do the right things. We are to trust God, especially when we do not understand why things happen the way they do. God is in control. He sees and knows the bigger picture. He knows what people are going to do. He knows the outcome of our choices. And He has a plan to accomplish His will which is to give everyone in the world an opportunity to hear and believe the gospel. If we do not do it, towards the end, God will send an angel to preach the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6-7). Then Jesus gave the disciples a lesson on prayer.

**Verses 23-24** Jesus said, *“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”* I like the way Mike Shepherd deals with this in his commentary. Faith is not some magical thing to get what we want. “Prayer is often answered when acted on.” “Pray, believe and ‘put feet to our prayers.’” Friday morning I stood in Doris Killingsworth’s apartment with three other people. She needed everything moved to another apartment a half mile away. I prayed asking God to move her stuff. He did. He gave us the health and strength to get it done in 3 hours. God always does His part. When we do ours, great things happen. Bear fruit that remains (John 15:16).

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