

The Miracles of Jesus
Miracle # 30

"Cursing of the Fig Tree"
(Matt 21:17-22, Mk 11:12-24)

The miracle that we are going to consider tonight is arguably the most puzzling of all the miracles for it is the only event in the Gospels in which Jesus used His power to **destroy** rather than to heal or restore. This miracle is found in both Matthew and Mark, Matthew's arrangement of topical, Mark's is chronological.

The Circumstances of the Miracle (Mark 11:12-14)

Jesus had just made his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-10) on the previous day where he had entered the temple and looked things over (v. 11). He then went to the nearby town of Bethany to spend the night. As he and his disciples return to the city, he was hungry and he walked over to a fig tree that was in leaf, but saw that despite its lush foliage the tree bore no **fruit**.

We find the story beginning in verse twelve, "Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. (13) 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. (14) In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it."

This tree promised much but it provided nothing; it gave promise of something that could satisfy hunger, it professed to be able to feed people but in reality it could not. He was describing what he saw in his people, the children of Israel. It is a picture of the **hypocrisy** of Israel in that day. It is also a picture of any person who pretends to be religious or spiritual and who is not. The reason Jesus cursed the fig tree was not because he was angry but because he wanted it to be a visual **parable** of what was happening in Israel. In the scriptures the fig tree is used numerous times in the Old Testament as a symbol of the nation of **Israel** (Jeremiah 8:13, 29:17, Hosea 9:10, 16, Joel 1:7, Micah 7:1-6).

They had a magnificent **temple** and people from all over the world came there to worship God. They had elaborate **ceremonies** and all kinds

of sacrifices and offerings, they had every kind of outward evidence of a vital relationship with God. Yet there was no reality and no fruit.

The test of reality in anyone's relationship to God is not the outward presence of leaves but the presence of **fruit**. ***Is any evidence in your life that you are really a born again child of God? If you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?***

If a person has really met the Lord Jesus Christ there is going to be a change in his or her life. 1 Cor. 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." ***Is there a change in your life?*** If there has been then there has got to be some fruit somewhere. ***When people look at your life, is there any evidence that you are saved?***

You might say;

"I'm a church member." That is nothing but leaves.

"I've been baptized." As important as the is, it can be nothing but leaves.

"When I get in a jam I pray." Nothing but leaves

"I carry my Bible to church" Nothing but leaves

"I have a bumpersticker on my car that says honk if you love Jesus." Nothing but leaves

Leaves are attractive and ornamental but no substitute for the real thing.

The Elements of the Miracle (Mark 11:15-18)

In this particular miracle our concern is not so much with looking at the different aspects of the miracle, but rather with how the events of that day revealed the purpose of the miracle. To understand why Jesus curses the fig tree and what it was a symbol of, I believe that have to understand what Jesus did in the temple that day. Beginning in verse fifteen we are told that Jesus cleanses the temple a second time. "On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, (16) and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. (17) And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: " 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (18) The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching."

To understand this scripture and to appreciate the indignation of the Lord, it is essential to know what was taking place in the temple. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had cleansed the temple (John 2:13-17)

but apparently the lesson taught then had been forgotten. The men who had been expelled, soon returned to again exploit the worshippers!

There are two words for temple in the New Testament. One (*naos*) means the inner **sanctuary** of the temple, the temple proper. The other word (*hieron*) is the larger term that includes the entire temple area, including the court of the gentiles where the **non-Jews** were allowed to come and worship. The latter word is the one used here. It means that Jesus came to the court of the gentiles, the place where the nations of the world could come, where Jews had the opportunity to share the real God with the lost and dying people of the world.

Three things are taking place in the courtyard.

First, there was the sale of **Sacrificial Animals**. The aroma of the livestock, accentuated by the enclosure made it smell and sound like a Sale Barn and the New York Stock Exchange all rolled into one. Animals brought for sacrifice were routinely refused and the worshipper sold an official approved sacrifice at an outrageous cost. The animals that were refused were kept and then sold to the next worshipper.

Secondly, there was the exchange of **currency**. Here the annual half shekel tax for the support of the temple was collected. But only certain currencies were acceptable, any other currency had to be exchanged, but the money changers charged exorbitant prices for their services. The family of the high priest had perverted Temple worship into a means of extortion well known to all. The real shame of this spiritual robbery was that the Gentiles, and indeed all seeking Israel, were prevented from true worship. ***The house of God, intended to be missionary, had become mercenary.***

Thirdly, the gentile courtyard had become a **shortcut** for anyone wanting to travel from one side of the city to the other. What at first must have seemed wise and beneficial had made a place of worship into thoroughfare that had all kinds of traffic moving through the temple.

“When Jesus came into the temple, he stopped it dead in its tracks. **“He would not permit any one to carry anything through the temple,”** which means that not only the rightful King of Israel but as the King of Kings that he rejected their worship and refused to acknowledge it as of any value any longer... Though the Jews would restore traffic later and kept it up for forty more years until the temple was destroyed, never again would the sacrifices have any **meaning** before God.”

This was the point of no return for this nation. It was undoubtedly this act, the stopping of the worship in the temple, which was the last straw with the religious rulers and resulted in his death within the week. This act sealed his death, but it also sealed their destiny. The truth is often painful but to resist it is always fatal. Truth cannot be ignored. The incident of

stopping those who used the temple as a shortcut suggests to us a question. Are there not even in our day those that use the church as a shortcut to financial gain, popularity, political stature and many other things?

Jesus then did two things; He **expelled** the moneychangers and those who sold animals and He **taught** the people.

The word "taught" is imperfect tense which suggest that there was an extended period of teaching. Here he probably gave detailed instruction on the divine purpose of worship. He also said, "Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves." (v. 17). Jesus here quoted and made commentary on Isaiah 56:7. He judged it for what it was. It was suppose to be a house of prayer for all people. It was suppose to be a place to meet with God. That was why it was created. It was to be a place of **worship**, a place of **communion**, a holy place, a place of **fellowship** with the living God.

Again it should be remembered that this the second occasion on which He had cleansed the temple. He cleansed it, but afterward it was the duty of the priest to keep it clean. They failed in their task. Paul emphasized that we are both the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit resides and priest before God. Christ has made us clean, but it remains our duty to maintain the purity of the sanctuary.

The Effect of the Miracle (Mark11:19-24)

"When evening had come, He went out of the city. (20) Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. (21) And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." (22) So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. (23) 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. (24) Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

The next morning when Jesus and his disciples were returning to the city, Peter pointed out the tree that Jesus had cursed the day before. It had withered away, "dried up from the root" (v. 20). When the disciples noted and were amazed at what had happened to the fig tree he used as a means to teach them about the **invincibility** of faith. He is not giving us the secret of cursing fig trees; he is telling us the secret of how to live so as not to be cursed.

"Have faith in God!" (v. 22)

The rabbis used the word, "**mountain**" when they were referring to **impossible** situations (Zech 4:7-9). Jesus in speaking metaphorically,

reminding His disciples that God is able to do what humans cannot and that through **prayer** the impossible becomes possible. Do you have any problems that look like mountains in your life? Our faith must be in God when face humanly impossible situations.

Jesus is not giving us a formula for throwing mountains into the sea. **"Have faith in God"** means that this is the way to live! The word "have" here is present tense implying that we are to make this a **continuous** practice of our lives. This is the way to a life that is full and rich and meaningful - trust that the living God knows what he is doing, to believe what he says, do what he commands and open our life to him so that he may enrich us and flow through us, and make us a fruitful person, or a fruitful nation, as the case may be. **"Have faith in God."** That is the answer. Interestingly "be thou removed" is passive, meaning that it is God who does the moving. But he is also telling us that to having faith in God at such times is will not be easy.