

Announcements:

- 1) The present given me of plastic fruit
- 2) Women of Faith—Thursday @ 10am ????
- 3) End of Year BBQ for AWANA's May 6 @ 6:30pm
 - 1) sign up for salads and sides
- 4) Mother's Day Lunch next Sunday—Menu is something special
- 5) Men's Retreat in 2 weeks
- 6) Family Camp—June 4-6, sign up in back

Lesson of a Fig Tree Mark 11:20-25

[Read Mark 11:20-25]

Last week we looked at what is really an A-B-A style passage. What I mean by that is Mark uses a sandwich technique in his writing. He writes about something as the first 'A', then writes about something else that doesn't seem related as the 'B', then comes back to the 'A' topic. And what Mark is doing is linking the stories together to make a point.

Mark also did this in chapter 6, verses 7-30 when he tells of the disciples being sent out by Jesus in two's and then tells the story of John the Baptist beheading followed up to saying mentioning the disciples coming back to Jesus and telling all they had done. Mark does this style of writing a handful of times in his gospel account.

Today we are going to finish up the Markan sandwich of Mark 11:12-25. Last week, we looked at verses 12-19. We learned not to be 'That' fig tree. The Fig tree was fruitless. Jesus was on His way from Bethany to the temple in Jerusalem. Just outside Jerusalem he comes across a fig tree. Fig trees are very common in Israel. On the outside, from a distance it looked like it was growing fruit, but when Jesus got to it there was no fruit, so He curses it. This is the 'A' part of Mark's sandwich.

When Jesus makes it to Jerusalem, He heads into the temple grounds, where Jesus gets infuriated with what is happening. He is angry at what the temple had become. Jesus had great zeal for the worship of God the Father and the temple was supposed to be the place set aside for all nations to come and worship. The temple had become a 'den of thieves' instead of a house of prayer. The religious leaders had made it hard to

worship God, when it should have been easy. The religious leaders had made it a place of extortion and rules instead of a place of safety and rest. Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." When we come to Jesus, when we bring our burdens to Him, when we come to worship, the result should be rest for our souls.

There was no fruit coming from the temple. The temple was to be a place of worship. It was to be a place of teaching and prayer. It was not.

THE FRUITLESS TEMPLE

The temple represented the old system. Because of mankind's sin, God had set up a sacrificial system. The picture was to help us to understand how devastating sin is. Sin requires death, that is why when man sinned in the Garden of Eden, mankind was now destined to die because we are born of humans. As Hebrews 11:27 says, "And just as each person is destined to die once." Sin is part of our DNA. We have a rendezvous with death. We need a vaccine that will altar our spiritual DNA to give us eternal life. Jesus Christ is that vaccine. The very next verse in Hebrews says, "Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people."

The old system required the sacrifice of innocent animals. Their blood was shed to wash over their sins so that when God would look upon them, He see innocence instead of sin and therefore they would not be judged for their sin. The problem with this system was that animals were not a good enough sacrifice. It had to be done over and over. It didn't wash away their sin, but covered over the sin as to temporarily hide it from God. God would make a better way.

The better way would require a perfect, spotless representation that would take the judgment that is rightly deserved by mankind. That is the mystery of God. He was willing to offer up His perfect son to go in our place, to shed innocent blood, so that we could have our sin not just covered by a substandard way, but to have our sin completely dealt with as Hebrews 11 says, "once and for all."

The old sacrificial system required action on our part. It was a work that was always left wanting. The imperfect trying to make their way to the God. God incarnate, who is Jesus, stepped into our place and became

the final, perfect sacrifice. He did the action. There was nothing you and I did. He did it all. That is picture of grace. That is the definition of love—selfless, sacrificial giving.

The temple was fruitless because it could not save. But, it was to be fruitful by pointing people to the Messiah who would come to save mankind from their sin. The religious leaders instead would use the temple to make much of themselves and Israel would use the temple as a place to tell the rest of the world they were better than everyone else. They were arrogant and prideful. They had lost their understanding that their sin just as heinous as the rest of the world's sin.

As Jesus cursed the fig tree and it would wither up from the roots which is a sign of devastation and ruin, so would the temple. It would no longer have a place. It would be judged. And it was. In 70 AD the temple was plundered and destroyed. Not one brick would be left upon another just as Jesus said. And it is that way until this day.

The temple will be rebuilt again, and it will be inhabited again by one who would desecrate it. The Anti-Christ will make an abominable sacrifice and desecrate the temple. When we see the temple built again, we will know the end times are upon us. The interesting thing is, when I was in Israel, they said they are close to having all the pieces put together for the artifacts of the temple. We are getting close, but we aren't there yet. More must happen. The end times will usher in the coming of Jesus to reign forever on earth, for final judgment to take place...those who know Christ will be His inheritance into eternity and those who don't know Christ will suffer judgment for eternity.

JESUS, THE FIRST FRUIT

The temple was fruitless, but Jesus would be fruitful. He would be the temple that would be raised in three days. With it, He would bring the fruit of the cross which is salvation to those who would believe.

1 Corinthians 15:20 says, "But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died." Jesus was the first fruit of rising from the dead. Jesus did not need saving. Jesus is perfect. Jesus is God. Jesus rose from the grave by the power of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Those who would have faith in Jesus Christ would be the fruit of Jesus's work on the cross. They too

would rise from the dead to new life by the power of God. Listen to the following verses, “So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.”

The fruit of the first Adam was death. The fruit of the Second-Adam, who is Jesus, is eternal life. Jesus is our source of life. Jesus is the source of fruit in the Christian’s life. When we trust in Christ we produce fruit. When we trust in something other than Christ, we don’t produce fruit.

Jesus gives us the imagery in John 15. Jesus says, “I am the vine.” The vine is the source of life to the branches of the vine. Verse 5 of John 15 says, “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” What is it we can’t do? Produce the fruit of God, and Jesus says we are not glorifying God the Father. Instead, we are glorifying ourselves...just what the temple and the leaders were judged for.

This brings us to our passage. On the way from Bethany to Jerusalem the morning after Jesus cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple, Peter sees the fig tree Jesus cursed, withered from the roots up. So, Jesus takes the moment to tell the disciples how to be fruitful. He tells them three things...all related. These three things were not flowing out of the temple, so it did not produce fruit. Jesus says,

1. Have faith in God.
2. Prayer that is filled with belief.
3. The third is tied to the first two: A forgiving heart.

All three of these are tied together. The fruit of God does not bloom nor grow without faith in God. You can’t have true faith in God and be devoid of prayer. You can’t have faith in God and lack forgiveness. An unforgiving heart does not receive answers to prayer. And a person who does not pray lacks faith. And, a person without faith does not produce the fruit of God.

I understand these are all pretty heavy statements when you think about them. And, I understand that these statements can come across

judgmental, but I firmly believe that scripture gives us a strong foundation for each of these statements.

FAITH

Faith always has an object. In scripture, the faith that God is looking for is faith *in* God. The object of faith is God. It isn't faith in yourself that you can do anything to gain more faith on your own. You don't lack saving faith in God and then conjure up saving faith. Ephesian 2:8 says that 'you have been saved through faith; and this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God.' Hebrews 12:2 says, "Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith." God gives us saving faith.

We grow our faith. But, again, it is not something you do alone. It is in tandem with the Spirit of God *in* you. God is working in you as Paul tells us. Growing faith is the work of God's Spirit and me.

Hebrews 5 and 6 tells us what it looks like when we don't put effort in to grow our faith. The writer says, "There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word...Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God...Dear friends, even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation." What comes with salvation, the fruit of God in and through our life.

Faith and growing faith in God has a response. That response is to obey the commands of God. John 15 tells us, "When you obey My commandments, you remain in My love." What was the command? To remain in Christ. The better translation is to abide, to dwell in Christ, to put up residency in all that Christ is. What does Jesus say we can do when we abide in Him? John 15:7 says, "But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!" This is the second fruit produces: prayer.

PRAYER

Prayer that believes God will respond according to His will.

The hard part about verses 23 and 24 of our text this morning is it almost sounds like if you muster up enough faith within you, God will do as you please, He will give you what you want. I have seen this be a struggle for many Christians. Listen to these verses, “I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours.”

This is not a ‘God is your Santa Clause’ verse. He isn’t your provider of your lusts and your human will or what you think is best. This doesn’t translate over well into English.

Verse 23 is actually part of a Jewish proverb that isn’t meant to be taken literally, but to be an analogy, a word picture for us to gain a spiritual truth. The idea is this: What is impossible for man to do is not impossible for God to do. It is so easy to take a verse of scripture and not read into through the whole of scripture.

There is a lot about prayer in scripture. The Faith Movement has done damage, I believe, here. Because the foundation of the faith movement has been to ‘have more faith.’ It’s a self-centered faith that is based upon selfish gain. If I just have more faith. If I just give more to God, He will bless me and give me more.

There is a lot in scripture about our prayers being hindered, not heard by God. For one, if there is no belief in Jesus, He doesn’t hear our prayer. If we are treating people poorly, our prayers are hindered. When we act in arrogance, our prayers are hindered. When we are following our lusts and whims, our prayers are hindered. When we don’t love God and others, our prayers are hindered.

And this would be the wrong response...”Ok, I will obey God so that He will do what I want.” Because, the faith isn’t placed upon God, it is placed upon yourself thinking you know what is best.

Listen to what James says in James 4:3, “And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.”

So, what is the right response? Abide in Christ. Dwell in Christ. Set your minds on the things of Christ. To pray in Jesus's name means to literally pray as He would pray. You are coming to God in Jesus's name.

First and most important is to understand that you can not and do not have the right to come to God on your own merit or because of your greatness. We can come to God because of Jesus merit and His righteousness, because of His work on the cross. We can come 'boldly to the throne of grace' as Hebrews says because we have a High Priest, Jesus, who has already entered heaven to intercede on our behalf.

Let's go back to John 15:7. It says, "But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!" You may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted. Alright!

"Jesus, I want 40 acres. Jesus, I want a new truck. Jesus, I want to no longer be under the mask mandate and to be out from under the things this government is doing. In Jesus name, Amen." Ok, so I should get all that now. I know God has the power to do it. Am I missing something in these verses? Yes. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you." Jesus said there will be troubles. Jesus said the enemy of God will hate me because the enemy of God hates Jesus. Jesus says I am a sojourner in this world, and He has gone to prepare a place for me in heaven.

Listen to 1 John 5:14-15, "And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases Him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for." Did you catch the qualifier in those verses? "Whenever we ask for anything that pleases Him." When we ask anything according to His will. That takes faith in God. That takes coming to God and trusting that He has an ultimate will for you and the world around you. That takes trusting that when things don't go according to your wishes that the One who created you and is sovereign over all things knows what He is doing. That can be hard. But, when we grow our faith and abide in His Words, obey Him, the Spirit works in us and grows us, building within us hope and strength and joy and love and faithfulness...and fruit begins to blossom.

FORGIVENESS

But, what about this forgiveness piece. How does that hinder fruit? Forgiveness is the response of our faith, because it is what even gives us faith. Jesus died on the cross so that you and I can be forgiven. It is not a right you and I have. It is straight out of God's big, loving heart for us. And when someone has been touched by the power of forgiveness it can do nothing but cause you to think. It stirs within you. It begins to move you.

Forgiveness given to one another is powerful, but when you begin to understand really what our sin did and the debt it caused, God's forgiveness is miraculous. It awakens what 'being made in the image of God' means. It awakens within the value of life. It awakens freedom. It awakens that we all equally deserve hell. It awakens the power of love and what forgiveness can do.

A lack of forgiveness is to make room for the growth of vengeance. Vengeance is to play God. To play God is a lack of faith in God and only leaves room for bitterness to creep in.

To be clear, God is not looking for perfect faith...remember Jesus's comment to Peter after sinking when he climbed out of the boat and walked on water, "O you of little faith." Jesus responded to even little faith. God knows we are human. God knows we will doubt. God knows we will mess up along the way. But, we humble ourselves, confess we need Him and then trust His grace. It is about honest, open dialogue with God. It is trusting the work of the cross.

The fruit of God grows with faith in God. True faith in God breeds prayer. Faith in God breeds a heart of forgiveness. A forgiving heart opens the door for answered prayer. A person who prays and believes God can and will do the impossible walks in faith. And, a person with faith produces the fruit of God.

We have learned the lesson of a fig tree. As we come to this [communion] table, we come in faith.