

Consequences

The cursing of the fig tree on the first morning after the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is often used as an example of teaching on faith. Indeed, Jesus, when questioned by the disciples on that first morning and when reminded by Peter the next morning, spoke to them about faith.

Firstly in Matthew 21.20 when the disciples asked, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."¹ And again the next morning as they were going back to Jerusalem... they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree You cursed has withered!" "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in Heaven may forgive you your sins."²

Indeed the cursing of the fig tree by Jesus on that first morning after the entry when He said, "May you never bear fruit again! May no one ever eat fruit from you again,"³ is a perfect demonstration of the power of the spoken word by a P/person with faith that is doubtless and in whom is the power of God. That which Jesus said happened immediately, for it is written: Immediately the tree withered. And the disciples saw this and were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?"⁴

How did they know the tree withered immediately? Because it had leaves and the withering of the leaves would have shown them the immediacy of Jesus' words. Then the next day, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.⁵ Now how does a person know that a tree has withered from the roots... except that the roots are exposed? So the tree was no longer standing with droopy leaves the next morning... but had its roots exposed, lying on its side beside the road... prompting Peter to make his remark. That is a very dramatic outcome for this fig tree... which was unusual in the first place because it had leaves even though it was not the season for figs. It was its leaves that attracted Jesus to it... as it is written: Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any fruit. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.⁶ In fact, that prompted Jesus to curse it so thoroughly that it was lying down with roots exposed the next day... giving an eerie reminder of these words of Jesus: "Every plant that My Heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots,"⁷ when He was speaking of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law objecting to His disciples eating with unwashed hands.

The attractiveness of the teachings of Matthew 21 and Mark 11 about faith by Jesus has taken our attention away from the lesson of the fig tree and its fate. What was it about this fig tree that provoked a curse from Jesus... He who had been described in Isaiah as, "He will not shout or cry out, or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out"?⁸ Sufficient for our purposes now, the teaching on faith those two mornings are important and valid for those who have yet to learn to have faith in God and know the power of a word spoken without doubt but full of faith in God. However, focus on this fig tree.

The truth is, it had leaves when it should not have had leaves... that is, it was behaving in a manner inconsistent with the times set for it and behaving in such a manner that it appeared to meet the needs of the Lord... that is, it appeared to offer Jesus figs when He was hungry. However, when Jesus saw it had no fruit, He cursed it. It was as if the fig tree deceived Jesus... as if that is possible. No, Jesus cannot be deceived. He knew there was no fruit before He went to it, but He did so to show us the importance and the consequence of failing to abide by the set times. Had that fig tree been leafless as all the others were for the season, it would have lived. However, because it did not abide by the times set for it, it perished. If any of the disciples were listening, it would have been a dreadful foretaste of what was about to happen to Jerusalem... for just before He entered Jerusalem... As He approached

¹ Matthew 21.21-22

² Mark 11.20-26

³ Matthew 21.19, Mark 11.14

⁴ Matthew 21.19-20

⁵ Mark 11.20

⁶ Mark 11.13

⁷ Matthew 15.13

⁸ Isaiah 42.2

Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you."⁹ And that first day as He entered Jerusalem He entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling.¹⁰

Just as the fig tree did not recognise and did not obey the times set for it... so also Jerusalem did not recognise the times set for it, and 70 years later, the 'fig tree' of Jerusalem was withered and uprooted where it remains today... the temple out of which Jesus had to drive out the sellers and money changers three times as recorded.¹¹

The fig tree reminded Jesus too much of the temple as He had found it again... full of what appears to be Godly, but lacking fruits, and given the mood that Jesus must have been in by that week, it simply did not pay to be a fig tree full of leaves but yet fruitless when Jesus walked by. What was Jesus' mood? Consider this, what mood would you be in if you knew you were about to be crucified and betrayed by the very people who have turned your Father's house into a den of robbers? A couple of years earlier, that was what He rebuked them for,¹² and now two years later, that is what He found again!

Jerusalem and indeed Israel failed to recognise its set times for the coming of their Messiah when the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus were being played out before their very eyes! For 400 years since their return from exile... except for those who tried to restore the kingdom by military and political means like the Maccabees... where had there been another time when they had such a duet ministry that fulfilled the prophets and by m/Men who themselves showed exceptional characters – John the Baptist with his wilderness ministry and water baptism, and then Jesus? No prophet (self proclaimed or otherwise), no rabbi, no teacher, no messenger or would-be messiah had appeared in the last 400 years with such a ministry, not only of words, but of miracles that outstripped Moses, Elijah and Elisha put together. Surely if you were a Jew in Israel at that time you must consider... what time am I living in? Surely these words: "See, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the Messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,"¹³ must spring to mind as you see this Man whom they call the Nazarene, who goes by the Name Jesus... going into the temple, causing a ruckus each time He appears, overturning the tables of the sellers and money changers, but unlike every other reformist, this One can also do miracles, for the blind see and the lame walk! A Man who calls the temple His Father's house, teaching with authority, disrupting everything, and yet has power to do miracles for the blind and lame that no one else has been able to do, not the high priest nor anyone else, and you still do not stop and think... what time is this? Like a fig tree with leaves out of season and no fruit to back up its promises, you risk being cursed and uprooted. And that is exactly what happened to them, but in God's grace 70 years later to account for the 70 years in exile.

Likewise for us now, the danger for you and I and everyone who claims to have faith in Christ and are seeking to minister in His Name – the danger of failing to "...recognise the time of God's coming to you"¹⁴ – is more real than ever. With the benefit of hindsight, anyone who has read about the Lord's words of the end times must surely be able to see that these 'birth pains' have engulfed the world for a few centuries already and like all birth pains, they are increasing, rushing to their sudden conclusion – the birth – which can come suddenly, even for those who are watching and waiting.

Even though others have made the mistake of claiming they know the date of His return and stupidly broadcasted it for a 15 minutes sound bite of fame only to perish, let not their mistakes distract you now from your due diligence that is needed to watch and pray that you are able to stand before the Son of Man when He appears suddenly.

Like the fig tree we should know... what time is it? Is it time to have leaves when it is not the season for fruit? Like the Jews of the temple who should have asked... is it the time? What is the time we live in that a Man who can open blind eyes and cause the lame to walk comes into the temple of God claiming to be the Son?

⁹ Luke 19.41-44

¹⁰ Luke 19.45

¹¹ John 2.16; Luke 19.45; Mark 11.15

¹² John 2.16

¹³ Malachi 3.1

¹⁴ Luke 19.44

Consider the world; is it time to build a ministry dependent on mammon's wellbeing or a ministry that is dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit and His wellbeing, considering what has gone before and what is ahead? Can a billion dollars raise the dead of an earthquake or a simple word spoken without doubt in God do a better job? What is needed when the frequency of these disasters increase until they are occurring daily? Money and reliance on international rescue? Who will do the rescuing when the rescuers themselves are buried by the earthquake or washed away by the cyclone? Well, there is yet a little time left by which preparations and sustenance can be achieved and maintained by conventional means. Surely it is also time to seek the Lord for the power to overcome these coming days.

What is the time? And now more importantly, what is the mood of Jesus? Is He in a compassionate mood as He was at the feeding of the 5,000 or is He in the mood that He was in when the fig tree put on its deceptive appearance? Be assured the Lord is always compassionate, and those who are in need of healing will always be healed when they come to Him... even when He was passing through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, He still healed the blind as He went in and out of Jericho. However, if we who call ourselves His servants are wasting His time now, I fear the fig tree was shown more compassion than will be shown to those who are lazy and wicked among His servants. Too lazy to read His word enough to master it through unceasing practice and too wicked to consider His needs above yours. You see, that fig tree failed to meet His needs... He was hungry and it did not feed Him.

What does Jesus need right now having said, "Yes, I am coming soon,"¹⁵ around 1,900 years ago... and what mood is He in with those who are responsible for the delay? I leave that to your thoughts to consider.

However, more importantly, learn from the fig tree, had it also had fruit and met the need of Jesus, would it have been cursed? No, of course not! The real lesson from the fig tree is this, elect, **be one who meets the needs of the Lord and no matter how out of season you are, He will not curse you! So consider earnestly, what does Jesus need** now, today and everyday after today, forgetting yesterday?

This is where it is time to put men to where they belong – humbled – especially male disciples. For the gospels clearly spell out for us that it was...

- A male disciple who betrayed Jesus,
- Male disciples who did not listen to Jesus and went to Capernaum instead of Bethsaida,
- Male disciples who could not drive out a demon,
- Male disciples who argued as to who was the greatest with the insensitivity to continue to do so right up to His last meal with them,
- Male disciples who did not go to Galilee and who did not wait in Jerusalem,
- And to male disciples He said, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority,"¹⁶
- And the list goes on.

However, of the females, it was they who anointed Him, they who went to the tomb first and saw Him first, and most importantly of all, it was only of the women who followed Jesus that these words are written: **Many women... had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for His needs**¹⁷ and **cared for His needs**.¹⁸ No such compliment is written about the men.

So what time is it, elect? If you are a male, it is time to learn to care for His needs and let the females show you how. If you are a woman, it is time to show the men how to care for His needs by the way you listen to Him and prepare Him for His next appointment like Mary, your sister, did.

Listen and you will be blessed. Ignore the times set for you and Jerusalem's temple and the fig tree await you. See, you have been warned.

¹⁵ Revelation 22.20

¹⁶ Acts 1.7

¹⁷ Matthew 27.55

¹⁸ Mark 15.41