

Introduction:

- Matthew tells this story more simply than Mark.
 - In Mark it is split into two scenes with actions of Jesus in between.
 - In Mark, “the reader is invited to compare the fate of the fruitless tree with the denunciation of the failed temple.” NICNT; France
- Matthew’s compression of the event into one scene stresses the power of Jesus words! Power as in authority and power as in ability to accomplish.
- The action is ‘out of character’ for Jesus in cursing the fig tree. He is all about healing and restoration. It is however very symbolic like many OT figures, in order to draw attention to the message which the symbols represent. What is the message that Jesus is sending? We will look at that.
- Jesus action against the fig tree follows the exercise of His authority over the city and over the temple. It therefore speaks of judgment against Jerusalem.

I. Curse That Tree

- A. The significance of the tree cursing. This event is taking place on the way into Jerusalem. Ie. “Red sky in morning sailors take warning.” The cursing of the fig tree is a sign of trouble for the city of Jerusalem.
- B. There are three things in 21:18-19 that support this thought.
 1. *“There were only leaves.”* It is a way of saying, “There is no fruit.”
 - a) At Passover time the leaves are beginning to form on the fig trees. Fig trees that are full of leaves will have fruit beginning form on them. The message has to do with the Temple even as Mt 24:32 does.
 - b) Because the tree was full of leaves it held the promise of fruit. It was not the time for fruit as Mark states but it was full of leaves so it held the promise fruit.
 2. *“Fruit”* has always been the way that God looks at His church, or His people. “Are you bearing fruit in keeping with God’s free salvation and leadership?” (3:8,10; 7:10-16; 12:33; 13:8)
 - a) The parable of the vineyard and two sons will say this again this in a few more verses.
 - b) There the establishment is judged and driven out and another (Gentiles, tax collectors and prostitutes) take her place bearing fruit. Again, it boils down to faith. What do you believe?
 3. The fact that it is a fig tree is highly symbolic.
 - a) In the OT the fig was incredibly prophetic. (Jer 8:13; 24:1-10; Hos 9:10, 16-17.)
 - b) The passage the Jews would be familiar with is: *“How miserable I am! I feel like the fruit picker after the harvest who can find nothing to eat. Not a cluster of grapes or a single early fig can be found to satisfy my hunger. The godly people have all disappeared; not one honest person is left on the earth. They are all murderers, setting traps even for their own brothers. Both their hands are equally skilled at doing evil! Officials and judges alike demand bribes. The people with influence get what they want, and together they scheme to twist justice. Even the best of them is like a brier; the most honest is as dangerous as a hedge of thorns. But your judgment day is coming swiftly now. Your time of punishment is here, a time of confusion. Don’t trust anyone— not your best friend or even your wife! For the son despises his father. The daughter defies her mother. The daughter-in-law defies her mother-in-law. Your enemies are right in your own household!”* (Micah 7:1-6, NLT)

(1) Jesus is hungry - “I am miserable.”

(2) Jesus unable to find figs - "I can find nothing to eat."

(3) Jesus send the message of judgement just like Micah.

4. All of the symbolism of the passage (these three things) all point to something that is not expressed verbally but is evident to the any who have knowledge of the Word.
- C. The disciples think is a very unique of Jesus' power and authority but He lets them know that it is for all who believe. 21vs Is much simpler than Mark.
1. Because the passage is in the plural form for each of the 'you' and verbs we can know that it was written for us as well. Jesus is saying that in God/Christ we have authority and we have power.
 2. Again, as we have seen earlier in Mt, the key is faith.
 3. The negative side is doubt. "The "faith" which receives answers to prayer is characterized by practical confidence in God's power and willingness to respond." France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew. (p. 795). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.
 4. *"You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it."* (Matthew 21:22, NLT) I believe that Jesus declare this because in light the judgement against the fig tree and Jerusalem: THERE IS NOT REASON TO NOT BARE FRUIT.

II. By What Authority

- A. Jesus is on the temple mount and teaching in the midst of the colonades.
- B. The question: *"By what authority do you do these things? Who gave it?"*
- C. What things? Riding in like you are some Messiah, Disrupting the Temple, and letting the children call you Son of David. The challenge of their question is of Jesus' authority. It is the one thing that Matthew seems to keep coming back to so that we 'get it'.
- D. Jesus' very evasive reply was very explicit in answer! He knew how 'cognizant' they were of his authority and also the crowd around them.
 1. He links His authority to that of John. Everyone knew of Johns authority!
 2. *"The parable which follows in vv. 28-32* will be explained on the assumption that John was the authentic messenger of the kingdom of God."* France, R. T. (2007). (p. 797). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.
 3. Jesus does not openly answer therefore they can't openly charge Him. They can't answer or they incriminate themselves and confirm their 'fruitlessness':
 4. The answer remains unstated but their is no doubt in anyone mind what the answer is.

Conclusion:

- Practical application:
 - Matthew is challenging unfruitfulness and letting us know it leads to judgment.
 - Matthew is also declaring that fruitfulness comes by faith. God has made a way for us to operate in fruitfulness with authority and power.
- As the Son of God, He wants us to see Him as Messiah and Savior.