

40. Jesus Taught About the Prayer of Faith

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the fact that many of the common people recognized that Jesus was the promised eternal king of Israel. In our topic today, we will see that Jesus taught His disciples about the importance of praying with faith.

Jesus, and the twelve, walked from Bethany back to Jerusalem the next morning. Mark 11:12-14 says, “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. In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ And His disciples heard *it*.” Here, we see that Jesus was hungry when He and the disciples left Bethany.

As Jesus, and the disciples, walked toward Jerusalem, they could see the leaves of a fig tree in the distance. Jesus decided to see whether there were any figs on the tree. Matthew 21:19 says, “And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, ‘Let no fruit grow on you ever again.’ Immediately the fig tree withered away.” Jesus, and the disciples, walked until they came to the tree. When they reached the tree, they saw that there was nothing but leaves on the tree. Normally, figs grow along with the leaves. Since the tree had many leaves, it would have been normal for there to be figs among the leaves. However, there were not even small figs.

Jesus then spoke to the fig tree, and said, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” The disciples heard Jesus as He pronounced this judgment on the tree. In the Old Testament, the fig tree was used as a picture of the nation of Israel. Hosea 9:10 says, “I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. *But* they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to *that* shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved.” This verse refers to the fathers as the firstfruits of the fig tree, but said they had become an abomination to God by their worship of idols. Deuteronomy 28:64 promised that Israel would be scattered, if they turned away to idols. That verse says, “Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone.” This judgment did come on the nation of Israel because of their sin.

However, God is a God of mercy who keeps His promises. He also promised that one day, that is still future, He would restore the nation of Israel. Romans 11:25-29 says, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’ Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable.” A short time later, Jesus warned of the judgment of that generation of Israel in another way.

We go on to read that the next thing Jesus did was cleanse the temple. Mark 11:15-19 says, “So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and 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. Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” Here, we see that Jesus showed that the Jews, living in the time of Jesus, were just as rebellious as their fathers.

The night before, Jesus had carefully observed what was going on in the temple courtyard before He went out to Bethany. As a result, Jesus began to take action once He arrived at the temple in the morning. Jesus went into the temple courtyard and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the courtyard. Those who were selling animals were selling them to the people who came from other areas and could not bring animals for sacrifices. The people who sold these animals and birds would pay the high priest in order to sell them in the temple, so the high priest and his family made extra money from these fees. The money changers would also pay the high priest, so they could use the temple area to exchange the Roman and Greek coins for Jewish coins. Jesus also stopped those who were using the courtyard as a shortcut to carry the things they sold to other parts of the city.

Then, Jesus explained the purpose of the temple by quoting part of Isaiah 56:6-7, which says, “Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” Here, we see that the real purpose of the temple was to be a place of prayer.

However, the scribes and the chief priests were not happy when they heard what Jesus had done. In fact, they were so angry they started thinking about how they could destroy Jesus. These men were convicted by the words that pointed out that they had made the temple a den of thieves, but they were unwilling to repent. Instead, they decided they would destroy Jesus. We see that these men were acting out of fear. 1 John 4:18-19 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.” Jesus had said earlier, in John 5:42-44, “But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God?” They wanted to destroy Jesus, because they did not have the love of God in their hearts. Jesus knew their plans, so that is why He went out of the city in the evening, so that they did not know where to find him during the night. Meanwhile, the rest of the people were astonished at the teaching of Jesus.

The next morning, Jesus and the disciples returned to Jerusalem. Mark 11:20-24 says, “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. 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*.’” Jesus and the disciples passed the tree Jesus had cursed on their way to the city. They saw that the tree had dried up from the roots.

Peter remembered what Jesus had said and pointed out the tree to Jesus. He told Jesus to look, and then said to Him, “The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.” The answer Jesus gave showed that Peter showed surprise by the way he said this to Jesus. This surprise is revealed more clearly in Matthew 21:20-21, which says: “And when the disciples saw *it*, they marveled, saying, ‘How did the fig tree wither away so soon?’ So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.’” We see that Peter spoke for all of the disciples because they were all surprised.

Jesus used the opportunity to teach the disciples about having faith in God. The statement, by Matthew, shows that if something is the will of God, it will happen if people have faith. Jesus said that if it was the will of God, even a mountain could be removed. This is illustrated in Zechariah 14:4, which says: “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.” We see, in this verse, that when Jesus returns to the earth to rule for one thousand years, it will be the will of God to move the mountains. Jesus said that the disciples would see God do similar things as they prayed for the will of God to be carried out.

Jesus wanted the disciples to learn to have faith as they prayed to the Lord. Jesus also wants each of us to have that same faith as we pray. Romans 8:26-27 gives a great promise about our prayers when those verses say, “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to pray for the will of God, in faith, because the Lord promises that He will answer if we pray in faith for His will. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children what it means to pray in faith by your example.