

THE BARREN FIG TREE

TEXT: MARK 11:12-26

Introduction:

1. We are looking tonight at the miracle of the barren fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-26).
2. Several things should be kept in mind when studying this miracle.
3. First of all, it is the only judgment miracle. On every other occasion, when our Lord performed a miracle it was to give life, not to take life. But here we see our Lord saying to the barren fig tree, “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever” (Mark 11:14).
4. Some say this was actually our Lord’s second judgment miracle, and they say the drowning of the pigs was the first (Mark 5:11-13).
5. However, the situation there was much different. The devils wanted to enter into the swine, and the swine preferred to drown rather than live with devils (5:12).
6. The fig tree is symbolic; it represents the nation Israel.
7. Our Lord came to the nation Israel and was disappointed to see that the people were barren and devoid of spiritual fruit (cf. Matt. 23:37-39).
8. Our Lord’s words were fulfilled in AD 70, when the Roman army destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and tore down the temple (cf. Luke 19:41-44).

I. THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE (cf. MARK 11:21)

1. Jesus came expecting to find figs (11:12, 13). When we think of our Lord’s omniscience, we wonder: Since Jesus is God and therefore omniscient, shouldn’t He have known there would be no figs on the tree?
2. D. Edmund Hiebert wrote, “This incident has often raised a discussion of the problem of the supernatural knowledge of Jesus. It does not disprove the clear possession of such knowledge on certain occasions, nor does it

- prove that His action was a pretense. The fact that He looked for fruit to satisfy His own hunger indicates that Jesus did not use His supernatural knowledge or power to meet His own needs. He accepted the ordinary limitation of human nature and used His supernatural knowledge only where and when it was needed to fulfill His mission” (*The Gospel of Mark*).
3. Christ has two natures: He is both God and man. Theologians refer to this as the “Hypostatical Union.”
 4. Matthew Henry said Christ “laid aside the majesty of his former appearance while he was here on earth. . . He was really and truly man, *took part of our flesh and blood*, appeared in the nature and habit of man. And he voluntarily assumed human nature; it was his own act, and by his own consent. . . Herein he *emptied himself*, divested himself of the honours and glories of the upper world, and of his former appearance, to clothe himself with the rags of human nature.”
 5. The two natures of Christ is a deep mystery, which we accept by faith.
 6. Our Lord gave the death sentence to the barren fig tree –“No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever” (Mark 11:14).
 7. Peter said our Lord “cursed” it (11:21). But this was not some angry, petulant curse.
 8. This was the judgment of God upon Israel, represented here by the barren fig tree (cf. Luke 13:6-9).
 9. Hosea 9:10 says, “I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree.”
 10. Nahum 3:12 says, “All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs.”
 11. Zech. 3:10 says, “In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.”
 12. Our Lord said in Matthew 24:32, 33, “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”
 13. “The tree was a fitting symbol of Israel’s failure to produce the spiritual fruit that it professed to have. Jesus used the tree to convey to His disciples a lesson of His condemnation of hypocrisy” (Hiebert).

II. THE LESSON OF THE FIG TREE

1. The day before, the fig tree had many leaves (11:13), but now it was dried up and dead (11:20).
2. Unfortunately, there are many churches like that. At one time they were fruitful, but now they are dead.
3. Our Lord said to the church at Sardis, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1).

4. Life is perpetuated through fruit bearing. Since the fig tree was not bearing fruit, it was of no use to God or man.
5. Our Lord said in John 15:16, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”
6. Apparently the apostles were very surprised by this miracle (Mark 11:21; cf. Matt. 21:20).
7. The fig tree started to wither immediately (cf. Matthew 21:19), but Peter and the apostles did not notice this until the next day (Mark 11:20, 21).
8. Oftentimes a church is withering and going into apostasy, but some of the members do not seem to notice.

III. LESSON ON FAITH (11:22).

1. “And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!” (Matt. 21:20).
2. “Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matt. 21:21; cf. Mark 11:22-24).
3. Our Lord used this as an opportunity to teach the disciples a lesson on faith. In Matthew 21:21, our Lord mentions both the fig tree and the mountain, but in Mark’s account only the mountain is mentioned (11:23).
4. The mountain symbolizes various obstacles in our way. God will remove them if we have faith (Mark 11:22-24).
5. Oftentimes, the Lord allows obstacles to get in our way in order to provide an opportunity for us to exercise faith. God’s mighty power is displayed when the mountain is moved.
6. God wants to increase our faith.
7. And God wants us to pray.
8. And God wants to answer our prayers (Mark 11:24).
9. John Newton put it this way:
 Thou art coming to a King,
 Large petitions with thee bring;
 For his grace and power are such
 None can ever ask too much.
10. Our Lord said, “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24).

11. EM Bounds called this Scripture “the very keystone of the arch of faith and prayer” (*The Necessity of Prayer*).
12. “That ye receive them” is in the aurist tense, and means the petition has already been granted – ye did receive them.
13. Although the actual bestowal is still future, we can be confident that God has already granted our request.
14. First John 5:14 says, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us...”
15. An unforgiving spirit hinders our prayers from being answered (Mark 11:25, 26).

CONCLUSION:

Let me conclude with another quote from EM Bounds, and then we can pray.

“Faith must be definite, specific; an unqualified, unmistakable request for the things asked for. It is not to be a vague, indefinite, shadowy thing; it must be something more than an abstract belief in God’s willingness and ability to do for us. It is to be a definite, specific, asking for, and expecting the things for which we ask. Note the reading of Mark 11:23: And shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatever he saith.

“Just so far as the faith and the asking is definite, so also will the answer be. The giving is not to be something other than the things prayed for, but the actual things sought and named. ‘He shall have whatsoever he saith.’ It is all imperative, ‘He shall have.’ The granting is to be unlimited, both in quality and in quantity.

“Faith and prayer select the subjects for petition, thereby determining what God is to do. ‘He shall have whatsoever he saith.’ Christ holds himself ready to supply exactly, and fully, all the demands of faith and prayer. If the order on God is made clear, specific and definite, God will fill it, exactly in accordance with the presented terms.”

