

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-4 The Tree and the Temple

No one enjoys being punished. As we grew up, our parents disciplined us according to the rules they thought best. When we disobeyed, punishment usually followed. As adults, we continue to mature only by disciplining ourselves. As followers of Jesus we live under his discipline and commands. We know there are times we may fail. In the Old Testament Israel failed God by rejecting his rules. God sent prophets to warn of coming judgments due to Israel's disobedience. Jesus himself warned them one last time. Their sin was failure to recognize Jesus as God's final plan. This time their own Messiah pronounced the judgment against them.

On the day of his triumphal entry to Jerusalem, Jesus went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went to Bethany to spend the night. Jesus did not stay in Jerusalem. He did not trust the authorities, for he knew their plans for him.

The next day as he and the Twelve were leaving the village, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in full leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. The figs are usually formed before the tree is all leafed out. A tree full of leaves early should normally have had fruit as well. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

Jesus was not angry at the tree. This became for the disciples a visual prophetic parable. The fig tree represented the nation of Israel. There was no longer any spiritual food or life left in her. Ancient prophets had prophesied that the first temple would be destroyed because of Israel's sin. The death of Jesus meant that the temple system would no longer be the way to approach God. The temple and its leaders, who were rejecting their Messiah, would soon face God's judgment. It signified that a new way to approach God was to come.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. This court of the Gentiles was the only part of the temple in which godly non-Jews could gather for worship or prayer. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. He would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. As he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The temple had lost its true purpose of being a "house of prayer for all peoples." In an attempt to help people worship God, the leaders had lost sight of its intended function. Inside the temple noisy and smelly animals and birds were sold to worshippers. Money was exchanged so the pilgrims could pay the temple tax with the correct local coins. With a selfish motive, the priests made profit and cheated the worshippers. The leaders could no longer see God's purposes as they robbed the temple of its sanctity. Some even used the temple courts as a short cut to move merchandise through the city. Jesus, as the Messiah, exercised his authority to clean up his Father's house.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard of this and began looking for a way to kill him. They feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city again.

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. The destruction was total. No one in the future would eat fruit from that tree. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. 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 them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Mark 11:12-26).

The cursed tree prompted Jesus to speak about faith and forgiveness. Faith in God’s power can accomplish and claim anything that is in his will. The other requirement for answered prayer is forgiveness. Since God had forgiven them, they also had to forgive others. The attitude of God’s people must include both faith and forgiveness in their daily activities.

This **story is important** because it shows that both Israel’s leaders and the temple had failed to obey God’s law. God would soon replace both, creating a new people, the church, and a new way to come to God through Jesus.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus as the Messiah had authority over Israel and temple. He was revealing to his disciples that the old covenant was ending and a new covenant was about to begin. Believing prayer and forgiving hearts are required for those under the new covenant of grace.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What curse did Jesus speak to the fig tree relating to the nation of Israel?
A. [Pause] If you answered that Jesus said, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again," you are correct.
2. What did Jesus say to explain why he stopped the sellers and money changers in the temple?
A. [Pause] If you answered that Jesus said, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers,” you are correct.
3. Why did the religious leaders fear Jesus?
A. [Pause] If you said, “They feared Jesus because the crowds were amazed at his teaching,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After telling it to someone new ask them this question, “What are two reasons God may not answer your prayers?” The answers are: 1) You have a lack of faith—doubting that God will answer, or 2) You holding something against someone, so God cannot forgive you and hear your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to pray with the new person so that God will increase their faith and help them to forgive all who have wronged them.