

## A Lesson About Faith And Prayer.

Mark 11:20-26.

Sunday morning, July 13, 2008.

### I. The disciples' surprise.

- A. On the Monday following the triumphal entry the Lord had gone from Bethany to Jerusalem early that morning; about a two mile trip. He would cleanse the temple that day and return to Bethany at night.
- B. On the way to Jerusalem they had passed a fig tree, full of leaves, but no early figs. The Lord, being hungry, had sought for some figs, but finding none he cursed the tree saying: "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." Mark 11:14.  
The fig tree became an object lesson of Israel as a nation at whose roots the ax did lay. Matt. 3:10.
- C. It is now Tuesday morning of the Lord's final week of His earthly ministry. Once again they make the trip into Jerusalem from Bethany, and once again they pass the fig tree which has now withered from the roots.
- D. The disciples are amazed and surprised.  
Matthew has them saying: "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?" Matt.

21:20

Mark, quoting Peter specifically: "Rabbi, look! The fig tree You cursed has withered away!" Mark 11:21.

#### Application:

Why were the disciples so surprised given all that they had seen the Lord do? Why were they still so surprised a few years later when Peter stood on their doorstep, fresh out of prison, in answer to the disciples prayer. Acts 12:1-16. Why are we surprised when we see the hand of God at work in our lives and in our world? Is it not because deep down we are the way the Lord describes us elsewhere saying "O you of little faith..." Matt. 14:31 and 16:8. To counteract this tendency toward unbelief Jesus teaches them (and us) a lesson about faith and prayer.

### II. Have faith in God. Vs. 22.

What does it mean in the context of this lesson to have faith in God?

- A. Faith is a conviction and an assurance that God is present with His people, and that He is furthering his purposes through them in history. That God is not passive but that he is active and that His purposes entail both judgments and redemption.
- B. Faith is the eye of the new man which sees and discerns what God is doing in history.
  - 1. Unless a man is born again he can not see the kingdom of God (the rule of God.) John 3:3.
  - 2. By the eye of faith David saw and perceived that he was to confront Goliath.
  - 3. By the eye of faith Simeon and Anna saw and perceived what God was doing when the Christ child was brought into the temple.
  - 4. By faith the Lord Jesus saw and perceived that unbelieving Israel would reject and crucify Him, and that "Jerusalem below" Gal. 4:25,26 would bear no further fruit for the Kingdom of God. So He curses the fig tree, Israel, saying,

“let no one eat fruit from you ever again.”

C. Faith is taking a stand for what we by faith see and perceive to be true.

1. So David did take a stand against Goliath. 1 Sam. 17:43-46.
2. So Joshua made the sun and the moon to stand still, perceiving that God was going to deliver his enemies into his hands if only the day were longer. Joshua 10:12-14.
3. So the mountain of obstacles Zerubbabel faced in rebuilding the temple after the captivity was made into a plain, by Zerubbabel taking a stand in faith for the rebuilding effort. Zechariah 4:6,7.

III. Lessons on prayer.

A. If faith is the conviction that God is actively present in a set of circumstances; If faith discerns the will of God in a given set of circumstances; And if faith takes a stand for the things it discerns, then prayer gives utterance to that conviction and that discernment, and the stand it takes, and it asks of God to honor its actions.

1. The words of the Lord: “...and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things which he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.” in Vs. 23, presume that the prayer is offered up out of the conviction of God’s presence in the situation, and the discernment of His will in the circumstances.
2. Standing on the ground of conviction and discernment you need to take your stand by believing and praying. In so doing you have the promise and encouragement that you shall have what you ask for. Vs. 24.

B. Prayer can never be offered up from the ground of a self-serving agenda. Vs. 26. Withholding forgiveness which is a form of withholding mercy is an action representing a self-serving agenda. You do not want to let go of that grudge because that grudge is precious to you. You treasure and nurture and protect that grudge very carefully in your heart, and the thought of throwing it away as

though

it were a piece of trash is repulsive to you.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart (a self-serving agenda), the Lord will not hear me.” Psalm 66:18.

C. Prayer must be offered up on the basis of a God centered agenda. This agenda always involves extending mercy to needy sinners. Extending forgiveness is a form of extending mercy.

In cursing the fig tree, and old covenant and unbelieving Israel, the Lord extended

mercy as well as judgment. For in the passing of Old Jerusalem, New Jerusalem comes into focus. In the passing of Israel after the flesh, the Israel of God comes into focus. In the passing of the Old Covenant, the New Covenant comes into focus. And a door of mercy is opened to Jew and Gentile alike.

Application:

This is the ground the Lord stood on as He cursed the fig tree, and as He taught on prayer and faith. This is the ground he invites you to stand on with Him as you learn to discern

his will, and taking a stand, extend his mercy.