

MATTHEW 21: 18 – 46

WHEN WE WEAR LEAVES

Have you ever asked someone a question and not gotten the answer for which you were looking? Or should I ask it this way, have you asked a question and wished that they would just get to the point? I believe we have all been there. Today we will read of the religious leaders in the Temple asking Jesus a question, and He doesn't answer them directly, but He does answer them. Actually, He answers by telling them that He will answer their question only if they first answer His question. There is a point to this. It is akin to having to show your work when answering a math question. The journey to getting the answer is more clear and vivid than just the answer itself. Life is just this way. It is why we have to experience things to really learn them. So today, Jesus will take the religious leaders on a journey to make His answer all the more clear than just the bottom line.

Jesus has already cleansed the Temple leading to an initial confrontation with the religious leaders, in which He made no bones about His being praised as the Messiah. You may remember that He left them with a "mic drop." After a night's rest back in Bethany, presumably at the home of Lazarus, He again enters the Temple, specifically the court of the Gentiles and will begin teaching. But on the way to the Temple, Jesus takes the time to teach His disciples a lesson.

Mt. 21: 18 - 22

18 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. 19 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.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"

21 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. 22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

It is truly a sign of the times that Jesus is often demonized for "killing an innocent tree." We have come a long way from reality.

But Jesus curses the tree for its lack of fruit. We will revisit this point later. But for

now, we see that Jesus again takes the time to show His disciples the power of prayer, though He does it in a hyperbolic way. He goes a little “over the top” in making His point that faith, when combined with the will of God can truly produce results that otherwise couldn’t be had. Then He and the others make their way to the Temple.

23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”

24 But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 25 The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 26 But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.” 27 So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.”

And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

- Teaching under the arches.
- A question of authority.
- Answer me first.
- John’s authority and message gives them the answer. But they refuse to acknowledge it.
- The journey to an answer begins.

28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ 29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?”

They said to Him, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

- The Father is YHWH. The first son is the “unwashed crowd.” They rejected the will of God initially, but then followed Jesus when He came. The second son represents the religious establishment. They claimed to follow the will of God but really went their own way.
- To add insult to injury, they’re likened to tax collectors and harlots.
- John’s ministry and message are affirmed again, answering their question of

authority. They failed to bow to the authority of the Father.

33 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

- The landowner is God. Vinedressers are the religious leaders of the day. It wasn't uncommon for religious leaders to own vineyards as a sideline investment. This supplemented their incomes.
- The landowner, God, left them with the responsibility of taking care of the vineyard and bearing fruit. He then went to a "far country." (Went back to His throne.)
- Servants = the prophets, who were killed by the religious establishment and the nation of Israel as a whole.
- God sent more prophets with the same result.
- He then sent His Son, the heir, but they killed Him also, seeking to take His inheritance for themselves. What was the heir to inherit? The fruit of vineyard of Israel.
- **The Q & A: 40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" 41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."**

- Like David when he was told, “thou art the man” regarding the stolen lamb, they answered the question, sealing their fate. But Jesus further clarifies things.

42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone.

This was the Lord's doing,

And it is marvelous in our eyes?’ ”

43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be

broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

Jesus quoted part of Psalm 118:22,23.

22 The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone.

23 This was the Lord's doing;

It is marvelous in our eyes.

The Pharisees, et al. would have hyperlinked to this Psalm, which has already been alluded to when He entered the city.

Ps. 118:25,26

25 Save now, I pray, O Lord;

O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity.

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.

- Save now! = Hosanna. Remember verse 9 from last week?
- **Matthew 21:9**
- **9 Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:**
- **“Hosanna to the Son of David!**
- **‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’**
- **Hosanna in the highest!”**

Jesus links them back to a Messianic Psalm! He has answered their question once again, but in a deeper way! He has told them in an overt way that He is the Messiah! There is no longer any need to question His authority!

Their response:

45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

They understood that they were the evil vinedressers and wanted to snatch a knot in Him, but they knew the crowds, whose support they coveted, thought of Jesus as a prophet. They feared men, craving an inheritance that wasn't theirs. And they failed to fear the Son, who was there to claim His inheritance.

- Back to the fig tree.
- **Deuteronomy 8:8**
 - **a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;**
- **1 Kings 4:25**
 - **And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.**
- **Jeremiah 8:13**
 - **“I will surely consume them,” says the Lord.**
 - **“No grapes shall be on the vine,**
 - **Nor figs on the fig tree,**
 - **And the leaf shall fade;**
 - **And the things I have given them shall pass away from them.” ’ ’**
 - The context is a corrupt priesthood.
- **Hosea 2:12**
 - **“And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees,**
 - **Of which she has said,**
 - **‘These are my wages that my lovers have given me.’**
 - **So I will make them a forest,**
 - **And the beasts of the field shall eat them.**
- **Joel 2:22**
 - **Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field;**
 - **For the open pastures are springing up,**
 - **And the tree bears its fruit;**
 - **The fig tree and the vine yield their strength.**
- **Zechariah 3:10**

- In that day,' says the Lord of hosts,**
- **'Everyone will invite his neighbor**
 - **Under his vine and under his fig tree.'** ”
- In the OT, fruitful fig trees are symbolic of God's faithful covenant blessings on His people as they dwell in fellowship with God, obedient to Him and trusting Him. Unfruitful and withered trees symbolize just the opposite.

Jesus didn't throw a fit and curse the fig tree because just because He was hungry. He did it as a sign of judgment. It was a precursor to the parables He was speaking. The fig tree had leaves, which meant that it should have at least had some young figs, known as **"breba" figs**, even at that time of year. But while it had leaves, meaning that it was alive, it bore no fruit. In the OT a withered fig tree was a sign of disobedience. Israel, her religious leaders specifically had been given a vineyard and were tasked with producing fruit, whether grapes or figs. The interesting thing is that the fig tree normally bears fruit with little or no human intervention. But there was no spiritual fruit in Israel of which to speak. Those in charge had sought an inheritance for themselves. And when the Son came, they would kill Him in order to secure their own place. Because of that the land would be handed over to other vinedressers, made up of harlots, tax collectors and even Gentiles who will render fruit and present it to God in due season. (The followers of Jesus.)

John 15: 1 - 8

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

The cursing of the fig tree was, in essence, a pronouncement of judgment. And it will be the recurring theme in Jesus' teachings until His crucifixion.

When we wear leaves.

- Fig leaves – an attempt to cover our own sin.
- When we don't bear fruit – hypocrisy, spiritual laziness.
- But God:

- **Genesis 3:21**
- **Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.**
- God had to kill an animal to clothe Adam and Eve. I'm willing to bet it was a lamb.