

Exegetical Notes, Mark 11:20-26

“A Phage Tree”

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Mark 11:20-26

Verse 20-21

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

- See notes on Mark 11:12-14
- These events happened on the second day after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- Peter remembered Jesus’ words to the fig tree (see Mark 11:14) and marveled that the tree was dead. That the tree had withered “from the roots” indicates that its destruction was absolute and complete.
- The cursing of the tree unto death seems out of character for Jesus. It has caused scholars to speculate. Most conclude that the tree is a symbol for Judaism which had become barren of fruit failing to be what God intended for it to be. It could then be seen as a symbol for a barren church which has ceased to be responsive to the call of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, no longer believes in or trusts the power of God.

Verse 22-24

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

- When Peter calls Jesus’ attention to the withered tree, Jesus teaches a lesson about expectant faith. Jesus says that even if we ask God for what seems to be impossible, believing/trusting God to act in power, God will give us the impossible thing for which we ask. We know that this rule does not violate other teaching about prayer. God will not

give us things that are harmful to us even if we ask for them. God's gifts always comes in God's perfect timing. The Holy Spirit will intercede for us so that we cannot ask God for things which offend Him. The point is that if we ask expecting God to act, God will act on our behalf.

- However, if we ask with no expectation of God acting, God will not act! This was the problem with the fig tree. It appeared to be ready, to be trusting God. But there was no fruit. In truth, it was like people who pray without expectation.

Verse 25

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.”

- But there is a second block which, in addition to unbelief, renders prayer ineffective – unforgiveness. So if you pray but have not forgiven those who have sinned against you... if you pray while holding a grudge against someone else... you should expect your prayer to be ineffective.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *A Phage Tree*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)