

## Daily Bible Study

### *“The Fruitless Fig Tree”*

*Mark 11:12 - 14*

*October 9 – October 15, 2011*

**THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY** –Our text for this week’s study is **Mark 11:12-14** and is a passage that records an interesting story and teaching from the life of Jesus. The teaching surrounds a fig tree and the fact Jesus cursed it because it had no fruit on it. Although it promised fruit, having leaves, it was found fruitless and received a very harsh response from our Lord. We can learn some very important lessons here for our lives today from the fig tree and the teaching of Jesus. The narrative of Christ’s triumphal entry which we saw last week is a story that is found in all four Gospels, while this story of the cursing of the fig tree is found only in Matthew and Mark. Matthew treats this story topically, and Mark treats it chronologically. A few of the differences between the Gospel records are as follow: Matthew begins, *“Now in the morning, as He returned to the city ...”* Mark begins, *“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany....”* The fact that Jesus was returning from Bethany to Jerusalem is clear from the immediately preceding accounts in both cases. According to Matthew, Jesus saw a fig tree *“by the road”* while Mark records *“And seeing from afar a fig tree.”* The interesting detail that Jesus *“went to see if perhaps He would find something on it”* is reported only by Mark. Though both Gospels inform the reader that Jesus went up to the tree and found nothing on it but leaves, it is Mark who adds, *“for it was not the season for figs.”* There are also slight differences between the words of the curse found in the two records. According to Matthew, Jesus said, *“Let no fruit grow on you ever again”*; according to Mark, *“Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.”* The two are in perfect harmony. Finally, Matthew calls our attention to the fact that *“immediately the fig tree withered away”* while Mark focuses our attention on The Twelve, stating, *“And His disciples heard it.”* As we see all through the Gospels, the writers were not merely copying each other; rather, each one tells the story in his own way. These two records do not conflict in any way but they supplement each other and help fill in details for the reader. In summary, Jesus was hungry. Although it was not yet the season for figs, this particular tree by the side of the road was in full foliage, giving indication and promise of having some early figs. Jesus went up to it and saw it had nothing but leaves. So, in the hearing of his disciples, he cursed it. Now read the inspired record: **Mark 11:12- 14** *“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” And His disciples heard it.”*

*(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?*

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*Suggestion for Prayer: Father God, teach and feed me from Your Word this week. Help me to be a Christian who would bear fruit that brings glory and honor to you.*

**TUESDAY – Mark 11:12** “Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.” We read that Jesus came out from Bethany where we know was located the home of his friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Mark indicates that Jesus was hungry this morning which informs us among other things that the fact Jesus was clearly human. It is possible that Jesus had risen early before daylight to pray as He we know He did (**Mark 1:35**). Perhaps He had done this and had not eaten breakfast yet or possibly He was just simply hungry as He walked the road that morning. Whatever the reason for this particular instance of the hunger of Jesus, it is neat to think about the fact that Jesus Christ, our Lord was thoroughly human. Like us, even He even became hungry at times (**Matthew 4:2**). Even this small fact of being hungry was part of the humbling, or may I say humiliation that Jesus underwent in the place of and for the sake of his people. The writer of Hebrews makes clear for us as believers that there is a wonderful, hope giving comfort here in this fact about Jesus and His life that is for us to see and understand (**Hebrews 4:15**). Read and ponder the truths of **2 Corinthians 8:9**, **Galatians 3:13**, and **Philippians 2:8**.

*(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?*

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*Suggestion for Prayer: Jesus, thanks for being human and understanding my weaknesses. Thank You for humbling Yourself to the point of taking the curse I deserve upon Yourself.*

**WEDNESDAY – Mark 11:13** “And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.” In this verse we again are reminded of the human nature of Jesus. Wasn’t He omniscient? As God we understand Jesus knew all things but this text informs us that Jesus acquired the information concerning this fig tree as we would, *He went to see* it. These verses earlier from Mark’s record speak to this issue of Jesus’ knowledge being supernatural and reveal to us His knowledge of future events (**Mark 2:8; 5:32; 9:33, 34; 10:33, 34; 11:1-2**). Well Jesus comes over to this tree and were told *He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs*. Some have asked whether Jesus should have expected fruit on this tree in light of Mark telling us that figs were not in season. The following observations of William Hendriksen are helpful: “In the region referred to here in Mark, the early or smaller figs, growing from the sprouts of the previous year, begin to appear at the end of March and are ripe in May or June. The later and much larger figs that develop on the new or spring shoots are gathered from August to October. It is important to point out that the earlier figs, with which we are here concerned, begin to appear simultaneously with the leaves. Sometimes, in fact, they even precede the leaves. Passover (about April) was at hand. Accordingly, the time when either the earlier or the later figs are ripe had not yet arrived. It was therefore “*not the season for figs*.” But Jesus notices that this particular tree, growing by the side of the road and thus probably in a sheltered place (**Matthew**

**21:19**), was something special. It had leaves, was most likely in full foliage, and could therefore be expected to have fruit. Yet, it had nothing but leaves! It promised much but provided nothing!"

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

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Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me understand that although You are omniscient, omnipotent, and means of growth I am also responsible to obey you and bear much fruit.

**THURSDAY – Mark 11:14** “In response Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” And His disciples heard it.” We get to a very interesting verse now in this story. Some see the cursing of the fig tree as one of the most difficult stories in the gospels. The main reason for this is that the story represents a destructive use of Jesus’ supernatural power. This alone causes many skeptics to deny that this even actually happened. Some discount it as legend or fable or simply made up and not factual. If we think merely with our sinful and impressionable emotions we can find sympathy for these arguments. This story “seems” to suggest that Jesus expected figs at a time which was not the season for figs, and yet blamed and cursed the tree nevertheless. It is VERY interesting what Jesus says after the disciples notice the fig tree being withered in **verses 21-22**. Jesus says, “Have faith in God”. We will discuss this and its connection Lord willing in a couple weeks when we get to this portion of the text. Back to our current text, we have to look deeper than merely seeing Jesus cursing a tree and punishing it because He was angry with it for not bearing fruit. Jesus never sinned and is not sinfully angry because He has a grumbling stomach and hunger pain; by common sense and observation, it appears that there is a deeper explanation. By looking elsewhere in Scripture, we can find that the fig tree as well as grape vines sometimes illustrated the nation of Israel (**Jeremiah 29:17, Hosea 9:10, Joel 1:7, Micah 7:1-6**). This story and curse upon the fig tree appears to speak concerning the judgment coming upon the nation Israel. It is interesting that in Mark’s record here we find the fig tree story separated by the act of “the cleansing of the Temple” done by Jesus. When Jesus would enter The Temple, the place where His worship should be foremost and fruitful He would be disappointed and stirred with righteous anger. The pretentious but barren tree was a fit description of Israel and in Matthews record of this incident we find that Jesus himself would interpret this story the next day (**Matthew 21:43**). Jesus would find in the Temple a lot of business activities (plenty of leaves) but merely religious formality and sinful greed, covetousness and sin (no fruit). There was a lot of religious activity but no sincerity and truth; a bunch of leaves promising something but not delivering anything. Jesus was prophesying the destruction and doom of the unfruitful nation in these two acts of cursing the fig tree and cleansing the Temple. Israel. This does not mean that Jesus would no longer save the Jewish elect but that instead of an international kingdom there would be an everlasting kingdom established, a nation bringing forth not just leaves but fruits, and gathered from both Jews and Gentiles.

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

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*Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for establishing a people that by Your grace bring forth fruit and do Your will. Thank You that this nation transcends ethnicity and geography.*

**FRIDAY & SATURDAY – Mark 11:14** “In response Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” And His disciples heard it.” The curse by Jesus upon the fig tree was a stark and destructive, and solemn warning of what was in fact going to happen to Jerusalem and The Temple in AD 70. It is also interesting the word used for *ever again* is the Greek word *aion*, *aeon* or “age” which is full in meaning (forever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity, the worlds, universe, period of time, age). Finally we read that *His disciples heard it*. *Akouo* in Greek. If you remember this word is used multiple times in **Mark 4:9** “...he that has ears to hear, let him hear” and it speaks not merely to hearing but to a perceiving and understanding. We are told that the disciples heard and they took notice to what He said. Possibly they took note because this was Jesus, the man whose heart went out to the multitudes, the man who desired to bring comfort and cheer, to help and heal, to seek and save, and here He was actually pronouncing a curse upon a tree. We can’t be dogmatic to the depth of their understanding as these are sinful, fallible men, but maybe they remembered that somewhat similar things were done by some of the Old Testament prophets as they acted out and prophesied for The Lord (**Jeremiah 13:1–11; 19:1–2, 10, Ezekiel 3:1–11, 12:1–16, Hosea 1:1–9, 3:1–5**). If they had read and remembered **Jeremiah 8:13**, and listened and understood The Parable of The Barren Fig Tree in **Luke 13:6–9** they could hardly have missed the point illustrated to them here. Finally, in Mark’s record this cursing of the fig tree and its subsequent withering is the last recorded miraculous work of Jesus (besides His resurrection). It is not only last but obviously the most destructive with a fatal ending for the tree. This puts in a contrasting light the wonderful miracles of healing and mercy which Jesus preformed. Two things are obvious: God takes great delight in showing mercy, healing and saving (**Isaiah 1:18, 45:22, 55:1–13, Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11, Hosea 11:8, Matthew 11:28–30, 23:37, Revelation 22:17**). And, “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (**Proverbs 29:1**) See also: (**Isaiah 1:19, 20; 5:3–7, Ezekiel 18:24, Matthew 11:20–24, 23:38, Revelation 14:9–11**).

*(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?*

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*Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for giving me ears to hear You. Help me learn from this warning that You are a merciful God but You command and require me to both repent and believe.*