

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree - Mark 11:12-25

¹²The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. ¹⁵On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves,¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷And 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.'" ¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. ¹⁹When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. ²⁰In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" ²²"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³"Truly^[d] 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. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

The appetite of labourers works for them; their hunger drives them on. **Proverbs 16 v25-26**

Hangry Jesus? 2 burdens

Was Jesus hangry? Hangry was added to the Oxford English dictionary in 2018 and means 'bad-tempered or irritable as a result of hunger'. You may have first hand experience of this before meal-times, with an agitated teenage son pacing around the house repeatedly asking 'When's dinner?' What is it? When will it be ready?

Today we look at a curious passage where it says Jesus is hungry, curses a fig tree which has no figs on it, goes into Jerusalem and ramsacks a temple courtyard, then the next day he sees the fig tree again and it has miraculously withered up and died.

Is this really the same Jesus, our sinless, faultless, lamb of God? Yes, it is. So why is he doing this?

A few months earlier he had told the parable of an unfruitful fig tree (Luke 13 v6-9), in which the fig tree clearly represented the Jewish leaders of the day, the Priests, the Levites, and the other Pharisees etc

He curses the fig tree on the Monday of Holy week, just 4 days before he is crucified.

Jesus is carrying with him this week, two heavy burdens. The first is that he has his biggest ever spiritual battle ahead of him, as he has to defeat the powers of darkness on the cross at Calvary. He is doing this to save the people from their sins, but the second burden is that most of the people he is dying for, are rejecting him, and will not be saved by his sacrifice.

Bethany and Palm Sunday

For the last week of his life, Jesus is staying in Bethany, with his faithful friends, the recently resurrected Lazarus and his sister Mary and Martha. He has loved them for years, and they are supportive to the end.

Yesterday, on Palm Sunday, he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, but stops half way when he sees the city's Eastern gate ahead of him and weeps over the city. **"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing"** (Mt 23v37)

The crowd are cheering him and do eagerly desire a **political** messiah, to bring freedom from Rome, but Jesus has come as their **spiritual** messiah, bringing freedom from their sins. As the Son of God, he will make a way through his death to usher them into the love of his Father. However he knows though that the leaders first, and then the people will harden their hearts to Him as messiah. The whole future of the temple, Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation depended upon them changing their hearts and as a nation accepting Jesus as Lord and Messiah. This was a **national** refusal of Jesus and he knew the consequences for the city were really bad. From heaven he had given them prophecies for hundreds of years, about what he would be like when he came, so they would not mistake him, and would know that Jesus was indeed their Messiah. He fulfilled all of the prophecies including the one from Zechariah of him arriving on a donkey.

He knew though in his Spirit, that despite fulfilling all these prophecies, he would be rejected by the nation as a whole, and as a whole they would be judged, and everything that had as a nation would be lost. This is why he wept. He could see what was coming. And he was right. By AD70 (just 37 years later), the Jews had so incensed the Romans with their rebellions that Titus and the 10th Roman Legion came in and destroyed Jerusalem, burning the temple to the ground and driving them out of their homeland. It would not be until 1948 that the Jews finally returned to Israel. But by then the temple mount would now have a mosque on it and there would still be no temple life or sacrifices for them.

Jesus goes into Jerusalem on a donkey but returns to Lazarus's house that evening, and to Martha, Bethany's number one hostess, who would have fed Jesus up very well if he had given her the chance. However he probably left the others to feast whilst he went to a remote place to pray. His two burdens weighing very heavy on him.

Monday – The Fig Tree (Mark 11v12-13).

On the crisp spring Monday morning, only four days before his death Jesus heads back, the short 'mile and a half' trek into Jerusalem, probably up early skipping breakfast.

He is feeling hungry. On a rocky outcrop, is a fig tree, which catches the sun and stands out attracting Jesus from a distance. The tree is leafy, which would normally mean it has fruit, as the fruit precedes the leaves. The main fruit harvest of figs is August through until October, but fig trees often have a smaller second crop in Springtime. So Jesus was justified in expecting that a leafy tree would be hiding some fruit, some small figs. So he goes to it and looks for the fruit. However there is no fruit on the fig tree, nothing under the foliage. This was no fruitful tree but a barren one. It has nothing but leaves.

Jesus then surprisingly speaks out a curse on the fig tree '**No-one shall ever eat figs from you again**'. (Mk 11v14).

Why the curse? Well it is not because Jesus is hangry. The issue is not that Jesus is in a bad mood because he is hungry. He spent 40 days without food in the desert when he started his ministry. Hunger does not make him angry. We mustn't forget his creation miracles, how he turns water into wine, how he fed large crowds from just a handful of loaves and fishes. He is not angry with the fig tree itself but what it represents.

In the scriptures the fig tree represented the nation of Israel. It was their most common tree.

This fig-less tree was a reminder of Jerusalem, that for all its leafy show, it was naked underneath. There was no true love for God, for his son, or his people. It was religion not faith. There was no spiritual fruit in Jerusalem.

Angry with the leaders:

The anger of Jesus was particularly aimed at the Jewish leader.

The third son of Abraham was Levi. His descendants were the Levites. This tribe was the only tribe that did not bow down to the golden calf idol that was made, so God set them apart with cities but no land, to serve the spiritual needs of the people, and to show the God of Abraham as the true God to the other nations. A section of the Levites were the priests. Between them they looked after all aspects of temple life, and were supported by the other tribes giving them 10%. This is how it continued up to the first century. But by this time, the leaders did not have a living faith where they listened to God, encouraged the people, then took the people's needs to God. Instead they had built up a religion full of rules and regulations and shunned anyone that did not have a good go at keeping them. They were labelled sinners and lumped in with tax collectors and prostitutes, as being well lost and not worth any effort by them. Also instead of reaching out to the Gentile nations they hated them with a passion. So as well as being bad shepherds for their Jewish flock, they were not being a light to the other nations either. This was their job, their calling, and yet they were failing miserably.

They generally lived a privileged life-style off the works of others, keeping the best cuts of meat for themselves, and fleecing people in the temple, with temple taxes and temple coinage exchange rates, and overcharging people for unblemished animals to sacrifice. The Leaders were not listening to God, and

listening Gods son, but were also driving many of the people away from God too with the heavy burdens placed on them.

So Jesus was angry with them. They were like a leafy tree with lots of show, but no fruit, no spiritual fruit to show for all their pomp, ceremony and sacrifices.

So this is not so much a curse, but more of a prophecy of what will happen to the nation and specifically to the Jewish leaders, and to the elders

He can foresee the destruction of the temple. When this happens these leaders will no longer have jobs. They will no longer be able to live a comfortable and privileged life off the backs of other people. They won't be able to feast on that fig tree again. They did not produce fruit and now there will be no fruit to feast off.

With the Fig Tree of Israel gone, those branches that choose to follow their God, will need to be grafted to a new tree. This will be grown out of the love and sacrifice of God sons Jesus Christ. Only by accepting his love, mercy and salvation through his death on his grafted onto Gods tree, or Gods vine as the Gospels also describe it

So this is Holy week, passion week. Yesterday he wept over Jerusalem and its leaders because they rejected him. Today he speaks prophetically over what will happen because of their rejection.

Ramsacking the temple

Jesus then goes into the temples large outer court which was for reaching the Gentiles, for scriptural debate and prayer. Instead of reaching out to people, they were being ripped off The court of the Gentiles was not full of teachers and ministry and encouragers sharing the love of God with the nations which it should have been especially at this wonderful Passover festival when the streets were crowded. Instead, it was full of market stalls, and money changers. This was sickening to Jesus. God is about holiness and he had had enough of this. So his entourage start turning over the tables, releasing animals and birds, pushing out the vendors, and blocking off the short-cut. There are people diving for the shekels that were flying everywhere, and general mayhem is being caused on Holy week Monday. **Jesus shouts out "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called for all nations the house of prayer'? But you have made it a den of thieves."** (Mk 11v17 from Isaiah 56v7 & Jeremiah 7v?)

Jesus is not just having a bad day; I am hungry so I will curse a tree and vandalise the temple. No, he is broken-hearted that the religious leaders are keeping people away from God, with their man-made profit making Religion.

More about Monday

To find more about this Monday you have to look in Johns Gospel (12v20-50). Here the teachings compliment the warning of the cursed fig tree.

He talks about a grain of wheat falling into the ground. If it dies to self, it will produce many grains. But those who love their own life, will lose it. An especially important message for the Jewish leaders. They are self preserving their seed, protecting what they have, and not dying to self, and trusting God the Father, and his son Jesus.

Then in another unique passage we see Jesus troubled by this heavy burden he is carrying, and it is like the prayer he gave later in the Garden of Gethsemane. **'My soul is troubled, save me from this hour, but no – this is why I came. I want you to be glorified'**. Then we hear the Fathers voice encourage Jesus, and says that glory has been brought to his name by Jesus and it will happen again. He is doing well, and he will carry on doing well to the end. Jesus concludes this by saying. **³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.** (John 12v31)

So we see him troubled on Holy week Monday, by the responsibility he is carrying to die for the world, but also the pain he feels because of the judgement that he knows will come on those who won't accept him.

Tuesday – the withered tree

They had gone back to Bethany that Monday evening, but again the next morning were taking the familiar walk back into Jerusalem, when Peter noticed the fig tree that Jesus had cursed. It was no longer leafy, but it had withered and died. The fig tree is full of moisture, so it would take a very long time to dry up and die. So to see the tree withered and dead within in a day was indeed a miracle. It is the first time that Jesus uses his power in a destructive way.

By Tuesday, we are now just 3 days from Good Friday. The withered Fig tree demonstrates that God the Father will bring judgement on those who do not accept forgiveness through Jesus, his Son, who is about to die for them.

Teaching Peter

Peter is really taken by the miracle of this withered fig tree, and he wants a comment from Jesus about the dead tree. Wow, what do you think of that Jesus? But Jesus does is not going to focus on the death of a religious system that prevents people from finding God, instead he wants the focus to be on what he does want from people. So Jesus says this to Peter.

.Have faith in God “Truly^d 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. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

He gives Peter three instructions.

First have in faith in Jesus and God. Trust Him.

Second, have an active prayer life, believing God can do great things through his prayers.

Thirdly, forgive others just like God had forgiven you.

This is what Jesus wants, and what God wants. This is the fruit that should have been on the tree of Israel. In addition to the fruit of repentance, saying sorry to God for what we have done wrong, he wants to see the fruit of Faith, prayer, and forgiveness. He wants relationship not religion. He wants a loving and forgiving people, who have faith in God, and power in prayer (which comes from being in line with the will and purposes of God). If the leaders had kept to that, then they would have had fruit on the Fig Tree of Israel and it would not have withered up and died.

What it doesn't mean

When Jesus says they no-one will ever eat fruit from the tree again. It does not mean that the Jews are beyond the love of God for ever. They are turning in numbers back to their homeland, with over 50% of Jews living there now, but they still need to turn to Jesus, with very few Jews finding faith in Jesus. But in Jesus there is always Hope. He has always wanted them to believe in Him and he still does.

It also does not mean, that we are cursed if we don't work hard for God. The bible says we are expected to produce good fruit (John 15) which comes out of our relationship with Jesus, because we love him and we want to please him. But first and foremost but we are loved by God for who we are nor for what we do. We are saved by Grace not by works. At the baptism of Jesus, Gods voice is heard saying ‘ This is my dear son, with whom I am well pleased’. He was well pleased with him, before he had even started his ministry. Jesus delights in you, for who you are. But as we delight in his love, he gives us the opportunity to busy ourselves in taking his love to others.

Still born spirituality

It is not religion that brings life, it is a person Jesus. Our new life comes out of that relationship with Jesus.

We are born spiritually dead. In that respect we are still-born. CS Lewis said that God did not send Jesus to make bad people good but to make dead people alive. We are the walking dead until we accept new life from Jesus. If all our lives, we keep saying No God. No God. No God, then at the end of our lives there will be no God. We walk from the spiritually dead to the eternal dead. Religion is not Faith.

The Religious rulers set out great ambition in all of their religious rules, and some no doubt made some aspects of their life very difficult for themselves. Even today the Jewish rules on Sabbath seem equally extreme. Some orthodox Jews will not only say you can not drive a car on the Sabbath because that is work, but you can be a passenger in a non-Jews car, because your extra weight makes the car work harder. Unless it's an emergency, then that's okay.

Some people spend all their lives climbing a ladder, and when they finally get to top near the end of their lives, they realise the ladder is leaning on the wrong wall. You can spend your life in tune with the drum-beat of the world, following the expectations and values it place on you, or you can break free and follow the beat of the heart of Jesus. Climb his ladder, produce his fruit.

You might be looking at some hopes and dreams that have withered and died. You may have pursued something that looked very promising from a distance, like the fig tree, but ultimately was disappointing for you, and left you hungry and upset or annoyed.

What Jesus said to Peter as he stares at a withered fig tree, is the same as he says to us today. Have faith in Jesus, believe in him. Get in-line with his purposes and will for your life, be forgiving of others, and then see some incredible answers to your prayers.

How hungry are you ?

Jesus was not in a bad mood because he was hungry for figs. But was he hungry? If so what for?

Jesus was facing the joint heavy burdens of the impending cross, and of rejection from the Jewish leaders and many of the ordinary people. So how did he keep going? Because he was hungry to do the will of his Father. He caught the Temple leaders by surprise on Monday by ramsacking the court of the Gentiles. But the next day they would have had time to regroup and gang up on Jesus though probably didn't expect to see him the next day. Jesus went back anyway to teach as normal as if nothing happened. Time was running out for him and he needed to be there on the Tuesday. Anybody else might have taking the day off, or even laid low for a bit. Jesus knew the will of his Father, and just wanted to bring Glory to him.

We view hunger as negative but this is not necessarily true. Proverbs say [The appetite of labourers works for them; their hunger drives them on.](#) (Prov 16v26)

Have you ever been so hungry that you would eat anything? I was trekking in Algeria and was without food. Eventually we got given some small fish which we fried up, and just ate the lot, head and tail. At that time if was edible I would have ate it. I was desperate to eat. Jesus was desperate to do the will of God.

How hungry are you to do the will of God, to please Jesus, to produce fruit for him. He describes himself as the Bread of life, and the life-giving water. Water and a nice granary load is good for you, but if you drink a pint of fizz lemonade and half a dozen jam donuts, you aren't going to be yearning after the bread and water.

If you binge on junk food, what is really nutritious does not appeal and will be squeezed out. The same with our lives we can binge our minds on junk and fill it with all sorts of unsuitable stuff, and then we lose our hunger for Jesus.

If you are not feeling hungry for Jesus, then perhaps there is some area of your life you need to cut back on, cut out. Everyones different, TV, internet, sport, career, lying around, long walks. All are good in the right quantity but if we indulge we will squeeze out our hunger for God. If you want more of Jesus, then what are you doing in your life right now, that you need to cut back on.

Leaves or Fruit?

Are you hungry for Jesus, are you producing good fruit for him. What does your life look like right now. From a distance to you may look good to others. Some-one that has got it all sorted ? But what if they go too close to you, could it be that you are all show and no substance, all leaves but no fruit. We can go to church, and do a lot of religious activities, without producing any fruit.

We have a simple faith which revolves around trusting Jesus and loving others like he loves you. But we need time and space to do that.

Is Jesus calling you back today to a simple faith in him. Believe that Jesus died for you and loves you. Forgive others like Jesus forgave you. Know what is good, and align yourself with the good things of God. Pray for him to help you live out the good life he has destined for you. Step out in faith and take this simple Gospel, and this love of Jesus, to those around you. Pray and believe in your prayers, and see him do great things through you, and be fruitful for him.

Perhaps there is something that is holding you back from that simple life of faith. Your ladder is on the wrong wall, or you have a different drum beat in your ears.

Perhaps instead you are focussing on Jesus, you are grafted into the right tree, climbing the right ladder. However there is something which is preventing you from progressing in your faith. Something that you need to lay down and break off from your past.

Then ask Jesus what it is that you need to lay down today for him. What is your sacrifice that you can lay down at the feet of Jesus. What beautiful fragrance will you leave as you lay down your old life for him, and take up a new one, one that will bear much fruit