

1. **Introduction:** In the next few verses, Jesus curses the fig tree (11:12-14), cleanses the Temple (11:15-19), and explains the fig tree's cursing to the disciples (11:15-19). This is another example of a sandwich.
 - We will take 12-14 and 20-26 together as the story of the odd fig tree.
 - It seems strange to curse a fig tree. Why curse a part of nature that has no spiritual heart, no ability to sin, and no power of making decisions?
2. **Mark 11:12-14:** ***"On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ And he said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it."***
 - ***"The following day"*** identifies the day of this event as the Monday after the Triumphal Entry on Sunday.
 - As they come from Bethany, Jesus is said to be hungry. Why Jesus would be hungry after just leaving Lazarus' home, we don't know. Jesus' hunger reminds us that He is human as well as God.
 - Seeing a leafy fig tree some distance away, He goes close to check for ripe figs. He no doubt was aware Passover (maybe April) was not the normal season for ripe figs. Regular figs were ripe August to October.
 - There is an explanation. Fig trees in the Mideast begin to have leaves in March. With the leaves small figs or buds from the previous year's sprouts. These small figs get ripe in May or June.
 - The time of Passover is not the season for figs of either type. Jesus would have been aware of that fact. What then is the issue?
 - Why does Jesus curse the fig tree? There are two things to notice.
 - (1.) If a fig tree fails to develop early buds, it will not develop the later larger figs. There will be no fruit at all. This tree had abundant leaves and should have had buds but had none. It will have no fruit.
 - Maybe Jesus decided to use the tree to teach an important lesson. If a person who professes to follow Jesus produces outward signs of faith (leaves) but no buds and no fruit, they are not true followers.
3. **Matthew 7:21:** ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."***
 - There were no buds which meant there would be no fruit later. A fig tree bearing no fruit is useless, so Jesus causes it to wither.

- (2.) What Jesus has done is create a “concrete metaphor” applicable to Israel and fruitless people who claim to be followers of Jesus.
 - Jesus did not curse the fig tree as punishment. The “lovely to look at” but barren fig tree was an apt physical metaphor for Israel.
 - The metaphor also applied to people who do externally visible good things (leaves) for motives (not buds) that do not come from a redeemed heart (Matthew 7:21).
 - The people of Matthew 7:21ff did works that were beneficial. The problem was that the works did not come from buds of righteousness produced by being like Jesus. They were the product of other motives.
 - Israel’s failure to produce the fruit of righteousness was made obvious by the rejection of the Messiah.
 - The Messiah had come as prophesied, but the religious elite refused to acknowledge Him and believe. Instead, they sought to eliminate Him, since they considered Him to be a “pretender.”
 - Israel was full of bustling religious activity especially at Passover. But the “leaves of activity” produced no fruitful actions to support Messiah.
 - Jesus’ concrete parable of the fig tree implied Israel was like a fig tree having leaves but no buds and hence no fruit.
 - The disciples were deeply impressed by Jesus’ cursing the fig tree & cleansing the Temple. These two symbolic acts had a single meaning – unfruitful Israel (many pious displays but no fruit) will be uprooted.
4. **Luke 13:6-9**: *“And he (Jesus) told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.’⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’⁸ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.’⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”*
- Israel had opportunities to produce the fruit of righteousness but repeatedly failed. Would the coming of Messiah change that picture? If not, Israel will be “cut down.”
 - The actions against Jesus will make Israel’s downfall certain.
 - On Tuesday morning, Jesus and the disciples pass that way again.
5. **Mark 11:20-25**: *“As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.”²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”²² And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.”²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe*

that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”*

- Peter and the other disciples were astonished as they came to the fig tree. Yesterday (Monday), it had been vigorous and green with leaves. Now it was a dead tree. How could that happen so fast?
- Peter did not question Jesus’ about why He cursed the fig tree, he simply wanted to know how a tree could die in 24 hours or less?
- Jesus responds with ***“Have faith in God.”*** Then metaphorically, Jesus says that if you pray without doubting in your heart, even if say to “this mountain” be cast into the sea, it will be so.
- “This mountain” refers to the Mount of Olives. The “sea” refers to the Dead Sea. For this to happen would mean plucking the Mount of Olives up and dropping it about 4000 feet into the Dead Sea.
- This clearly is a metaphorical expression.
- From the context of this metaphor, which deals with faith and prayer, Jesus means no task in harmony with God’s will is impossible to those who do not doubt but trust God.
- Verse (11:24) confirms that view, ***“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*** Prayer must be in submission to God’s sovereign will.
- The reference to moving a mountain is reminiscent of Zech 4:7a, ***“Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.”*** It is a mountain of difficulties that will disappear.
- Remember that the disciples had already been doing things that would have seemed just as “impossible” as causing a mountain to be lifted up and thrown into the sea.
- Peter “by faith” had walked on the water. A few days later the disciples were startled to realize that when commanded in Jesus name, even demons were subject to them.
- Soon, Jesus (John 14:12) would say ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”***
- What Jesus said here about prayer is exactly what He means.
- Back to the fig tree metaphor. The fig tree was a metaphor for Israel as God’s covenant people. Israel appeared to have life and health but failed to bear the fruit of righteousness (healthy leaves but no fruit).
- Israel’s spiritual & political leaders had long since placed their faith in something other than God.

- For protection, Israel relied, not on God, but on treaties with nations.
 - They used political intrigue against their internal foes.
 - There was little difference between Israel and worldly nations.
 - In only a few days, Israel would tragically reject and execute its Messiah. In consequence, they would be cursed.
 - Jesus' directive, ***“Have faith in God”*** leads to a discussion on prayer.
 - Jesus placed three conditions on effective petitionary prayer to God.
 - (1.) Pray without doubting God's power to accomplish what you ask or doubting His goodness and love for you.
 - (2.) Pray accepting that God's power and goodness will accomplish your intent in the best possible way.
 - (3.) Pray after cleansing yourself of all grudges by forgiving so that God may forgive your trespasses.
 - Many Scripture passages inform us that disharmony with others hinders prayer. Obedient forgiveness increases prayer's effectiveness.
 - Prayer is effective and pleasing to God only when it comes from a loving obedient spiritual heart.
 - Jesus said, ***“whenever you stand praying.”*** Standing to pray was not unusual at that time. But the posture of prayer was not the issue. The issue was attitude of heart and mind. Alert, humble reverence and genuineness are vital.
 - Remember the Pharisee and Tax Collector praying. Both stood, but their attitudes were totally different, and only one prayer was honored.
6. Next lesson begins with Mark 11:27.

