

## Dried Up From The Roots

Our Lord Jesus left us several curious examples of His humanity and divinity in incidents designed to teach lessons to His disciples, a feature we have noted often in our studies in Mark. His cursing of a fig tree is one such. Jesus was hungry and went to a tree looking for food. However, despite an outward show of greenery the fig tree was barren of fruit.

### **Another object lesson**

Speaking to the tree the Lord said, 'No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever'. The Lord's words were taken by the disciples as a curse upon the tree and the next day they marvelled to see the tree dried up and withered not only in its green leaves and branches but from its roots. Peter was astonished at the speed of the transformation and said so to Jesus.

### **A small miracle**

The Lord's response to Peter's comments show there was a lesson in the miracle and a deeper spiritual significance to the incident than mere food or figs. Perhaps the Lord was contrasting Jewish religious pride with its actual spiritual poverty; the overnight withering of the fig tree suggesting Judaism's rapid decline and the destruction of Jerusalem.

### **The curse of empty religion**

There is a broader application, too. No religion can serve a man's spiritual need or nourish a woman's soul if it does not approach God upon His terms and by Jesus Christ, His revealed Way. There may be natural energy, enthusiasm and excitement in the rituals and religion of the world, and plenty of show, but if true spirituality is absent all such activity merely clutters people's lives just as a fruitless fruit tree clutters the ground.

### **The necessity of faith**

However, the Lord does not merely expose the problem, He supplies the solution. Faith is the essence of fruitfulness and must be at the heart of all spiritual worship and service. Without faith it is impossible to please God. The Lord drew the attention of His disciples back to first principles in man's approach to God to teach them, and us, the necessity of faith and its power to effect change and transform lives.

### **Faith a free gift**

Remember, these men, Judas excepted, were believers, so it was not saving faith the Lord was enjoining; that is, faith in the promises of God and the person of Christ. Rather it was faith in the power of God to perform miraculous things above the strength of nature. None can 'have faith' if it is not first given as a free gift of God. The disciples had faith in Christ and understood the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the coming days they would begin to grasp more completely the significance of the Saviour's death and resurrection, and their own continuing role in His service. It was in these apostolic duties that the disciples' faith to perform miracles would be tested.

### **Faith in God's power**

The Lord tells the disciples that with faith, they would personally prove the power of God in their own ministries and be able to do miracles comparatively much greater than causing a mere fig tree to wither. By faith they would move a mountain and cast it into the sea. They were close to the Mount of Olives, and likely the Sea of Galilee came most readily to the disciples' mind.

### **The work of the Gospel**

Whatever mountain and sea might be involved, literal or figurative, for the sake of the gospel of Christ, and the souls of elect sinners, the apostles would be able to perform things much more difficult and surprising than they could presently conceive. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to Isaiah who prophesied, 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain'. Thereby, the way of salvation would be revealed to sinners by the faithful and successful ministry of the Lord's disciples.

### **Christ prepares His apostles**

This must have been a wonderful encouragement to Christ's disciples who soon would be left bereft of their Master. In time, each would prove the truth of the Lord's words as Christ enabled their service and went with them 'even unto the end'. The Lord would prove to them, and through them, that He will indeed move mountains to gather His people and establish His church.

### **Forgiven and forgiving**

The Lord's closing reference to forgiveness reminds us that grace, not law, regulates a believer's conduct. We who have enjoyed divine forgiveness have been shown a life blessed by mercy and touched with love and grace. Such qualities, once experienced, will be evident in the life of Christ's redeemed people. Having been forgiven, we forgive one another, having been loved, we love one another, we care for each other having tasted the Lord's goodness and mercy in our own souls. In such ways the elect of God bear the fruit of our salvation, revealing Christ in us, our hope of glory.

Amen

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