

## Cursing Tree & Clearing Temple

Mark 11:12-26

ABC 2/19/24

Last week we looked at Mark's account of Jesus approaching Jerusalem as the messianic King in fulfillment of Zech 9:9. He borrowed a young donkey & rode it into Jerusalem as the disciples & crowds threw their clothes & branches in His path while shouting, **Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!** (Mk 11:9-10). But Jesus wasn't the type of king they wanted. He didn't come to conquer Rome & restore Israel. He came to conquer sin & redeem His people. Mark's account of what we know as *The Triumphal Entry* ends with these words: **Jesus entered Jerusalem & came into the temple; & after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late** (11:11). He looked around the temple complex & quietly left to spend the night in Bethany. It's fair to assume His disciples went to bed that night excited by the events of the day. In our text today (Mk 11:12-16) Jesus does 2 symbolic things: He curses a fig tree & *clears* the temple. Let's read it & then get into it. **12-26**

A quick comment on that last verse. Many of your Bibles either omit it, have brackets around it, or have a note stating it's not in the oldest manuscripts, meaning it was probably added by a later copyist, taking it from Mt 6:15. As we read the passage, vs 26 probably isn't what you focused on. If you're like me, you focused on the fig tree because it seems so odd. Before we get to it, notice that Mark *sandwiches* the *clearing* of the temple between the beginning & end of the fig tree event. We've seen Mark do this before (3:20-34; 6:7-30; etc), & by doing so he's saying both events are linked. Here, they're linked in that they interpret each other. What are we to see? God's judgment against Jerusalem & the Temple because of their lack of fruit.

**1. Fig Tree** (12-14) The cursing of the fig tree is the last miracle in Mark, other than Jesus' resurrection, & is the only miracle of destruction in the gospels (unless you include the herd of swine in Mk 5). Some find it troubling. Why curse a tree that fails to satisfy His hunger? Mark's bracketing technique offers a solution & corrects any thoughts that Jesus gives into a fit of irrational anger. I'm told fig trees in Israel produce 2 crops. The 1<sup>st</sup> comes in the spring on the

previous year's shoots. These are the early figs (Is 28:4; Jer 24:2; Hos 9:10; Mic 7:1). The main crop comes in late summer. Since this is Passover, Jesus would have been looking for the early fruit.<sup>1</sup> He's disappointed to find only leaves on the tree & no fruit. In response, He curses the tree. This seems to many as petty & vindictive & has caused much embarrassment & debate. Mark's comment, **because it was not the season for figs** (13), makes it even worse, since Jesus should know better than to expect fruit out of season. Bertrand Russell, in his essay *Why I Am Not a Christian*, singled out this passage for criticism:

*This is a very curious story, because it was not the right time of year for figs, & you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history.<sup>2</sup>*

He thought this incident showed that Jesus wasn't a righteous man, let alone the Son of God, because He expressed vindictive fury on an innocent plant. Even some Christian scholars are perplexed by this story, saying it represents a waste of supernatural power or it's not worthy of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Yet Jesus' actions are neither petty nor vindictive if He's intentionally acting out a parable showing the unfruitfulness of Israel & the nation's coming judgment. This isn't a fit of temper against an innocent tree but an object lesson for the benefit of the disciples. Jesus didn't curse the tree because He was hungry & it didn't provide what it promised. He could do without food (Mt 4:1-4) or create food (Mk 8:1-9). The reason Jesus cursed the fig tree was because He wanted it to become a visual parable of what was happening to Israel. What happens to the fig tree parallels what happens to the veil in the temple, ripped from top to bottom. It points to judgment on the temple & emphasizes the significance of Jesus' death. Jesus, among other things, was a prophet. One of the most graphic forms of prophetic communication in the OT was the object lesson. The prophet would take something from nature or everyday life & use it to communicate God's truth. Here Jesus found an object that illustrated unfruitfulness. This tree had the appearance of fruitfulness but was barren. Jesus took the opportunity & *used the fig tree to set forth the judgment that was about to fall on Jerusalem.*<sup>4</sup> Fig trees are common symbols in the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 491

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian & Other Essays*, p 19

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *Mark*, p 280

<sup>4</sup> Victor of Antioch (5<sup>th</sup> century) wrote it was an acted parable in which Jesus *used the fig tree to set forth the judgment that was about to fall on Jerusalem.*

OT for Israel & her spiritual unfruitfulness (Is 28:4; Jer 8:13; 24:1–10; 29:17; Hos 2:12; 9:10, 16–17; Mic 7:1). Most famous is the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5 (1–7), where God pronounces judgment against Israel at the hand of the Assyrians because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. In the parable of the wicked tenant farmers in Mk 12 (1–12), Jesus adapts Isaiah’s parable, portraying Israel’s leaders as wicked tenant farmers who will be judged because they rejected the owner’s messengers (God’s prophets) & the owner’s Son (Jesus Himself). The fig tree’s withering, sandwiched around the clearing of the temple, represents the destruction of the temple & Jerusalem, & the whole nation will suffer the consequences of the leaders’ actions.<sup>5</sup> Under their leadership, the nation (except its righteous remnant) is unfruitful & will suffer the consequences. All this still leaves unexplained Mark’s final comment, **it was not the season for figs**. On one hand, if Jesus was looking for early fruit, then Mark is wrong, since it *is* the season of (early) figs. On the other hand, if it wasn’t the season of figs, Jesus seems dishonest in looking for them. Various explanations have been proposed, none that completely explain it. One commentator paraphrases the last clause, *It was, of course, not the season for figs, but it was for early figs*.<sup>6</sup> The problem is that Mark doesn’t actually say this. Why make the comment if early figs were in season? The Greek in vs 13 doesn’t say Jesus was looking for figs specifically, but for *something* on the tree, perhaps the early figs.<sup>7</sup> But fixating on this risks missing Mark’s point. Whatever the case, Jesus turned a search for a snack into an object lesson on faith & spiritual unfruitfulness. The fact that this fig tree had foliage, but had no fruit portrayed exactly what Jesus had seen in Jerusalem & the temple the night before. Israel was a barren tree & the magnificence of the Temple hid the fact that Israel hadn’t produced the fruit of righteousness demanded by God. When Jesus cursed this tree, He may have had Jeremiah’s words in mind: **“I will surely snatch them away,” declares the Lord; “There will be no grapes on the vine & no figs on the fig tree, & the leaf will wither; & what I have given them will pass away”** (8:13). The tree gives the impression that it might have something to eat, just as the temple gives the impression it’s a

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<sup>5</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 493

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, pp 339–340

<sup>7</sup> Robert Gundry, *Mark*, p 636

place dedicated to the service of God. The temple profits only the religious leaders & it profits nothing for God.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Temple** Mark now gets to the middle of the sandwich. **15-16**

The temple was built on a massive, raised platform some 500 yards north to south & over 300 yards east to west. The outer court, the Court of Gentiles, was lined on the south side with a covered portico known as *Solomon's Colonnade*. Josephus says the colonnade was made up of 162 columns set in 4 rows, each 30 ft tall. This outer court was as far as Gentiles could go. Plaques on the gates leading into the inner court warned Gentiles that entrance would result in their immediate death. The inner court, in which the temple proper stood, was made up of the Court of Women, the Court of Israel (only for Jewish men), & the Court of Priests. Jesus' actions took place in the Court of the Gentiles. Keep in mind, the Jews hated the Gentiles & expected when the Messiah came, He'd cleanse the temple of the Gentiles & get rid of them once & for all.<sup>9</sup> That's not what Jesus did. Instead, He **drives out** the sellers & buyers & overturned the money changers' tables. The money changers exchanged various currencies for the coin used to pay the temple tax. Every Jewish male 20 years or older was required to pay the annual half-shekel temple tax (Ex 30:11–16; Neh 10:32–33). So much for the one-sided *gentle Jesus, meek & mild*. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Qualities we consider to be lamb-like, gentleness & meekness, are in Christ, but so are the regalness & the ferocity of a lion. The Scriptures speak of **the wrath of the Lamb** (Rev 6:16). To be sure, Jesus is the meekest, gentlest person who ever lived. He said, **for I am gentle & humble in heart** (Mt 11:29). But meekness isn't weakness but strength under control. Meekness has the strength to not defend oneself but will boldly defend others. Here Jesus struck out in defense of the holiness of God the Father.<sup>10</sup> This cleansing is largely symbolic, like His entry into Jerusalem. Otherwise, the temple police or Roman soldiers would have been quick to intervene.

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<sup>8</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, p 440

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, p 286

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 2, p 89

Jesus isn't opposing the transactions themselves. The merchants performed a vital service for the temple, providing sacrificial animals & valid currency for pilgrims coming to Jerusalem. It's their location in the temple & the disruption of worship that's the problem. This is indicated by the fact that Jesus clears not just the sellers, but also the buyers, & then prevents merchandise from passing through the temple courts. Jesus is creating & protecting sacred space. It's the temple's function as a house of prayer that's being compromised by the business.<sup>11</sup> The whole purpose of God's temple had been distorted & corrupted.

But why would Jesus attempt to cleanse something He predicts will soon be destroyed (13:2)? The best answer is that *He doesn't intend to reform the temple*. Jesus, as a prophet, doesn't simply make announcements, He also engages in prophetic actions to communicate truth. Jesus appears here as a prophet & graphically acts out God's rejection of the temple & its coming destruction. He attacks the function of the temple & heralds its destruction. The temple's days are coming to an end. In private, Jesus will predict to His disciples that the temple will be destroyed (13:1-2), & His hostility to the temple emerges as a charge at His trial (14:58) & as a taunt at the cross (15:29). **17**

Jesus cites 2 passages to justify His actions. The main quote comes from Is 56:7, followed by the phrase, **robbers' den** from Jer 7:11. Jesus seeks to restore the temple as **a house of prayer for all the peoples** (Is 56:7). This means that God didn't plan for the temple to be only for Israel. Isaiah 56 gives God' promise of blessing for all who might think they're excluded from God's salvation: the foreigner (56:3), the eunuch (56:4), & the outcasts of Israel (56:8). Most Jews assumed that Isaiah 56 spoke of some distant future, but Jesus expects it to be fulfilled right then. During His ministry Jesus has been gathering in the impure, the outcasts, the disabled, & has even reached out to Gentiles. He expects the temple to do the same. But the temple had become a Jewish symbol that served only to divide Israel from the nations. As stated in the OT, the temple was meant to be the light of God's glory to all the nations. If it were to become what God intended, **a house of prayer for all the nations**, walls would have to crumble. As we know, walls will soon

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<sup>11</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 495

collapse & barriers will be breached. When Jesus dies, the veil is split from top to bottom & a Gentile confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (15:38–39).<sup>12</sup> Since the term for **robber** normally means *highway bandit* or *insurrectionist* rather than extortionist (cf 14:48; 15:27, it's unclear whether it refers here to the sellers, who may or may not be charging exorbitant prices, or to the priestly nobility, under whose authority the temple has become a defiled place. By quoting from Jer 7, Jesus reminds the people that something holy can be perverted. He claims that the same abuses that tainted the temple in the time of Jeremiah stain it now. The temple, God's house, has been made into **a robbers' den**. The robbers aren't swindlers but bandits, & they don't do their robbing in their den. The den is the place where they retreat after having committed their crimes. It's their hideout, a place of security & refuge. Calling the temple a **robbers' den** isn't necessarily a cry of outrage against the dishonest business practices in the temple. Jesus indirectly attacks them for allowing the temple to degenerate into a hiding place where people think they find forgiveness & fellowship with God no matter how they act on the outside. Jesus' actions & words attack a false trust in the effectiveness of the temple sacrificial system. **18**

It was this action more than any other that led to Jesus' arrest & execution. Yet what was the significance of the event? Was Jesus *cleansing* the temple, purging & restoring it for authentic worship or was He was judging it & predicting its destruction? I believe He was predicting that God would destroy the present temple & rebuild another **made without hands** (14:58). Even more importantly, the parallel & sandwiching of the temple cleansing with the withered fig tree indicate an act of judgment leading to destruction. Jesus is acting with messianic authority. As God's agent, He calls the religious authorities to restore true worship to the temple or face God's judgment & destruction.

The gospel writers certainly see the temple's destruction as evidence of its replacement by Jesus & the new community of faith. He is the stone that was rejected yet became the cornerstone for the new temple of God (12:10). Since Jesus referred to His soon death as a ransom for sins (10:45) & since He would soon recreate the Passover meal centered on His own death rather

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<sup>12</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, p 438

than the sacrifice of lambs in the temple (14:22–25), He’s likely hinting at the ultimate replacement of the temple & its sacrificial system.

As you’d expect, Jesus’ actions provoke an adverse reaction from Jerusalem’s religious leaders. Two groups are named. The **chief priests** were the priestly aristocracy of Jerusalem. The **scribes** were the experts in religious law. They were angered with Jesus & feared His influence with the people. They plotted against Him to take His life. In just a few days, they’d accomplish their goal.<sup>13</sup> By acting against the temple, Jesus is challenging the priests at their center of authority. So they plot against Him. In contrast to the religious leaders, **the whole crowd** is astonished at Jesus’ teaching. Then, as is their pattern throughout Passion Week, Jesus & His disciples withdraw from the city for the night, probably to Bethany (19). The departure allows for the discovery of the fig tree the next morning.

### **3. Fig Tree** Mark now finishes the story of the fig tree. **20-21**

By sandwiching this episode with the temple clearing, Mark indicates both are symbolic gestures related to Israel’s unfruitfulness & the coming destruction of Jerusalem & the temple. The implication is that the tree represents the temple, where **not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down** (13:2). The lesson of the tree applies to Israel, symbolized in the OT as God’s fig tree. Just like the barren fig tree, Israel had proven unfruitful to God’s purpose for her. Her worship had become an exercise in hypocrisy. As the fig tree was cursed, so was the nation of Israel. It seems surprising that Jesus doesn’t explain the significance of what happened to the tree when the disciples marvel. Instead, He appears to turn the cursed tree into a lesson on faith & prayer. His comments reveal the essence of the new order that replaces the old, one based on faith in God (22) that overcomes insurmountable odds (23), is sustained by grace (24), & is characterized by forgiveness (25).<sup>14</sup> **22**

**A. Trust God in Prayer** Peter noticed the withered fig tree & Mark tells us, **Jesus answered & said to them, “Have faith in God”** (22). This is a command from Jesus to His disciples &, by extension, to us. He was saying, *Trust God*. Trusting God is the obligation of everyone. It’s a moral, ethical,

<sup>13</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, p 287

<sup>14</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, p 441

& spiritual duty, because not to trust God is to question the truth of His Word, His promises, & His character. It's possible Jesus commanded the disciples to have faith because both the cursing of the fig tree & the cleansing of the temple illustrated infidelity, which is faithlessness. The temple, which was meant to be the place where God's people focused their faith & trust in Him, had become a monument of unfruitfulness & unbelief. The fig tree, which was designed to obey its Creator by bearing figs, also proved fruitless. Maybe these 2 examples of faithlessness prompted Jesus to issue this command. Another possibility is the disciples may have been astonished at the power of Jesus to cause a fig tree to die by His spoken curse. Perhaps they were asking, *What kind of power is this?* & Jesus was saying to them that the power of faith makes possible deeds far greater than the killing of a fig tree. Faith acting through prayer is able to move mountains. **23**

Though the mountain is, of course, proverbial, in Mark's context it likely refers either to the Temple Mount or the Mount of Olives. Both would fit the context. Jesus' point isn't about identifying the mountain, but the power of faith. Moving a mountain is proverbial for something humanly impossible, but possible with God (cf Zech 4:7). If you pray with faith, Jesus says, you will receive what you ask for. This is a common theme in Jesus' teaching (Mt 7:7; 18:19; Lk 11:9; Jn 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24). Jesus then added, **24**.

We have to be careful with this verse. A whole theology based on this vs has permeated Christianity around the world. The *name it & claim it* theology says that all we have to do to receive something we want is to claim it by faith as ours in Jesus' name, & we will receive it. The Bible gives us a lot of teaching about prayer, repeatedly stressing the importance of trusting God for the answers to our prayers. Therefore, a statement like this has to be understood in light of all of that teaching, especially the qualifications about how God answers our prayers. Of course, this is not the only lesson Jesus ever gave on prayer; & we must be careful not to isolate it from the rest of Scripture. Prayer must be in the will of God (1 John 5:14-15), & the one praying must be abiding in the love of God (John 15:7-14). Prayer is not an emergency measure that we turn to when we have a problem. Real prayer is a part of our constant communion with God & worship



of God.<sup>15</sup> True prayer isn't trying to get God to change His will but an endeavor to release His will in our own lives. Prayer is like a boat hook that a sailor uses to pull the craft to its anchoring place. He doesn't try to pull the shore to the boat, but the other way around. In prayer we should draw ourselves to God & not try to pull God down to us.

Think of the statement by Jesus: **I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven** (Mt 18:19). That's easy to test. It wouldn't be hard to find 2 people who'd agree that war should be abolished, cancer should be cured, or injustice eliminated. Does this mean these things will be granted by the Father? No, it's not saying that. This verse, as all vss, must be understood in light of the consistent teaching of Scripture that we must pray in accordance with the will of God. What was Jesus saying about the relationship between faith & answers to prayer? When we fall on our knees & cry out to God, & we give Him the concerns of our hearts, we can know that He always hears & answers perfectly. But we tend to think that if God doesn't do what we ask, He hasn't answered. Jesus, in agony, prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, asking, **Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me** (Mt 26:39). Does the fact that Jesus went to the cross the next day mean the Father didn't answer Him? No, He did answer Jesus' prayer. His answer was *No, it's not possible*. We need to remember that Jesus also prayed, **yet not as I will, but as You will** (39). Jesus' response was, in essence, *If You say 'no' to My request, I say 'yes' to what You want Me to do*. That is the prayer of faith. That's trusting God.<sup>16</sup> Believers are called to pour out their hearts before God in persistent, passionate prayer (Ps 62:8), but their prayers must always be qualified by the desire that His will, not theirs, be done. Such prayers acknowledge that His will is greater, purer, wiser, more generous, more gracious, & more merciful than anything we could ever imagine.<sup>17</sup>

**B. Forgiveness & Prayer** Jesus concludes his explanation with the promise, **25**.

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<sup>15</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, p 150

<sup>16</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, p 292

<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 147

The topic shifts from faith & prayer to prayer & forgiveness. Our failure to forgive others isn't only harmful to our relationship with them, but also with God. So Jesus commands His followers to offer forgiveness, just as they've been forgiven. This parallels Mt 5:23–24, where the context is offering a sacrifice in the temple. Forgiving others as a prerequisite for forgiveness from **your heavenly Father** also appears in the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:12) & elsewhere (6:14–15). Relationship with God is based simply on faith & forgiveness. If one can unleash God's power by faith & find forgiveness through prayer & a forgiving spirit, the temple has been bypassed, & a house of prayer that has become a robber's den has no more use than a fruitless fig tree. God's power is available to those, including Gentiles, who have faith that it can be unleashed apart from the temple. The temple with its priesthood, sacrifices, & taxes is no longer the place of God's presence, where one meets God & where sins are forgiven. By the time Mark writes, the temple is already destroyed or soon would be. The forgiveness in view here isn't the eternal forgiveness that accompanies salvation, which isn't based on works (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7) & can't be lost. As was the case in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:14–15), Jesus here referred to relational forgiveness, the sins that are part of believers' daily lives & disrupt their enjoyment of fellowship with the Lord. To attempt to pray while harboring an unforgiving spirit against another person is self-defeating. Since the Bible commands believers, **Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you** (Eph 4:32); to fail to do so is a sin. & since the psalmist wrote, **If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear** (Ps 66:18), such a person's prayers won't be heard. The choice believers face is clear: hold a grudge or have their prayers heard. To put it another way, one can't accept the full, gracious forgiveness of God & then be unforgiving of someone else (Mt 18:23–35).<sup>18</sup>

So what does all of this mean? Jesus' actions in the temple were both a symbolic cleansing & a pronouncement of coming destruction. As with His teaching, miracles, & entering Jerusalem as King (11:1–11; cf Zech 9:9), Jesus is acting with messianic authority. Just as Solomon dedicated the 1<sup>st</sup> Jerusalem temple & other kings of Judah restored the purity of its worship, so Jesus

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<sup>18</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 149

symbolically casts out the sellers & temporarily restores the temple as a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus' actions reveal even greater authority. In the OT it's God himself who pronounces judgment on the nation Israel for her sins of idolatry & unfruitfulness. In Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Is 5:1-7), the owner of the vineyard is God, who breaks down the vineyard's walls so the Assyrians can overrun & destroy her. Jesus is acting in the role of Yahweh Himself, pronouncing judgment against Israel's unfaithfulness. He is **the Lord** who comes suddenly to His temple to purge & to judge (Mal 3:1). It's no wonder that in the next episode, the religious leaders will challenge Jesus to tell by what authority He's performing these actions (11:27-28).

The fig tree's problem is that it's bearing no fruit & this is the problem of Israel & her leaders. Jesus' actions against the fig tree & the temple point forward to the parable of the tenant farmers (12:1-12), in which the vineyard's caretakers, Israel's leaders, refuse to return the owner's share of the produce, killing the owner's messenger, & eventually his son. For this they face judgment, as the owner comes & kills the tenants & gives the vineyard to others (12:9). This theme also recalls Jesus' parable of the sower, in which the seed fails to bear fruit in many who hear it (4:1-12). The religious leaders are like the seed that's snatched by Satan before it even has a chance to sprout (4:4, 15). The people, who at this point in Mark are still amazed & delighted at His teaching, are like the seed on rocky ground, who receive the message with joy but will soon fall away. The question hanging heavy over this all is whether the disciples will eventually bear fruit or will they too fall away? Obviously, the responsibility to bear fruit has direct application to the church today. Jesus repeatedly tells parables about good stewardship, the need for His followers to be faithful with the gifts & calling God has given them (Mt 24:43-51; 25:1-13, 14-25; Lk 12:38-40, 42-46; 16:10-12; 19:11-27). In John's gospel Jesus speaks of the need to stay connected to the vine in order to bear fruit (Jn 15:1-8). The fruit we bear impacts others for the kingdom of God. This can refer to bringing others to Christ, the fruit of new birth in Christ, as well as our behavior that has a positive impact on others, the fruit of the Spirit that Paul refers to in Gal 5:22: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**

Jesus also turns these 2 events into a powerful lesson on faith, prayer, & forgiveness. He cites the common refrain through the NT that God answers prayer & that whatever we ask for we will receive (Mt 7:7; 17:20; 18:19; Mk 9:29; Lk 11:9; Jn 14:13–14; 15:7, 16; 16:23–24; Js 1:5–8; 1 Jn 5:14–15). This is because behind our requests stands the awesome Creator of the universe, who has infinite resources. Yet this promise mustn't be misunderstood as a promise that God will give us anything we selfishly want. There are some qualifications to this promise. Most importantly, we must ask according to God's will (1 Jn 5:14); we must ask in Jesus' name (Jn 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26), that is, in accord with the person & work of Jesus; we must ask from a position of obedience (1 Jn 3:21–22), & having forgiven others in the same way God has forgiven us (Mk 11:25). God isn't a magic genie or a cosmic bellhop who immediately jumps to meet our every desire. No, we are His slaves, & since He's redeemed us from Satan, sin, & death, we owe Him total allegiance. Our requests must therefore be according to His will & purposes (Mt 6:33).

Putting all of this together, fruitlessness invites a curse. Faith is the solution. Genuine faith results in fruit, prayer, & forgiveness. Is your life fruitful or fruitless? Do you have faith in God? Specifically, do you have faith in His Son who died in the place of sinners? Do you come here, sing hymns, bow your head in prayer, all without a relationship with Jesus? If so, then that's simply a show. Even if it's enthusiasm, it's empty enthusiasm. If that's the case, if you've not put your faith in Jesus, then let me invite you to do that, to trust Him, & put your faith in the eternal Son of God who took to Himself a human nature in order to die in the place of sinners so that all who come to Him will receive forgiveness. If you haven't done that, then you're very much like the fig tree & under a curse. My invitation to you is to believe in Jesus. For those who already know Jesus, how fruitful are you? How is your faith seen in your prayers & forgiveness of others?