

Lesson 76 – THE BARREN FIG TREE

Matthew 21:12-19

(Matt. 21:12-13) – It was the Passover, and Jews from many nations came to Jerusalem to observe this most sacred of feasts at the Temple of God. Recall that the Passover was one of the most beautiful and clear pictures of salvation by God’s grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (cf. Exod. 12). Each household was required to get a one-year old lamb that was without spot and without blemish and sacrifice the lamb and spread the blood on the doorposts of each house. Then they were to roast the lamb with fire and eat it while being dressed to leave Egypt under the leadership of God through Moses. God said that when He saw the blood, He would Passover them. All of this pictured the sinless sacrifice of Christ, based on the sins of His people imputed to Him, to satisfy God’s law and justice as their Substitute and Redeemer. Sadly, most of the people who participated in this feast were ignorant of the true Gospel meaning in these types and pictures.

Because Jewish law required a temple tax (Exodus 30:11–16), Jews and visitors from other nations came to pay their taxes when they offered their sacrifices. But foreign coins with the likeness of pagan emperors would not be accepted in God’s temple. So, money changers exchanged those foreign coins for Jewish money, but they did so at an exorbitant profit. Some also sold sacrificial animals, overcharging people who did not bring their own. Either way, they turned the Temple into “*DEN OF THIEVES*” instead of a “*HOUSE OF PRAYER*” and worship. So, the Lord “*OVERTHREW THE TABLES OF THE ONEYCHANGERS, AND THE SEATS OF THEM THAT SOLD DOVES.*” He drove them out of the Temple as He had done once before when He was there (John 2:14-16).

(Matt. 21:14) – Here is another instance of our Lord healing “*THE BLIND AND THE LAME*” who came to Him. This is another illustration of how the Lord heals us of our spiritual blindness and lameness by His grace and power to justify us by His righteousness imputed and give us life from the dead – the ability to see with spiritual eyes (John 3:1-7; 2 Cor. 4:6) and to walk by faith in Christ (2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:16,25). Christ Himself is the spiritual and eternal Temple (dwelling-place) of God (John 1:14; 2:18-22). In Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead, a holy God meets with sinners and sinners meet with and come near to God. There is no acceptance, thanksgiving, communion, or worship of God except through Christ and based upon the merits of His obedience unto death as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. He alone is the way to the Father (John 14:6; Heb. 10:19-22).

(Matt. 21:15-16) – When these religious leaders “*SAW THE WONDERFUL THINGS*” that Christ did, “*AND THE CHILDREN CRYING IN THE TEMPLE, AND SAYING, HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID; THEY WERE SORE DISPLEASED.*” Once again, as He did in verse 9, the Savior did not reject, but rather received the honors heaped upon Him. This

was an open affirmation that He is the one true Messiah, God manifest in the flesh. When the religious leaders heard the little children and saw Jesus healing more people, they were very displeased and wanted to rebuke Him and the children. Instead, Christ spoke words of reproach to them by quoting *Psalm 8:2* – “*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.*” The variation between *Psalm 8:2* in the phrase “*ordained strength*” and our text in the phrase “*perfected praise*” fits together to mean that the little children gave glory and praise to Jesus “with a strong voice.” If the religious leaders would not honor the Lord’s Christ, the children, in simple truthfulness and with strong voice, would shout forth His praise and glory.

(Matt. 21:17) – The Lord then left the disgruntled chief priests and scribes and went back to Bethany. Most would not receive Him (*John 1:11*), but others, such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, willingly received Him. May God be gracious and give us receptive hearts to receive and follow the Lord of glory (*John 1:12-13*).

(Matt. 21:18-19) – The Lord now returned to Jerusalem. Along the way “*HE HUNGRED.*” Things like this prove the Lord’s sinless humanity. In His humanity, He suffered the infirmities of human flesh, but without sin. Again, He was “made sin” only by imputation having the sin-debt of His sheep charged to Him so that He would justly suffer unto death for them (*Rom. 8:33-34; Heb. 4:15*). In the same way, we are made the righteousness of God in Him by the imputation of His righteousness to us so that we are justified by God’s grace through the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death (*2 Cor. 5:19-21*).

Seeing a “*FIG TREE*” in full leaf, He stopped to eat some of the figs. As it was not the time of the season for figs (*Mark 11:13*), and as the Lord knew this, He stopped here to make a point for His disciples. The Lord said unto the tree, “*LET NO FRUIT GROW ON THEE HENCEFORWARD FOR EVER. AND PRESENTLY THE FIG TREE WITHERED AWAY.*” This barren fig tree represents national Israel under the curse of God (*Gal. 3:10*). The people were ignorant of God’s righteousness and were going about to establish one of their own (*Rom. 9:31 – 10:3*). They rejected Christ, the only way of righteousness for sinners (*Rom. 10:4*). As we saw in their view of the Temple and the Passover feast, they had an outward form of religion, just as fig tree had leaves, but no life so as to bear fruit. Christ would tell their religious leaders later – “*Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*” (*Matt. 23:28*). This ought to remind us who are saved by God’s grace, that were it not for Christ “*being made a curse for us*” (*Gal. 3:13*), dying for our sins and establishing righteousness for us, we too would be cursed of God and wither unto death. Thank God for His grace that saves us and comes to us freely and fully in and by the Lord Jesus Christ!