

Prayer:

Slide # 1

Theme: *Christ the King*

Outline:

- Chps. 1-2 The Advent of the King. (Proving His LEGAL right to the throne by His genealogy.)
- Chp. 3 The Forerunner of the King and the King’s baptism.
- Chp. 4 The Test of the King. (Proving His MORAL right to the throne by not yielding to temptation; and exhibiting His kingdom resume.)
- Chps. 5-7 The Pronouncements of the King. (Proving His JUDICIAL right to the throne as seen in the wisdom of His kingdom teaching.)
- Chps. 8-10 The Power of the King. (Proving His PROPHETICAL right to the throne by fulfilling prophecy.)
- Chps. 11-12 The Rejection of the King.
- Chp. 13 The Parables of the King.
- Chps. 14-16 The Revelations of the King.
- Chps. 17-20 The Instructions of the King.
- Chps. 21-23 Formal Rejection of the King.**
- Chps. 24-25 The Predictions of the King.
- Chps. 26-27 The Passion of the King.
- Chp. 28 The Resurrection of the King.

In our study we have come to what is commonly called “**The Passion Week**” – that is the last week of Christ’s earthly ministry culminating in the crucifixion. At the start of this week Christ officially presented Himself to Israel as her Messiah as seen in the Triumphal Entry.

However, even though it seemed like the crowd was actually receiving Christ for Who He was, in truth the nation as a whole merely recognized Him as a prophet, and the city of Jerusalem itself led by its religious leaders did not truly receive Him.

For this reason, as Jesus came to the outskirts of Jerusalem He wept over the city as seen in Luke 19:41 because it did not “**know the time**” of their visitation (Lk. 19:44). In Matthew Jesus then cleansed the Temple which is followed thematically in our text today with the cursing of the fig tree.

There are actually 5 key events recorded in Matthew 21 involving Passion Week, however they are not given in chronological order.

Slide # 2

Five Major Events in Matthew 21

- ***The Triumphal Entry*** – Matt. 21:1-11
- ***The Cleansing of the Temple*** – Matt. 21:12-17
- ***The Lesson of the Fig Tree*** – Matt. 21:18-22
- ***Conflict over Christ's Authority*** – Mt. 21:23-27
- ***Parables Indicting Israel's Religious Leaders*** – Matt. 21:28-46

Matthew writes thematically to make the emphasis he wants to make while the parallel passage in Mark 11 presents what happened chronologically.

Slide # 3

Sunday

- Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
- Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem
- Jesus Enters and Inspects the Temple
- Jesus Returns to Bethany

Monday

- ***Jesus Curses the Fig Tree***
- Jesus Cleanses the Temple
- Jesus Returns to Bethany

Tuesday

- The disciples see the withered tree on the return to Jerusalem.

As I say Matthew (while presenting the same events) does not keep them in chronological order but rather presents them in a thematic order to make a certain point.

It is important to note the thematic context here because it points to the meaning of the lesson that is being brought across in relation to the cursing of the fig tree. The whole surrounding context is about judgment on Israel because of the rejection of their Messiah as led by the religious leaders.

The cleansing of the Temple was an indictment of the religious leaders and their corrupting of the worship center.

In Matthew right after the cursing of the fig tree, we find the religious leaders confronting Jesus about His authority to do the things He was doing at the temple.

So sandwiched right in the middle of conflict with the religious leaders who were leading the nation in their rejection of Christ, right in the middle of this context we have Jesus cursing the fig tree which is representative of Israel. This is the **CONTEXT** for this event.

Jesus in His last week performed two acts signifying judgment in that He cleansed the temple and He cursed the fig tree. This was contrary to Christ's normal ministry which was not about judgment. At the Second Coming He will be all about judgment, but at His first coming He came presenting GRACE (cf. Jn. 1:17).

Slide # 4

John 1:17 (NKJV)

17 For the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ.

John 3:17 (NKJV)

17 For **God did not send His Son into the world to condemn** the world, but that the world through Him **might be saved**.

However, the nation in the rejection of Jesus as their Messiah was now facing judgment because of it and this is now what Christ is demonstrating in His cursing of the fig tree.

The theme of judgment on God's people is symbolically acted first and then strongly pressed home in three parables.

– The New Bible Commentary

And that brings us to our text this morning which we pick up at Matt. 21:18...

Matthew 21:18–22 (NKJV)

18 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry.

Remember Jesus is coming from Bethany – which was just 2 miles outside of Jerusalem.

We don't know where Jesus stayed at in Bethany – commonly commentators suggest the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Others suggest that perhaps Jesus had spent the night largely in prayer as He was known to do at times, but we really don't know.

Again, if the Triumphal Entry was on Sunday, then this would be Monday as made clear by Mark.

Slide # 5

Mark 11:12 (NKJV)

12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.

And remember according to the chronology of Mark this is now the same day that Jesus also cleansed the temple.

Slide 6

The Order of Things

Sunday – Triumphal Entry

- Wept Over Jerusalem

Monday – ***Cursed Fig Tree***

- Cleansed Temple

In this context we see an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus. To begin with He was hungry. As a human being Jesus experienced everything we do as normal human beings including being tempted – only He was without sin, and He never yielded to sin (cf. Heb. 4:15).

19 And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Immediately the fig tree withered away.

Some have struggled with the fact that Jesus initially didn't know that this fig tree didn't have any fruit on it. After all on other occasions we see Jesus knowing the future or knowing what is in the hearts of people which requires omniscience. How can this be explained?

Theologians often talk about the “kenosis” reality spoken of in Phil. 2:7.

Slide # 7

Philippians 2:7 (ESV)

7 but **emptied** himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The word “emptied” is the Greek word “kenosis”. Christ did NOT empty Himself of His deity, but He did set aside the independent use of His divine attributes. Coming in the form of a servant (lit “slave”- Gk. doulos) Jesus in His state of humility at every point moved under the direction of God the Father.

Slide # 8

John 5:30 (NKJV)

30 **I can of Myself do nothing.** As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

When the Father willed for Jesus to put His divine attribute of omniscience (all knowing) on display He did, but at other times the Father’s plan was that Jesus experience the limitations of humanity in His state of humility. So sometimes Jesus exercised all power in doing the miraculous and sometimes He did not. It all depended upon the Father’s will of which Jesus was 100% submissive to in His state of humility. He was here as a servant simply doing the will of the Father at every step.

As such, Jesus is the most amazing and intriguing person Who has ever lived. He was God in a human body and yet in this state the exercise of His divine attributes was limited according to His mission of humility and dependence upon the Father.

In the Bible there are three GREAT touchstones of mystery involving the connection of Deity and humanity that is inscrutably profound.

Number one: There is the reality of holy Scripture which is a production made in combination of deity and humanity. God inspired it but He used human authorship in the process. The Scriptures therefore are the very Word of God but yet also the very words of human authors who used their own style and so forth.

Slide # 9**2 Peter 1:21 (NKJV)**

21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but **holy men of God spoke** as they were **moved by the Holy Spirit**.

Number two is salvation: God moves in salvation and is the author of salvation from A to Z so that it is all grace, and all the glory goes to Him alone, and yet it also involves the element of human response and human responsibility. This combination too ultimately has mystery in the mix.

Slide # 10**Matthew 11:27–28 (NKJV)**

27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and **the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him**.
28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

And then number three: This is the truth of the incarnation. Jesus was fully God and fully man in ONE person. On the one hand we often see His divinity on display, and on the other hand we often see His humanity on display, and exactly how this combination of deity and humanity works involves mystery that is profound beyond what we can comprehend.

Slide # 11**1 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV)**

16 And without controversy **great is the mystery** of godliness: **God was manifested in the flesh**, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

In the earthly life of Christ we see splashes of divinity and we see splashes of humanity all under the direction of the Father who was bringing to pass the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies in perfect balance and harmony.

Jesus as the God-Man is the PERFECT mediator. On the one hand He perfectly represents God. On the other hand, He perfectly represents mankind – thus being able to bring us into relationship with God because He perfectly represents both sides.

As our great High Priest Jesus can perfectly sympathize with our human struggles because He being human has gone through it.

Slide # 12

Hebrews 4:15–16 (NKJV)

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot **sympathize** with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore **come boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace **to help** in time of need.

Here in our study this morning we see the humanity of Jesus on display in the fact that He was hungry and in the fact that initially He did not realize there was no fruit on this fig tree.

Jesus was hungry and seeing this fig tree He came to it (obviously with the desire to find some figs to eat) but instead found nothing on it but leaves.

Jesus then said to the tree, ***“Let no fruit grow on you ever again.”*** What is this all about? Was Jesus having a bad morning and taking it out on this poor tree? Was He “hangry” meaning being easily angered because of His state of being hungry. That would make Jesus very “human” – but remember He was completely without sin.

The answer is seen in considering the CONTEXT. Most Bible scholars believe that the fig tree here is a symbol for fruitless Israel and Jesus cursing it at this point is symbolic of the judgment coming upon Israel because of it. The fruitlessness of Israel is seen in the fact that they rejected Jesus as Messiah-God. **That is the CONTEXT.**

Although there is no statement that the situation should be regarded as parabolic, that seems to be the only reasonable explanation of the incident (for trees have no moral responsibility). It provided a graphic sequel to the earlier parable of Luke 13:6-9 regarding the Jewish nation, unfruitful despite every advantage.

– ***Wycliffe Bible Commentary***

If the fig tree is taken to represent Israel, then the cursing of the tree represents judgment of that nation for its false profession.

– ***Stanley Toussaint***

What is happening here in CONTEXT is sandwiched between Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and Him cleansing the temple – both which were indicative of judgment on Israel’s hypocritical unfruitfulness.

Slide # 13

The CONTEXT...

Jesus wept over Jerusalem – Lk. 19:41

[Jesus cursed the fig tree] – Mk. 11:14

Jesus cleansed the temple – Mk. 11:15-17

Matthew skillfully introduces the record of Israel’s rejection of Jesus with the account of the withering fig tree. – ***Stanley Toussaint***

The whole surrounding context argues that this was not an impetuous act of frustration or anger but rather a symbolic object lesson illustrating that judgment is now being pronounced against Israel.

The theme of judgment is first acted out symbolically in the cursing of the fig tree (representing Israel) which is then strongly pressed home by three parables of judgment which follow at the end of Matthew 21 and the beginning of Matthew 22.

The fig tree is often representative of Israel in the Scriptures (cf. Jer. 8:13; 24:1-8; 29:17; Hos. 9:10; Joel 1:7, 12); and withered figs as judgment (cf. Isa. 34:4; Jer. 8:13; Hos. 2:12; 9:16; Joel 1:7; Micah 7:1). Interestingly enough in Luke 13 Jesus gave a parable about a fig tree that for 3 years was unresponsive.

Slide # 14

Luke 13:6–7 (NKJV)

6 He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘**Look, for three years** I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’

Our Lord makes no specific comparison of that three years to the three years of His ministry, but it was three years after Jesus first presented Himself to Israel as her Messiah that the people declared their final rejection of Him by putting Him to death.

– **John MacArthur**

Fig trees were a staple fruit in Israel. Fig trees normally bore two crops every year, but if it didn't freeze some fruit could remain on the tree almost all year long until overtaken by another crop. Fig trees can grow up to 20 feet high and be about that wide in terms of the shade provided.

Slide # 15



In Deut. 8:7-8 the promise is that God would bring the Jews into a good land full of “**fig trees**” among other things. When Jesus met Nathanael He told him that He had seen him “**under the fig tree**” – perhaps having his quiet time (cf. Jn. 1:48). In the kingdom we have this promise in Zech.

Slide # 16

Zechariah 3:10 (NKJV)

10 In that day, says the LORD of hosts, ‘Everyone will invite his neighbor Under his vine **and under his fig tree.**’ ”

Just as the fig tree is a symbol of blessing and prosperity the cursing of it is a symbol of judgment (cf. Mt. 24:32).

Normally a fig tree sprouted fruit before the leaves filled out. So normally if you saw a leafy tree you would expect to find fruit on it. This is what Jesus was looking to find – fruit. The outward manifestation of leaves would leave one to believe it should have some figs.

And so it was with Israel. They had an outward form of “leafy” religiosity, but there was no real fruit. The nation as a whole was barren as evidenced in their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah.

The consequence was that Jesus pronounced a severe curse upon them saying, “**Let no fruit grow on you ever again.**” and then the text says, “**Immediately the fig tree withered away.**”

This was most remarkable because this is the only miracle of JUDGMENT found in Christ's ministry. This is the only occasion He specifically cursed rather than blessed; that He destroyed rather than restore (cf. Jn. 3:17; Acts 10:38).

For this reason, the entire CONTEXT of what is happening is telling. The context was one of rejection of the Messiah that climaxed in the cross. In that context (out of character for His ministry) Christ performed a symbolic miracle of cursing – signifying a curse being placed upon Israel.

Slide # 17

Mark 11:21 (NKJV)

21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which **You cursed** has withered away."

In the OT God very strongly and specifically told His people Israel that they would be blessed for obedience, and they would be cursed for disobedience (cf. Deut. 28:1-6; 15-19).

God is a very patient God. In GRACE He reached out to Israel for 3 long years climaxing in the Triumphal Entry. But now in view of their rejection of Him Christ uncharacteristically pronounced a curse upon them as symbolically seen in the cursing of the fig tree.

When it says, "***Immediately the fig tree withered***" this indicates that immediately it began to die. According to Mark 11:20 the next morning (which would have been Tues morning) "***they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots***". Immediately it began to wither from the bottom up, but the disciples didn't notice it until the next morning.

This speaks of the severe consequences for the hypocritical fruitlessness of Israel which climaxed in their rejection of Christ. Living things are expected to bear fruit. In Matthew fruit is indicative of life and having a living relationship with God. Matt. 7:18 says, "***every good tree bears good fruit***". In the parable of the soils all the genuine good ground bears some level of fruit as seen in Matthew 13 (cf. 13:1-9). Fruit is consistently the manifestation of true salvation (cf. Mt. 7:21-23; 12:50).

The fig tree was guilty of "false advertising" (so to speak). It had the appearance of reality but there was no fruit. So also with Israel. It claimed to be spiritual but in reality was spiritually barren and unproductive. The leaves on the fig tree spoke of profession but there was no fruit for God. This amounts to sheer hypocrisy and God hates hypocrisy as Jesus stressed to the religious leaders (cf. Mt. 6:2, 5, 16, 7:5; 15:7; 23).

Empty religion almost invariably has many outward trappings in the form of clerical garments, vestments, ornate vessels, involved rituals and other [such things]. It is also typically characterized by repetitious prayers... - **John MacArthur**

In other words, empty religion continues to have an outward form or show of godliness but it is all show and no substance (2 Tim. 3:5). This by the way is characteristic of last days apostate Christianity as seen in 2 Tim. 3-4. And this is what characterized Judaism in the time of Christ. That was the point being made in the cleansing of the temple.

As someone has well said, “**Profession without fruit is an abomination**”. Yet incredibly evangelicalism has developed a whole system of theology called “Easy Believism” that says you can be a Christian and yet never bear fruit. I frankly think that is the doctrine of demons. We are not saved by fruit, but if we are saved the expectation is that there will be fruit – some level of fruit. No fruit – no salvation (cf. Mt. 3:5-12).

When Jesus was on trial before Pilate the Jews with one voice cried out, “**His blood be on us and on our children.**” (Mt. 27:25). And it has been. Israel as a whole has remained spiritually unfruitful, barren, and unproductive, and will continue to be so until they finally come to recognize Jesus for Who He is as their Divine Messiah.

The sovereignty of God continues to preserve Israel, but His blessing is not upon them. They are still in rebellion. Yet, because of His covenant promises Israel still has a future and their being back in the land in the latter days is in perfect accord with last days prophecy as seen in Ezekiel 38-39.

The linking of the symbolic miracle of judgment (cursing the fig tree) and the cleansing of the temple (which immediately followed) implies God’s imminent punishment of Israel which would result in the destruction of the temple – the very center of Jewish society.

In just a few years the Romans demolished the temple and crushed the Jewish state as a political entity. The Jews were then scattered throughout the world for almost 2000 years (cf. Lk. 21:20-24).

Thus, in the cursing of the fig tree it seems evident that Jesus was setting aside that generation which would never really see fruit and would not see the kingdom. And this continues to be in place until there will come repentance in Israel (cf. Acts 3:19-21).

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither away so soon?”

According to the chronology of Mark this actually took place on Tuesday (cf. Mark 11:20).

Slide # 18

Sunday – Triumphal Entry

Monday – Fig Tree Cursed
- Temple Cleansed

Tuesday – Disciples see the withered fig tree

Immediately when Jesus cursed the tree it began to dry up but the next day (within the span of a few hours) the tree was completely withered up – so much so that the disciples marveled and said, “***How did the fig tree wither away so soon?***”

I mean when a tree dies normally it takes quite a while for it to go through the dying process to be completely withered up. It can take years for a tree to die. Never do they die one day and are completely shriveled up the next day. This was shocking! Even though the disciples had seen the Lord perform so many miracles, yet this was new and the rapidity of it caused them to be astonished.

At this point the disciples were not asking “***WHY***” but rather “***HOW***”. They understood the why as being because it wasn’t bearing fruit, but they probably didn’t really understand the symbolism of it until later. But their question at this point was on ***HOW*** – how did this happen?

Well, obviously it was a miracle, but Jesus took advantage of this situation to make it a teachable moment. Since they didn’t ask WHY but rather HOW Jesus changed direction and deals with the source of the power (God) and the means of tapping into that power (faith).

21 So Jesus answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.

22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

When Jesus says, “**Assuredly**” it is a strong assertion. The Greek word is “**Amen**” and is often translated as “**Truly**”. When Christ wants to strongly affirm something He often uses this word.

Here Jesus makes the issue that of FAITH and PRAYER.

Note that Jesus connects His emphasis on faith and prayer to what was done to the fig tree saying, “if you have faith...you will be able to do what was done to the fig tree”. This would perhaps suggest that what Jesus had done to the fig tree was bathed in prayer. This is the HOW! Again, it is not spelled out specifically but that may be the implication.

The connecting point between the cursing of the fig tree and the HOW it happened is linked to Christ’s emphasis on believing prayer.

Faith is not faith in faith. It’s not faith in yourself. It’s not faith in your dreams, desires, hopes, or aspirations.

Slide # 19

James 4:3 (NKJV)

3 You ask and do not receive, because **you ask amiss**, that you may spend it on **your pleasures**.

There is a wrong kind of praying and God doesn’t answer those prayers.

Prayer is not an abstract idea or a vague sentiment. It is not a feeling. Faith alone does nothing. Faith must have an object and biblically faith has as its object God and His Word. It trusts God to do what He says – what He promises.

Biblically, faith is always connected to God and His Word. People say, “**Well, I just have faith that this or that is going to happen.**” The question is on what basis? Do you have a promise from God for that? If not, you have no basis. You have a human feeling or sentiment, but that might simply be faith in your feelings which is completely unfounded.

Jesus promises that if you have faith and don’t doubt then you will not only be able do what was done to the fig tree but also cause a mountain to be cast into the sea.

Now this gives us pause. Casting a mountain into the sea has never in the history of the world ever happened. Jesus Himself never did this. The apostles never did this. No one has ever literally done this. So, this causes us to think that Jesus is here speaking in metaphorical terms.

The great rabbis in Judaism were considered to be solvers of great problems and therefore called “**rooters up of mountains**”. To move mountains became synonymous in Judaism with being able to do the seemingly impossible.

Jesus regularly used this metaphor in the sense of seeing God do the impossible. In Matthew 17:20 we see Jesus used the very same type of language.

Slide # 20

Matthew 17:19–20 (NKJV)

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”

20 So Jesus said to them, “Because of your **unbelief**; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have **faith as a mustard seed**, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Here Jesus was telling them that God can accomplish “**impossible things**” through faith. We have the very same emphasis here in chapter 21. Jesus is simply telling them that they will be able to see impossible things happen on the basis of faith that does not doubt (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2).

Jesus was thinking a lot about faith and prayer at this time during the final hours of His earthly ministry. At the Last Supper Jesus told the disciples this:

Slide # 21

John 14:12 (NKJV)

12 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and **greater works** than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

We should note the qualifiers in context here very carefully.

In the immediate context of John 14 Jesus is talking about how He put the Father on display in response to Phillip's request to "**Show us the Father?**" That is what Jesus had been doing for 3 years. But now He is telling them that they (corporately as a whole group) will put the Father on display in a greater sense in terms of volume and extent than He had done individually.

Jesus as one person put the Father on display as He was led of the Spirit perfectly. But He was just one person in one place at a time, never going more than 200 miles. But now He was going back to the Father and once there He would send the Spirit Who would come and live in all His disciples.

Then they would put the Father on display (as they walked in the Spirit) wherever they went to the furthest parts of the earth. The net effect of that would be a greater display of the Father in terms of sheer volume than that which Jesus Himself had personally done all by Himself.

Jesus was not talking about doing greater SIGN MIRACLES. That is not the context of what Jesus was saying. So, it is important to always understand what Jesus is saying in context.

Furthermore, Jesus went on to make this qualifier...

Slide # 22

John 14:13–14 (NKJV)

13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

To ask in Jesus Name is to ask for His sake and for His glory! This kind of praying is all about what Jesus wants – not what I selfishly want. Jesus centered kind of prayers are always answered.

The problem is that our prayers often don't align with Jesus and what truly brings Him glory. Spirit-filled praying that aligns with God (what Jude calls "**praying in the Holy Spirit**" – Jude 20) is to pray as Jesus taught us to pray saying, "**Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" (Mt. 6:10). When what you truly want is what God wants (His will) then you have reached the point of powerful praying.

Slide # 23

1 John 5:14–15 (NKJV)

14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

No matter the impossible thing (the size of the mountain) if we look to God in faith to remove it – it will happen. Again, we are not talking about literal mountains but rather impossible obstacles in the spiritual realm.

22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

What is the condition for seeing God move metaphorical mountains -which is to say do impossible things? The key is believing prayer that aligns with the plan, purpose, and will of God.

In prayer the whole goal is to get God’s will done on earth and not my will approved in heaven.

There is a WHOLE context here related to what is happening with Israel. The cursing of the fig tree had nothing to do with Christ’s personal whim or a self-agenda detached from the Father. No, He was moving in sync with God’s program for Israel. That is the CONTEXT.

When we pray in keeping with God’s program, He moves mountains. The major thing in Christ’s ministry was souls. His whole reason in coming was to “**seek and to save that which was lost**” (Lk. 19:10).

To properly understand what Christ is saying we must understand He is talking about prayer in relation to people and God’s plan for people. The emphasis in Christ’s teaching was praying in relation to people – not stuff.

Again, on the night before His crucifixion in the Upper Room Christ addressed the issue of prayer in relation to “fruit bearing”.

Slide # 24**John 15:16 (NKJV)**

16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Fruit happens through prayer – believing prayer. If you don't pray, don't expect fruit. If you don't pray in faith – don't expect fruit. God works fruit through believing prayer.

What kind of prayers do we see in the early church in the book of Acts? What kind of prayer model do we see in the lives of the apostles as they were taught by Christ?

Well, to begin with we see them in prayer in Acts 1 as they awaited the coming of the Spirit and then He came with power in Acts 2. In Acts 4 they prayed for boldness to speak the Word (Acts 4:29-31) and God answered that prayer. As they prayed in Acts 13 the Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to mission work (Acts 13:1-3). As Paul and Silas were praying in prison in Acts 16 the Lordship of Christ was suddenly put on display with the shaking of the prison resulting in the conversion of the jailer and his family.

The point is this: If you examine believing prayer closely in the NT you will find it is not solely, but predominately soul oriented. The great goal is to win souls – that is being fruitful.

But here is the deal that is an IMPOSSIBLE – mountain moving endeavor. We can't do it. Christ said without Him we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). Paul said his message was not of human wisdom, "***but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power***" (1 Cor. 2:4).

2 Corinthians 3:5 (NKJV)

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

Slide # 25

When we depend upon organizations, we get what organizations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do; when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.

- A. C. Dixon

Again, I think the emphasis Christ is making is in relation to believing prayer is in relation to God's plan, purposes, and program. And what God is doing in the world today above all else is building His Church.

Powerful praying is about God's program of Church building – winning souls, seeing them grow, and their spiritual well-being. This is what NT praying is largely about.

It's when we pray about the issue of souls that we see God move mountains. Making disciples is an impossible thing. We can't do it! We are not sufficient for anything. As Paul said, ***"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."*** (1 Cor. 3:6). And how does God do this: Well, He does it through BELIEVING PRAYER! That is God's method!

Jesus right here put His finger on Israel's problem. They were no longer people of prayer (generally speaking). Of course, God always has a remnant, but the nation a whole was spiritually barren. Israel had turned her temple from a place of prayer into a den of thieves. No powerful praying going on there. No emphasis on souls there. The nation was not focused on faith – they didn't believe the clear truth about Jesus the Messiah.

In contrast, Jesus tells His disciples that the KEY to seeing God work impossible things (miraculous things) is believing prayer. This is what God uses to bring people to Himself – to change people.

God is no longer doing sign miracles today because that was unique to Christ and the apostles. However, but He is doing spiritual miracles in the hearts and lives of people in answer to believing prayer. And this is where we come in!!

I am thinking about a situation where someone years ago fell into sin and left the church. This person was very upset with me personally. I kept this person on my prayer list for many years and then one day a "mountain moving" miracle happened (I mean a spiritual miracle in answer to prayer). The person called me and told me they had repented. They were once again on track with the Lord and that has borne out in their life.

This happens frequently! Only God can change people. Only He can move spiritual mountains and He does in answer to believing prayer. Only God can really change a hardened heart! But as we pray, we see God work as only He can do.

And yet here too we are in the mystery zone of God's working and human responsibility. God doesn't force people, but He works in answer to prayer.

Want to see God move mountains through believing prayer? Jesus said, ***“Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt...whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”***

If a mountain moving endeavor is in accordance with the will of God and you ask in believing prayer, then it will happen. I did like what David Jeremiah said at this point:

Nowhere in the Scripture does anyone cast a mountain into the sea through a faith-filled prayer. Why not? Because God has never willed anyone to pray such a thing. – ***David Jeremiah***

Now while that is true physically, I do think (metaphorically speaking) God does remove spiritual mountains through believing prayer.

Slide # 26

Ephesians 3:20–21 (NKJV)

20 Now to Him who is **able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works in us,
21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

God does not build His church or build up His people by better ideas, better programs, or better methods, although such things can have a place in His work. God promises to truly reveal His power only through faithful believers who, in persistent prayer, seek only His will.
 – ***John MacArthur***

Jesus used this event to teach His disciples a practical lesson about faith and prayer. The temple was supposed to be a “house of prayer,” and the nation was to be a believing people. But both of these essentials were missing. We too must beware of the peril of fruitlessness. – ***Warren Wiersbe***

In believing prayer we don’t just have a blank check – we have a blank check with this qualifier: Is Jesus name on it? It’s all about Jesus! If He can sign off on it – it will happen! And as we pray accordingly, we will see God do the impossible in keeping with His will for His glory!

God help us to be people of believing prayer!