

**WHO SAID?
MATTHEW 21.18-27**

The authority that Jesus demonstrates that will be granted to the disciples is questioned by the present leadership in Israel. Through their questions, the leaders in Israel are driven to the conclusion that Jesus' authority is from God.

1. CURSING THE FIG TREE (18-22)

In the morning (18a): Cp. 21.1-17: enter the city first and then enter the Temple. Same pattern & emphasis here.

“in the morning” – resonance of the “day of the Lord” dawning. Cf. e.g. Gen 19.15; 32.24; and the resurrection of Jesus.

Day of the Lord = when God will punish the wicked and deliver his people, giving them the positions promised to them.

City and the fig tree (18-19): hunger. Proof of humanity? Yes, but not Mt's emphasis. It is his assumption.

Later parables the lord of the house/vineyard comes to receive fruit from his vineyard. Taken with those, along with the fact that the fig tree and figs appears many times in Scripture in similar contexts as the vineyard, Jesus is equated with the lord of the house who is coming to this fig tree desiring to eat of its fruit.

The fig tree and the city - fig tree is representative of Jerusalem and possibly even more specifically of the Temple. Cf. Num 13.23; Dt 8.8; 1Kg 4.25; Hos 9.10; Joel 1.7; signs of peace and prosperity; used for healing (e.g. 2Kg 20.7).

Israel was supposed to be a delight to God by producing good fruit for him to enjoy as well as being a source for healing and life for all those who approached and ate of the tree. Jesus approaches as the Gardener expecting fruit.

Why curse the fig tree? Remember Jesus is *the* prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. These are prophetic actions that pronounce Jerusalem and its Temple have not produced the fruit intended and must, consequently, be done away with.

“Fig leaves” – cf. Gen 3.7, the inadequate covering for Adam and Eve. The Jews have been “hiding” in the Temple thinking that they can find refuge there even though they disobey God by rejecting Jesus. Temple will be an inadequate covering.

Faith movers (20-22): Disciples stunned that the fig tree withered immediately.

“Amen” = solemn promise.

Fig tree and “this” mountain essentially synonymous w/ different nuances. Standing just outside the city looking at Jerusalem, Mt. Zion, with the Temple mount being the highest point. “This” mountain is specific.

Mountain = kingdom. This is the old kingdom centered in Jerusalem and its Temple. It will be cast into the sea (= Gentiles = consumed by the Romans in AD 70).

The promise: prerequisite = faith. Faith is taking God at his word and acting upon it. Faith is having your life—your thinking and your actions—shaped and dictated by what God says so that God's word determines the entirety of your life. Cf. Heb 11.

Faith is more than conjuring a strong feeling. It is not faith in faith (“If I believe enough it will happen.”) Centered on God's Word, revealed in Jesus the Messiah.

“and do not doubt” - Doubt is the opposite of faith here. Doubt is not the complete absence of fear or reservation.

Doubt is paralysis caused by fear so that your thinking and actions are shaped by those things instead of what God said. In other words, you are being controlled by something other than God's word; e.g. the fear of man, fear of loss, impatience waiting on God's future, *etc.*

“ask *in prayer believing.*” “In prayer” relates back to the purpose of the Temple, a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus showed us the shape of this prayer: healing and welcoming the praise of children.

Prayer is practically synonymous with worship. The Temple is a house of worship or a house of prayer. Asking something in prayer in the way that Jesus wants us to ask means that we are to be true worshipers.

Faithful or true worshipers are concerned about what Jesus is concerned about. Contrast Jms 4.1ff.

Having answered prayer is not a matter if you “believe enough,” but if you believe right and have your agenda lined up with God’s agenda. That is true faith. That is the faith that in prayer will wither fig trees and move mountains.

2. CHALLENGING JESUS’ AUTHORITY (23-27)

Who said? (23): Jesus is teaching. Priestly responsibility. He is the great high priest who teaches God’s people God’s law.

“The elders of the people” = judges among the people. Also “elders in the gate.” They represented the people and judged disputes among the people. Cf. Ex 18

“These things” refer to the actions taken by Jesus earlier in cleaning out the Temple, receiving praise as the Son of David, and bringing the blind and lame into the Temple for healing.

Another “test” for Jesus. They have sinister motives. If Jesus says that his authority comes from himself or another man, then he undercuts his whole message and can be condemned for acting insanely against the rules that had been established by the existing authorities.

If he says he has direct divine authority, then they will probably accuse him of blasphemy and take him out and kill him right there. If he claims kingship (Messiah), then he could be viewed as seditious by the Romans.

Answer my question first (24-27): cp. 10.16. Jesus is being wise as a serpent.

Why ask a question about John’s baptism? Just difficult? Yes, but more than that. Jesus is leading them to a conclusion.

“Fearing the people b/c they hold John to be a prophet” links this group back up with Herod in ch. 14.

Jesus is answering in riddle-like fashion. John was a priest (of the line of Aaron) and a prophet. What do prophets do? They anoint kings.

Cf. Samuel, Elisha, *et al.*

If John was a prophet and Jesus was anointed by him at baptism, then Jesus is the King, the Son of David. And if Jesus is the Son of David, then his authority is from God and legitimate.

In other words, he has the right/authority to do everything he does. He leaves them with this to figure out. The question of the legitimacy of John and his baptism is directly linked to the legitimacy of Jesus and his authority. It is not just a difficult question.

What is established is that Jesus is the one with authority and the present authorities need to yield to him. He demonstrates this authority at the fig tree and obliquely proclaims his authority with the counter-question. Jesus is the true King, the Son of David, to whom they need to submit.

1. Faithful prayer is necessary for the accomplishment of the mission Jesus gave us.

2. Direct answers and confrontation are not always the answer in dealing with adversaries.

3. God expects fruit from us.