



17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. 18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. 19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, **Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.** And presently the fig tree withered away. 20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! 21 Jesus answered and said unto them, **Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed,** 22 **And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.** 23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? 24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, **I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.** 25 **The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?** And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? 26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. 27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, **Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.** 28 **But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.** 29 **He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.** 30 **And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.** 31 **Whether of them twain did the will of his father?** They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, **Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.** 32 **For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.** (Matt 21:17-32)

A very sad circumstance is unfolding for Old Israel. They have rejected the Lord of Glory, and their fate is being sealed by their own actions and not that of a heavenly decree. It is a bit noteworthy that Christ never spent a night in Jerusalem on this visit. He slept at Bethany and, on the last night, He was found in Gethsemane at the base of

the Mount of Olives. He is the Light of the world, and that Light is being withdrawn from Jerusalem and the Jews for their treachery and rejection, so He lingers not there in hours of darkness – for their darkness shall wax greater and greater. The cursing of the fig tree and the parable of the two sons communicate a dramatic turn of events for old Israel. The Gentiles, and all who believe in the Son of God, shall be called Israel now. The Old Testament church, being sound in faith and hope, is given newness of life in the New Testament Church.

*“And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.”* The dearest friends of Christ live at Bethany. It was here that He called Lazarus forth from the Tomb, and here that He often supped at the house of Martha and Mary. Christ will make His home with those who love, and not hate, Him. So He withdraws from Jerusalem for sleeping these last few days.

*“And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, **Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.** And presently the fig tree withered away.”* When a tree fails to produce fruit, it also loses its ability to produce fruit just as the muscles which are not used will atrophy. Lack of fruit results in death. The fig tree immediately withered. There is an underground lake in East Tennessee called the Lost Sea. The lake is perhaps four hundred feet beneath the surface. One may rent a glass bottomed boat to venture out onto those dark waters which have been kept in thick darkness for centuries on end. One may notice many large bass in the water beneath. They are white in color because no light has been available to interact with their pigment. But the most astonishing thing to note is the fact that these fish have scales grown over their eyes and are blind. The eyes not being used for so many centuries, they no longer need them in the darkness. Blindness has happened to Israel, too, but not because God has struck them blind, but because they have desired darkness rather than the Light of the World.

Why do we disciples wonder when God speaks and acts out His Words? *“And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!”* Why marvel at the sure judgments of God. There were two cities along the Gulf coast of Mississippi and Louisiana which boasted of great gambling casinos and prostitution. In one fell swoop, God sent a storm against those cities and destroyed them. All of their patrons and traders were aghast that such devastation could come upon their Babylons, but it did. The storm came on Friday. One of those cities, New Orleans, was to host a Gay Pride Day boasting of 250,000 participants on the following Monday. That event never occurred because there was no longer provision at New Orleans to host them. *“But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.”* (Prov 1:25-27)

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, **Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.**”* These mountains are figurative for the movement of true mountains of granite would be only for the purpose of sensation and also alter the natural creation of God. Alcoholism, drugs, egregious temper – all these are mountains of men to be moved by the Spirit of God to those who trust. All things, and only all those things, which conform to the will of God may be accomplished through faith and prayer. You may remember reading of the prophet Jeremiah’s purchase of the very land upon which the Chaldean Army stood in siege of Jerusalem. But, in expression of his full faith and trust in the return from captivity from Babylon,

Jeremiah purchased the field of Anathoth upon which that army was encamped. And Judah did return after their sojourn in Babylon according to the prophecies of the Lord through Jeremiah. If God can move mighty armies, He can also move our private mountains of hurt and pain.

*“And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”* These derelicts of religious fables were alluding 1) to Christ’s chasing their profit makers and money changers from the Temple, and 2) to the acclamations being offered to Him by the people. How is it that they consider Christ guilty of the voluntary actions of the people fired by a glimpse of faith? *“Who gave thee this authority?”* Certainly, Christ had not received THEIR permission for they were neither teachers nor cleansers. When their diabolical power and profit base was challenged, they demanded relief!

*“And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?”* This was a brilliant verbal trap set by the Lord. Of course, the authority of Christ comes from His divine nature and the Father. But now the query points them to John whose authority also came from God. They could NEVER admit this for they rejected John. They neither could deny that authority for fear of the multitudinous numbers who loved and followed John. So like most all politicians, they denied knowledge one way or the other. *“And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell.”* They could not tell for, either way, they were losers! *“And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”*

*“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?”* This parable reflects on the Jewish nation and its rejection of Christ and hypocrisy in claiming divine right, but following its own blind guides. The other group may be the Gentiles who were reckless and insolent libertines until they came to the knowledge of Christ and His offer of salvation. Saul was every whit as good a king as David as the measure of men goes, but Saul promised and did not follow up. When Saul sinned, he never felt an obligation to repent. David failed seriously many times, but always repented in grief and sorrow. He came to serve God after each remarkable episode of sin. *“They say unto him, The first.”* These men were shrewd and fully capable of logic and reason, but they took undue pride in their education, training, and position and were blinded thereby. They answered Christ correctly in this case.

*“Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”* These harlots and publicans had previously said ‘no’ to the obedience required by God, but later recanted and came to Him in humble repentance. These chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees had said ‘yes’ in their vows to obey God and later acted with hypocrisy and impunity towards the Law of Love. It may be true that many former prostitutes and sluggards may enter heaven before the finely attired preachers of our day. Please do not forget that even a prostitute and an adulteress were accounted in the genealogy of Christ. There was, too, a woman of the cursed Moabite race in His genealogy (Ruth). So take no pride in bloodlines or

parchments. These do not save – only grace, by faith in Christ, enforced by good deeds of evidence.