

The School of Christ

Lesson 7

ANCHORED IN FAITH

Matthew 21:18-22

You were within, but I was without.
You were with me, but I was not
with you. So you called, you shouted,
you broke through my deafness, you
flared, blazed, and banished my
blindness, you lavished your
fragrance, and I gasped.

St. Augustine (Confessions)

OUR INVITATION

- › Open up to God in faith
- › Have a living relationship with Abba through faith
- › The call to a living faith is the thrust to this passage

I. Setting the Scene

Matthew 21:18-20

In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves.

Then he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once?'

Matthew 21:18-20

PASSOVER TIME IN JERUSALEM

- › City is crowded/full of pilgrims
- › Jesus and his disciples stay outside the city overnight

- › In the morning they are returning to the city
- › Jesus is hungry and spots an olive tree
- › He goes to it but it has no fruit

- › Surprisingly Jesus speaks against the tree and it withers immediately
- › The disciples are amazed at the power of Jesus' words - How can a tree wither immediately?

UNDERSTANDING THIS EVENT

- › The action as an enacted parable
- › Similar to riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Palm Sunday)
- › The action of the withering olive tree becomes a symbolic act

'FRUITLESS OLIVE TREE'

- › The action refers back to Old Testament texts which speak of Israel as a 'fruitless olive tree'

When I wanted to gather them, says the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.

Jeremiah 8:13

- › The action speaks to the fruitless (nominal, legalistic) religion of the day
- › It is for this reason that Jesus overturned the money tables in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13)

AN ATTITUDE THAT RINGS TRUE TODAY

- › People resist the movement of God
- › Where there should be fruitfulness there is hollowness and lack of nourishment

THE WITHERING CHURCH

- › The church withers and dies when disconnected from God's spirit - we need to remain rooted in the power + presence of Jesus
- › Churches die for reasons other than changing demographics or socio-economic changes

II. Faith, Prayer + God's Kingdom

Matthew 21:21-22

Jesus answered them, 'Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree,

but even if you say to this mountain, "be lifted up and thrown into the sea", it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.

Matthew 21:21-22

JESUS CALLS FOR TRUE FAITH

- › 'Faith' + 'do not doubt' act here as synonyms not a special kind of faith - faith even as a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20)

- › The commands (v21b):
'Rise up'; 'be thrown into the sea' speak to the power of faith
- › The teaching is summarized:
"Everything you ask for in prayer (faith) you will receive" (v22)

EVERYTHING WE ASK FOR?

Jesus is not presenting God as a genie in a bottle:

- i. Does not mean all enemies disappear
- ii. Does not describe a perfect faith but a true faith (James 1:6-8)

- iii. It does say 'ordinary Christians can overcome impossible circumstances through God's power and presence'

III. Going Forward
We are invited to...

TRUST IN GOD'S PROMISES

- › We proceed in faith that insurmountable mountains are overcome through God
- › Meaning Live in trust not mistrust

BECOME GENERATIVE PEOPLE

- › Based on Erik Erikson's 8 levels of psychosocial development – 'Generativity vs Stagnation'
- › Keep bearing fruit – not to give up or become stagnant

NURTURE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- › Be intentional about this loving, ongoing relationship of Love
- › Faith is not a quality but speaks of a relationship

The disciple is the one who is close enough to hear and to respond to Jesus' deepest question, "Do you believe me?" (John 11:26). Everything depends upon my answer! My faith, my ministry, my lifestyle, my prayer, is anchored in my faith in Him as present with me, "always going before me" (Matthew 28:7). E. Farrell