

When Jesus cursed the fig tree (and it died), the Greenies wouldn't've been very happy, and probably the owner of the fig tree wasn't happy either... But it was worth it, because there were 2 key lessons for us.

We covered the first lesson last week:

1. It was a warning – a warning against having a false sense of security, in fruitless religion.

Many people, who claim to be Christians, are like that fig tree – all show – they appear to be all lush and spiritual, but they don't bear fruit... And of course, when we're talking about fruit, we're talking about the fruit of righteousness – the fruit of the Spirit – we're talking about the fruit of a changed, redeemed life...

And many people (who claim to be Christians) – well, they're no different to the world around them – they live as children of the devil, 6.5 days/week, and then they front up to church, and fulfil all religious righteousness, and go away, feeling “Ah, I'm good with God again. Right, back into that same sinful lifestyle I was doing before...” And they do it, week after week, after week.

Jesus didn't save us, so that we can simply go on sinning. He saved us, to be fruitful – He saved us, to live a life, filled with the Holy Spirit, and producing **fruit** of the Spirit (Love; Joy; Peace; Patience; Kindness; Goodness; Faithfulness; Gentleness; Self-Control)

So, that was the first lesson – Fruitless religion – no matter how spiritual it may appear – it will not save us.

## 2.

And the second lesson, is today's message, and it's about prayer... And it may **seem** like it's a vastly different topic, but it's not – the two must go together... What we learned last week (about fruitless religion), must therefore shape, how we pray.

Alright, God isn't interested in prayer, that's an expression of fruitless religion.. He wants us to pray fruitful prayers...

But before we begin this lesson on prayer, let's begin with a prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ,*

*You taught your disciples about prayer,  
and your words continue to teach us (2000 years later).*

*Lord, our desire, is to be a people who pray well.*

*We want to pray as You would have us pray.*

*So Lord, as we study Your word today,  
our request is simply, "Teach us how to pray."*

*Amen.*

Righto:

The disciples were amazed that in one day, the fig tree had withered away to its roots – they'd never seen anything like it...

And so Jesus took the opportunity to teach them about prayer; and the power of prayer; and about praying in faith....

Unfortunately, today this passage of Scripture, has pretty-much become the ‘go-to’ passage for a very selfish form of prayer, which forms a large part of “prosperity theology”... Some people see it as the scriptural foundation for the whole ‘name-it-and-claim-it’ thing. ...

These people believe:

- “Just **ask** God for what you want;
- **believe** that you’ve got it; and
- you’ll **have** it”...

And then of course, if your prayer **isn’t** answered, you obviously doubted (or didn’t have enough faith).

And you might hear some people saying “We’re believing for a miracle; We’re believing for this; We’re believing for that...” And they’re trying to speak what they want, into being...

And **if** we take this reading out of its context, I can see how some people **can** come to that position... And that’s why it’s really important that we don’t do that. Today we’re going to dig deeper – We’re going to look at what Jesus **really** said; We’re going to look at what Jesus **fully** said; and we’re going to keep it in the context in which Jesus put it...

So, right from the beginning, I’m giving you the ‘heads-up’... The structure of how this is written, is **really** important (and we shouldn’t leave any of it out... The account of the killing of the fig tree (which forms Jesus' lesson on prayer), is divided into two. And right in the middle of it, we’ve got Jesus driving the traders out of the temple (do you think that perhaps there might be an important lesson there for us on

prayer???)... And because Jesus put it together, we're going to keep it together, and so we're going to talk about the significance of what Jesus did at the temple, for our prayer-life...

## 1.

So, the first lesson on prayer, is **"Have faith in God..."**

Now, that might seem like a very obvious statement, when it comes to prayer... and yet "having faith in God", is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the church...

The Greek word πίστις (pistis), means "belief; faith; trust"... But often when we pray, we confuse what faith is about...

Jesus told us, to **"Have faith in God..."**. He didn't tell us to have faith in what we're asking for – He didn't tell us to have faith in our prayer – He didn't even tell us to have faith **about** God.... He told us to have faith **"in"** God...

What's the difference between having faith **in** God, and having faith **about** God? Well, let's see how the meaning of v23 changes, depending on whether we have faith **about** God, or whether we have faith **in** God...

Jesus said: **"Have faith in God..."** <sup>23</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Now, if I just believe **about** God – if I just have faith **about** God, the focus of v23, and the outcome of whether my prayer will be answered or not, tends to focus on **me**, and what **I** want, and what **I** believe about God...

Alright, so if I just have faith **about** God, it comes down to “What do I believe about God? What do I believe that God can do?” Well, I believe that God can do anything... And so, provided I have enough faith, I can even tell a mountain to be taken up, and thrown into the sea, and it’ll happen... It’s about believing that God has the power to do what I ask... That’s where we get to if I have faith **about** God.

*Let me give you a machinery example... Let’s say I want to push over a tree... I have a little skid-steer loader (<3tonne). What do I believe about my little skid steer loader? Well, I believe it can push over a tiny tree, but if I take it out into a paddock and attempt to push over a big tree, I know it cannot do it... I don’t believe it has the power or the weight to achieve it...*

*But if I could borrow somebody else’s Caterpillar D10, which weighs 70 tonne (>600hp), what do I believe about a D10? I believe it’s got oodles of power. I believe it **can** push over that larger tree.. It has power, and it’s the machine to be used...*

And for some people, in their prayer life, their faith is what they believe **about** God... They put themselves in the position of being the operator, And God is some kind of powerful machine at their disposal... What do they believe about God? God is almighty; God is all powerful; God is able to achieve anything...

And so, they pray for what they want, and expect that God will do it...

That's where you get to, if you believe **about** God...

But Jesus didn't tell us to have faith **about** God... He told us to "**Have faith in God.** And that's a very different concept...

*Having faith **in** God, is where the machinery example has to end, unless you have a fully automated machine, that will take you where you don't even know, and it will achieve things that you never planned...*

Having faith **in** God, impacts our prayer-life, long before we even start asking for anything... In fact, having faith **in** God, determines the sorts of things that we're going to pray about in the first place...

It's not about God being able to achieve what **we** want – It's about God revealing His will to us (whether it's something we want, or whether it's something we **don't** want) and then **we** trust in God enough, to pray for what God wants (even if it's **not** what **we** want)... Because we have enough faith in God, to believe that God's will is **better** than my will...

Jesus had faith **in** God, when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane...

**Mark 14:36** And he said, "**Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.**"

You see, Jesus had faith **in** God. He didn't ask for what He wanted. He was praying for His **Father's** will to be done. And even though His Father's will meant a torturous death for Himself, His prayer of faith, was "Your will be done"...

You see, having faith **in** God, means that we trust, that what God has determined, will come to pass... God is able to do anything, if it is His will... But one of the **exciting** things about being a disciple of Jesus, is that God wants to involve **us** in what He's doing... He doesn't want to just do His will – He wants **us** to seek His will, and to pray for His will to be done...

Now, it's a profound mystery to me "Why God does it like that", but isn't it a marvellous blessing, that He does? Isn't it a marvellous blessing, that God wants to involve you and I, in praying for His Kingdom work to be done...

BTW, the example of a mountain being thrown into the sea is a good one... Why would any of us ever pray for a mountain to be thrown into the sea (showing off)? ... I can only give you one good reason why we would ever pray for a mountain to be thrown into the sea... And that's if God **told** us to pray for it.... You see, if God has a purpose in throwing a particular mountain into the sea, and He reveals this to us, and He says "I want you to pray for this to happen", well, that's a good reason to pray for it isn't it???

It's like when God told Moses to speak to the rock and tell it to give water... What reason would Moses have to do it??? Well, only because God **told** him to do it...

## 2.

Which brings me to the second point:

When we pray, we should be praying in accordance with the will of God...

Some of you might remember the old Janis Joplin song

*Oh Lord, won't you buy me, a Mercedes Benz?*

*My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends...*

And for some of us, that's about the extent of our prayer life...

Lord, give me more; give me more; give me more;

- Give me more rain
- Give me good crops
- Give me fat cattle
- Give me a bigger house
  
- Give me a better job
- Give me a skinnier waistline
- Give me a better car
  
- Give my family better health
- Give my friend a longer life
- Give me
- Give me
- Give me

And of course, Jesus said: **whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.**

And so we say: Oh, I'm believing for this.. I'm believing for that...

Well why not???

### 3.

But the thing is, "Prayer, is a 2-way thing", and this is what we tend to forget...

Prayer isn't about us giving our instructions to God... We're not phoning through an order... God isn't a machine for us to operate...

**This** is what prayer **should** look like:

**As** we live day by day in the presence of God, and as we learn more about God and His ways, by reading the Scriptures, and dwelling on His Word, our hearts become more and more in tune with God... In Ephesians and Jude, we're told to pray in the Spirit – that means "Don't pray for your own desires – but pray for the things that **God** is seeking..."

Prayer should be just as much (or maybe **more**) about seeking the will of God, rather than us telling Him "**our** will".

### 4.

And so the 4<sup>th</sup> lesson, is what we learn at the temple...

The “name-it-and-claim-it” fraternity, completely ignores that the lesson of the fig tree (and therefore Jesus' lesson on prayer), brackets the whole episode in the temple, that reveals what **wrong** prayer is all about... **Wrong** prayer, is self-centred and unfruitful...

When Jesus told them that the temple was supposed to be a place of prayer, for all nations to come,,, but it had become a den of robbers, He was talking about the way they'd turned the place into a place of commerce and greed (sure enough)... It had become a place that effectively **excluded** the foreigner and excluded the vision of the expanding Kingdom of God....

And as we discovered last week, Jesus' concern, is that our hearts be aligned with His heart... His concern (& therefore our concern), is for the foreigner; and the widow; and the orphan; and for justice and mercy... What do you suppose, God might want us to be praying about??? Ourselves???

## 5.

Something that I'm learning, is that when it comes to prayer, I believe God wants our vision to be so much bigger, and for us to be praying for things of the Kingdom of God... Let's make our prayers bigger... Let's begin praying for the things of the Kingdom of God...

And do you know where that starts? Right here with ourselves...

## 6.

Fruitful prayer, comes from a Godly heart (and a pure heart).

V25 often gets overlooked by the “name-it-and-claim-it” crew... <sup>25</sup> **And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses.”**

Sometimes people tell us that our prayers aren't answered because we've got some unforgiven sin in our life... And there might be a bit of truth in that, but what Jesus is saying here, is that **our** forgiveness, is dependent on our forgiveness of others...

V26, which your bible may or may not have, states it more bluntly... But why do some Bibles have V26 & other Bibles don't???

Well, when the editors of our various bibles put them together, they look at the original source material... (Alright, these are ancient manuscripts we are dealing with)...

And there are many, many ancient manuscripts (all hand written)... Some of them are fragments, and so we only get little bits... Some of them are more complete... And **some** of the manuscripts have V26, and some of them don't...

And the reason that most of our modern translations of the Bible don't print V26 (although most **will** include it in a footnote down the bottom), but the reason it's not included in the main text, is because it's not found in the oldest and most

reliable manuscripts... And so biblical scholars believe that the original Gospel of Mark probably didn't have V26... But what it says, is just the logical outcome of V25:

**But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses...**

Whether or not it was originally in the Gospel of Mark, it doesn't matter, because Jesus definitely said it in the Gospel of Matthew, as He taught the disciples how to pray (Lord's prayer)...

But do you hear what Jesus is saying:

Praying with a Kingdom vision, begins with a transformation of ourselves... Because God has forgiven us, we must become Godly, and forgive others... And our ongoing forgiveness, **depends** on us forgiving others...

When we pray, the Lord wants us to be fruitful – to be pure in heart, and for that to happen, we need to be forgiven, and forgiving...

Righteous prayer – Godly prayer – spiritual prayer – fruitful prayer, is “Praying in faith, and with the vision of the Kingdom of God”.

And I thought we might finish today, by praying together, the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name,  
**Your** kingdom come,  
**Your** will be done,  
On earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
As we forgive those who  
sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial  
And deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are Yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

Questions...