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Four Days before Passover

The Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Time
Cursing the fig tree	21:18–19	11:12–14			Morning
Second cleansing of the temple	21:12–16	11:15–18	19:45–48		Afternoon
Response to an unbelieving crowd				12:37–50	
Return to Bethany	21:17	11:19			Night

Let us walk with Jesus again from Bethany to Jerusalem, about 2 miles away again today, it's just four days away from Passover.

Cursing the Fig Tree

Talking about this event, to begin with, why would Jesus curse a fig tree? It is a fact that a fig tree should have figs by the time the leaves are evident. The fig tree produces fruits before the leaves appear. So, if there are no figs the time the leaves are out, there will not be any figs that year altogether. Jesus was *hungry*! What was His hunger about? Recount that this incident took place on the way to Samaria in John 4.

John 4:8, For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. (NKJV)

They were hungry and they had gone to buy food, and Jesus was sitting by the well side in Shechem or Samaria. Jesus then speaks to a Samaritan woman and He prophesies about her state, which then

makes her believe that He is the Messiah, eventually spreading the news about Jesus to the others in the village. In the meantime, the disciples return to Jesus and offer Him food.

John 4:31, *Meanwhile, his followers were begging him, "Teacher, eat something."* (NCV)

But He responded as thus in John 4:32 (NKJV) – *But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."* Jesus was still hungry but not for the physical food. He does convey it to His disciples, but they had no clue as to the food He was talking about, which He later explains as thus in John 4:34:

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." (NKJV)

Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work." (NLT)

Remember when Satan tempted Jesus to make bread out of stones, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4 (NKJV) – *"Know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."* Isn't it obvious then that He was not looking to satisfy His physical hunger but was rather looking to teach His disciples an important spiritual lesson through the event.

Mark 11:14 mentions that Jesus *answered* the fig tree! The tree has not spoken to Him verbally, but it had communicated to Him by showing off the leaves. All of God's creation communicates with its Creator; so are we expected to answer with faith. Therefore, this fig tree in the picture was professing something that it did not even have, though it was still too early for figs. It was hypocritical.

It is probably that this tree was representing the hypocrisy in nature and hence Jesus cursed it. We have learnt from our Discipleship lesson that Jesus hates hypocrisy – one of the most rebuked by Him. Read Matthew chapter 23 for a better understanding.

It is also possible that Jesus knew this action would gain the attention of His disciples, and He would therefore use it to teach them a lesson. Jesus was not only having trees talk to Him, but He was also talking to them, just as He also encourages us to do so, be it a mountain (Mark 11:23) or a storm in our life. What is the point in talking to a tree or mountain? When Jesus cursed the fig tree, it withered immediately. The Greek word used is “PARACHREMA,” which means “instantly” (Strong’s Concordance).

However, the disciples did not realize that the fig tree had died until the next day (Mark 11:20). If the tree died instantly, why did not they notice it until the next morning? The answer to this question is found in Mark 11:20. The tree was dead from the root up. The tree did die instantly, just as the Word declared, but what had happened to the roots was not visible until the next morning.

We understand that God created everything by His word.

Hebrews 11:3 – By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (NKJV)

The whole creation was made by the spoken Word of God. In the same way, our words also have power when we release it in faith.

Proverbs 18:21 – Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit. (NKJV)

What we have here is a big spiritual lesson concerning receiving things from God. When we ask, we do receive as per Matthew 7:7, but sometime it takes a little while longer to manifest in the natural realm. When we physically see the manifestation of what we hoped for is NOT when God actually answered our prayer; in fact the Lord answered when we prayed (Mark 11:24). But just as in the case of this fig tree, we do not see the result instantly in the natural realm as we cannot see His work behind the scenes but wait until it manifests.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

This is something very difficult for us to imagine. The merciful, graceful, all compassionate God, full of love, who cries looking at His people, who used all of His money to meet other's needs, who multiplied the food for the people, shows His other side for the second time. Yes, you heard it right, the second time! John 2:13–17 records the first time, but what amazes me is that He actually sat and made a whip out of cords to drive them out of the temple!! This happened during the initial period of ministry, and now it is almost three years from then and He still cleanses the temple. I am convinced that even Jesus had to repeat the lesson because of the hardness and dullness of the heart of the people. But why did He have to do this? When the Pharisees and the religious leaders called Him all kinds of names, like demon, Beelzebub, winebibber, drunkard etc., He never for once retaliated. However, He takes the whip here because of His zeal for the Lord and His house.

Mark 11:17

Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" NKJV

Only Mark mentions that Jesus would not allow anyone to even carry a vessel through the temple; Jesus wanted His Father's house to be dedicated completely to prayer and the ministry of God. Also, as with the Sabbath, work symbolizes our own effort, and our own effort will

always fall short of what God demands for salvation. Therefore, anything that resembles work was inappropriate in the house of God.

It is worth the point to remember that these money changers were buying and selling the money to pay for temple tax and also selling animals for sacrifice. They were charging extra money from people who came from a foreign land so there was a huge money making in the exchange. These merchants were corrupt and they were also doing their business in the house of God. Anyone who uses the house of God to make money will be judged severely before God.

This is applicable even today. God tolerates us even when we commit sin against Him over and over again, such is His mercy, but one thing He really abhors and deals with harsh punishment is using God's name to make money. We should also not tolerate such acts in the name of God.

Can you imagine Jesus making a CD of His sermon and selling it? Or, for that matter, His worship song collection? Can you imagine God charging you for a healing? Can you think of Jesus asking you to pay 1000 dollars for Him to lay His hands on you for prosperity? Do you realize how the so-called Christians have disgraced the Gospel of God? It really saddens the heart of Jesus no doubt.

One of the clear identifications of false teachers, apostles, or the spirit of anti-Christ is the love for money, specified in the scriptures. I give myself as an example here, so I am safe: You will know if I preach

- a different Gospel
- a different Jesus
- apart from what is given in the Bible
- anything plus or minus Jesus

But what if I try to preach to you with an intention of milking money manipulating your compassion for the poor and the needy? That's the

kind of deception that is rampant in the Christendom these days. So, my dear brothers and sisters watch out!! (1 Timothy 6:10 says you should know by the love of money in their heart and also should be able to identify such fraudulent preachers.)

Matthew, on his account of the event, in chapter 21 adds a little more information following the clearing of the temple courts – he adds a note on children praising God, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” for which Jesus replies to the indignant chief priests quoting Psalms 8:2.

Matthew 21:17

*And said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read,
‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have perfected praise?’” NKJV*

The Unbelieving Crowd

John 12:37–50

People often misunderstand the free will of God and think that they are not given adequate opportunity to believe in God; contrarily, some even profess the predestination theory – all not true.

Titus 2:11

God’s free gift of being saved is being given to everyone. (NLV)

Revelation 3:20

*See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears
My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him
and we will eat together. NLV*

Revelation 22:17

*The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!"
Everyone who hears this must also say, "Come!"
Come, whoever is thirsty; accept the water of life as
a gift, whoever wants it. GNT*

Romans 10:13

*for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will
be saved." NIV*

So, the gift of salvation is for all mankind and whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. However, the Jewish people who lived while Jesus was on the earth could not believe Him because they chose to reject Him. They could not believe because they chose NOT to believe; they stumbled over the stumbling stone – the Christ (Romans 9:32). In Mark 6:5, the Greek word used is "OU" and "DUNAMAI," to say that Jesus could do NO mighty works because they would not believe. Jesus could not do any mighty miracles among them not because He did not have enough power to pull it off but because He chose not to use His power against the will of the people.

John 12:42–43

*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men **more than** the praise of God. NKJV*

Their unwillingness to confess Christ throws serious doubt on the complete genuineness of these men's faith and the willingness of them to commit to Christ. Jesus said, "*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 10:32–33). The Apostle Peter at one point failed to confess Jesus before people (John 18:17 and 25–

27), but after the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him, he was a different man altogether who boldly confessed Christ even among those under authority (Acts 4:8–13).

The Word of God

John 12:48

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. (NKJV)

Psalms 138:2

I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name for Your loving kindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name. NKJV

God has magnified His word above all else, which Jesus also confirms here that on the Last day, His word that He has spoken will judge them! This has also been prophesied about Jesus Christ by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18–19 (NKJV) – *I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.* The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among them; but they did not receive Him and their rejection of Him will be judged by God on the Last Day!

Night Stay

Mark 11:19

When evening had come, He went out of the city. NKJV

Matthew 21:17 Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there. NKJV