

Episode #8-48 Matthew 21 Part 4-The Lord's Authority

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being "in Israel," in contrast to believers today who are "in Christ."

II. In Matthew 21:18-19, the Lord cursed a fig tree for having no figs on it, and it immediately withered away. We discussed that the Lord looks for people, even today, who will have the courage and faith to bear fruit out of season.

III. The Withered Fig Tree. Matthew 21:18-22.

A. Verse 20. The disciples marveled, as they often did at the Lord's amazing actions. "So soon" is the same word as "immediately" in the last verse.

B. Verse 21. Assuredly or "Amen" I say to you. The Lord's solemn assertion. I claim to be a man of faith, one who takes God at His Word and responds accordingly, Who takes God's Word seriously, and who believes. Did they have more faith then? John 20:24-29, not so! Yet I cannot do what Christ did to the fig tree. Why not? Because I have no faith in regard to that. Faith comes by hearing, Romans 10:17, and I have no word on trees that do not produce fruit. If He had said that to me, all I would have to do is take Him at His word, and I could do accordingly. Yet He has not told me to cast out demons, heal the sick, and so forth, as He told the disciples. In all God's Word to me, I see no command about cursing trees or moving mountains. The Canaanite woman believed the Lord's word to her that she was a dog, and she took the dog's place and received the dog's portion, and her faith was great. He has said nothing to me about moving any mountains, but He has told me that Christ died for my sins, I believed Him, and that mountain of guilt has been removed. To have faith you must have a word from God.

C. Verse 22. This is no basis for prayer in the present time. To pray believing is to pray based on something God has said. If God has said nothing about it, then I cannot pray believing. But I can pray about the Savior God has provided and receive Him! They could pray believing those things that the Lord promised to give them, like the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They could not believe that they could fly like Superman, or become incredibly rich, because He never said anything to them about that.

IV. The Lord's Authority. Matthew 21:23-27.

A. Verse 23. The "temple" is again *hieron*, the temple courts, not the central building. The "chief priests" were the arch-priests; the "elders of the people" were the representatives. These were the men in charge of the temple, and so took an interest in all that was taught there. "Confronted" is the word *proserchomai*, that occurs 49 times in Matthew and 16 in the other three gospels combined. It can mean "approached," and many times people are said to approach Christ in Matthew, as a King. Their question is a more formal way of our expression, "Who do you think you are?" They were angry about His shutting down of the market in the temple, which He was still enforcing. "Authority" is *exousia*, meaning delegated authority. Of course, a teacher has to have authority. This is right. They referred to the fact that they were supposed to be in charge and had not given Him authority. What higher authority did He have? The second authority is also *exousia*. They don't seem to consider that He might have *dunamis* or inherent power.

- B. Verse 24. “Thing” is *logos*, I will ask you one word or expression, in this case of your opinion or judgment.
- C. Verse 25. “Heaven” in this case this means God. Since the Jews hated to say the name of God, thinking that way they could never take it in vain, they liked to use substitutes, one of which was “heaven.” Clearly a place did not authorize John’s baptism, but the God Who is exalted or lifted up, “heaven up.” Also “from heaven” and “from men” are parallel, showing heaven is a party like men. He might well have responded like they thought, or told them that John testified to His authority, so it was clear that His authority also came from God. And it was clear, much clearer even than in the case of John, for the Lord worked miracles to prove His claims, the miracles predicted of the Messiah.
- D. Verse 26. Notice this statement about the multitude. Where is the assumed rejection of Christ and His forerunner here? By His enemies’ own admission, the crowd held John as a prophet. They held Christ as one too, as we saw in the triumphal entry. The reason they did not hold Him as being more is because He did not proclaim it, and they could not understand why the Messiah would not identify Himself. But the common people were accepting Him, not rejecting.
- E. Verse 27. They show the disingenuousness of their opinions by this answer, for they could have told. They were more concerned with the effect of their words than with the truth. Notice that the truth never entered into their reasoning! If they couldn’t even tell or determine this, then what right did they have to comment on anyone’s right or authority to do anything? They had just revealed themselves as blind and clueless! They got out of the trap, but only by embarrassing themselves. Yet when the Lord got out of their traps, people marveled.

V. Conclusion: The Lord assured His disciples that, if they had faith and did not doubt, they could do what He did to the fig tree, or even move mountains. Yet we need to understand what faith is. It is not just deciding God should do something and then feeling confident that He will. It is believing what God has said, and if God has said nothing, then there is no faith. The religious leaders questioned His authority, but when He questioned them about John’s baptism, they weaseled out of answering, so the Lord refused to answer them. What do we think about John? Do we believe in his authority, and in his testimony regarding Jesus Christ? Let’s believe!