

Sing beforehand: Versification: 14-1:3:

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earthⁱ. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christⁱⁱ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise 36:2

2-

*Thy love and faithfulness extend
Wherever Thou to heaven's end
Thy righteous scepter wieldest.
Thy judgment is a secret deep,
Thy justice like God's mountains steep,
And man and beast Thou shieldest.
Of Thy great mercy heaven sings
For in the shadow of Thy wings
No son of man shall perish.
Thou shalt them to Thy feasts invite,
They drink from streams of Thy delight,
Thy precious love they cherish.*

Prayer

- *Doxology:*
- *Worship:*
- *Confession:*

Supplication (for pardon of sins):

- *Thanksgiving:*
- *Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)*
- *General supplication:*
- *Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):*

Amen.

Versification 1-1:5 (24:5)

Scripture reading : Mark 11ⁱⁱⁱ

Text : Mark 11:17b

... My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? ...

The Lord hates an external display of faith, which, if it were tested, does not display the same internal appearance. He condemns such a faith and destroys the person who possesses such a faith.

- 1. The prelude to the cleansing of the temple.**
- 2. The cleansing of the temple.**
- 3. The meaning of the prelude.**

1. The prelude to the cleansing of the temple.

This leaves many people embarrassed, because the Lord Jesus is very aggressive in this instance.

- He never acted by simply damning a tree for not bearing fruit.
- And that, while the Bible expressly states that it is not yet the time for figs!

As a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus never used His power for His own sake.

- When in the desert, the devil tempted Him to turn stones into bread, He refused.
- When He was taken captive that evening in Gethsemane, He could have given a simple command and a whole host of angels would have come to slay the people who arrived with Judas.
 - But the Lord did not do that.

Why does He damn a fig tree this time – and from the appearance of it, an innocent one at that? Let us look at what the issue is in this passage.

Immediately we realise that there are two parallel matters, namely

- The fig tree and
- The temple in Jerusalem.

What the Lord does with each of the two corresponds to a large extent. Hence it is apparent that a similarity must exist between these two.

- First we must note what happens with regards to the fig tree.
 - The Lord is hungry – He then saw the tree with all its leaves.
 - He looks through the tree but finds no fruit - consequently He curses the tree.

This happened the *Monday* before the crucifixion.

The next morning, *Tuesday morning*, when they again passed the tree, the disciples notice that the tree had dried up from its roots.

It seems so wrong. Never before the Lord Jesus condemn someone or something and here a condemns a tree... Did He become that angry or what was the matter here?

2. The cleansing of the temple

In order to understand it all, we need to look at what happened just after the Lord left the tree.

- From there he went to the temple in Jerusalem.
- The Jews were particularly proud of temple in Jerusalem, because it was the symbol of their religion.
- There the Scribes busied themselves with their study of the law.
 - The Pharisees and Scribes' religious display was so enormous that of own accord, they increased the Ten Commandments with thousands of laws of their own.
 - In the temple the Pharisees and chief priests did tremendously long prayers for all to see.
 - They used make-up to make themselves pale so that the people would think that they fasted severely.
 - As circumcised men, they looked down upon those who did not have the sign of the covenant.

All these things were their external glory that they were a people of God.

The great tragedy of it all was that as impressive as this external display was – it was inherently empty.

- That is why Jesus calls them plastered graves – very impressive on the outside but filled with skeletons.
- They were a bunch of hypocrites and murderers: they were the priests who were supposed to have recognised the Lord's Son when He came to them, but who did not. They are the one's who later on screamed that He must be crucified.

This is why Mark gives such a detailed description thereof that when Jesus entered the temple, He did not find a house of prayer.

- He walked into a business where the office bearers no longer served the Lord, but only ensured that their pockets got filled.
- That is why the Lord turned the tables of the moneychangers and dove sellers upside down, and why He chased out all the traders.

The Lord enters the place where He is supposed to find His people busy worshipping Him.

- But there He finds the world where trading; selling and buying, fills in the air.
- The peace and quiet of God's presence is absent.
- The Lord Jesus was supposed to have found an entire people in worship – a people who were able to immediately recognise Him as the Messiah!

That is why the Lord harshly re-establishes the order and then reminds His people that the temple is intended as place of prayer.

- It is the place where the fruit of your gratitude towards God, for all His goodness and blessings, is supposed to come to the fore.
- Today still, we confess that prayer is the most important part of our thankfulness towards God.
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The point is that the people displayed all the external signs of serving the Lord, but a service to God, which truly bears fruit, it was most certainly not. Their hearts were totally estranged from the Lord.

3. The meaning of the prelude

Let us return to the fig tree. The Lord wishes to reveal something to the disciples.

- That is why, on His way to Jerusalem, the Lord walks to a fig tree, which, while having abundant leaves, has no figs.
- He wants them to know in advance what He does to a false church / believer.
- That is why it is so significant that it is expressly written for us, that it was not yet the season for figs.

It was spring.

- Before a fig tree has leaves, the budding fruit are visible from the first day already, and sometimes the fruit are not that small either.
- The *second crop* of figs accompanies the leaves.

In other words, it is so, that a fig tree must bear fruit at the time that it has it's leaves – especially that early on in the season.

- The Lord examined that tree roughly two months before the fruit was supposed to have been ripe.
- There were supposed to at least have been green figs on the tree, but there was not a single fig in site.
- The fig tree thus had the appearance of something, which it was not!

The fig tree is a symbol of the people who had the external appearance of having a temple and of worshipping the Lord. But their hearts were very far from the Lord – the Lord who's Name was so frequently on their lips.

The fig tree was cursed on the Monday. By Tuesday it was completely dried up. Friday the Lord was crucified – proof that the church could not recognise the King of the Church, that is why they killed Him.

Let us apply this passage to ourselves.

- What the Lord Jesus did to the fig tree and church in Jerusalem has a direct bearing on us.
- The Lord expects that our external piety be accompanied by internal sincerity.

In the event that it is not so with us, real conversion is required.

- Or else we will suffer the judgment of the fig tree over us.
- The Lord does not have patience with false worthiness.
- He does have grace for someone who sins, but fights hard against it – someone who lives a life of re-birth and conversion.

Everyone gathered here today, has been baptised.

- When a child is baptised, we are the witnesses that the Lord establishes and seals His covenant to that child.
- At that moment: what do we think of our own baptism, and the responsibility that flows from it with regards to our daily life of faith?

Baptism establishes that the baptised person belongs to the Lord, and shares in His grace to the full extent thereof.

- But for exactly that reason the question: do we now bear the fruit of the Lord?
- Or are our lives like that of the fig tree: covered with beautiful leaves in spring, displaying the luxuriousness of its greenery, but unable to withstand the Lord's test because it did not bear the fruit that was supposed to have accompanied it's leafy abundance.

We celebrated the Lord's Supper.

- With the sacrament the Lord established to us that He died so that we may be reconciled with God and so that the Holy Spirit now dwells within us.
- The meaning thereof is on the one hand that we do not have to fear the Lord's judgment.
- But on the other hand that sitting at the Lord's Table we do so knowing that in our service to the Lord we are faithful - that together with our leaves, we also bear fruit for the Lord.

Dear congregation, in our faith, we should never pretend to be what we are not.

- The Lord does not look to our outside.
- The Lord Jesus pushed the leaves aside and thoroughly examined the tree - He looks into our hearts and he tests our thoughts.

With a shock the disciples the next day discovered that the tree had dried up completely!

- When they referred to it, the Lord Jesus said to them: You must believe in God!
- He spoke more about specifically the trust and prayers of our faith. Pray and believe.
- Prayers should not be limited to a church building - our lives before God must be lived in continual prayer.

Naturally not a single one of us is perfect.

- The Lord knows that – that is why He let His Son die for us.

- But He does ask complete conversion of us - sincere conversion.
- He asks honesty.

It's senseless to want to be something in which you do not believe. Ultimately it is not the people for whom you put up a facade who will judge you – it is the Lord Himself.

- We must please bear in mind that Lord hates a false pretence of faith, which does not match up with your inside.
- He condemns such a faith and destroys such a person.

Our comfort is that we do not need to pretend.

- In the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ we are already saved.
- (As church) we are already a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Live with the dignity and honesty with God gives us in Christ.

Amen.

Prayer.

Psalm 1:1,2

1-

*How blessed is the man whose walk is not
In evil counsel which the wicked plot,
Who does not stand where sin its pleasure offers
And will not take his seat among the scoffers;
But his delight is in God's cov'nant law:
By night and day he ponders it with awe.*

2-

*Behold, the righteous man is like a tree
Which by the streams yields fruit abundantly,
Whose leaves are green and shall not fade or perish;
In all he does, the righteous one shall flourish.
But wicked men are not like him, for they
Resemble chaff that winds will drive away.*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.^{iv}

Amen.

Dr. M.J. du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
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ⁱ *Psalm 124:8*

ⁱⁱ *1 Corinthians 1:3*

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+11&version=KJV>

^{iv} *2 Corinthians 13:14*