

# The Rejection

📖 Matthew 21:12-22

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 July 13, 2016

🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Last time we studied Matthew 20:29-34 which is the prelude to the Triumphal Entry in the healing of the two blind men. It is a prelude because Jesus' healing of the two blind men depicted in a physical way what He could provide for the nation Israel in a spiritual way, if they would only come to Him admitting their need for Him to heal their blindness as the two blind men. In 20:29 they were leaving residential Jericho (Jewish Jericho), on their way through municipal Jericho (Roman Jericho) up to Jerusalem, and a large crowd followed Him. In 20:30 two blind men were sitting by the road. The parallels note that the large crowd is what prompted them to ask what all the commotion was about. When they learned that it was Jesus they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The parallels mention only one blind man named Bartimaeus but this is likely because he was the spokesman for the two. Matthew probably recorded both in order to meet the demand of two witnesses for his Jewish audience. The significant points of the verse are three-fold. First, that they recognize Him as Lord, a title used only here in the Gospel of Matthew and signifies His sovereign authority. Second, that they recognize that they deserve nothing and thereby request mercy. Third, that they recognize Him as the Son of David, a Messianic title. In 20:31, the crowd told them to shut up but they could not be shut up and cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" The startling point is that while they were physically blind they had spiritual sight whereas the crowds who had physical sight were spiritually blind. In 20:32 Jesus stopped and asked them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" By this is shown that we must declare to Him our need. In 20:33 they said, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." In 20:34 Jesus was moved with compassion, even in the midst of His nearing suffering and death, and touched their eyes upon which they immediately regained their sight and followed Him. What did we learn? The two blind men illustrate what Jesus would do for the spiritually blind nation of Israel if only they would admit their need. Since they would not the kingdom would not arrive at this time, but instead spiritual sight would be given to each individual who puts their trust in Him during the postponement and they will be raised to enter the kingdom when a future nation of Israel does admit their need and come to Him.

In 21:1, having made the ascent they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the east slope of the Mount of Olives. From here in 21:2, Jesus sent two disciples to the nearby village of Bethany where He told them

by omniscience that they would immediately find a donkey tied there with her colt, and to untie them and bring them to Him. If anyone said anything, which the parallels record they did, then they should simply say, "The Lord has need of them, and immediately he will send them," which they did. And so prophecy was being fulfilled, as Matthew reports in 21:4, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet and in verse 5 he quotes Isa 62:11 as an introduction to Zech 9:9. The change of introduction is due to the fact that the nation had rejected Him and therefore needed the King to be pointed out to them. And so "Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." At His first advent Jesus would ride the colt which symbolized a king entering as a servant offering peace to His people; whereas at His second advent He will ride a horse which is a symbol of a king entering as a conquering warrior to establish the kingdom. In 21:6 the disciples did just as Jesus instructed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat upon the coats that were laid upon the colt, which was unbroken, and had his mother alongside, which is thereby an indication that He is the Last Adam who re-establishes dominion over nature which was lost by the First Adam. And in a very striking and open display in 21:8 He made His approach to Jerusalem with most of the crowd, though not all, spreading their coats in the road or others laying palm branches from the trees in the road as a sign of welcoming the King. In 21:9 there are those who went ahead of Him and those who were behind Him, as if He were entering in a great Triumph and they were shouting over and over in the imperfect tense, "Hosanna," or praise, "to the Son of David;" and issuing the Messianic greeting of Ps 118:26, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." This was a good response but relative to the probable 2.7 million that were in the Jerusalem environs for the Feast of Passover, it was a very small group. He entered the city as the Lamb of God on the very day that Jewish tradition asserts the Passover Lamb would be selected. In 21:10 He likely entered the Sheep Gate, the very gate these lambs would pass through on their way to sacrifice, and yet ironically they would pass over the Lamb of God in favor of sheep which cannot remove guilt or bring peace to Jerusalem, only the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God can do that. And when He had entered Jerusalem all the city, millions of people were shaken, as if by a great earthquake, and saying, "Who is this?" And in 21:11, the crowds do not answer as Peter had answered, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, but were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." So we see a rejection of His Person. Luke says they did not recognize the time of their visitation since the 69<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's prophecy had transpired on that very day, and the consequence is that they would be militarily defeated and dispersed to the four corners of the earth.

This event became known in Church History as the Triumphal Entry, but I propose that this is a misnomer because He did not enter in Triumph. He was presented as a Triumphant King and would have been if they had accepted Him, but they interpreted Him merely as a prophet from the despised town of Nazareth and therefore rejected, despite the fact that He had presented Himself to the nation in fulfillment of OT prophecy as a humble, servant King mounted on a colt, offering peace to Jerusalem through Himself as the Passover Lamb, on the very day predicted by the seventy sevens prophecy of Daniel. So their failure to recognize Him, greet Him and

enthroned Him as King not only confirmed their rejection beyond all shadow of doubt but manifested tremendous blindness that caused Jesus to weep over the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Shortly, Jesus said, a barricade would be put up around them, this was fulfilled by the Romans under Titus, their women and children would be killed, their Temple would be destroyed such that not one stone laid upon another, all because they did not recognize the time of their visitation.

Now as to the timing, Walvoord and others hold this was on Sunday and thus Palm Sunday whereas Hoehner and others say it was Monday and so I guess, Palm Monday. It's difficult to tell from the Gospel accounts. What we know from John 12:1-10 is that they arrived in Bethany six days before Passover, which on the Judean calendar was Friday, making their arrival six days before on Saturday, and that he had supper there that night with Lazarus and Mary with Martha serving. That was when Mary poured the costly perfume on his feet and wiped them with her hair as a preparation of His body for burial and Judas protested this great waste of nearly a year's salary but Jesus defended her. The text then goes on to say in 12:12 "On the next day...they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem" and the Triumphal entry is described. Thus people argue that day would have been Sunday. Thus Palm Sunday. However, Hoehner argues that the text of John 12:12 is not definitive enough and only proves that a large crowd gathered in Bethany on Sunday to see Jesus and then when they heard that He was going to come to Jerusalem prepared for the Triumphal Entry which occurred on Monday.<sup>1</sup> Thus Palm Monday. I think the Monday view is better since the text is not definitive that it was Sunday and a Monday entry links it with the very day that Jewish tradition states the lambs for Passover were chosen such that Jesus would be presenting Himself as Israel's Passover lamb on that very day they chose the lambs; whereas a Sunday entry loses that forceful connection. So I hold to Palm Monday.

Now, when you come to Matthew 21:12, the cleansing of the Temple, you'd think this was later on Monday after the Triumphal Entry, but Mark 11:11 says, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late." So all He did at the Temple on Monday, the day of the Triumphal Entry, was enter into the temple compound through the Sheep Gate on the north side and walk around and investigate all the shenanigans that were going on. Then He left for Bethany and the reason stated is that it was already late. So as we go through the week you'll observe that they go to Jerusalem but they return to Bethany at night and the reason is because Bethany was outside the jurisdiction of the scribes and Pharisees. And so while they wanted to arrest Him and kill Him, as well as Lazarus, they couldn't do it while they were in Bethany because that was outside their jurisdiction. And they couldn't do it while He was in Jerusalem either because He was too popular with the people and it wouldn't be politically expedient. So, all of this to say that He went back to Bethany each day so that He was not arrested and killed prematurely. He had to die as the Passover Lamb on the Judean Passover which was Friday. The crucifixion will occur on Friday. So during the week He will stay in Bethany because he's safe in Bethany and He will travel to Jerusalem each day. Where's Bethany? Bethany, is on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. It's about two miles to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

So Matt 21:12 is Tuesday and it goes straight to His arrival at the temple where He drove out the moneychangers. But Mark adds that on the way from Bethany He became hungry and He saw a fig tree and He went over to it but there were no figs and He cursed the fig tree. Then they came to Jerusalem and He drove out the moneychangers. You hear all these supposed problems. It's my take that Mark is giving the chronology account. Matthew does mention the cursing of the fig tree down in verse 18ff but seemingly after the cleansing of the temple. So which is it, Matthew indicates the order is cleansing of the temple and then cursing of the fig tree whereas Mark indicates the reverse. Laney says, "Mark, true to his style, has given us the more detailed account, recording the chronological order of events. Matthew, more interested in thematic development, has telescoped the two events into one. Putting the two accounts together, we see that Jesus cursed the fig tree before cleansing the temple and commented on the withered tree the next day in response to His disciples' question."<sup>3</sup> So Matthew, for thematic reasons, mentions the cleansing of the temple first and then the cursing, though in strict chronology these events occurred in reverse.

We'll follow Matthew's thematic order. In verse 12, **Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.** He probably **entered the temple** this time from the southern Hulda gates. There was a double and triple gate, still evidenced today on the southern retaining wall of the Temple Mount. The wide southern steps evidence that most pilgrims entered the Temple Mount from the southern gates. Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, the world's leading authorities on the Temple Mount say, "The enormous dimensions of this monumental stairway suggest that it was the grandest of all the approaches to the Temple gates. It therefore was probably ascended by the majority of pilgrims going to worship in the Temple."<sup>4</sup> These gates pass through the large retaining wall in a 240-foot long tunnel and surface on the Temple Mount in the court of the Gentiles. It should be remembered that the sacred space was originally a square as constructed by Solomon and later used by Zerubbabel after the partial return from exile to Babylon and only later did the Hasmonians (Maccabees) and Herod the Great expand the Temple Mount to its dimensions in Jesus' and our times. These expanded areas north, south and west are outside of the space designated as sacred by God. Therefore, if the buying and selling were going on in this space Jesus probably would not have cleared them out. Since He did it seems that they had moved their business into this sacred Temple space. Ritmeyer says, "So, when we read in the Gospels that Jesus drove away the money-changers and those who sold sacrificial animals, it would appear that this was an occasion when the market had spilled over from the Royal Stoa into the holy area, thus profaning it."<sup>5</sup> I didn't mention the Royal Stoa but it was a large covered porch all along the southern end of the Temple Mount. As a consequence, in verse 12, **Jesus...drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple,** somewhere in the sacred space. The verb **drove out** means He "...assumed authority over 'the temple of God...'"<sup>6</sup> This was not something easy to do although He had done it before earlier in his ministry. Malachi 3:1 predicts that when Messiah comes He will come suddenly to His temple. This is not a fulfillment of that prophecy because they were in rejection, but it was a foreshadowing of what He could do and will do when He comes in

His kingdom. Walvoord says, "There is no excuse for trying to harmonize this with a much earlier incident, recorded in John 2:13-16, which was at a previous Passover. There is obvious resemblance between the two cleansings, but the point, of course, is that the first cleansing was ineffective in bringing about any permanent cure."<sup>7</sup> He had come to the Temple but they did not want Him to come.

Significantly, none of the parallels report any resistance to Jesus' taking control. Walvoord says, "It is significant on this occasion, as in the first cleansing of the temple, there was no resistance offered. There was something about the bearing of Jesus that silenced these money-loving merchants, and undoubtedly the people approved."<sup>8</sup> Jesus was very manly not a weak, long haired hippie.

What angered Jesus is that they had turned the sacred space of the Temple from a house of prayer into a house of business. Pilgrims came from great distances. They could bring their own animals for sacrifice but they would be met with resistance from the religious leaders. The people were encouraged to purchase animals that had been under their auspices in the environs around Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> The prices of these animals was hiked up, but hey, it was for religious purposes. Further, they couldn't use their own money to purchase these animals because the religious leaders insisted that in the temple money that had been in circulation could not be used. Therefore, they had to exchange their money, at a fee, and then use the temple money to purchase the animals. Quite obviously the religious leaders took every opportunity to milk the people in order to enrich themselves. Barbieri says, "Many were making their living from the temple and the sacrifices purchased there. They insisted that in the temple the people could not use money that had been circulating in society, but had to change their money into temple money first, for a fee, and then use the temple money to purchase animals for sacrifice, at inflated prices."<sup>10</sup> They had turned the Temple space into a stockyard and business and so Jesus cleansed the Temple by driving out all those engaged in business, overturning the tables of the moneychangers as well as the seats of those who sold doves to those too poor to purchase lambs.

In 21:13 **He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den."** They had turned the Temple into a robber's cave, a dungeon of bandits. Where prayer was the order of the day, theft had taken over. Jesus claims the house as His own whereas the religious authorities considered it their safe house for conducting theft. Lenski said, "No matter what they do even by violating the sanctity of their Temple, they imagine that their adherence to this Temple will protect and shield them from any penalty." They were sorely mistaken. Jesus quoted from two OT passages showing from one the purpose of Temple and from the other what the Temple had been turned into. The first passage is Isa 56:7, **'My house shall be called a house of prayer'** The Temple was viewed as the place where those on earth communicated with God in heaven. Therefore, the Temple was to be **a house of prayer**. Even Daniel, when exiled from Jerusalem prayed toward the Temple illustrating that the prayers offered from earth were viewed as travelling horizontally to the Temple and then vertically to heaven in order to reach God. The Temple was viewed by David as the footstool of God. I make mention of this because things were different during the economy of Israel under the

Law of Moses. The place of worship was one place on earth. The Church is under the economy of the Law of Messiah where each one of us is a Temple no matter where we are. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." These differences must be respected in the distinction between Israel and the Church. At that time the place of worship was the Temple and only the Temple. But the second passage Jesus quotes is Jer 7:11 where God says I see that you have turned My house into a robber's den. Toussaint says, "...the temple had become a garrison for a group of bandits." The context of Jeremiah says that they would steal, murder and commit adultery and then claim to be excluded from the consequences of their sin because they held on to the Temple. This was ridiculous theology. God saw exactly what they did to His house and Jesus cleansed it. His authority was met with silence.

Next, in 21:14, **the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.** These were excluded from the more holy inner courts by their condition but He healed them to give them access. Verse 15, **But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant.** Note that the **chief priests and the scribes** could not deny the healings. Even they attested that they were **wonderful things.** The Greek word *θαυμασιος* refers to "remarkable things," "things worthy of amazement." In response the children were identifying Him as **the Son of David** and **shouting** out **Hosanna** to Him. **Hosanna**, an Aramaic word that came to mean "Praise." The Greek word translated **children** is *παις* and has a focus on one below the age of puberty. It is masculine and so refers to boys the age of twelve who had come for the first time up to Jerusalem for Passover as Jesus had first come up at age twelve. Walvoord said, "These were boys, who like Jesus, had come to the temple for the first time at the age twelve."<sup>11</sup> They referred to Him as **the Son of David.** The title **the Son of David** was a common appellation for the Messiah that is used more extensively here in the final days of Jesus. These twelve-year-old boys recognized Jesus as the Messiah and ascribed praise to Him for His great works. But by contrast **the chief priests and scribes...became indignant**, not just because they referred to Him as the Son of David but also because of the wonderful works that He did. The picture is clear; the leadership were rejecting His Person and His Works whereas mere twelve year old boys were accepting His person and work. The pattern is clear in Matthew's Gospel; the magi proclaimed Him king of the Jews, not the scribes, the centurion had great faith, not Israel, the Syrophoenician woman had faith, not Jews, and now the children declare Him to be Messiah, not the chief priests and scribes. They had a chronic case of blindness.

In 21:16 the chief priests and scribes **said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them** frankly, **"Yes"** signifying that He was receiving their praise. He then quotes from Psalm 8, **have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?'**" The specific quotation is Ps 8:2 and refers to the praise that will be given to the Messiah in His kingdom. If in the kingdom infants and nursing babies will praise Him for the kingdom conditions, then why is it problematic that

twelve-year-old boys praise Him before that kingdom comes? Had they not read the Scriptures? Toussaint says of the significance, "The use that Jesus makes of Psalm 8...is also significant. This Psalm is a prophecy of praise which men will offer to God for the conditions that exist during the millennium. Therefore the praise of the children at this point is a foreview of the adoration which will be Christ's in the future."<sup>12</sup> By radical contrast to the young boys the leadership were savagely hostile to Him.

With their rejection of Him we should not be surprised that in verse 17 He rejects them. The words **And He left them** are words of rejection, not just physical movement out of the city. The additional words **and went out** refer to the physical movement **out of the city**. Toussaint says, "...This passage shows that Christ is about to reject Israel. Verse seventeen says that He forsook them and went outside the city. Emphasis is placed on His leaving by the use Matthew makes of the verbs "to leave and to go forth," and the preposition "out" (*καταλειπω, εξερχομαι, and εξω*)."<sup>13</sup> At this point he returned **to Bethany, and spent the night there**, again, because this was outside the jurisdiction of the scribes and chief priests, they could not prematurely apprehend Him and kill Him before the Passover. The point is clear; Jesus is in complete control of the timing of these events leading up to and including His arrest, suffering, crucifixion and resurrection. No one could take His life from Him but He laid it down of His own accord.

Now we come to verse 18 and as I mentioned before it discusses the fig tree. Matthew placed this after Jesus cleansed the Temple whereas Mark placed it before Jesus cleansed the Temple. Mark gives the proper sequence. Jesus had cursed the fig tree on his way to Jerusalem to cleanse the Temple. Matthew moves it after for thematic reasons related to the following lessons that are taught in the three parables of the two sons, the landowner and the wedding banquet. All three of them relate to the lesson of faith that the leadership did not have and the judgment that was going to come on that generation as a consequence for lack of faith.

In 21:18, **Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry**. This is as He was on His way to cleanse the Temple, it was Tuesday morning. Along the way **He became hungry**. This emphasizes His human nature. Jesus is a true human with a human body, spirit and soul. Isaiah 9:6 says, "A child will be born." As Jesus was born so He is a true human and as a true human **He became hungry**. In verse 19, **Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only**. He was looking at it from a distance and hoping to find some figs on the tree. Commentators are often perplexed over how He could expect there to be figs on the tree this time of year, especially when Mark 11:13 adds that "it was not the season for figs," yet such confusion is due to a lack of understanding the different weather conditions in Judea and the Galilee. In the Galilee the weather is warming permitting people "to see figs hanging ripe on the trees every month in the year excepting January and February..." whereas in Judea the weather is cooler and figs ripen later in spring, which had not yet arrived. However, Jesus seeing **leaves** on the **lone fig tree** thought that the prospect was promising, for "as the fruit of a fig sets before the leaves unfold, this tree looked more than usually promising." However, when **He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; He said to it, "No**

**longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered.** This might give the impression that Jesus did this miracle out of His divine nature and He did, of course, have a divine nature, and some miracles appear to have been done that way. However, we learn in the next verses that Jesus was able to curse the fig tree by exercising faith in God, **and at once it withered**, that is the work of God.

Now some argue that if Jesus could curse the fig tree and cause it to wither at once then how could He not have known that the fig-tree would have no fruit on it. Walvoord says, “Here, Matthew is apparently speaking from the viewpoint of human intelligence only, but the whole incident was planned as a means of conveying truth to the disciples.” What truth is that? Clearly what follows is a lesson on faith.

However, another lesson may relate to the significance of the fig tree. Most hold that the fig tree is a depiction of the nation Israel and that what is being demonstrated is that Jesus is rejecting that generation of Israel because of their failure to produce fruits in accordance with repentance, the very thing John the Baptist called for. They showed all the outward signs of promise, just as the fig tree, but there was no genuine fruit. Edersheim says, “...the fig-tree served in the Old Testament as emblem of the Jewish nation—in the Talmud, rather as that of Israel’s lore, and hence of the leaders and the pious of the people. Israel was that barren fig-tree; and the leaves only covered their nakedness, as erst they had that of our first parents after their Fall. And the judgment, symbolically spoken in the Parable, must be symbolically executed in this leafy fig-tree, barren when searched for fruit by the Master.”<sup>14</sup> This is possible contextually in that Jesus is rejecting that generation because they rejected Him and there are other symbols employed such as the mountain. Of course, there were believing Jews of that generation and they were not being condemned. Toussaint explains. “It is significant that of all the miracles which Christ is recorded to have performed, this is the only miracle of judgment. The reason it occurs here is to mark the future of that generation of Jews, who failed to accept their Messiah.” Christ is not condemning Jews who had believed, nor is He “condemning Israel forever, but he is judging that generation forever. It would never see the kingdom.”<sup>15</sup> Whether Jesus is employing this rich imagery of the barren fig-tree to teach a lesson about that generation of Israel or not the context seems to support that He is and He now uses the occasion to teach a second lesson to the twelve about their apostolic ministries in the coming Church age. I see two lessons.

In 21:20, **Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, “How did the fig tree wither all at once?”** **21 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen. 22 And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”** This is an important lesson about praying with faith. In verse 21 Jesus implied that He had exercised faith in God when He cursed the fig tree. As a result, God had withered the tree. The point is that His disciples must exercise faith in God in order to see great miracles done through them. They had been taught this on a prior occasion when they could not cast out some difficult demons. Note that Jesus says **if you have faith and do not doubt...**In other words, faith



must not be mixed with doubt. In fact, faith is the absence of doubt. James 1:6 says that one “must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a doubled-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Despite the Bible’s insistence that faith is the opposite of doubt I warn you that many are saying that faith is not the opposite of doubt. For example, Bobby Conway says, “Doubt is not the opposite of faith, it’s in that in-between place, that no man’s land between unbelief and faith.”<sup>16</sup> Conway’s goal is to get people to doubt toward faith rather than toward unbelief. He thinks that when we doubt toward faith this helps us to search for answers to our doubts. While I agree that when we doubt we should search for answers I think that making doubt an in-between neutral world between faith and lack of faith is biblically flawed. James 1:6 makes clear that one “must ask in faith without any doubting” and Jesus in Matt 21:21 says, “if you have faith and do not doubt,” seemingly making the two incompatible. I don’t think doubt is a neutral stance in between faith and unbelief. I think fundamentally, it is unbelief and Rom 14:23 says whatsoever is not of faith is sin. So I warn you about that teaching that is becoming very prevalent and is opening the door for saying that God accepts us with our doubt and that would mean with our sin. As a holy God He does not. The only response He accepts is faith. So what Jesus is teaching is clear; just as He exercised faith in God with the result that God caused the tree to wither so the apostles must exercise faith in God in order to see God work miracles through them.

At the end of verse 22 Jesus uses a figure of speech related to moving a mountain. This is a figure He used on a prior occasion when the disciples had trouble believing and could not cast demons out (Matt 17:19ff). Here He says, **but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen.** A mountain is a serious obstacle. Jesus used it as a figure of speech for overcoming something very difficult. In reality He has in mind healing sickness, physical abnormalities and even raising the dead, obstacles they will face in their future ministries but by praying with faith will overcome and be authenticated as divine messengers.

In 21:22 Jesus connects this directly with **prayer** saying **And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.** This may sound like a blanket promise that whatever you ask for in faith you will get. But in the context Jesus is talking to the disciples about their ability to do miracles in their future ministries in order to authenticate their apostleship. The fulfillment is spelled out in the Book of Acts as they heal the lame, the sick and even raise the dead. What Jesus was saying was that if they faced these tremendous obstacles all they needed to do was ask in prayer, believing and they would be able to do such miracles. That is the interpretation.

Of course, we may make application of the principle of prayer with faith since that is required for us to receive anything. In the context He is talking about asking in prayer for help in overcoming obstacles in the Christian life. In other words, asking for skills to navigate difficult trials that we face, much like the Book of James addresses. So while there are some passages, including this one, that sound like a blanket promise for answered prayer, in the immediate contexts of those passages there are limitations. Despite this Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel groups use these passages to justify the name it and claim it theology and plague those who do not prosper

with guilt over not having enough faith. That is a ridiculous theology. There are no blanket promises that God will answer your prayer when it is coupled with faith. One would think this is obvious as the Scriptures often explicitly mention conditions for answered prayer, some of which include; righteous behavior (Jn 5:16), abiding in Him and His words abiding in you (Jn 15:7), perseverance in prayer (Luke 11:5-13), in the will of God (Jn 14:13) and right motives (Jn 4:3). The long of the short of it is that in the application Jesus is not guaranteeing that whatever you ask for with faith you will get but whatever spiritual skills for overcoming obstacles you ask for with faith God will provide.

But the interpretation remains firm, the apostles will face tremendous obstacles in their future ministries, they will need supernatural help from God to do miracles. In the same way that Jesus exercised faith in order to curse the fig tree so they will have to exercise faith to do miracles. Their miracles done in the Book of Acts authenticated them as the divinely sent messengers of God.

In conclusion, what lessons can we learn? First, in the episode of cleansing the Temple, Jesus showed the contrast between the faith of the twelve-year-old boys and the rejection of the leadership. In light of their rejection He rejected them. Second, in the episode of cursing the fig-tree, Jesus taught two lessons. First, His rejection of that generation of Israel because they, like the fig-tree, showed outward promise of bearing fruit in keeping with repentance but bore no fruit. They were therefore cursed and would not see the kingdom because it would be postponed until a later generation does bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Second, that the disciples, in order to do miracles must couple prayer with faith. That is how Jesus did this miracle and that is how they would do miracles in their later ministries in order to be authenticated as God's messengers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, p 91.

<sup>2</sup> Cf J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 377.

<sup>3</sup> J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions*, p 202.

<sup>4</sup> Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, *Jerusalem: The Temple Mount*, p 68.

<sup>5</sup> Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, *Jerusalem: The Temple Mount*, p 70.

<sup>6</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933.

<sup>7</sup> John Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, p 157.

<sup>8</sup> John Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, p 157.

<sup>9</sup> Probably the temple flock referred to in Mic 4:8 where the Shepherds were watching their flock by night when Messiah was born (cf Luke 2:8ff).

<sup>10</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 68.

---

<sup>11</sup> John Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, p 158.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 244.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 244.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Edersheim quoted by J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 378.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 245.

<sup>16</sup> [https://today.faithlife.com/2016/06/29/dr-bobby-conways-new-book-about-doubt-counting-the-10-commandments-2/?utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_source=feedpress.me&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+faithlife-today-6](https://today.faithlife.com/2016/06/29/dr-bobby-conways-new-book-about-doubt-counting-the-10-commandments-2/?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedpress.me&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+faithlife-today-6)