

Grace Downtown CG Discussion Guide

Mar 19-22, 2018

Matthew 21: 18-22

Series: Signs of the King

Announcements:

Faith Skepticism and Conversation: What are some of your big questions regarding faith, spirituality, or philosophy? Join a judgment-free discussion on the following topics of Faith, God, and Reason. This gathering will happen regularly, and the first one will be **Wed March 21**, 7:00 pm. Church office. Contact Andrew@gracedc.net for details.

Holy Week:The Grace DC network will honor the life, death, and resurrection of our savior Jesus Christ through these Holy Week services. Consider inviting a friend!

Maundy Thursday, **March 29**, 7:00 pm. Grace Meridian Hill, 810 Shepherd St NW

Good Friday, **March 30**, 12:00 pm. Calvary Baptist, 755 8th St NW. (Yes, at Calvary!)

Easter Sunday, **April 1**, 5:00 pm. Chinese Community Church, 500 I St NW.

Kingdom Prayer: The prayer team is hosting a **monthly** prayer the first Sunday of each month at 4pm. The next gathering will be **April 1**. Location: Classroom in the fellowship hall at Chinese Community Church. All are welcome and invited to pray for our church and our city.

Introduction to Grace Downtown: At this seminar, you'll hear from our pastors and other ministry leaders on the vision and core values of our church. Open to all. Required for church membership. Lunch, snacks, and refreshments will be served. **Sat April 7**, 9:00 am- 3:00 pm. Church office, 637 Indiana Ave NW, Suite 300.

Introduction:

In the passage tonight, we've jumped ahead in Matthew. Jesus has left Capernaum and the area around the Sea of Galilee and moved south to Jerusalem, the place of his death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). The passage we are reading takes place right around the time Jesus cleared the temple of the money-changers. (Matt. 21:12-17). Jesus had left the city to stay in Bethany, and the fig tree at the center of this story was evidently on his route in and out of Jerusalem (Mark recounts this episode chronologically in two parts, with the clearing of the temple in the middle. Mark 11:12-25. Matthew provides a thematic account, grouping the events together.)

Some knowledge of agriculture—and the Old Testament—is helpful to understanding this “enacted parable.” The account in Matthew and the parallel account in Mark both note that the fig tree had leaves (Matt. 21:19; Mark 11:13). Generally, fig trees produce leaves and figs around the same time. So the fact that the tree had leaves meant that it should have had fruit as well. Given the time of year (Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover), it was a bit early for fig trees to produce either fruit or leaves (Mark 11:13). But even then, the absence of figs was telling. Throughout the Old Testament, the fig tree is symbolic of Israel. (E.g., Jer. 8:13) The prophet Hosea said that when God found Israel, his joy was akin to “seeing the early fruit on the fig tree.” (Hosea 9:10). Here, there was no early fruit in which to delight.

Read and Discuss:
Read Matthew 21: 18-22 aloud together.

1. How is this miracle different from the miracles we've studied previously? Particularly following his actions in the temple (Matt. 21:12-17), what does this tell us about the different ways Christ used miracles in his ministry?
2. Why is it significant that the fig tree had leaves but no fruit? (Hint: Review the discussion in the Introduction) Would Christ's reaction have been different if the tree had neither leaves nor fruit?
3. In what ways was Israel like the fig tree in this passage? What were they doing that was giving the impression that they should be bearing fruit? (Hint: Matthew 23) Why might they have been expected to produce fruit earlier than other "trees"?
4. Read Luke 13:6-9. How does that help us to understand God's reaction to fruitless trees?
5. Rather than asking what this miracle means, the disciples ask how it was done (v. 20). Jesus uses that question to shift gears and teach a lesson on faith (vv. 21-22). How is that lesson related to the miracle he just performed? (Hint: What sort of fruit does faith produce?)

Application:-

1. In context, the fig tree represents Israel, and particularly the religious leaders of the day. But the message of this passage also applies to anyone whose outward profession of faith or public acts of piety do not flow from genuine faith. Have you ever been more concerned about outward signs of fruitfulness rather than cultivating fruit itself? Is there anything in your life that amounts to leaves rather than fruit?
2. What is required in order for us to bear fruit? (Hint: John 15:4-5)

Prayer:

...that we would always remember Christ's sacrifice for our salvation. Pray that we use the Lenten season to meditate on the temptation and suffering that Christ was exposed to when he came to earth as a man.

...for those who are suffering in solitude. Pray that our church would foster a spirit of openness that encourages us to share our most personal burdens with each other. Give thanks that God is always with us in our sorrow and will never forsake us.

...for organizations that provide health and welfare services to people who are homeless. Pray that the Lord would bless these organizations with resources to advance their mission of caring for the less fortunate. Pray that the church would provide an example of a community that loves people who are homeless and all people who are ostracized by society.