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As you find your place in Matthew 21, I want to ask you a question: **How much faith do you have this morning?** Would you say your faith is strong, weak or somewhere in between. Do you know how most will answer that question? Most will lean to saying that they’re weak. Why? Because I believe many Christians (and that would include me...for a lot of my life), have been tricked by Satan that we’ve got to be Billy Graham or the Apostle Paul to have great faith.

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Let me ask another question. Can a little bit of faith lead to great faith? Yes. I think you would agree with me that yes...a little bit of faith can ultimately lead to great faith...the question is: HOW DO WE GET THERE? How can we have faith that doesn't doubt but grows? How can we grow in our faith, when our faith so often, seems so small? We're going to see how to do that this morning...how to “Have Faith that Doesn’t Doubt.”

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Here in Matthew 21, verse 18. Matthew is going to describe a “picture of faith”...that doesn't seem like a picture of faith at first, but eventually, we'll see it as just that... Jesus is headed back to the Temple and it's Monday morning of the last week of His life... **Verse 18.**

### **Matthew 21:18-22**

<sup>18</sup> In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. <sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once. <sup>20</sup> When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” <sup>21</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. <sup>22</sup> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

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Now as we begin today, let's be reminded of what's happened in Jesus' life during the last week of His life. In Matthew 21, verse 1, we saw where Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey...



This is considered the “Triumphal Entry,” and it happened on what we call: “Palm Sunday.” On Palm Sunday after riding into Jerusalem...taking a look at the Temple and the grounds...Jesus and His apostles would return to Bethany that evening and stay at Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home, which was their custom when they came to Jerusalem. The next morning (Monday), Jesus would return once again to Jerusalem. This time He would go to the Temple and do more than just look around... He would clean house... Pastor Dale taught on this last week...



Jesus cleansed the Temple. And oh, would this incense the religious leaders. Oh, how they wanted to destroy Jesus... Yes, that act poured gas on the fire of their hatred when He came into the Temple and in cleansing it...He claimed to be God by calling the Temple “my house.” He said, “You have made MY house a den of thieves!” Matthew described the feeling of the chief priests and scribes as “indignant” (vs.15). Which meant they felt insulted, disrespected and offended to the highest degree!

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Well, it’s that Monday morning that I want to back up to... but in order to do that, we’ll have to go to Mark’s account. **Turn to the companion account of this passage to Mark 11:12.** As you are turning there, let me tell you that this event of the cursing of the fig tree actually took place over a period of two days, but Matthew’s Gospel condenses it into one account. But, I want you to see the chronology of what happens because this “cursing of the fig tree” is tied into the “cleansing of the Temple” and it’s significant and I’ll show you why this is the case in a moment.

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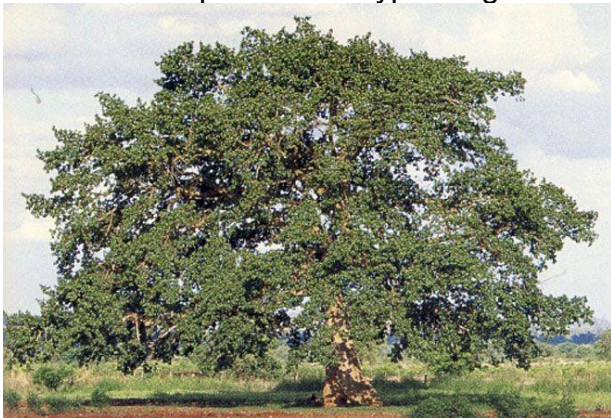
Now as you’ve made your way to Mark 11, verse 12... Jesus has made His way back into Jerusalem...

**Mark 11:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> On the following day [Monday], when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. <sup>13</sup> And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.

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Now here’s a picture of a typical fig tree that still grows in Israel today...



They are huge! They can get 20’ tall and 20’ wide! They are massive trees!

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Now, the Bible says that Jesus was hungry (verse 12). Did you catch that? That’s astounding to

me. Jesus is hungry...and just who is Jesus? He's God! He's the representation of God in the flesh. He is Emmanuel, "God with us," yet He's hungry. Do you see His humanity? Did you know there is a God/man in heaven? It's Jesus Christ. 100% God and 100% man. Jesus has the scars on His head and in His hands and His feet in heaven. He had them in His glorified body after He resurrected from the dead and He'll have them for all eternity...and they will remind us FOREVER all that He did for us! Yes, He was fully human and YES...HE GOT HUNGRY!

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You say, "Didn't Mary and Martha feed Him some breakfast?" Well, I'm sure they tried. But, knowing Jesus, He was off alone praying...which was His custom to get up early in the morning, while it was still dark and go pray. Maybe He missed breakfast? Would we miss breakfast to pray? He was hungry and He walked up to this fig tree on the way to the Temple and this is what He expected to find...



Leaves with fruit budding! Mark records that He saw the "fig tree in leaf," and so does Matthew's Gospel. Now, that doesn't mean anything to us, because we know nothing about fig trees. But, for Jesus and the apostles, they knew what this meant. Anyone living in Israel knew that fig trees would send out the bud of the fruit almost simultaneously with the leaves and there were sometimes where certain parts of the tree might actually have ripe fruit on it.

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Here's what a ripening fig looks like on a fig tree...



And here's what one looks like cut open...



They are beautiful and tasty fruits. They can be eaten straight off the tree, just like we would an apple. The entire fig is edible, including the skin and even all the tiny seeds.

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So, Jesus, in His humanity, was hungry and looking for something to eat and yet, this is what He found...



He saw a tree with leaves and no fruit...not even the buds for any fruit were found on that tree. It was barren. Now **go back to Matthew 21** and we'll see this. **Look at verse 19**.

### **Matthew 21:19**

**<sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.**

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Amazing!! The leaves on that tree literally turned brown right before their eyes. Can you imagine? From green to brown in one fall swoop! Amazing isn't it! The same one who spoke (WITH WORDS) everything into existence, including the trees...now cursed a tree. The same One who said to Adam and Eve, be fruitful and multiply said to this tree...you will never bear fruit again. Jesus showed once again that He had power over creation and power over nature. Be reminded of that church family... Mother Nature is not in charge...she doesn't even exist...she's just the scapegoat for inaccurate weather forecasters...blame it on Mother Nature.

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So what does this mean? Why Did Jesus curse this fig tree before He went into the Temple to cleanse it? Well, again...because we don't easily grasp Jewish culture or fig trees, we need to seek to gain a better understanding of the Jewish culture of that day. Take a look at the screens...



You see there, two trees. A fig tree on the left and an olive tree on the right. These two trees were some common sites to the people of Israel. They were considered the national trees of Israel. When these trees were producing figs and olives...it was considered a time of prosperity and God's blessings. If they didn't produce, it was seen as a time of famine and God's displeasure.

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Now think back with me... Jesus had just come into Jerusalem, the day before, riding on a donkey, being hailed as the King..."Hosanna to the King!" they said, as they laid down their cloaks and palm branches. The King has come. And this was true! He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lord's! And you see, He is now exercising His **Kingly authority**. You say, "How?" In that He is pronouncing judgment on the nation of Israel by cleansing the Temple and by cursing the fig tree, a national symbol.

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Do you understand what Jesus is teaching? He walked up to that tree to inspect it, expecting fruit...



From a distance, it looked okay...after all, there were leaves...so, there should have been fruit! But, there wasn't! Do you know that barren fig tree represented? The nation of Israel. They looked religious but were fruitless. And this was evidenced by what Jesus did in the Temple. He would go into the Temple and buddy would He clean house...



flipping the tables of the money-changers, who were in cahoots with the Pharisees and Sadducees. It was all a ruse to rip off the people and pad their own pockets!

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You see, even John the Baptist was on to their hypocrisy. **Turn back to Matthew 3.** John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus and he was baptizing people in a baptism of repentance in preparation for Jesus. And he said this in Matthew 3:7...

### **Matthew 3:7-10**

**7** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. **9** And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. **10** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

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John the Baptist, knew what His cousin, Jesus knew...he knew the religious leaders of the nation of Israel were fakes. Why? Because there was no fruit on their trees! They were worthless!

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Listen, Jesus stood in front of that fig tree and was expecting fruit and He found none. Hey, let me ask you a question...when Jesus gets up close to you, what does He find on you? What does He see? Fruit or nothing but leaves? Is your life bearing fruit or is your life barren?

Oh...listen to me this morning, when people get up close to you...real close...if you'll let them...what do they see? You know people can tell what kind of person we are pretty quickly,

folks. We might think we can put on a front...or a mask...or a façade...but, we're not really fooling anyone. People are pretty bright...and when they get up close to us...they can tell if we're the real deal or not. AND SO CAN JESUS! He wants fruit! He's hungry for fruit in our lives. And that's why He came. He came so that we might bear fruit... That's why God sent Him...

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## **2 Corinthians 5:21**

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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That righteousness of God is the fruit that's produced from salvation! It's the evidence that we've met Jesus! It's being born again! Regenerated! The old passes away and all things become new!

You see, this is a spiritual lesson Jesus is teaching by the combination of cleansing the Temple and cursing the tree...and here's why...the Pharisees and Sadducees, representing the nation of Israel did not have true faith. They would not believe. They refused to believe, and thus they were fruitless! That fig tree represented the spiritual deadness of Israel. You see, they had all of the outward signs of being religious...with all their sacrifices and ceremonies, and washings...but, they were spiritually dead!

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You know, Mark's Gospel records that they came back the next morning and the tree was dead down to the root. It looked like this...



Totally dead. The leaves have now fallen off. It's dead to the root! Oh, John the Baptist was right... "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is to be cut down and thrown into the fire." **That's exactly what Jesus was teaching when He cursed that tree, but He's not done teaching... [Go back to Matthew 21:21.](#)**

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## **Matthew 21:21-22**

<sup>21</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. <sup>22</sup> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

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Does this seem strange to you? What does having faith and not doubting have to do with the cursing of this fig tree? Well, it's actually pretty simple when you study what Jesus was doing... Jesus was teaching that we can do what He did to the fig tree if we will believe. Jesus is pointing His disciples to the power of faith and prayer. But, you may ask: "But, Pastor Kevin, how is He doing this when he is talking about moving a mountain into the sea?"

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Well, this is another place we need to understand Jewish culture. As a Jew (and we've even

adopted this thinking in our culture from this very account)...when you talked about moving mountains, you talked about doing the impossible. In essence, Jesus was saying, "You can do the impossible when you believe in me."

Now, so that you don't misunderstand...He wasn't talking about me telling Rendezvous Mountain to dump itself into the W. Kerr Scott Dam. No, once again...this is Jesus using hyperbole to exaggerate to make a point, just like He did when He said, "If your right hand is causing you to sin, cut it off or gouge out your eye...or if you offend a young believer, you should tie a millstone around your neck." **It's all hyperbole to make a point.**

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His point is this: it's not the fake religion of the Pharisees that will get you to heaven...it's not your religion or your Temple or you being the chosen nation of God that will get you to heaven...NO! it's me. I'm the power! I'm the one you must trust! Not your religion and not your heritage.

### **Matthew 21:22**

<sup>22</sup> **And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."**

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That word faith, is the Greek word: Pistis...

**FAITH**: (Gk: Pistis) **Conviction** that leads to **Action**

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I've shown you this before...but, it works better than anything I know. I can say I believe in this chair all day long...but, it's not true conviction until I take action and stand in it...put all my trust in it. Jesus is saying, if you will have faith in me and put your trust in me and act on your faith...you will have power.

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**Let me give you an example** of a man and his family and many, many people who prayed for him. That's Danny Beshears...



He had a check-up at his doctor and he sent me this text last week...

**"I heard from my doctor. The scan was clear in my lungs and brain. I'm so grateful to God! He told me another thing that none of us knew. The scan showed evidence where cancer had been healed in my spine!"**

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Folks, that's God! That's what prayer in faith does! Now, does that mean that everyone who prays gets healed? No! You know that's not true! Sometimes God chooses not to heal. But, the point is: we don't have any hope of seeing God work if we don't stand in the chair.

**And by the way... having faith and living for Christ is going to look strange to the world!** Belief always looks strange to the world and that's why so few will stand. They are intimidated to the point that their belief doesn't translate to conviction...and they take no action...which leads to a barren life!

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You say, "But, I don't have that kind of faith! I've just got a little faith!" Right! That's okay...remember when we studied Matthew 17, when Jesus said, "If you have faith like a grain of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." It doesn't take much faith...just a little. Do you remember what a mustard seed turns into?



This! Massive trees! 20' x 20' trees. All from a seed so small that it's hard to even feel it in your hand.

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Listen... God's power is released by our faith. It's our faith that activates the power of God in our lives. And it all starts with just a little bit of faith...

Yes, I asked you at the beginning of the message...how much faith do you have? And we all kind of agreed that most of the time...not very much. But, that's enough! It doesn't take much in the hands of Jesus. But, here's the problem...

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So often we let Satan discourage us from believing and praying. So often, we pray one prayer or maybe two...or maybe even for a few days, but then we quit! We give up! Why? Because we don't see immediate results! And so we stop!

Listen...you don't plant beans and reap a harvest in two weeks, do you? It takes time. God's timing is not our timing! So, keep praying. You might be this close to seeing the breakthrough! So, don't dare quit! You might break through with your next prayer!

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I want to show you a picture...



That was taken in the Philippines. Hands being raised! And then, people coming forward to be saved...





It was so powerful to see the Lord work! Why did He work? Because I'm a good speaker? No! Because I'm a holy man. No... I believe He worked because I'd been praying and believing...praying for the Lord to do something powerful! And so had Pastor Dale and you! And as I watched the cards being filled out... See it...



I said, "Lord, would you do this at home." He said in my spirit, "Why don't you ask me and believe...stand in the chair Kevin for home...believe for home."

Well I'm standing!!! And I'm believing! I'm asking!!

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### **Listen...Are you believing today?**

He wants you to believe...He wants you to ask. He wants you to expect. He wants you to act on that little bit of faith!

And understand this...we're not talking about having faith in faith or having faith in myself. We're not talking about believing in myself or believing my dreams...we're talking about having faith in Jesus. The One who will help us see the impossible...like fig trees withering right before our eyes

...like having the power to love the un-loveable in our lives. The people who are so hard to love.  
...like helping us to put marriages back together that seem broken beyond repair.  
...like helping us to say NO to temptations that's been dominating our lives.

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No, we're not trusting in ourselves...not our will-power...because this always leads to failure... No, we're trusting in Jesus!

So, who's ready to stand in the chair with me? To have faith! It's time! Why not exercise your faith in Jesus today?

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