



## NG Study Guide: Mark 11:15-33 “Have Faith in God” [7.11.21]

### Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

### The Study

**Thesis:** What are you putting your faith in? Jesus exhorts us to have faith in God [22]. Faith in God provides contentment and confidence in this life and the life to come. On the other hand, people who put their confidence in something or someone else: self, society, science, family, friends, and finances discover those objects of faith will fail in this life and the life to come. They simply cannot and will not deliver eternal life, a quality of spiritual life that God offers in this life and the life to come. **Faith is only as good as the object it is placed in. So, have faith in God.**

**Context:** Jesus had just cursed a fig tree that had leaves but no figs. It was the only time in Jesus ministry that He cursed anything [Mk. 11:11-14]. The fig tree was a symbol of Israel, and this may reflect the Jews outward appearance of religion, but a lack of faith producing true spiritual fruit. Fig leaves also remind us of Adam and Eve’s effort to cover their sin, and discovering that only trust in God can restore the consequences of rebelling against Him.

#### 1. The Purifying of The Temple [15-19]

*<sup>15</sup> So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>16</sup> And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. <sup>17</sup> Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’ ” <sup>18</sup> And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. <sup>19</sup> When evening had come, He went out of the city.*

#### **Obstacles to worship are removed.**

Jesus and the twelve came to Jerusalem [15]. Jews from all over Israel, and beyond, were there for the Feast of Passover (one of three weeklong feasts, along with Pentecost and Tabernacles, where Jews came to Jerusalem to worship God and offer sacrifices at the temple). There were *merchants* in the temple courtyards who sold animals required for ritual sacrifices. Also, there were *money changers* who would exchange Roman coins for the Jewish ½ shekel of silver that was required for the annual temple tax. There were also those who *sold doves* [15]. Doves were an acceptable offering for the very poor [Lev. 5:7], who simply could not afford the cost of a lamb. All of these merchants were extorting worshipers by charging exorbitant prices and thus exploiting worshipers, which was horrible especially in regard to the poor. Finally, because of the immensity of the temple courtyard atop the temple mount, and the masses of people gathered there, merchants sold goods to the religious pilgrims [16], making the epicenter of worship of the true and living God look more like a bizarre. Jesus was indignant with righteous and

intense passion as He contemplated the scene. He began to drive out the merchants and turn over tables [15-16], and undoubtedly caused quite a stir among the masses.

### **Gather to learn, pray, and worship.**

*Then Jesus taught, saying to them ... [17].* Jesus is patient, gracious, and longsuffering, but God's anger is righteous and they needed to understand what the problem was. So Jesus taught them. There is no indication that He screamed at them, but He spoke so they could hear, learn, and ideally rightly respond: *"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves'" [17, Is. 56:7].* The Hebrew word translated *prayer* in the Isaiah verse is *tephillah* which included supplication (prayers for yourself), intercession (prayers for others), and prayers set to music and thus songs of praise, adoration, and worship. God is uniquely present among His people as they gather to learn the Bible, pray and worship. God's house was for *all nations*. The Jewish people were chosen by God for a covenant relationship to reveal the true and living God, and bring forth the Messiah, to bless all nations. So that Jews and Gentiles could come to faith in God.

The Gospel of John records a similar incident of purifying the temple at the start of Jesus' ministry three years earlier [Jn. 2:13-22]. Thus at the beginning and the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry He is confronting obstacles to worship. God wants to gather with His people to teach them, pray and be glorified by them [Jn. 4:23-24]. The faithful seek to gather to learn, pray, and worship.

Rather than humbly receiving correction the religious leaders *sought to destroy for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching [18].* Jesus's teaching is amazing, profound and perfect; and He always accurately represents the Father to us. Thus, people were and are drawn to Him. *When evening had come, He went out of the city [19].*

## **2. The Lessons of The Withered Fig Tree [20-26]**

*<sup>20</sup> Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. <sup>21</sup> And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." <sup>22</sup> So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*

### **True faith trusts God to do great things despite obstacles [20-24].**

The next morning they passed by and saw the fig tree that Jesus cursed had dried up from the roots [20]. Peter pointed out the withered tree to Jesus [21]. Peter marveled at how quickly the tree withered – it seemed impossible. Jesus wanted *them* [22] (i.e. all of His disciples) to understand the impact of *faith in God* [22]. Faith in God is characterized by attitudes of dependence and actions of obedience. Faith in God produces Christ-like character and transformed lives [Gal. 5:22-23]. Jesus spoke of faith that moves mountains [23]. Jewish literature refer to mountains as a metaphor for obstacles [Zech. 4:6-7]. Faith and prayer (communication with God) changes our perspective regarding obstacles.

Jesus did no mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief [Mk.6:5-6]. Our lack of trust can hinder God's work.

Jesus taught, *whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them [24].* Jesus is not promising to give us literally anything we ask for. This is not an unconditional offer. Paul prayed three times for restoration and was not healed, and we can presume that there was no lack of faith [2Cor. 12:8-9]. The purpose of prayer is to get God's will done on earth, not our will. Thus, Jesus' is giving us a principal that when God has inspired our prayer that we can know that despite obstacles God will deliver, and thus we should act in confident belief.

### **True faith forgives [25-26].**

*"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. <sup>26</sup> But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

A test of our faith is our ability to forgive others who have wronged us. Those who have received God's gracious undeserved forgiveness through faith in Jesus forgive others [Mt. 5:23, Eph. 4:32]. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, but is the idea of no longer seeking to avenge the wrong. Paul wrote, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" [1Cor. 13:2]. True faith in God is gracious, loving, and forgiving.

### **3. Jesus' Authority Questioned [27-33]**

<sup>27</sup> Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. <sup>28</sup> And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" <sup>29</sup> But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: <sup>30</sup> The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me."

<sup>31</sup> And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' <sup>32</sup> But if we say, 'From men' "—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. <sup>33</sup> So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

#### **True faith yields to Jesus**

The religious leaders question Jesus' authority [27-28]. In other words, who gave you the right to receive worship when you entered Jerusalem (Triumphant Entry) or to cleanse the temple court? The inquiry is intended to be a trap: if Jesus asserts that He is Messiah they will accuse Him of blasphemy, and if not then His authority comes from men. Then, Jesus would be discredited since the *chief priests, the scribes, and the elders* were the established authority. They didn't want to really want to yield to Jesus' authority. Jesus responded by asking them a question as a condition to answering their question: is John the Baptist's ministry from God or man? [29-30]. The response reveals Jesus' wisdom and brilliance. Since John identified Jesus as the Messiah (Christ), then if John is a prophet from God the religious leaders need to repent and obey since Jesus has all authority as Messiah [31]. On the other hand, if they say that John was not of God they would alienate the multitudes who recognized that John was a prophet of God. The religious leaders realize their dilemma and refused to reply [33].

Jesus did not need to defend his authority. His teaching, ministry and miraculous signs all fulfilled Old Testament prophecies to confirm His identity (as would his death and resurrection).

The person who asks, "Who is Jesus to tell me what to do?" needs to consider whether they really want to know. Jesus is God in the flesh, the perfect representation of God to reveal to humanity the way to true life in God through faith [Jn. 14:1-9]. How you can know whether you have faith in God: you learn from, learn of, yield to Jesus' authority, and imitate Him [Matt. 11:28-30]. But without faith it is impossible to please God [Heb. 11:6].

#### **How to grow in faith in God:**

- 1. Learn the Bible: Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God [Rom.10:17]**
- 2. Experience God: time in prayer and solitude with God. Gather experience and discover God is faithful [Mk.9].** The father of a demon-possessed son, "Lord I believe help my unbelief!" Jesus healed his son and his faith grew
- 3. Take steps of faith: Take small or big steps beyond your comfort level and discover God [Josh. 3, Mt. 14:29].** Join a Neighborhood Group, serve at your local church, share your faith, pray in a group, share your resources.

#### **Study Guide Qs**

**Q1. What lessons might we learn from Jesus purifying the temple?**

**Q2. What are some of the obstacles to gathering to learn, pray, and worship God? How might the faithful overcome?**

**Q3. What thoughts or ideas came to mind from: The Lessons of The Withered Fig Tree [20-26]?**

**Q4. How might yielding to Jesus' authority (obedience) and faith in who Jesus is (and what He does) be related?**

**“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)**

**1. Read the section “How to grow in faith in God.” How would you like to apply those lessons in your life?**

**2. Here is an interesting article on how to grow in faith in God:**

**<https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-grow-faith.html>.**

**Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:**

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?

3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

**Invite a neighbor to join you as you gather to worship God at your church or with your group.**

**Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:**

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?

2. What might we do about that need to help?

**Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:**

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

**Leader Notes:**

**1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

**2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

**3. The “Digging Deeper” section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the “Digging Deeper” section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

**4. Every time you meet consider asking:**

**a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.