

## Faith in a Superficial World

### Mark 11:12-14, 20-25

### Message Outline

Courageously be who you are.

Care for your root and the fruit will take care of itself.

Love sincerely by forgiving freely.

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### Looking Back

In our superficial world, keeping up appearances seems to matter more than substance. After finding no green figs on a tree full of leaves, Jesus cursed the tree which promptly withered. This was an acted out parable, demonstrating the coming judgment on God's people who appeared healthy and active but lacked faith. This is also an important lesson to us to move from emphasis on our exterior to our interior life, to devalue the superficial and live a life of authenticity.

### Thinking It Through

disagree|agree, consider|contemplate

*Great impressions can be made from a distance, but reality can only be tested up close. ~ Howard Hendricks*

*For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self. ~ Thomas Merton*

*Unless we forgive one another, it becomes clear that we have got no sense of the grace of God that has forgiven us. ~ Alistair Begg*

### Working it Out

1. Read the expanded passage of Mark 11:1-25, paying special attention to Jesus' interaction with the fig tree. How would you characterize the over-arching context of chapter 11? (For additional background on the fig tree as a symbol of the nation of Israel, see Hosea 9:1-17, especially v. 10 and 16; Micah 7:1)
2. Why do you think Mark sandwiches the account of Jesus' clearing the Temple court of money-changers and merchants (v. 15-19) in between the cursing and withering of the fig tree (v. 12-15, 20-25)? What might Mark's teaching purpose for this arrangement

be? (Compare Matthew's ordering of the same events where the event of the fig tree is condensed into one episode in Matthew 21:1-22).

3. Put yourself in the story of verses 12-14. Imagine anticipating a nourishing snack of fresh fruit only to be disappointed upon closer inspection of the tree. How could this physical experience portray a spiritual reality in our lives? How might we avoid this pitfall?
  4. How does Jesus' clear command to "Have faith in God" (v.22) challenge you? Verses 22-24 have often been misused or misunderstood by being minimized (sidestepped or explained away) or maximized (name-it, claim-it self-focused expression of faith).
    - a. How can we guard against these tendencies?
    - b. How did Jesus himself apply this concept a few days later in his prayer recorded in Mark 14:36 and what was the outcome of that prayer? How could Mark 14:36 help you understand and interpret Mark 11:22-24?
  5. Why is our willingness and ability to forgive a true test of our love and our faith? What can make forgiveness so difficult? Is there someone you need to forgive or ask to forgive you?
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