Elder's Corner

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." (Mark 11:25, 26)

It's Tuesday of the Lord's so-called "passion week." The day before, as He and the apostles came into Jerusalem Jesus saw a **fig tree** with leaves and assumed it would have fruit.[1] Jesus cursed the fruitless tree, and now as **Jesus** and the apostles approach it on the next day, **Peter** pointed out to **Jesus, "The fig tree which You cursed has withered away" (Mark 11:21). The cursed and withered fig tree** was a profound, yet simple portrayal of God's chosen **people and nation**, and what they had become. Out of all **the peoples** and nations of **the earth**, **the Lord God** had chosen them to be a **special treasure** to Himself **(Deut. 4:34; 7;6)** and a terminal of blessings from **God** to themselves and **the peoples** around them **(Exod. 34:10).** They had proven themselves not to be **people of faith in the Lord God** and were about to **strike** their long-awaited Shepherd-Messiah **(Zech. 13:7)** in just a few days.

In response to Peter's remark about **the withered fig tree**, **Jesus** proceeded to give instruction on prayer, beginning with the words, **"Have faith in God."** Our **Lord** emphasized **faith**, because **faith in God is** what was missing in the children of Israel. Early in their history they worshipped idols rather than the true **God**—leading to their captivity for seventy years. Now, back in the land, they relied on law-keeping and their self-righteousness. Like the **cursed fig tree,** they produced no fruit. The significance of our Lord's answer to **Peter** is found in this quote, "But Christ encouraged Peter to trust God—to have faith in God for the fulfillment of the promises even though the nation had been brought under judgment (Mark 11:22). In view of the judgment that had been announced, it took faith to believe that there was a future for Israel and that God would fulfill the covenant."[2] **Jesus** assured **Peter** that no matter how great the mountain or obstacle seemed to be, the prayer of **faith** would be effective:

> **Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. (Mark 11:24)**

Just as **faith** in **Jesus Christ** and His finished work is essential for salvation **(Eph. 2:8), faith** in the power and trustworthiness of **God** is essential as we **pray** to Him.

After impressing the importance of **faith** regarding prayer to the apostles, our **Lord** turned His attention to the importance of forgiveness regarding prayer, as seen in the verses quoted at the beginning of this article. The Old Testament writings already contained the warning, **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18).** (Unforgiveness is **iniquity**). **Psalm 86:5** also shows that **the Lord** Himself is **"ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all who call upon** Him**."** Our **Lord Jesus Christ** demonstrated the willingness to **forgive** that resides within the godhead a few days later, when from the cross, He said, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).**

The words that our **Lord** spoke regarding the importance of forgiveness with prayer ring true today. Paul emphasized the importance of believers being proactive in respect to this matter:

> **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:30-32)**

An unforgiving spirit grieves the heart of **God.** It promotes the **springing up of a root of bitterness . . . and by this many are defiled (Heb. 12:15).** How are you doing in regard to all of this? Have you exercised **faith** by asking **Jesus** to be your **Lord** and Savior? Do your prayers manifest **faith** in the only one who has the ability to answer them? And do you stand as **ready to forgive** as your **Father** in heaven is? Maranatha!

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[1] *Scofield Study Bible* note states, "Fig trees which have retained their leaves through the winter usually have figs also."

[2] J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 382