

Jesus Uses the Cursed Fig Tree to Teach the Disciples

Here is a Full Breakdown of:

 **Matthew 21:20–22,**  **Mark 11:20–26**
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Parallel Passage Overview

Gospel	Verses	Summary
 Matthew	21:20–22	The disciples are amazed that the fig tree withered immediately. Jesus teaches that with faith and no doubt, they can do even greater things—like moving mountains. He emphasizes that believing prayer will be answered.
 Mark	11:20–26	The next morning, the disciples see the fig tree has withered from the roots. Jesus teaches that faith in God can accomplish the impossible. He adds that when praying, one must forgive others in order to be forgiven.

Narrative and Structural Context

In both Gospels, this scene is part of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem (Passion Week). The fig tree is cursed in response to its fruitlessness, and later, the disciples notice it has withered.

Jesus uses it to **teach on the power of faith and the conditions of effective prayer.**

Sequence in Mark:

1. **Mark 11:12–14** – Jesus curses the fig tree (Day 2 – Monday)
2. **Mark 11:15–19** – Jesus cleanses the Temple
3. **Mark 11:20–26** – Disciples see the tree withered (Day 3 – Tuesday)

This literary structure forms a "**Markan sandwich**", where the fig tree frames the temple cleansing—connecting **fruitlessness and judgment** to both the tree and the religious leaders.

Passage Breakdown

Matthew 21:20–22

The disciples marvel at how quickly the fig tree withered. Jesus responds:

- **"Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt..."**
- They can command mountains to be cast into the sea.
- **"Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."**

Mark 11:20–26

They pass by in the morning and see the fig tree "withered from the roots."

- Peter remembers and points it out.
- Jesus replies:
"Have faith in God."
 - Speak to a mountain and it will obey—if you don't doubt.
 - **"Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it."**
 - **Forgiveness:** Before praying, forgive others so that the Father may forgive you (v.25).
 - **Note:** v.26 ("If you do not forgive...") is missing in some manuscripts.

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🔍 Greek Highlights

Word/Phrase	Greek	Meaning
"Withered"	ἐξηράνθη (exērānthē)	Dried up, used metaphorically for judgment (Mark 11:20)
"Mountain"	ὄρος (oros)	Symbolic of impossibilities
"Doubt"	διακριθῆ (diakrithē)	To waver, hesitate, make a distinction (Matthew 21:21)
"Believe"	πιστεύετε (pisteuete)	Present imperative: keep on believing (Mark 11:24)

✡ Old Testament and Jewish Background

- **Fig Tree** = Common symbol for Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1).
- The **withered fig tree** = sign of judgment, especially of unfruitful religiosity.
- **Moving a mountain** was a common Jewish idiom for doing the impossible (cf. Zechariah 4:7, rabbinic sayings).

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🌿 Theological Themes

Theme	Explanation
Faith	Not generic belief, but trust in God's power and character.
Prayer	Effective prayer requires faith and aligns with God's will (cf. 1 John 5:14).
Judgment	The fig tree represents those who appear religious (leafy) but bear no fruit—like the temple leadership.
Forgiveness	Faith is not isolated—unforgiveness hinders effective prayer (Mark 11:25).
Authority of Jesus	His power over nature affirms His messianic authority and judges fruitlessness.

🤔 Why Does It Matter?

- **Discipleship Warning:** This is a living parable—**fruitless religion will not endure**.
- **Spiritual Fruit:** Jesus expects His followers to **bear fruit** (cf. John 15:1–8).
- **Prayer Life:** True faith leads to powerful, believing prayer—but it must be **accompanied by forgiveness and humility**.

✚ Messianic Implications

- Jesus acts as a **prophet** (like Jeremiah) who uses **sign-acts** to pronounce judgment.
- The fig tree and temple cleansing together point to the **end of the old system** and a call to true, fruit-bearing **kingdom life**.