

(Matt. 21:20-22) – The barren fig tree was like apostate Israel. Having leaves but no fruit, Israel had all the outward trappings of religion and worship, but their devotion was only a veneer. Though they appeared righteous unto men, within they were full of sin and death. There was no true Christ, no truth, and no grace in their religion (John 4:23; Isa. 1:10-18; 66:1-3). They sought after righteousness but found it not, because they sought it not in and by Christ, His righteousness imputed. They sought righteousness by their works and failed (Rom. 9:31 – 10:3). The Lord would expose them fully as recorded in Matthew 23. They had a form of godliness but no true grace, substance, life, or power (2 Tim. 3:5). The cursing of the fig tree was a foreshadowing of that day when the Lord would sit in judgment upon all whose religion is a sham, a mere outward show of the flesh (Matt. 7:21-23).

He tells His disciples, *“VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, IF YE HAVE FAITH, AND DOUBT NOT ...,”* not only could you do that which He did to the fig tree, but, metaphorically, you could move mountains. *“AND ALL THINGS, WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK IN PRAYER, BELIEVING, YE SHALL RECEIVE.”* We would think that, after having seen all that Christ had done before this, they would not have been so amazed at the withered fig tree, but that is human nature. As sinners saved by grace and having been given the gift of saving faith, we still have our doubts that come from our flesh (Heb. 12:1). It is not the power of our faith that saves us or that could even perform miracles. It is the power of Christ in Whom our faith stands (Heb. 12:2). The keys to prayer that receives that for which we pray is that we pray to the true and living God through Christ and on the basis of His merits, and that we express our desire that in all things for which we pray, God’s will be done!

(Matt. 21:23) – It was now Wednesday morning, and Christ returned to the temple and began to teach the people. The chief priests and elders questioned His authority to teach His message and to the things He did – *“BY WHAT AUTHORITY DOEST THOU THESE THINGS? AND WHO GAVE THEE THIS AUTHORITY?”* They claimed that their authority was from God according to their view of the Old Testament Scriptures. The teachings of Christ challenged their authority and their message of salvation by the works of men. They hated Christ’s claim of being the one true Messiah, God manifest in the flesh, and His message of salvation for sinners by the grace of God based on the righteousness that He alone would accomplish in His obedience unto death. His message exposed theirs to be false (John 3:19-20), and if His message was from God, they would be exposed as false prophets.

This issue of authority is one of the most basic and most important issues of true Christianity. Upon what authority do we believe what we believe? How do we know our beliefs about God, about ourselves, and about Christ and salvation are true? It is upon

the authority of God's Word as revealed in the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Isaiah the prophet said, *"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (Isa. 8:20). Multitudes in our day who claim to be "Christians" believe things that are not found in God's Word. Their claim of faith has no ground in the authority of God.

(Matt. 21:24-27) – The Lord had proclaimed on several occasions that He was sent by God the Father (cf. John 6:39). He declared His authority, but the leaders had refused to hear Him, so He would not tell them again. He outsmarted and confounded these religious fools so that they had to shut their mouths. If they admitted that John's baptism was truly of God, then Christ would ask, *"WHY DID YE NOT THEN BELIEVE HIM?"* If they admitted the authority of John's message and baptism, they would have to admit that they were false preachers who needed to repent, and they would have to admit that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah (Matt. 3:7-8; John 1:29-34). As John was so popular with the people, these false religionists knew that to accuse him of being a false prophet would raise the anger of the people against them. So, they said, *"WE CANNOT TELL."* Christ said, *"NEITHER TELL I YOU BY WHAT AUTHORITY I DO THESE THINGS."*

(Matt. 21:28-31) – This parable illustrates the difference between the true people of God and the unbelieving religious leaders. The first son refused to work in His father's vineyard. This illustrates how we all by nature will not bow to and receive God's way of salvation in and by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:11; 6:44; 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 3:10-12). He then repented and went to work for his father. This illustrates how God brings His chosen people to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry (John 1:12-13; Rom. 6:17-18). The second son said he would go work but did not do what he said. This illustrates false professors of religion who, like the Pharisees and scribes, claim to be true worshippers and servants of God but who are not. Christ asked them, *"WHETHER OF THEM TWAIN DID THE WILL OF HIS FATHER?"* They recognized that the first son obeyed his father. Christ then said, *"VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT THE PUBLICANS AND THE HARLOTS GO INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEFORE YOU."* As we see in the next verse, the Lord spoke of great sinners whom the Lord had brought to repentance unto life.

(Matt. 21:32) – *"THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"* is the Gospel of salvation by God's grace that reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:21). John the Baptist pointed sinners to Christ for all salvation and righteousness. Trust Christ Whose blood cleanses and Whose righteousness is freely imputed to all who believe in Him (Rom. 10:4). Reject Christ, continue in sins, no matter how righteous you appear before men, and be condemned by the Lamb of God Whose righteousness is the standard of all judgment (Acts 17:30-31; Prov. 1:23-33).