

Matthew 21-04-04a

Good morning, welcome to the Resurrection Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. Everyone looks very resurrected and happy about the wonderful truths that come to our mind at this time of the year and on this particular Sunday. And we're going to, perhaps not unexpectedly, be observing something that Jesus said in the week that preceded this Sunday.

It's very traditional to review the history of the arrest, the trial, the crucifixion, burial, resurrection of the Lord Jesus on this Sunday. And we've done so many times. There are many coverages of that in our specials archive on the website.

We're going to do something a little bit different today, but it pertains. It is what the Lord Jesus emphasized during this week and in the light of his impending work on the cross. So we're going to endeavor to put the emphasis where the Lord Jesus put it for this week.

And we're going to begin by looking at the fig tree, the withering of the fig tree on Monday. I've been working my way toward this fig tree. I've been manfully trudging in its direction and trying to get under its shade now for four sessions, and we're going to do it today.

Hades or high water, the fig tree is up next. So you can be heading in the direction of Matthew chapter 21 as we begin our time of worship and fellowship this morning. And we'll ask God's blessing on it, and then we will begin.

Father, what a wonderful hope we have in Christ that not only has he atoned for our sins, satisfied the requirements of your righteousness and your justice, granted to us eternal life, but what a wonderful future hope it is that we will not only exist, but we have the opportunity to serve, to fulfill potential, to put into practice the things that you have taught us in this life through your word and through your spirit, through experience, through facing challenges, through enjoying blessings and provisions. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this morning and the words of the Lord Jesus regarding the life that we live here and our walking by faith, that your Holy Spirit will minister these truths in his supernatural power to each heart, that we will be strengthened. We will be renewed.

We will be focused. We will be motivated to understand that good and acceptable and perfect will that you would have us fulfill in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's turn to Matthew chapter 21. I am wasting no time.

There will be virtually no review. I want to do the fig tree. Jesus, as you will recall, and

this is as much review as I'm going to do, on Sunday went into Jerusalem on roads covered with garments and branches, on the foal of a donkey also covered with garments.

And anytime you think of garments, how far back can you go? Biblically speaking, what's the history of garments? What's the first garment ever mentioned in scripture? The first time anybody ever dressed themselves with anything. What was it? It was in the garden and there was a problem of nakedness, as we like to say in Oklahoma, people looked around and saw that they were naked. That's N-E-K-K-I-D for your notes.

Naked. They were naked. So what did they do? They looked around in the trees of the garden and found the one with the biggest, broadest leaves, plucked some of those leaves and sewed them together into aprons.

As the King James says, what were those leaves? What kind? Fig leaves. The first garments were fig leaves. Were they adequate for the task? Did they do the job? No, they did not.

God said, your fig leaves are completely unacceptable. God made clothing. The second human clothing was made of what? Skins.

God made them clothing of skins. What was required to provide those skins? The previous owners had to die. And it was the covering for sin by death of a vicarious substitute.

God performed the first animal sacrifice in the Bible. He sacrificed those animals and took their skins and clothed Adam and Eve. Why? Fig leaves, not good enough.

In case the lesson was not clear, you move down a generation to Cain and Abel and the two sacrifices. What were the sacrifices that were brought? Which one was acceptable and which one was not? Abel's sacrifice of animals which were skinned and divided and laid on the altar was acceptable in God's sight. Cain's sacrifice of his garden was not.

The vegetation was not acceptable. What is the symbolic distinction between those two types of covering and those types of sacrifice? Who made the first acceptable clothing? God made it. It was of God's material, of God's design, and it was acceptable in God's sight.

Who made the first unacceptable clothing by their efforts, by their design? Adam and Eve making it out of fig leaves. So the link between garments and fig leaves is as old as the third chapter of Genesis, right? You come to the most momentous occasion in all of human history, and in the days preceding, you have that link made again. You have clothing strewn all over the road on Sunday, and on the next day, as Jesus comes back into the city, He sees not a sycamore tree like Zacchaeus climbed up into.

I was thinking about that song. I bet they don't even teach that song because it's hurtful to short people. But Zacchaeus was a wee little man.

That's how I learned it. Well, you can't talk about wee little people anymore without getting in trouble with somebody. So, of course, this is my favorite joke when the girls are tired in the evening, but we want a little bit of entertainment.

And they say, well, can we watch something short? And I say, well, I can find Danny DeVito, or maybe there's a little cartoon about Zacchaeus we can watch. But the link is important, and it's intentional. It's there on purpose.

It's there for a reason. Why didn't they just strew the path with branches? Why is it clothing? Why of all the different kinds of trees is it a fig tree? Not a sycamore, not an oak, not any other tree. It's not a date tree.

It's not a palm tree. You didn't come find one of the palms that somebody tore all the branches off of to strew the road with. You wonder how much of the palm debris is on that road because he's traveling the very same road on Monday that he traveled on Sunday.

Well, let's read about it in Matthew chapter 21. If you pick up in verse 17, what we're going to find is that Matthew organizes his material thematically and not chronologically. We get the chronology in Mark chapter 11.

We know that the tragic entry took place on Sunday. The cleansing of the temple took place on Monday. Matthew unites those without a lot of time description because it serves his theme, tying the approach to the city to Jesus' judgment of the temple.

We know from Mark that Jesus looked around at the temple on Sunday night, came back and purged it on Monday. But in Matthew, after the Hosanna to the son of David and so on, and this wrongheaded expectation that this is the day the king is going to be crowned and the kingdom is going to come in, Jesus left in verse 17 and went out of the city to Bethany and he lodged there. This is Sunday night.

You can put a note out there that this is Sunday night. You should have a note beside verse 12 of Matthew 21 that says this is Monday. 21.12 is Monday.

21.17 gets us back to time and that is Sunday night. It is out of order. It is intentionally and consciously out of order.

Matthew had Mark in front of him. This is a virtual certitude as did Luke. Mark seems to have been written first.

I am a believer in the priority of Mark. I think Peter preached first. I think Mark wrote it down.

I think Matthew composed his gospel with Mark's notes on Peter's preaching in front of him as did Luke. So 17. He left them and went out of the city to Bethany and he lodged there.

That is Sunday night. Now in the morning, verse 18, this is Monday morning, this past Monday on the calendar. As he returned to the city he was hungry and seeing a fig tree by the road he came to it and found nothing on it but leaves.

Now this every word counts. As he returned to the city he was hungry. He did not eat.

You would expect and I have even seen commentators remark on this. How could someone who was hosting the Lord Jesus not feed him breakfast before he left? I don't know what their habits were if they had three meals a day or not but Jesus has left the place where he slept overnight. It may well have been Mary and Martha's house in Bethany.

Most likely I would expect that's where he stayed but either he got up before Martha had a chance to make breakfast. She seems to have been the one that did the kitchen chores. Remember she complains because her sister is sitting at Jesus' feet while she's doing the dishes and she says, hey I could use some help in the kitchen.

But Jesus has left and he's hungry. So he has had no breakfast. It's early in the morning and he's heading straight back into town.

So he's hungry. It says in verse 19, seeing a fig tree by the road. This is important.

He didn't see it at a distance. He saw it by the road. Some of this tree's branches may well have been torn off and thrown in the road on the previous day but this is a tree that is full of leaves and we know from the other accounts that it is quite full of leaves.

It's very leafy. Now this is unusual because it is not the season for figs. Again you can go to the parallel in Mark chapter 11.

It's not the season for figs but this tree is full of leaves and the leaves are a harbinger. They hide both the late fall fruit of the previous season and the new fruit that is about to grow. The tree can have both kinds and leafy trees when the leaves are out this is when that fall fruit is ripe enough to eat.

It's a small little fruit that has persisted through the winter and it doesn't ripen until the spring when the leaves come out and new fruit begins to form. So you have a chance. Remember when Jesus said a good teacher brings forth out of his storehouse things new and old? A good fig tree brings forth on its branches fruit both new and old and you have the opportunity for both kinds when the leaves come out in the spring.

Well it's not yet the season for figs. It's early in the spring. We know the time of year it is.

Our spring is just beginning. The dogwoods are blooming. The red buds are blooming.

Grass is turning green. The buds on the trees are just starting to turn into little tiny green leaves. Spring has sprung and it was that time.

It's not that much of a different latitude there than it is here. But it's early. You wouldn't expect fruit on trees this early.

But this tree is in a favored position. Why? It's by the road. What kind of a road is this? What direction does this road go? The Bible doesn't tell us but we know this.

What direction are you traveling if you're going from Bethany to Jerusalem? You're heading west, right? If you leave Jerusalem and go back to Bethany what direction are you traveling? East. Where does the sun rise? Where does it set? So on an east-west road a tree by the road there is a cleared strip for the road and so the light all day long can hit this favored tree. Trees along this road get more light than trees that are clumped up with in groves with other trees and are shaded by taller trees and so on.

This is a favored tree because it's by the road. What do we know about roads in the Bible? Well you don't want to stand in the road of sinners, right? From Psalm 1, blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, doesn't stand in the way of sinners, doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful. What kind of a way do we want to be in and near? What did Jesus say in John 14 6? I am the what? I'm the road.

I'm the way. I'm the truth. I'm the life.

What does Psalm 1 say about the tree that is planted by the rivers of water? What do you know about a river? It's also a clearing. It's a place where sunshine can get to those things that have both water from the nearby stream and light because the stream prevents things from growing so that it can be in a favored position. So this is a favored tree.

It's by the road and so it is unusually able to put out these leaves and bear its fruit when other trees are not so favored, not so blessed, not so divinely positioned for opportunity and potential. This tree you could say has been divinely located for exceptional and unusual potential. Isn't that true of us in Christ, in this dispensation with the fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, with the fullness of the revelation of God's word? Are we not also favored and divinely positioned uniquely to bear exceptional fruit? So the Lord Jesus comes and He is evaluating this tree.

He says, because of your favored position, you've got these fig leaves all over you. The tree is covered in what kind of leaves? Fig leaves. It has covered itself in fig leaves.

So the question is, is there any real fruit or is all you've got is leaves, which we know from Genesis chapter 3 are not acceptable in God's sight. They do not hide your

unrighteousness. They don't cover in any kind of an atoning fashion.

It's amazing. You can read the law of Moses from cover to cover and you never find God saying, well, and on the 17th day of the month, Adar, bring fig leaves and put them on the altar and, you know, put some honey on them and add a little bit of salt and it will be an acceptable salad in my sight. It never happens.

They're never acceptable. Jesus can't eat the leaves. He's not interested in the leaves.

He wants the fruit. He's looking for the fruit. This tree, because it is capable of producing leaves, ought to be capable of having both the old fruit and the new fruit.

And seeing the fig tree by the road, he came to it and found nothing on it but leaves. All appearance, no genuine, usable fruit worthy of the master's attention, fitting in the master's judgment. It is not there.

So Jesus says to it, it doesn't say he was angry. Doesn't say he, you know, struck it with a rod or got an ax and chopped it down. What does he say? Because you have not produced fruit in this season of opportunity, in this position of favor and blessing, you're not ever going to grow fruit.

Let no fruit grow on you. You didn't use your position and your favor and your opportunity, this unique sunshine just at the right point on the slope to not be burned by the sun, to have water coming down the hillside. This tree is uniquely qualified and favored unlike other trees in the area to bear.

And of course it's a picture of the nation of Israel. Well, as goes Israel in the Old Testament age, so goes the individual believer in this age. The nation of Israel is a picture for us as individuals.

The nation of Israel had a temple for the presence of God. We as individuals are the temple for the presence of God. So when we look at national judgments, national successes and national failures in the Old Testament age, and Jesus lived in the Old Testament age, this is the Old Testament age of Israel that we are looking at.

It's the old dispensation. The clock is not going to change until Pentecost, some 55 days hence or so. Let no fruit grow on you ever again.

So you could say, well, the tree could continue to be leafy, continue to stand. People would admire it and say, what a leafy tree. But instead it says immediately the fig tree withered away.

Now this is Matthew doing the same thing that he did with the entry into Jerusalem on the colt and the purging out of the money changers and the buyers and sellers. Because we know from Mark 11 that it didn't. And by the way, this withered is an heiress.

It's not a present. It didn't wither before the disciples very eyes, but immediately the fig tree began to wither. This is the same thing as Jesus telling Adam in the day that thou eat thereof, thou shalt surely die.

The death process inexorably and inevitably began on the day that Adam and Eve ate the fruit. The fig tree withered away. The disciples are actually going to see this in the morning.

And you can turn over to Mark chapter 11 right quick to get the sequence here. Then we're going to come back to Matthew and see the result. So in Mark chapter 11, you have what your new King James calls the triumphal entry.

This is face palm Sunday and hosanna and so on. And in verse 11, this is Mark 11, 11, Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. When he looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, he went out to Bethany with the 12.

The next day, Monday, verse 12, when they had come out from Bethany, he was hungry. Notice there is no record of the cleansing of the temple on Sunday, because that's going to start down in Mark 11, 15. This is Monday.

Matthew reorganized his material for thematic purposes. It is important to be careful about drawing superficial conclusions, looking at just one part of scripture. This is why we always compare scripture with scripture.

And it gives us the full three-dimensional view. If you've ever seen drawings by Escher and some of these that, and they've even made three-dimensional models. And when you look at them from a certain perspective, it looks like a continuous stairway that goes up and down and links.

And then you change your perspective and you see, oh, that's the impression I had looking at it from one perspective is not correct. Sometimes when I'm driving, I think I see a person standing by the side of the road up ahead, but there's two hills between me and what I saw. And by the time I get over the second hill, it's two mailboxes.

And the angle that I was looking at that made it look like a person was standing there, but it's actually two mailboxes. I need another perspective from a different angle to properly understand what I see. Well, this is why we have four gospels.

So the next day, Mark 11, 12, Jesus came out from Bethany and he was hungry. Seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, he went to see if perhaps he would find something on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves for it was not the season for figs.

In response, Jesus said to it, let no one eat fruit from you ever again. Notice the loose quotation compared to what it said in Matthew. You're not going to bear fruit again, and no one is going to eat this fruit again.

This is particularly interesting when you recognize the tree as a symbol for Israel, because in the time that God has allocated in human history, prior to the kingdom of the son and the kingdom of the father, there is no more time where Israel is God's mechanism, God's people for representing and communicating God and his truth. No one is going to eat fruit. Now we certainly benefit from the historical example and God's dealings with Israel, but Israel is no longer the people of God in this dispensation, and they will not be again until the millennium.

The kingdom of the son and kingdom of the father are completely distinct and separate from the Old Testament times and our New Testament age. And so for these last 2,000 years, Israel has not been God's means of ministering, benefit, nourishment, spiritually speaking, for people. No one has eaten fruit from that tree because they did not know the time of their visitation, and his disciples heard it.

Then you go on down and you have the cleansing of the temple on Monday. Well, go back to Matthew 21 now because it's what Jesus says next that we're really going to focus on this morning. Verse 20, Matthew 21-20, when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither away so soon? So we have jumped between verse 19 and verse 20 from Sunday to Monday in Matthew's account.

You see that from what we just read in Mark, right? Matthew is organizing this thematically. He wants to get the withering all in one go. Tell this story sequentially.

So when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither away so soon? When the disciples saw it, that's the next day. Jesus answered and said to them, Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, Be removed and be cast into the sea, it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.

So what do you think about this? Have you moved any mountains lately? There is a, excuse me, I'm getting a frog in my throat. There's a strong and consistent theme in the week preceding and extending back throughout the latter ministry of the Lord Jesus to his disciples about faith. Faith.

If you had even a minuscule amount of faith, these extraordinary things would happen. Now we always, we look at this. I've certainly looked at it this way.

I think you might also say to a tree, be removed and cast into the sea. I look at this with the same amount of reserve as I do. If your eye offends, you pluck it out.

If your hand offends, you cut it off. I think the Lord can't be talking in literal terms here. I'm not sure I see the utility.

There's certainly trees up on this hillside that I'd be glad to move with my faith and not

have to do the chainsaw and the trailer and the brush piles and the, you know, all of the work that it takes. So what is he talking about here? Assuredly, I say to you now, remember what day this is. This is Monday.

Where is Jesus going to be on Thursday? He is going to be nailed to a tree. Jesus will be nailed to a tree on Thursday. He's talking about a tree on Monday.

How important is this tree? The symbol, the fig tree representing Israel. And then this tree that he talks about, if you have faith and do not doubt, this is something Jesus has been pounding. I've told you a dozen times.

I like that, uh, Richard Dreyfus movie. I don't remember the name of it, but at one point he's a band teacher and he's trying to teach a guy how to play the, the drum, Mr. Holland's Opus. Thank you, Elizabeth.

And he's trying to get the guy to get rhythm. And so he puts a football helmet on him and he takes a drumstick and he's going bong, bong, bong, bong on the guy's head. This is a beat.

This is a regular interval. And I get the idea that, that the Lord is doing that with me. Sometimes he's sticking a football helmet on me and he's just pounding, pounding, pounding.

When are you going to get this? What do I have to do to make you see this thing about faith? Jesus has been pounding into his disciples for months. This, if you think should remind you of something else Jesus said about faith a few chapters back, we're going to take a quick look at it and then we're going to take our break. If you had faith and do not doubt, let me first of all say, and you need to make this note at Matthew 21, 21.

We just looked at Mark 11, 11. That was a great verse. Here's Matthew 21, 21.

If you have faith, this is a present subjunctive. Subjunctive goes with the if. It's the mood of potential.

Maybe you will, maybe you won't have this faith, but if you do, but it's a present subjunctive. A better translation, honestly, would be if you are being faithful. If you are, if, if faith characterizes you, this is a present, it is ongoing action in present time.

If you are a person of faith, if you are regularly and consistently expressing faith, living by faith, walking by faith, this isn't the moment of faith. This is, you are a representative of faith. You live faith.

You are faith. You are faithing your way day after day after day. Present subjunctive.

If you are a person of faith and at the moment where the chips are down and the challenge is on, do not doubt. This is an aorist subjunctive. Jesus in the Greek here

changes the tense.

I think he probably taught this in Aramaic, but as it is written for us in Greek, if you are having faith, if you are faithing your way through life and at a particular moment when that faith really needs to be exercised, at that moment, that aorist moment, you do not doubt. And this is the word for doubt is real interesting because it's a middle in form and passive in meaning. You are not made to doubt.

You don't allow yourself to doubt. You don't get conflicted. You don't start coming unglued.

At the moment you've been living by faith, well, now you've got a faith test. Now there's a specific time when your pattern of faith is going to be put to the test. This is like Simeon at the temple.

Simeon's been living his life waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. You will not pass away until you have seen the salvation of the Lord. And by day, by day, by day, when he comes to the temple, he sees Mary and Joseph and the Christ child.

Now what's he going to do? It's a pattern. Now it's a moment. Anna at the temple, pattern of life.

Now there's a moment. We as believers live faith day by day by day. Now there's a particular occasion where that faith is going to be challenged.

It's going to be tested. It's going to be given an opportunity to reveal itself, its strength and its depth and its intelligence. Its spiritual perception is going to come to the fore at this aorist particular point in time and you don't fail at that point.

You do not doubt. You are not made to doubt, caused to doubt. You don't allow yourself to doubt.

Middle in form, passive in meaning. It's a wonderful, you could just talk about the Greek here all day long. I could.

And do not allow yourself to become unconvinced. You will not only do what was done to the fig tree. Wow.

He doesn't say you're going to move mountains and do this. He says you will do what was done to the fig tree. What did Jesus just do to this fig tree? Did he bless it or did he bless himself? You know, turn this tree into figs.

If Jesus is hungry, how did Jesus ministry begin right after the baptism of John? What happened in the wilderness after 40 days? What was the first temptation? Jesus was and hungered at the beginning and he's and hungered at the end, right? What was the temptation at the beginning? Well, son of God, turn these stones to bread. He is the son

of God. He's just been acclaimed as the son of David yesterday.

He's hungry. Why can't he just make this tree, pop himself out some figs. He has been living in obedience to the will of the father this whole time.

And at a time of hunger, what does he do? Is he concerned about his own personal hunger, his own personal need? Or is he concerned about teaching something to his disciples and teaching something to everyone since then in the inspired pages of scripture about what is required of God? What does the Lord require of you? Oh man, to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God, humbly by faith, do justice by faith, love mercy by faith, sacrificial to self-beneficial to others. You've got to be trusting God that he's going to take up the slack when you put yourself out on behalf of others. When you put yourself out on behalf of larger things that belong to the plan and purpose of God.

Well, what about me? Jesus is the ultimate picture of that in the events of this week. And it begins on this Monday where not my will, but thy be done, not my hunger being satisfied, but the teaching purpose for the disciples, the symbolic value of this tree to represent Israel and to help us understand why the kingdom did not come in. Jesus never lets his personal needs get in the way of the plan and purpose of God and the benefit to others that his life provides.

And it's a powerful lesson for us. The cross of course is the ultimate picture and it casts so great a shadow that we often miss this one. But several weeks back, remember when it was all about the bread? Here it is all about the leaves.

It's all about what is righteousness? What is it that constitutes faith? We lay hold of righteousness by faith. Jesus says, if you live by faith and at the time that your faith is challenged, you do not come unglued. You do not fall apart.

You don't let doubt move you. You can be an example like this fig tree. You can do what I just did to the fig tree.

You will do. Your life will be a reflection of faith and righteousness in stark contrast to something that is all leaves and no fruit. Or as we say in Texas, all hat and no cattle, right? Leaves don't cut it.

It's got to be the fruit. There are a lot of leafy Christians. There are a lot of leafy churches today.

We have got to listen to what the Lord says. As individuals, we've got to live by faith and don't let doubt creep in and start eroding away and cause us to fail at the point of opportunity. That's Jesus' message here.

We have much more to say about this. I'm going to have to really start picking them up

and laying them down to get through it. So we're going to pause here and take our break.

And when we come back, we're going to see the previous times, just as we saw last Thursday night, how many times Jesus said, do you not know that there's something that comes between this time and the kingdom? Did I not tell you that the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, crucified and rise again? Why would you think the kingdom is coming now? Oh my goodness. Are we going to see something about that when we come back from the break? But we've got some wonderful intermission music from my brother Matthew and a wonderful resurrection morning special from our musicians. And so we're going to enjoy that and then we'll come back and see these tremendous things.