

# No One Takes My Life From Me

## PART 2 - AUTHORITY

TEXT: MARK 11:12-14, 20-25 (ESV)



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### Monday Morning

In the 1<sup>st</sup> part of this study of the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, we traced His Sunday morning Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem. Mark writes of the rest of that day; "He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when He'd looked around at everything, as it as already late, He went out to Bethany with the 12." (Mk 11:11) Though little is known about what all He did that day in the city, we know His entry was like the coronation of a King, setting the temple officials to monitor His movements in the hopes of arresting Him before any more was made of Him being a King in the eyes of the people.

Jesus said no one takes His life from Him, but He lays it down of His own accord. He has authority to lay it down and to take it up again, which He did on Easter Morning. (Jn 10:18) Our objective in this series is that we'd see that the events leading to the cross which He bore for the sake of sinners were not thrust upon Him, as though He was a man caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, or rising from the grave just was a divine attempt to make good come from a bad deal. No, Jesus came to lay His life down for those who would believe in Him.

Today we pick up the story on the next day—Monday morning. Much of what the Gospels tell us about Monday centers on the theme of Jesus' authority—both over creation and in passing judgment. Everything Jesus did He did with authority. So when He woke His disciples Monday saying He wanted go back into Jerusalem to teach, as risky as it sounded it wasn't surprising. But everyone sensed something stirring, as if Jesus had rounded a corner and His end was coming fast. He was a marked man.

Tension between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem had escalated to new heights. Perhaps one of the hardest things for the Chief Priests in Jerusalem to deal with was Jesus' air of authority. Wherever He went, He acted like He owned the place. Most leaders are naturally territorial, but the boundaries Jesus presumed to reign over seemed to have no end.

On Monday, Jesus does something that would eliminate any ambiguity anyone might have about how He perceived His own authority, and it begins even before He enters the Temple. Crossing the valley, He sees a fig tree. It reminds Him He is hungry. It is not the season for figs, but He goes over to have a look. What follows is one of the most unusual and definitive claims of authority Jesus makes over humanity & creation itself.

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

*<sup>12</sup>On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. <sup>13</sup>And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup>And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it...*

*<sup>20</sup>As they passed by [the next] morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. <sup>21</sup>And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." <sup>22</sup>And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup>Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. <sup>24</sup>Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. <sup>25</sup>And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

### The City & People of God

If Jerusalem was a bee hive, with His triumphal entry Jesus had hit it with a stick and you could hear the buzz grow as the anger within got organized. With that kingly arrival, He made a strong declaration about Himself. Today He goes back for more, this time to declare the failure of His own people to live up to the covenantal mandate God had given them to be a blessing to the world. This was the hour of their visitation. God had sent His Messiah and they were unaware. All they knew was Jesus of Nazareth was disrupting the order they labored to preserve, and they were pretty sure He was out of His jurisdiction.

This was Jerusalem, the crown jewel of the people of Israel. They'd known hardship. They'd been invaded and conquered. But they still had Jerusalem, and for many this meant they still had a place in this world. Was there ever a more glorious, ancient city? Such well worn roads, packed by the feet of a million pilgrims. So much of the peoples' hope rested here. The desert palette of browns and tans with its traces of green in the olives, dates and figs could trick the mind into believing this city wasn't built but grown. It was easier to believe this city budded through the germination of something out of nothing than it was to accept that man played a part in her construction.

But in the morning, as the sun rose from behind, the limestone walls up on that hill shone as though the city was wrapped in a ribbon of Solomon's gold. And the structures which rose above those walls testified of the stone masons King David hired to execute the plans Moses drew up in order to realize Abraham's dream. It was the city of God but it was also a city of man, laid one brick at a time. And even when invading armies toppled the walls and leveled the temple, the people of God eventually returned and, brick by brick, put her back together again. It was easy to look to the strength and history of this city to find hope that even in the face of opposition, the people had an identity, a purpose, a home. A refuge—Jerusalem.

### The Fig & the Vinedresser

As Jesus made His way across the valley to enter that city, He saw a fig tree, which reminded Him He was hungry. It would be another month or so until the season for figs, but the leaves were developed, which meant there might be a crop of *taksh*—the little green almond-shaped forerunners to the summer figs. The presence of *taksh* was a sure sign of the crop to come. And if there were none, there would be no figs either that year.

*Taksh*, which grew in early spring, were bitter but edible in a pinch. He looked but found none. This tree would bear no fruit this year. So He cursed it. On the surface this is strange. What are we to think? Was this an immature tantrum from a hungry, cranky miracle worker? Or was Jesus making a point? When His disciples heard Him curse this fig tree, did it call to mind what Jesus had said about fruitless fig trees when they first set out for Jerusalem a few weeks back? He told this story:

*A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. He said to the vinedresser, "Look, for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" And he answered him, "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."* (Luke 13:6-9 ESV)

For three years Jesus' disciples had been following Him. For three years Jesus had been teaching, healing and living among the people of God. Everywhere He went He seemed to be seeking something—evidence that the people who claimed to represent God actually *knew* God. He was looking for fruit of that. Was He finding any? The point of His parable was that the owner of the tree was within his rights to expect fruit.

What makes a fig tree a fig tree? Figs. A man keeps an orchard not for the love of foliage, but for its fruit. If all you get from your grape is the vine, you'll have no wine. If all you get from your olive is the branch, you'll have no oil. And if all you get from the fig is the leaf, you'll have no fruit. So why bother tending such a plant? Maybe it was a bad year. Maybe next year the leaves will bud and the *taksh* will cluster and all will be forgotten. But after two years of this, the third year is a mercy.

Still, there is mercy. Another year it is. But after three years of searching for fruit the tree refuses to yield, one begins to doubt the tree's integrity. Everything about it sells the bill that it is a fig tree. Even a lush, healthy fig tree—the kind that would draw you over from a distance expecting to find fruit. But to the land owner, he knows not only that the tree bears no fruit, but that this has become its *habit*. To its owner, the tree is nothing more than a land-occupying, resource-wasting weed.

But the vinedresser intercedes, "Give me one more season. I'll dig around it. I'll fertilize it. I'll do everything I know to awaken this tree to its purpose." The land owner agrees. The tree, however, has no idea it is being contended for. It cannot feel the shovel turn the earth around it or see the rich darkness of the dung heaped beneath its drip line. But the vinedresser knows. But even more than that, he *works*. He does his work the best he can. He prunes in the fall. He keeps careful watch in the winter. He fertilizes in the spring until the moment of truth arrives.

The tree, which for a winter has looked all but dead, begins to bud. Life stirs within. The buds begin to unravel into a canopy of green. If everything has gone according to plan, and if the tree has responded to the vinedresser's care, he will find more than leaves at the hour of his visitation. He will find the tell-tale evidence of a transformed tree. He will find *taksh*! Bitter but beautiful *taksh*! Or nothing. Either way, the truth will be told.

Jesus inspected the tree and found only leaves. Did the disciples recall His parable about the vinedresser all those weeks back, or what He said yesterday through tears about Jerusalem not being prepared for the hour of her visitation? He entered the city to the praises of the masses, but His heart broke because Jerusalem didn't know *this* was the time of her visitation. He was the vinedresser and this was the third year of inspection.

Jesus walked up to the tree with the authority of the vinedresser coming for his final inspection, as if it were one of *His* trees, and as if things were not well between the land owner and this tree. What would make for peace? Fruit at the time of the vinedresser's visitation would make for peace. But there was none. So He declared, "May no one ever eat from you again." The disciples heard Him. Immediately it began to wither.

## Authority Over All Things

Within a day, to the astonishment of everyone present, the tree shriveled away down to its roots. Seeing it, His disciples burned to know, "How'd you do that?" Jesus launched into a teaching on faith and prayer. In another message we can develop His reply in more detail. But here I want to focus on the overwhelming spectrum of authority Jesus is claiming for Himself. By appealing to the power of prayer here, He is teaching that true authority over anything ultimately lies in the hands and will of God alone.

Jesus stood before this city and passed judgment on the people claiming to bear God's name. The tree was the city, the people and their entire approach to relating to God as though He was someone to pacify, as though they could achieve this, as though they had a chip to play. Jesus judges them to be fruitless, bearing nothing of what God had intended or expected from them.

He passes judgment as One with authority over them—authority which was getting harder to argue with. Earlier, once when the disciples were stuck on the Sea of Galilee in a surging storm, Jesus spoke a word and the winds ceased and the waters subsided. That day the world found He had authority over the weather. And when Lazarus was dead four days in the grave, Jesus raised Him proving His authority over death too. Then yesterday, when the Pharisees demanded He rebuke His followers for praising Him as He rode into the city, He said if they wouldn't praise Him, the rocks and trees would. In that statement, He claimed authority over creation itself. And here before this fig tree He proved He held that authority too. The world saw Him claim authority over the elements, creation and even death. He made good on those claims. The storm yielded to the power of His word, as did the grave as now the fig.

Everyone watching Him knows His only hope of escape from death lies in abdicating any perceived authority He might claim over the world. But this He will not do. And the reason He won't, and the reason He will go from this fig tree to the temple which He will clear as though He owns that too, is because all authority in heaven and on earth *has* been given to Him. (Mt 28:18) He will not relinquish His authority because the authority belongs to Him. He has authority to rule creation and to pass judgment—right judgment—on the hearts of all of us. This isn't the authority of someone hungry for power. It's the authority of One who was involved in the creation of the world itself, evident in the fact that the world obeys His voice.

Everyone appeals to some authority—our own or someone or something else's. We even do this with what we believe about our eternal destinies. And we put eternity in the balance when we do this. Does Jesus Christ have the authority to inspect your life for the fruit of a purpose fulfilled? Life is meant to be saturated in purpose. Nothing will ever change this. As Jesus lays down His life, He claims authority over creation and humanity—over the world you live in and over you. There is a purpose for your life—to live as God intends—dependent upon Him, yielded to His work in you. The question you must settle before Him is, do you believe this? If not, what do you believe?