

Jesus Kills a Tree

Jesus' Last Days (Mark): Part 5
Mark 11:21 (Mt.21:19-20) 9/14/2020

Why did Jesus kill a tree? And what does that say about the age of the earth?

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Introduction

They're on their way back into Jerusalem, but on the way, much to the chagrin of the commentators, Jesus stops and kills a tree.

12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig-tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no-one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

The scholars absolutely hate this miracle because it embarrasses them. They actually read that as Jesus having a tantrum like a two-year-old. Like that term that's getting popular now, "hangry." You go to MacDonalds dreaming of an egg McMuffin, you get to the window and they say, "Sorry, we're serving the lunch menu now," and so you burn down the MacDonalds. There are actually Bible scholars who think that's what Mark is describing here. Mark is just stopping right in the middle of this climactic moment of the king taking over the Temple of God to tell a random story about Jesus having an irritable moment over not getting a fig.

Is This a Bad Miracle?

That blows my mind. I read those commentaries and think, *Really?* Given all you know about what Jesus was like and how Mark portrays him—a man who voluntarily stays out in the desolation and fasts for 40 days? At the well, he declined food even though hungry, because he was so concerned about the spiritual reality going on. You really think a man like that would throw a fit over not getting a fig?

Then the next day, when Peter asks about the killing of this tree, and Jesus' response is basically, "Have faith in God and you will be able to do similar things." Are we to believe Jesus was promising Peter that if he had faith and didn't doubt, then Peter would also be able to throw a fit in moments of irritation when he misses breakfast? These scholars have such brilliant minds, but once in a while you just wonder if their great learning has driven them mad.

I don't know if they are projecting their own selves onto the historical Jesus or what, but I do know Jesus was not a man who was governed by his physical appetites. And yet scholar after scholar ignores everything we know of Jesus and how Mark presents Jesus and they go on and on about what a bad thing Jesus did to this poor, innocent tree. And they actually use that language. They say, "This tree didn't deserve to be cursed. It wasn't even the season for figs, so it wasn't the tree's fault!" Then some conservatives argue, "Well, it kind of did deserve to be cursed because it had all those leaves advertising fruit, but didn't have fruit."

We just need to come to our senses here and realize—it's a tree! No tree deserves anything, good or bad. Trees can't earn anything, they don't deserve anything, they don't have anything coming to them because they aren't moral agents—they're just wood. Saying this tree didn't deserve to be cursed is like saying Ezekiel's garment didn't deserve to be torn. Jeremiah's belt didn't deserve to be buried in the rocks for many days where it got totally ruined (Jeremiah 13:1-11) Prophets very often used object lessons, and some of those were hard on the objects—so what? Jesus miraculously took bunch of wood with sap in it and made it into a bunch of wood with no sap in order to make a point.

What amazes me is that these scholars who criticize Jesus for using a tree to teach a point—those people write those criticisms on what? Paper—which comes from trees! They have no problem with trees dying so they can communicate their message, but they're all outraged if Jesus kills a tree to communicate his?

The truth is, Jesus actually honored this tree. Jesus took a worthless, fruitless tree, and made it the most useful tree that ever grew. Because of that one tree, thousands of people have learned priceless, timeless truths about God and about themselves!

Not only that, but Jesus' killing this tree was actually an act of mercy on the people. The tree didn't deserve to be cursed—who did? The people! But instead of sending them all to hell on the spot, Jesus gives them an object lesson instead so they can have a chance to repent.

Curses Throw off Dating

As an aside, I wonder, if a group of scientists got together and studied this fig tree the day after Jesus cursed it, how long they would say it had been dead. If they tried to calculate that, do you think their figures might be off a bit? Be wary of scientists who think they know how old things are by how old they appear. Someone will say, "That's not a fair comparison—this tree was a special case." Oh? Why's that? "Because Jesus cursed it." Okay, so if something has been cursed by God, then it might end up having an appearance that looks older than it actually is? The whole creation was cursed, and there isn't a scientist alive who can give even the foggiest guess at what effect that curse had on natural elements. The next time someone wants to talk to you about how science points to an old earth, ask them, "Show me a peer reviewed scientific study that tells me exactly what effect the curse of God had on the creation. Tell me what scientist knows that information and how they know it, and then I'll listen to that scientist's theories about the age of the earth. Until then, I'll just trust what God says."