

## Mk. 11:12-24 “A Barren Tree and a Den of Robbers”

**For the Children:** Have you ever had a “temper tantrum” when you didn’t get what you wanted? Younger children sometimes do, or children who have been spoiled. Sometimes adults do as well. The Lord Jesus did not. He is the Great King. He comes into His House and finds it has been taken over by robbers. His House is a holy place. He throws the robbers out, so His House can be holy again. Then He warns the robbers that God will judge them for what they have done. For us, God’s “House” is the Lord Jesus, and His church and His people in whom His Spirit lives. As faithful servants of the King, we want to help His church and His people, and make sure that sin doesn’t stop us from being close to the Lord Jesus. **Questions:** What did Jesus do to throw the robbers out? How did He warn them that God would judge them? How can we stop sin from making us draw away from the Lord?

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### **Introduction:**

#### **First Point: Zeal for the House of Prayer**

- The Cleansing of the Temple: The Lord’s inspection (11:11) showed that the Temple needed to be cleansed. It had become a “den of robbers” (Jer. 7:11). The outer court was being used to sell sacrificial animals and exchange currency for the Temple Tax at extortionate prices. This area had also become a thoroughfare for merchants. This was a perversion of God’s purpose for the Temple. So the Lord acted quickly to overturn the merchants’ tables and chairs and prevent their traffic through there
- A Place for the Gentiles: This making of money also pushed the Gentiles out of the “Court of the Gentiles,” which God had set up for them as part of His plan of salvation. See Is. 56:7. Thus the Jews were also spiritually robbing the Gentiles, as well as “robbing” God of His glory.
- The Cursing of the Fig Tree: The Lord also acted out a prophecy regarding Jerusalem, its Temple, its leaders and its corrupt system. He saw a fig tree that promised the possibility of fruit, but turned out to have only leaves. He cursed the tree, so that it withered completely. This represented the destruction of Jerusalem, since Israel had only outward show and no real fruit. For the OT background to this symbolism, see Jer. 8:13, 29:17; Hos. 9:10,16; Joel 1:7; Mic. 7:1-6; Hos. 2:12; and Is. 34:4.
- Zeal for His House: Both the cleansing of the Temple and the cursing of the fig tree must be seen as prophecies of God’s judgement and evidence of Christ’s zeal for His Father’s House (Ps. 69:9) – not a display of uncontrolled temper. We are also to show zeal for the Lord’s Name and “House” (2 Cor. 7:11). But for us, His House is no longer a Temple. It represents His *Presence* – in Christ, in His church and in the individual believer indwelt by His Spirit. Our zeal therefore involves promoting Christ’s Name, using the means He has provided to draw close to God, fighting sin in self and in the congregation, involving ourselves in the worship and life of the church, and seeking the welfare of our brethren.

#### **Second Point: Zeal for the Prayer of the House**

- Faith and Prayer: The Lord responded to Peter’s observation that the fig tree had withered, by saying, “Have faith in God!” They must have faith in contrast to the Jewish leaders. They must have faith that what Jesus curses will really be cursed! That faith will be expressed in prayer – the opposite of the “robbery” in the Temple, for prayer honours God.
- Moving Mountains: Prayer carried out in faith seeks to align itself with God’s plan of salvation – and the defeat of His enemies. Consider the imprecatory Psalms. It might have seemed to the disciples that there was no way the fortress of Jerusalem, the Temple on the immovable mountain and the strangle-hold of the Leaders, could be undone. But the prayer of faith can move such mountains! They can do even more than curse trees! Double-minded prayers have no such guarantee.
- Anything You Want: V. 24 might sound like a promise that we can have anything we pray for so long as we really believe. However, the context here is praying for God’s plan of salvation and the defeat of His enemies. We can be sure that our requests will be granted only if we are praying according to God’s Word – His promises, commands and teachings.

### **Conclusion**