119 MINISTRIES

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Messiah and the Fig Tree
Part 2: Whatever You Ask

This is the second part of our teaching on the withering of the fig tree in Matthew chapter 21. Let's quickly recap what we covered in part 1. Here is the passage from Matthew that we have been discussing:

Matthew 21:18-22

> In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

In part 1 of this series, we defined what is meant by the symbolism of the fig tree being fruitless and withering, the meaning of faith and doubt, and the symbolism behind casting mountains into the sea. To briefly summarize, the fig tree represented the chief priests and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel. The lack of fruit represented their lack of righteousness, their disregard for God and mistreatment of his people. The withering represented the judgment, the destruction that these leaders were going to face because of their wickedness. Faith was defined as belief in God's Word, that results in obedience, while doubt was defined as disbelief in God's Word, that results in mistreatment of one's brother. Casting mountains into the sea represented God providing judgment that would lead to the salvation of his people, and the establishment of his kingdom.

In this teaching, we will be addressing the last part of Yeshua's statement in verse 22:

Matthew 21:22

> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.

When Yeshua says, "whatever you ask for in prayer," does he mean that we will receive literally *anything* that we ask for? Well, usually when the term "whatever" is used in the Scriptures, it doesn't mean literally "whatever," but "whatever" inside of certain limitations. Here are some verses that illustrate this point:

1 Corinthians 10:25

> Eat **whatever** is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

Matthew 15:17

> Do you not see that **whatever** goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?

In these verses, the term "whatever" clearly has constraints: Paul wasn't advising that people should eat snakes or poisonous mushrooms if those things happened to be sold at a meat market; clearly, he was talking about eating whatever *meats* were sold there. Yeshua wasn't saying that putting a brick in your mouth will result in normal swallowing and digestion; clearly, he was talking about whatever *foods* go into the mouth. When the term "whatever" is used, there are almost always limitations that constrain its meaning. So, what are those limitations when Yeshua says that "whatever" his disciples ask for will be given to them?

One limitation that constrains this phrase, "whatever you ask for in prayer," is that God will only give us things that are "according to his will":

1 John 5:14-15

> And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that **if we ask anything according to his will** he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

What is God's will when it comes to granting our requests? What does God want to give us? God has given many blessings to his people, but there are several requests that he consistently provides. One of those things is our daily needs; the things we need to survive. Just like God gave the Israelites manna, "bread from heaven" (Exodus 16:4) every day when they were in the wilderness (Exodus 16:35), so he promises to give those who seek him the things that they need each day:

Matthew 6:31-33

> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Another thing that he wants to give us is wisdom. When God asked King Solomon what the king wanted to receive, this is what Solomon said:

1 Kings 3:9-14

> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"
> It pleased the LORD [YHWH] that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies,

> but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

So, the wisdom to properly rule God's people was exactly what God wanted Solomon to ask for. James says that we too will receive wisdom from God if we ask for it:

James 1:5-8

> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Another thing that God wants to give to his people is an inheritance; specifically, an *eternal* inheritance. This is what he promised to Abraham:

Genesis 17:8

> …I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an **everlasting possession**, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel reiterated this promise:

Ezekiel 37:24-27

> My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. **They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever**, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Peter, too, spoke of this eternal inheritance:

1 Peter 1:3-5

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua]! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] from the dead, to **an inheritance that is imperishable**, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(See also: Psalm 37:29; Ephesians 1:11-14; Colossians 3:23-24; Hebrews 9:15)

So God wants to provide us with this salvation, this eternal inheritance. If we ask God to receive this inheritance, this salvation, he will grant our request:

Psalm 18:2-3

> The LORD [YHWH] is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. **I call upon the LORD [YHWH], who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.**

Joel 2:32

> And it shall come to pass that **everyone who calls on the name of the LORD [YHWH] shall be saved.** For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD [YHWH] has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD [YHWH] calls.

Romans 10:9-13

> …if you confess with your mouth that Jesus [Yeshua] is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, **bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."**

So, these things: daily bread, wisdom, and salvation resulting in eternal inheritance, are three of the things that God has always planned to give to his people; they are his will. That's not to say that other blessings are not his will, but these are three things that he has explicitly promised in the Scriptures. We can keep these in mind as we move forward.

Another limitation that restricts the term "whatever we ask," is that God will only give us what is appropriate for us. He will not give us things if we intend to use those things wrongly.

1 Kings 8:37-40

> If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar, if their enemy besieges them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, whatever prayer, **whatever plea is made** by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and **render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways** (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind), that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers.

James 4:2-3

> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. **You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions**.

So, if we are asking for things so that we can use them for selfish gain, or in order to abuse other people with them, then God is not going to heed our request.

Still another limitation on the term "whatever" is that sometimes what we receive from God is contingent upon what we give to others:

Psalm 18:20-27

> **The LORD [YHWH] dealt with me according to my righteousness**; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD [YHWH], and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did

not put away from me. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt. So the LORD [YHWH] has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. **With the merciful you show yourself merciful**; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous. For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

If we want to receive good things from God, we must be willing to give good things to others. This is especially true of spiritual blessings, things like mercy and forgiveness. In Mark's account of the story of the fig tree, this point is especially emphasized:

Mark 11:22-25

And Jesus [Yeshua] answered them, "Have faith in God. 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. Therefore I tell you, **whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 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.**"

(See also: Colossians 3:12-13)

So, there are some constraints that are placed on the term, "whatever you ask": what you ask for must be part of God's will, you must not intend to use it wrongfully, and in some cases, it must be something you are willing to give. Within these constraints, Yeshua is telling us that if we have faith, we will receive the things that we ask God for. Again, "faith" means not only that we believe that God exists, but that he has standards, and that he rewards and punishes people based on those standards. As the author of Hebrews wrote:

Hebrews 11:6

…without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

These words echo what is said in many other scriptures, including the following:

Proverbs 15:29

The LORD [YHWH] is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

Matthew 7:7-12

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For **everyone who asks receives**, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your

children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So **whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them**, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

1 John 3:21-23

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and **whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him**. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

(See also: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 34:15-18; 84:8-11; Proverbs 15:8; 28:9; Jeremiah 5:24-25; Zechariah 7:13; John 14:12-15)

So, with the understanding of what the fig tree represents, and what God wants to give to his people, let's put this all together. Here is Matthew 21 again:

Matthew 21:18-22

In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

God wanted his people to be righteous, to prosper, and to live, but the religious leaders of Yeshua's day were not serving God. They were a tree without fruit. Yeshua preached to them, urging them to repent and turn back to God, as we can see in this parable from Luke:

Luke 13:6-9

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig 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.'"

However, the chief priests and Pharisees refused to hear Yeshua's words; they did not bear fruit. So, Yeshua caused the fig tree to wither, and in so doing, foretold the destruction that was going to come upon these religious leaders. Then, Yeshua told his disciples that if they had faith (that is, if they believed in God and obeyed him), and did not doubt (that is, they did not mistreat their brothers and hold grudges against them), then they could move mountains into the sea (that is, nothing would prohibit them from preaching the gospel, turning people toward God, and causing them to bear fruit). They would also receive whatever they asked for in prayer; that is, God would give them the things that he had always promised to give his people: their daily bread, wisdom, and their eternal inheritance in his kingdom.

So, with this understanding of the story of the fig tree, how can we apply this to our lives today? What lessons can we learn from this story?

Practical Application

One thing that this story teaches us is how we should pray, and what we should pray for. Just like Yeshua taught in Matthew 6 (Matthew 6:5-15), we should pray that God forgives those who have sinned against us. We should also pray that his kingdom is advanced in the world, that any "mountains" that stand in the way of us preaching the gospel would be removed. It is God's will that people be forgiven of their sins, and enter into God's kingdom. And we do not need great power or riches for his will to be accomplished. All we need is his spirit, as he told Zerubbabel:

Zechariah 4:6-7

> …Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain…

Sometimes, God will give us material things for the purpose of accomplishing his will, but instead of asking for those things, we should, like Solomon, ask for wisdom. If we are seeking God's will first, then we will receive everything we need to accomplish his will, as well as our "daily bread," the things we need to survive day-to-day (Matthew 6:25-32). As Yeshua said:

Matthew 6:33

> …seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Another thing that this story teaches is that we should be fruitful trees. We should not be fruitless like the fig tree that Yeshua caused to wither. As Paul said:

2 Timothy 4:2

> …preach the word; **be ready in season and out of season**; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

We don't want to be religious hypocrites, people who exploit and abuse others while proclaiming ourselves to be righteous. Instead, we want to be sincere, faithful, and fruitful followers of God. So, how can we do that? How can we be fruitful trees?

One way is by studying God's commandments and living by them. As the Psalmist wrote:

Psalm 1:1-6

> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD [YHWH], and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD [YHWH] knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

If we study God's law and take it to heart, then we will become familiar with God's will; we will know how God expects us to act, and what kind of people he wants us to be. We will be fruitful.

For a deeper look into Psalm chapter 1, see our teaching, Studies in Psalms: The Way of the Righteous (Psalm 1).

Another way to be a fruitful tree is to especially focus on living by the teachings of Yeshua. When we abide in Yeshua's teachings and his love, we will be doing God's will, and will become fruitful branches, as Yeshua said:

John 15:1-11

> I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

So, if we are abiding in the love of Yeshua, obeying his teachings, forgiving others, having faith that God will do the things that he has promised, and obeying God's commandments, then we will be fruitful branches. We will not wither and be cast into the fire, but we will abide in love, and our joy will be full. The mountains will be removed, and God's kingdom will flourish. So, let us abide in Yeshua's love, keep his commandments, and be a fruitful tree.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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