

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

We're certainly not reading about American Jesus today. American Jesus is never angry. He's full of love and patience for everyone. Not true, however, of Bible Jesus. What Matthew recorded was actually Jesus' second cleansing of the Jerusalem temple, the first being three years earlier as recorded by John (see John 2:14-17). John describes a veritable stampede, with Jesus using a scourge of cords to zealously drive out people, doves, sheep and oxen, while pouring out coins and overturning tables. That is Bible Jesus.

Why, exactly, was Jesus so angry? It was not simply because there was buying and selling going on. God is not opposed to commerce, as long as it is fair and honest. Jesus was offended primarily because the temple was supposed to be a sacred sanctuary of prayer, not a market place. What the merchants and money changers were doing was dishonorable to God. It was sacrilegious. It also appears that the commerce being conducted was not honest in light of Jesus' statement about the robbers' den.

Bible Jesus also revealed Himself in today's reading as being divine. When the chief priests and scribes complained that He didn't restrain the praises of the children, He quoted from Psalm 8, where David wrote that God had prepared praise for Himself out of the mouths of infants and nursing babes. Jesus' reply can only be considered a claim to be equal with God. For such claims He was ultimately crucified (see John 5:18; 10:33; 19:7; Mark 14:61-64).

Notice that in both the parable of the two sons and the parable of the vine-growers there is a consistent theme: God is looking for obedience. He's not interested in insincere verbal professions of faith. He's interested in a faith that is lived out in action. He is expecting to receive fruit from His vineyard, and judgment will fall upon those who don't produce it. Tax collectors and prostitutes will be in heaven, according to Jesus, because they repented, producing fruit, while scribes and Pharisees, who all possessed "the assurance of salvation" but no fruit, would be denied entrance. This same idea may have also been the primary lesson behind Jesus' cursing of the fruitless fig tree that we also read today. Fruitlessness invites God's curse and destruction.

Of course, the incident of the withered fig tree carries a second lesson about faith in God. Some, however, have taken it to an extreme, teaching that our words have creative supernatural power, and that we can create good and bad circumstances in our lives by the words we speak. Notice, however, that it isn't words by themselves that contain power, but faith-filled words. You cannot kill a fig tree or move a mountain by your words unless you believe what you say will happen. And the only way you could have faith for either is if God revealed it was His will for a certain fig tree to die or a certain mountain to move. Otherwise, all you could do is hope that your words would come to pass.

If you don't believe me, try cursing one of your house plants and watch what happens. Once you do, you'll no longer be troubled by the "confession police" who lurk in church lobbies ready to pounce on you for your "negative confessions that are bringing curses on your life!" If you read the Psalms of David, you'll read many "negative confessions" that were simply factual statements describing His trials. He wasn't creating negative circumstances with his words. But notice that he always ended his complaints with a confession of faith in God!

So the application of what Jesus said works in prayer that is based on God's promises. When you have a promise, you can pray with faith, and speak faith-filled words that will bring the answer.

Finally, Bible Jesus also revealed Himself in our reading today as an unbreakable cornerstone---foolishly rejected by the builders---a huge stone that everyone should fear (21:42-44). If anyone tries to break it (falling upon it), he will be broken to pieces. And if this stone falls upon anyone, representing Jesus' judgment on those who reject Him, they will be scattered like dust. That's Bible Jesus.