

Jerusalem SmackDown

Round Two – The Temple Courts

January 17, 2010

Matthew 21:18-27

¹⁸ In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. ¹⁹ 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 not fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once.

²⁰ When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” ²¹ 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. ²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

²³ And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” ²⁴ Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, the I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Discussion Questions

Has anyone ever asked you a trick question?
What did you do?

Does this fig tree story seem odd to you? Why?
Why do you think Matthew (and the Holy Spirit) wanted us to hear this story of the fig tree?

Reread verses 21-22. What do these verses mean to you?
Are they exciting, confusing, difficult?
What do you think Jesus is saying with these verses?

What are the religious leaders trying to do with this question?
Why did Jesus respond as he did?

How do you understand the religious leaders’ reluctance to answer Jesus’ question?
What does it tell you about them?

What do we take away for our faith from these stories?