

Interpreting the Bible as a Whole

Series: Sustainable Faith: The Word

Matthew 21:18-22 NIV (0934)

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I. The challenge of bold statements in the Bible

a. Bold statements often lead to a bold divergence of interpretation

Matthew 21:18-22 NIV ¹⁸Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, *“May you never bear fruit again!”* Immediately the tree withered. ²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked. ²¹Jesus replied, *“I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

b. Critical question—What did the original author intend to convey?

c. Thank God for the balance

²²*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.*

II. Genuine understanding requires genuine engagement

a. Learning to interpret the Bible as a whole

Matthew 13 :57-58 NIV ⁵⁷And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, *“Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”* ⁵⁸And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Mark 8:12 NIV ¹²He sighed deeply and said, *“Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.”*

James 4:1-3 NIV ¹What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Mark 10:35 NIV ³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

John 15:7-8 NIV ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

1 John 3:21-22 NIV ²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

1 John 5:14-15 NIV ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 NIV ⁷To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

b. Investing in the process of faith-building