

## **Fruit, Faith and Forgiveness**

Mark 11:12 – 25

...transformed by the message and miracles of the Son of God...

**Proposition:** Remain in Christ and in His Word to produce fruit for His glory and to pray in faith for His will to be done.

**Application:** Get connected and remain connected to the Lord. Allow the Lord Jesus to cleanse our hearts. Get into His Word and discover His will. Pray in His will with a heart to forgive

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I learned that figs are one of the easiest fruits to grow. That is because fig trees have few disease or pest problems. Many fig growers do not need pollination to produce a crop. Figs grow best in Mediterranean climates. Failure of fig trees to produce fruit is often because of poor care practices. In many cases it is because of lack of water. In today's passage we find Jesus cursing a fig tree because it failed to produce figs.

It was Monday about 6 AM, the day after the Triumphal entry known as Palm Sunday. Jesus and the 12 left Bethany, His home base while serving in Jerusalem. Jesus was famous with the crowds in Jerusalem and Palm Sunday was proof of that. On His way to Jerusalem, He cursed a fig tree for not bearing fruit. Even though this fruitless tree was cursed it still has a useful purpose for us today. The cursed fig tree teaches us a lesson on fruit bearing. The lesson is that as we remain in Christ Jesus, and in His Word, we will produce fruit for His glory.

### **I. On Producing Fruit (11:12 – 18)**

*Fruitless Fig Tree (11:12 – 14):* Fig trees produce healthy, tasty buds, the size of an almond, called first ripe figs. They appear in early spring when leaves come out. They are not real figs, but pre-cursors; signs that real figs are still to come (Isa 28:4). These first ripe figs soon drop off the tree to make room for real figs. Jesus was looking for the nutritious buds, the first ripe figs. The leaves gave Him a promise that first ripe figs were present and mature figs were still to come. Jesus found many leaves but no buds and therefore, no future figs. The leafy fig tree is a picture of a false report. In effect it said, "*Because I have leaves, I will soon have figs.*" This fig tree could not produce what it had promised. It gave a false witness. And so, it was cursed. The fig tree was a symbol of Israel (Hos 9:10). Jesus looked for fruit in the religious leaders but found none. At the time, Judaism was all about religious devotion yet devoid of spiritual fruit. It was an outward show of godliness, without an inward change of heart. In the same way when we profess to be Christian, it comes with an expectation that we will reflect the Lord Jesus in our lives. How well do we reflect Him? We best reflect the Lord Jesus by bearing His fruit. What is the fruit we are to bear (Gal 5:22 – 23)? When others hear us

profess the name of Jesus yet find no proof of Christ like character we are no different than the fig tree. If we fail to produce fruit, God is not pleased. He is not pleased with an outward show of godliness yet devoid an inward change of heart. He is not pleased with all talk but no walk. If we bear the name of Jesus yet fail to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, we are giving false witness. Just as the Lord judged the fig tree for not bearing fruit, He will also judge those who profess to know the Lord yet fail to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (Matt 7:17 – 23). We know what spiritual fruit looks like, but how do we bear the fruit of the Spirit? We need to get rooted in the Lord Jesus and stay rooted in Him (John 15:1 – 8).

If we are attached to the Lord, we will bear fruit. A fruitless life may be due to a lack of water – so, we need to be in the Word of God. A fruitless life may be because we fail to repent of sin. So, we need to be quick to repent and to forgive (Matt 3:8). Not only did Jesus see a fruitless tree He also observed faithless temple worshippers.

*Faithless Temple Worshipper (11:15 – 17):* The temple was a place where people from all nations went to seek the Lord. The scene took place in the court of the Gentiles (court of Gentiles, court of Jews, court of Jewish women, court of Jewish men, court of priests). Commerce could only take place in the court of the Gentiles. Because the Passover was at hand it was a busy place. Jews scattered across the nations as well as God-fearing Gentiles converged in Jerusalem. Because the court of the Gentiles was the place for commerce this area of the temple did not capture the same respect as the other courts of the temple. Jesus cleansed the temple once before. Early in His ministry He expressed outrage at the moral decay in the temple. We read about it in John 2. The issue was not doing business in the temple court. The issue was using the temple court as a place of profit rather than a place of prayer. When pilgrims came from other nations they came with Roman coins. The temple tax could not be paid with Roman coins because an image of Caesar was engraved on the coins. Graven images violate the commandments, so to pay the temple tax, or to purchase sacrificial animals, Roman coins had to be exchanged for temple shekels. The term money changer means “*one who clips money.*” When we lived in Abu Dhabi we had to exchange dirhams into dollars. When we did so the value of our Canadian dollar would be reduced (clipped). For instance, rather than 1 dollar in exchange for 5 dirhams we would only get 4 dirhams for 1 dollar. That is money clipping. The money changers clipped the coins – shrinking its value, trimming its buying power. Pilgrims could not bring their sacrifices from long distances so they would buy the required sacrifices from sellers in the temple (Deut 14:22 – 26). Doing business in the temple was allowed. The problem was not the business but the profit making. Some pilgrims would bring their own lambs for the Passover sacrifice and the priests would inspect them and tell the owner the animal had flaws. So, they were forced to buy new flawless animals. About 500 000 sacrificial animals would be purchased during the Passover season. Picture the potential profit. Doves were the sacrificial animal for poor worshippers. The sellers were inflating the price of doves, putting an added financial burden on the poor. Jesus was upset at the way the poor were treated.

Jesus called His house, not a House of Prayer but a Den of Robbers. A robber differs from a thief. A thief steals in secret without physically harming others. A robber openly resorts to force. The money changers and sellers threatened people, using force to get at their money. A den is a hideout for robbers, a place they run to after doing a crime. These robbers found refuge in the House of God. They felt secure in the temple courts. The veneer of religion served as a cover for their greed. God's name was blasphemed among the nations because of this (Jer 7:11). Not long ago I heard about a group of old colony Mennonites who drove across the US/Alberta border hauling farm equipment on a flat deck trailer. They had a Bible on the dash and a cross hanging from the rearview mirror. When the border agent checked the farm equipment on the trailer, he found over 30 kg of cocaine hidden within the equipment. The cocaine was headed for Calgary. The drivers hid behind the guise of religion for cover. Let us never be found guilty of hiding behind our piety as a cover for our sin.

The temple was like the fig tree, full of foliage but devoid of fruit; full of religious activity but lacking the fruit of righteousness. Just as the fig tree was destroyed, 37 years later the temple was destroyed. It stands as a heap of rubble to this very day. Jesus has authority over His house. He owns the house. Now we are the House of God. Our heart is where His glory wells. Does the Lord Jesus need to do house cleaning in our hearts to bring forth fruit? We are made to bear fruit. Let's not resist His efforts to clean house.

The lesson of the fig tree is to bear fruit for God by staying rooted in the Lord Jesus; by reading His Word; and by repenting of all known sin. The lesson of the temple is that we must not hide behind religious pretence as a cover for sin. Instead, we should allow the Lord to cleanse our hearts.

## **II. On Praying in Faith (11:19 – 24)**

*Faith has an object (11:20 – 22):* Notice Jesus did not say, have faith, nor did He say have God's faith. He said have faith in God. Having faith in God is to believe He will do what He said He will do. The success of answered prayer is not the size of faith but the object of faith. Faith has power only because God is faith's object. We cannot say, "*Look at what my great faith did*" but we can say "*Look at what my great God did through faith?*"

*Faith overcomes obstacles (11:23, 24):* A mountain is a symbol of the greatest hindrance that we cannot scale (Matt 17:20). A mustard seed is a symbol of the smallest object. The smallest faith in a great God is more than enough to move mountains - it is enough to remove any hurdle we may face and make it vanish from sight (Ps 97:5a). God is the One who removes the hindrance. God is the One who makes it vanish. God works through faith. Yet sometimes the Lord does allow obstacles to arise in our lives to give us the choice to trust Him so that He may display His power.

*Faith does not doubt.* Doubt means to waver between two thoughts in conflict. On the one hand God is able on the other hand we may not feel worthy to receive an answer. On the one hand it is His will on the other hand maybe it is not His will for me. On the one hand my prayers are focussed on Him but on the other hand they may be for selfish motives. Faith settles the conflict. If our prayers are to be answered they must be on God's terms. What are God's terms for answered prayer? He answers prayer that is directed to Him and aligned to His will He answers prayer uttered according to His character (i.e. in His name). Faith enjoys the answer before it arrives.

*Hindered prayers:* Our prayers can be hindered when we ask amiss; when our asking is not aligned with His will (James 4:3; 1 John 5:14 – 15). Take God at His Word. If it is His will, He will bring it to pass. Our prayers are hindered when we pray amiss. They are also hindered when we hold grudges.

*Prayer and Forgiveness (11:25):* Forgiveness means “*let it go;*” to release the grudge. A faith that is expressed in prayer is also a faith that forgives others. Unforgiveness hinders the expression of faith. Our prayers are to be full of faith and full of forgiveness.

Bear fruit by getting connected and remaining connected to the Lord Jesus. Bear fruit by spending time reading His Word. Bear fruit by repenting of all known sin. Do not use religion as a pretence for sin. Allow the Lord Jesus to cleanse your heart. Pray in His will, according to His character and with a forgiving heart.