

The Fig Tree

Matt 21:18-22

Scripture Ref: Is 6:13-14; John 15:5-8, 16-17; Eph 5:9; Gal 5:22; 1 Cor 12:8-11; Eph 4:11-12; Matt 9:37; John 15:8

18 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. 19 And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away. 20 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?" 21 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. 22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

1. **This might be one of the strangest things that Jesus does in His ministry.**
 - a. **The environmentalist might think *"How could Jesus just kill a tree like that? That's just mean!"***
 - b. **The pragmatist might think *"Why wouldn't Jesus simply command the tree to make fruit?"***
2. **So what is Jesus trying to teach us about?**
 - a. **Fruit?**
 - b. **Faith?**
 - c. **Clearing land of useless fig trees?**

Parables

3. **Jesus used mostly parables to teach, and much of the time people didn't understand.**
 - a. **Many times His own disciples had to ask *"what does that mean?"* – earlier they asked Jesus *"Why do you speak to the people in parables?"* – in other words – *"I'm so confused!"***
 - b. **And Jesus responded by quoting Is 6 *"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: " 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."***
 - c. **In other words having *physical sight and hearing* does not mean that you have *spiritual sight and hearing* – they are two entirely different senses.**
4. **And by teaching in parables Jesus forces the listener to put some spiritual effort into understanding the meaning**

- a. The hearer has to seek deeper than the surface of the parable – much like a gift that is wrapped – you can admire the pretty wrapping paper, or you can open the gift and get to the real treasure that is covered by the wrapping paper.
5. As well, what Jesus did to the fig tree wasn't just a random act of killing off a tree that had no fruit – it was witnessed by His disciples, and placed into the gospel, so that they and we could see something deeper.

The Fig Tree

6. The interesting thing about this fig tree was that Jesus approached this tree during the time of the year when fruit should have been on the tree,
 - a. Yet – the tree had leaves, but no fruit.
 - b. Which, in a way made the tree – well - a *hypocrite*. It looked like every other fig tree, like it was growing and looked healthy, yet there was NO FRUIT.
 - c. Given the setting: Jesus entering Jerusalem, we can see that the tree was representative of the nation of Israel:
 - d. They had all of the outer trappings of being a “nation under God”...
 - i. They had the temple, they had the word of God, had their religious institutions, their religious leaders...
 - e. But there was NO FRUIT. Just like the tree, the nation was not fulfilling its intended purpose: Being a light to the world.
7. Interesting metaphor – can we think of a modern-day parallel?
 - a. Sure! There are churches all around where all of the outer trappings of Christianity are there....
 - i. Big buildings – big services – big events – community involvement...
 - ii. But if Jesus were to visit that church, just like the fig tree, He would not find any fruit
 - iii. (ref: compare the church to Revelation 2-3, letter to the churches, always a convicting exercise!)
8. But – here's the thing to remember: We're not supposed to take these truths from Gods word and apply them to others – that's what the Pharisee's did.
 - a. We're supposed to apply these truths to our own lives.

James 1:22 ...be doers of the word, and not hearers only

- b. So what would the application be, if we applied this to our lives?

God wants to produce fruit in the lives of His people

John 15

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

9. **Fruit is the natural product of a living, health plant. Any plant that does not produce fruit, like this fig tree, would be considered defective, of no use, and would be cut down and discarded from the orchard.**
 - a. **At first blush that sounds a little harsh, "so like God is going to pull me and toss me if I'm not producing?"**
 - b. **Not exactly – remember that it is natural for a healthy plant to produce fruit...**
 - c. **A fig tree is not stressing and striving to produce figs. If it gets water and nutrients, it will produce figs.**
 - d. **Just like us – if we are worshipping God, the water of the Holy Spirit flowing through us, feeding on the word of God,**
 - e. **The most natural thing in the world is for us to produce fruit from our lives.**
10. **The point of the illustration is not that we should be looking over our shoulders if we don't have a bunch of fruit when God walks by.**
 - a. **The point for us is that if we look at our lives, like the fig tree, and there is no fruit, then we need to figure out WHY.**
 - b. **If a fruit tree is not producing, a good gardener would look at the fundamentals:**
 - i. **Is it getting water? Sunlight? Nutrients?**
 - a) **Am I submitted to the Spirit? Am I living in the light – no hidden secrets? Am I taking in the word of God?**
 - ii. **If fundamentals are there, we would look for disease in the plant**
 - a) **Is there sin in my life that is hindering my spiritual fruit-bearing?**

- c. If you are a born-again, Spirit-filled believer, and these things are present, there should be fruit in our lives!
- d. But some of you might be wondering, “What does fruit look like?”

Fruit of the Spirit

11. A changed heart:

Eph 5:9 ...for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth

Gal 5:22 ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

- a. That means that how we act is different – how we respond to others, how we treat others.
- b. There shouldn't be a trail of casualties in our wake.
- c. People that are around us should experience a sense like eating a sweet, juicy, fragrant piece of fruit!
 - i. They ought to feel the love, experience the joy, the peace, the kindness, the gentleness!
- d. You hang out with some Christians, its like biting into a rotten apple – and that's just not something you want to go back for more of!

12. A fulfilling ministry...

1 Cor 12:8 *wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to **each one individually** as He wills*

Eph 4:11 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.*

- a. I don't mean being on staff at a church, I mean something that you are involved in that is tapping into that spiritual gift that you have been anointed with.
- b. Note 1 Cor 12:11 – “to each one individually” – not “to some people on staff at church”.
- c. That means that there is something that God has gifted you to do as a ministry to others.

- d. **If we aren't bearing fruit – just like the fig tree – we dry up, shrivel up**
- 13. **Some might say “I don't know what my gift or calling is” – I'll ask this:**
 - a. **Have you sought the Lord? Have you come to God and said “Lord, use me, send me” (just be ready when you do!)**
- 14. **In other words don't just be planted in the ground, sprouting some leaves, looking like a Christian on Sunday...**
 - a. **Get involved in the work of the Kingdom –**

***Matt 9:37** The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*

- b. **Life in the Kingdom is not boring, showing up for church, just playing the part.**
- c. **Life in the Kingdom is a radically changed life that bears forth the fruit of our God...**

***John 15:8** By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

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