

The previous passage was Mark chapter 11, verses 1-11. That was what we call The Triumphal Entry of Palm Sunday.

Look at verse 11. Notice that Jesus went into the temple. Then we have this statement, “*..when [Jesus] had looked around at everything...He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.*” Jesus looked around at everything in the temple. This is not looking around like a tourist who might look around and then leave. No. This “looking around” is with observation and with purpose. As Jesus left the temple that night, it was with preparation for a decisive action the next day. Before Jesus took action in that temple, there would be an incident with a fig tree that would help us to understand what Jesus was planning to do, what Jesus did, and what it meant.

Between the cursing of the fig tree in verses 12-14 and the withering of the fig tree in verses 20-25, stands the event of Jesus clearing out the temple. The story of the fig tree is interrupted to tell the story of Jesus clearing out the temple. This is a clue to the lesson of the fig tree.

I'll give you the answer now. Jesus was not cleansing the temple. Jesus was shutting it down and replacing it! Temple worship had failed. It had lost its focus. God must do more than purify the temple and overturn some tables. God must replace the temple with Jesus Himself. The temple had been making a promise that the temple could not fulfill – the temple was promising to bring people to God in worship. But instead, the temple was misleading people and not leading them to God. Jesus cursed the fig tree and Jesus turned the tables, because Jesus was announcing that He was about to close down the temple! Jesus Himself would become the temple and He would lead the people to God. What would happen that next morning would be a planned demonstration, intentionally done during prime time for maximum exposure. Turning over the tables would be a demonstration calculated to interrupt business as usual and bring the immediacy of Christ's reign abruptly and forcefully to the attention of all. Sadly, after Jesus turned the tables, we can well assume that the tables were back in place the next day. Jesus would need to take more severe action than turning over tables. Jesus would need to become the temple, and mount the cross and die in order to cleanse the people of their sins, and bring us to God.

Our Lord's dealings with the fig tree teach us about Himself.

1. Only leaves on the fig tree = only buyers/sellers in the temple = only busy activity in the church. No fruit means not being what God designed us to be. (11:12-14)

Verse 12 told us that Jesus was hungry after traveling from Bethany to Jerusalem. Verse 13 tells us that Jesus notice two things about the fig tree. a) it was in the distance and b) it was in leaf (which means it had leaves on it). After

noticing those two things about the fig tree, Jesus went toward the fig tree. Why? Verse 13 told us that the reason that Jesus went to the fig tree was to see if He could find ANYTHING on the fig tree.

Why did you go to the cupboard or to the refrigerator? It is pretty obvious right? To see if there is anything good to eat. When Jesus went to the fig tree, it was to see if there was anything on it. What could Jesus expect to find on the fig tree? Figs! However, there are two kinds of fruit on fig trees. Pre-season tiny fruits, and later the full figs. This is why the word here is ANYTHING. Jesus was looking for ANYTHING on the tree, and he could reasonably expect to find the pre-season tiny fruits.

For a fig tree to be alive and to have leaves, but not to have the pre-season tiny fruit, means that tree is not going to have the figs later either. The fig tree was decaying inside.

Good tree = good fruit. Bad tree = bad fruit. No exceptions.

When Jesus arrived at the temple in verse 15, what did Jesus expect?

Worshippers!

The one who made the fig tree has arrived. That is the best moment, Mr. Fig Tree, to have some figs to enjoy.

The One who made the heavens has arrived at the temple. That is the best moment, Mr. Temple leader, for you to have some worshippers to enjoy. God has arrived at the temple, that is the best moment for you to worship!

Verse 13. It told us that the fig tree did not have figs for a very good reason. *“FOR IT WAS NOT THE SEASON FOR FIGS.”* Yet we have verse 14, when Jesus said to the fig tree what is basically a command for a miracle. Not a miracle of healing/growth/fruitfulness, but rather it was a rare command for a miracle of withering, a miracle of destruction. Calling for the negative miracle, Jesus was calling down a divine curse on the tree. We read it in verse 14, *“MAY NO ONE EVER EAT FRUIT FROM YOU AGAIN (,MR. FIG TREE)”*

One way to understand the lesson of this passage is to imagine that Jesus was in a play. Jesus was acting out a parable to teach a lesson. What is the lesson of the fig tree?

Let's walk through the play. You sit down in a theater, and the curtain opens. The stage is empty. The first thing that happens is a man enter the stage from the left. For our play, what are the only 2 things we know about the man from verse 12? 1) He came from Bethany with a group. 2) The man was hungry. Okay, what happens next in our play? The hungry man sees a fig tree. What is next? The fig tree has leaves, which leads the man to hope that where there is a fig tree, and where there are leaves on the fig tree, there will also be figs on the fig tree. See, the play is simple, and the play is set up so nicely. We have story tension. The progression of the play has developed in us a natural question. Will

the fig tree have figs to offer the hungry man? Yes or no? We the audience waits in anticipation. The man walks all the way over to the fig tree. The group of people seem to follow after him. The man knows that there are leaves. Perhaps the man moves some of the leaves, as if looking for something. The man looks up and down, left and right, and even looks underneath the leaves. The man found nothing but leaves. Let's freeze our play there.

Now let's walk through the meaning of the play, as we have it so far. Enter stage left a Savior. What are the only two things we know about the Savior? 1) He came from heaven 2) He is eager for His people to worship Him. What is next? He looks and sees that they have a temple. He sees that they have services in the temple. The Savior hope that where there is a temple, and where there are worship services in the temple, that there will also be worship. See, the meaning of the play is simple, and the meaning is set up so nicely. We have story tension. The progression of the play has developed in us a natural question. Will the people in the temple conducting worship services, have any worship to offer to the Savior? Yes or no? The crowd waits in anticipation as the meaning of the play is explained and understood. The Savior walks from Bethany (v.12) to Jerusalem (v.15). The Savior walks all the way over to the temple. The Savior enters the temple. What does the Savior see in the temple? Does the Savior see people worshipping? NO! Does the Savior see any people praying? No. What does the Savior see, in the location where the Savior should have seen people praying? The Savior sees people buying and selling.

Now let's go back to unfreeze our play and finish it. Verse 14, the man said to the fig tree - may you never have fruit again. And His group heard him say it. The end.

Now let's interpret the end of our play. Verses 15-19, the Savior performed an act of judgment – He cleared out the temple of all buyers and sellers! All that was left was the Savior alone in the temple. All that was left was the only true worshipper of God the Father. Jesus performed an act of judgment, and it was a parable of what He would do as Savior. As Savior, He would clear out the temple, and purify it, leaving only pure worshippers. He is left there by Himself.

We are not shown the last act of the play. The last act is the only true worshipper being hung to die on that tree. We are told about it in Galatians 3:13, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—*" In order to bring us back into right worship, He received the curse and judgment of God for all of us buyers and sellers that should be cast out of God's presence. We are the trees with leaves and no fruit. We are the hypocrites. We fake worship. We are the ones trying to use God's temple to get something we want or to get rid of something we don't want. We are trying to gain, instead of coming to use God's temple for its one

designed purpose – to simply be in awe of the God who resides in that temple! To worship!

Jesus is the fruitful tree. He is the only One who is what God designed Him to be. He was the fig tree that was cursed in order that we might be accepted.

2. We are designed to be people who trust God, talk to God, and forgive others; all our fruits come from these roots. (11:20-25)

In chapter 11:20, the disciples noticed that the fig tree withered, even to the roots.

Even the Old Testament prophets knew that the fig tree was a symbol of God's people. Micah 7:1-2, "*Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires. The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind...*"

When Jesus had looked at the fig tree, Jesus compared it to Jerusalem's temple community. They had the form of religion, but none of the power. Like the fig tree that had the branches and leaves, but no figs, no fruit. The city had a temple, and sacrifices there, but no faith (v.22-23), no believing prayer (v.24), no conviction of sin, no turning from sin, no forgiving each other, no loving God with all their hearts. (v.25)

People get dressed up. Building gets fixed up, heated up, lit up. We are looking like worshippers. Bulletins get created, instruments get tuned, music gets practiced, and together we give off the sounds of a worship service. But is it really a place where Jesus is truly worshipped, by His Holy Spirit?

3. Remain aware of the nearness of Christ and the trustworthiness of His Word. (13:28-31)

The verses in Mark 13:28-31 emphasize looking for Christ's coming. Certain signs on the fig tree show that summer is near. In the same way, we know that Christ is coming and that He is coming soon. This passage pushes us to considering the nearness of Christ's coming. This passage also urges us to realize the top importance of Jesus' coming, and the permanent radical change that He will bring. He will change everything we have ever seen and known. But what Jesus taught will not change. The passage ends with the statement in verse 31, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*"

What Jesus is teaching here is that everything we can see in the physical world is less stable than the words of Jesus. Everything we have ever seen, such as the sky, the ground, the lakes, rivers, oceans, plants and animals, are actually unstable. They will undergo a transformation. But that His own Words will continue to prove their same stability and worth forever and ever.

Peter echoed this teaching of Jesus when Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:24-25, "*All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and*

the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”

Conclusion:

The lesson of the fig tree is *because we have Christ, we truly worship God and we bear spiritual fruit.*

Christ, the true temple, brings us to God. 1 Peter 3:18, “...*Christ...suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.*”

Because we have Christ, we have true spiritual fruit.

What we learned from these 3 passages about the fig tree is that the issue of worship and spiritual fruitfulness is one of immense significance.

We have life in Christ, and so we have true worship and spiritual fruitfulness. Like what? Let’s look at two. Faith and forgiveness.

Mark 11:22, we have faith in God. Verse 23, mountain-moving faith. A faith that does not doubt. The mountain is not a literal mountain. Then what is it? The mountain is what appears to be impossible, immovable, and beyond our ability. Good. That is where faith begins. God expects us to have that kind of faith. We rely not on our ability, but rather we rely on God’s ability. We tap into God’s power to accomplish His purpose. God can do that big, impossible, immovable.

One fruit of true worship is to depend on God for what we need. And furthermore, to depend on God in His wisdom, to give us what we need. He knows better than we do what we need! That kind of faith. That is fruit of coming here to actually worship God. We are not here to tell God what we think God should do. We are here to sit powerless before God, and expect that God will do God’s part.

A second fruit of true worship is forgiveness. Verse 25, “...*whenever you [are] praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*”

What if you struggle to forgive? Is it clear to everybody around you in your life that you are overcoming that? That is Christ on the move in your heart! Christ is bringing you to God!

Do you find forgiveness really hard? C.S. Lewis wrote in the book *Mere Christianity* that “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.” Right. Forgiveness is terribly hard to do. When others fail us, we tend to put the spotlight on their actions. When we fail others, we tend to put the spotlight on our good intentions.

But Jesus shows us that true forgiveness is vitally important, because God has forgiven us at the cost of Jesus’ death. God’s forgiveness of us, and our forgiveness of others are inseparably linked. If we will not forgive others, it calls into question whether we believe the gospel of grace that Christ has died and risen to cover our wrongs! But because we do believe that, we only need to reflect on that, and then our forgiveness of others, though it is still really hard, will be

granted to us by Christ as a gift of His grace. A forgiving heart is proof that Christ has changed that heart by His Spirit. The cross is bigger than the sins the other person has done against us. The debt we owed to God is bigger than the debts that others owe to us.

Is it becoming obvious to the people who know you best that your character is undergoing a radical transformation? Or, is it becoming obvious to the people around you that you are just busy with religious activities, but nothing is changing – no fruit?

Christ gives us fruit. Fruit is the proof that Christ is at work. Christ gives his Spirit, so we have the fruit or proof of His Spirit with character traits such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These things we have because we have both the root and the fruit – the Spirit of Christ.

Christ gives us true spiritual fruit, true worship, true faith that rises above doubts, true believing prayer, a forgiving community, that is the lesson of the fig tree. Christ Jesus is making us into the people that we were designed to be, the people we were redeemed to become.

Because we do have Christ, we do have true spiritual fruit.