

**Matthew 21:17-22:** And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany & lodged there. <sup>18</sup> In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. <sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it & found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. <sup>20</sup> When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

**Intro:** Last week we saw that Israel's religion was full of hypocrisy & selfish idolatry. So Jesus comes as faithful Israel! Jesus came to clean house! He's the true temple Who ushers in the righteous reign of God! He was & is true & undefiled religion incarnate Who came to save all nations from their sin. For Jesus, judgment starts with the household of God, & He cleansed God's temple of sin, gave grace to all nations, showed mercy to the weak & needy, & accepted the praises of men as the God-Man Who comes to save sinners: **Malachi 3:1:** Behold, I send my messenger & he will prepare the way before me. & the **Lord** [Ha Adon – 6 places] whom you seek will suddenly come to **his temple**; & the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the **LORD** of hosts.

Israel's religion was fruitless. Israel was like a fig tree that was not bearing fruit! Israel had failed to be & do what they were supposed to be & do – they were to be a light to the nations & bear lasting fruit for the glory of God. So Jesus comes as fruitful, faithful Israel! He's the most fruitful tree there has ever been, Who had to be cursed on a tree so that Israel & all nations might be saved & made fruitful!

Today we see Jesus, the God-Man, curse the fig tree, giving an illustration of His curse on Israel's ungodliness, sin, & hypocritical religiosity. Jesus also encourages His disciples to pursue true, genuine, & vital religion through faith and prayer.

### **1. Jesus Is Truly Man**

**Matthew 21:17-18:** And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany & lodged there. <sup>18</sup> In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry.

Jesus needed a place to lodge & sleep. And Jesus got hungry! Jesus was fully man! **1 Timothy 2:5:** For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus!

Jesus got hungry; Jesus got tired; Jesus slept; Jesus had to have His diaper changed! Jesus was tempted!

**Creflo Dollar:** Jesus slept & God doesn't sleep so Jesus is not God! Wrong! Jesus is truly man & truly God!

### **2. Jesus Is Truly God**

**Matthew 21:19:** And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it & found nothing on it but only leaves. & he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" & the fig tree withered at once.

Jesus speaks to fig trees, & they wither immediately! Jesus speaks to wind & waves, & they are still immediately!

**Hymn:** Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake; to guide the future as He has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know; His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

**The LORD God found no figs on the fig tree & punished: Jeremiah 8:12-13:** Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among the fallen; when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the LORD. <sup>13</sup> When I would gather them, declares the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.

### 3. Jesus Curses The Fig Tree

**Matthew 21:19:** And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it & found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" & the fig tree withered at once.

#### **a. Figs & fig trees are a picture or representation of Israel & Israel's blessing & cursing as a nation:**

- **Hosea 9:10:** Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers.

- **Luke 13:6-9:** Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, & he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, & I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

- **Blessing: 1 Kings 4:25:** During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.

- **Cursing: Hosea 2:10-13:** So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. <sup>11</sup> I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days – all her appointed feasts. <sup>12</sup> **I will ruin her vines and her fig trees,** which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. <sup>13</sup> I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD.

- **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. <sup>2</sup> The godly has perished from the earth, & there is no one upright among mankind; they all lie in wait for blood, & each hunts the other with a net

**b. Israel was not bearing fruit:** We see this in the O.T.: Israel was a stubborn, rebellious people! They're rescued in the Exodus; They're given God's law; They broke it over & over again; They played the whore! Reject Christ!

**We see this all over the N. T.: Matthew 15:8:** This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me

**Matthew 7:19-20:** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

**There are two ways to run from God:** 1) Obvious rebellious sin; & 2) not so obvious rebellious sin (False Religion): **James 1:27:** Religion that God our Father accepts as pure & faultless is this: to look after orphans & widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. **GOSPEL!**

**c. This fig tree Jesus curses was leafy when it wasn't the season for figs, but there was no fruit on the leafy tree:** If the tree had leaves, it should also have fruit. But it didn't. It was like false advertisement. The tree appeared on the outside to have fruit because it was showing leaves, but there was no fruit: like the hypocrisy of Israel.

**D. A. Carson:** That it was not the season for figs explains why Jesus went to this particular tree, which stood out b/c it was in leaf. Its leaves advertised that it was bearing, but the advertisement was false. Jesus, unable to satisfy his hunger, saw an opportunity to teach a memorable object lesson & cursed the tree, not because it was not bearing fruit, whether in season or out, but because it made a show of life that promised fruit, yet was bearing none

Israel failed to bear fruit! No light to the nations! No heart religion! Idolatry over & over again! Killed prophets!

**d. What is the significance of Jesus cursing the fig tree?** Jesus is cursing the hypocritical lives of much of Israel!

- **David Platt:** The cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree are closely related; in fact, Mark brackets the story of the temple cleansing with references to the fig tree to make the same point. Jesus was commenting on the religious life and worship of God's people, particularly Israel's leadership. They had leaves, so to speak, on the

outside, but on the inside there was no real fruit. There was a lot of man-centered religious activity completely devoid of God-centered spiritual productivity. These spiritually dead individuals claimed to worship God in the temple, all the while rejecting Jesus, who is God in the flesh, the new & greater temple. Jesus had no tolerance for such hollow worship & hypocritical religion.

- **Greg Beale:** The fig tree without fruit symbolizes Israel's spiritual destitution, & the withering indicated the temple's & nation's rejection & judgment by God.

**e. We should all be careful that we have leaves with no fruit:** Do you ever give the appearance of being religious, but on the inside there is no fruit of true, heart religion that is trusting God & loving Him & others?

**James 1:22:** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

**J. C. Ryle:** Where are the once famous churches of Ephesus and Sardis and Carthage and Hippo? They are all gone. They had leaves but no fruit . . . Let us remember this. Let us beware of church-pride: let us not be high-minded, but fear . . . Open sin, and avowed unbelief, no doubt slay their thousands. But profession without practice slays its tens of thousands.

- 1) When was the last time you grieved over your sin & asked God to forgive you & change you?
- 2) When is the last time you loved a non-Christian enough to tell them the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- 3) When is the last time you loved one of your fellow Christians enough to seek to help them grow in Christ by meeting with them, praying with them, & encouraging them toward love & good deeds?
- 4) Children, do you seek to do what you know is right because you want to please God, or merely because you know you better do what's right or else you'll get in trouble with mom and dad?
- 5) Are you living out the works of the flesh or the fruit of the Holy Spirit?: **Galatians 5:19-23:** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, & things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control
- 6) Is your heart in your religion & is your religion in your heart?

**Oh may our hearts be for God! Psalm 42:1-2:** As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

**Psalm 73:25-26:** Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

**Charles Spurgeon:** O professor, how base you are, to call yourself a blood-bought child of God, yet you still live for yourself! How dare you, O barren tree, professing to be watered by the bloody sweat, and digged by the griefs and woes of the wounded Savior – how dare you bring forth leaves and no fruit? Oh! sacrilegious mockery of a hungry Savior! Oh! blasphemous tantalizing of a hungry Lord! That you should profess to have cost Him all this, and yet yield Him nothing! When I think that Jesus hungers after fruit in me, it stirs me up to do more for Him. Does it not have the same effect on you? He hungers for your good works; He hungers to see you useful. Jesus the King of kings, hungers after your prayers – hungers after your anxieties for the souls of others; and nothing ever will satisfy Him for the travail of His soul but seeing you wholly devoted to His cause.

#### **4. Jesus Promises His Disciples That They Will Follow In His Steps By Faith In Him Through Prayer**

**Matthew 21:20-22:** When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" <sup>21</sup> & Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith & 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. <sup>22</sup> & whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

**a. Jesus calls for true, vital, living religion by encouraging His disciples to have faith:** 1) This promise isn't about rearranging the Alps: Who in the Bible actually, literally moved mountains? God! This promise isn't about naming and claiming every carnal, worldly desire that every other worldly pagan desires!

**H. Ridderbos:** It is not the task of faith literally to move mountains. That is irrelevant . . . Jesus was not speaking of the task of faith . . . but only of its power. This power is unlimited because it is based on God's omnipotence.

2) This promise about mountain-moving faith is about trusting God so that nothing that Jesus has called you to do or given you the authority to do will be impossible for you: By faith we are empowered to walk in all the will of God! To trust Him, obey Him, bear fruit for Him, win the lost for Him, make disciples of all nations for Him!

3) This promise is that in Christ by faith, you can overcome any & all difficulties, obstacles, pains, hardships, & sufferings, even ones that seem impossible to you, so that you might walk in the good, pleasing, & perfect will of God: Trust in the LORD! He will provide all the help you need to follow, trust, & obey Him!

**D. A. Carson:** Removal of mountains was proverbial for overcoming great difficulties.

Mountain-moving is proverbial for accomplishing something difficult that seems impossible: You'll have to move a mountain to get that job! You'll have to move mountains to get into that school! To win the World Series!

- **Psalm 46:1-2:** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea . . . .

- **Isaiah 54:10:** the mountains may depart & the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you

- **1 Corinthians 13:2:** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (Whatever you face, you'll overcome!)

4) Mountain-moving faith empowers you to obey the difficult commands of God: **Tom Schreiner:** The question remains: What is mountain-moving faith? Notice what Jesus says in Luke: Those who have faith like a mustard seed do great things. They have the faith to forgive brothers & sisters who sin against them repeatedly. The illustration Jesus provides, then, is enormously helpful. We know it's God's will that we forgive those who sin against us. Yet when we're faced with actually forgiving them, we often struggle because the pain is so severe. Mustard seed faith, then, is faith that kills works of the flesh & produces the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, & patience are mountains that can only be climbed by faith; faith, after all, expresses itself in love. Mustard seed faith believes the gospel will go the ends of the earth and triumph over the gates of hell. And the clearest evidence of mustard seed faith is whether you love God & your neighbor. Our greatest enemies are not outside of us but within. Our greatest foe is the hate & rebellion that overtakes us, & mustard seed faith – because it is placed in Jesus Christ – gives us the victory over our sin. Yet we are freed from the sin that enslaves when we rely on Christ & not our own strength & works. Mustard seed faith is enormously powerful – not because of our faith, but because it unites us to the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

5) Mountain-moving faith empowers us to more than conquer great suffering and keep clinging tightly to Jesus: By faith in God, we more than conquer in hard marriages! By faith in God, we more than conquer the loss of loved ones! By faith in God, we more than conquer loneliness! By faith in God, we more than conquer terrible past church experiences! By faith in God, we more than conquer having disabilities or living with children who have sicknesses and disabilities! By faith in God, we more than conquer all pain & suffering & hardship & loss!

6) Christians live by faith: **John MacArthur:** Now, faith moves mountains. Faith accomplishes great things. That's obvious. I think we've heard that many, many times. But I wonder if we really understand what it means? Let me give you just a little background. It was faith in God's power that caused Caleb, the Jewish spy, to look at the land of Canaan, with its giants, and say this in Numbers 13:30, "Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it." That was faith in God's power. It was faith in God's care that enabled Job to say, in the

midst of personal disaster, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him,” Job 13:15. It was faith in God’s protection that enabled Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to stand on the edge of the fiery furnace and say, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace. And He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king,” in Daniel 3:17. It was also faith in God’s Word that enabled Daniel to survive the lion’s den, as it says in the sixth chapter. So, Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him because he believed in his God. It was faith that saved the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, as it tells us in Luke chapter 7, verse 50. And as you look at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, that great chapter of faith, the Bible tells us it was faith that enabled Abel to offer a better sacrifice. It was faith that caused Enoch to be translated to heaven without death. It was faith that allowed Noah to build a great ark and preach righteousness. It was faith that caused Abraham to follow the call of God. It was faith that caused Sarah to have a child. It was faith that caused Isaac to bless his sons, that caused Jacob to bless his sons, that caused Joseph to hope in the future. It was faith that called Moses to reject the pleasures of sin for the reproach of Christ. It was faith that caused Rahab to receive the spies. And it was faith that came, in the time of crisis to Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, Jephthah, and David, and Samuel and the prophets, and many, many others. The power of faith. And the writer of Hebrews leads into the great opening of the twelfth chapter and says, “Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” – and to what are they witnessing? To a life of what? – of faith – “as we stand surrounded by so many who say that we are to live by faith, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” And so, you have throughout holy Scripture the testimony to the life of faith, to the power of faith. [And faith is so powerful, only because it’s object is so powerful – the omnipotent God!]

7) Mountain-moving faith is a true, living, & active faith in Jesus Christ: a) Knowledge; b) Assent; c) Trust

8) Mountain-moving faith may point to the casting away of religious hypocrisy & old covenant worship: Temple

**b. Jesus calls for true, vital, living religion by encouraging His disciples to pray: Verse 22:** whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.

**Commentator:** Jesus is saying that the believer who looks to God for anything at all in the path of Christian service can be confident of an answer to prayer: “you will receive.”

- **John 14:13:** Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

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

## **5. Jesus – The Most Fruitful Tree Who Was Cursed On The Tree**

**Do you remember another time and place where there were fig leaves but no fruit?**

**Genesis 3:6-7:** When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food & pleasing to the eye, & also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some & ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, & he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, & they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together & made coverings for themselves. **Even then there were slaughtered animals to cover their shame!**

Jesus is the true & better Adam who didn't hide behind fig leaves but came as the fruit of the world! Jesus is the tree of life Who died on the tree of death so that we might be saved! Jesus is the true & greater Israel! He’s the most glorious, beautiful, bountiful, fruitful fig tree that has ever crossed the horizon of this world! Jesus is the true & better religion! He is the purest religion incarnate: He was bound to God like no other, & He alone can bind us back to God through His death and resurrection!

- **Psalm 1:1-4:** Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, & on his law he meditates day & night. He is

like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season & whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

- **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 hung on a tree."

- **Habakkuk 3:17-18:** Though the fig tree does not bud & there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails & the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen & no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Jesus, the God-Man, curses the fig tree, giving an illustration of His curse on Israel's ungodliness, sin, & hypocritical religiosity. Jesus also encourages His disciples to pursue true, genuine, & vital religion through faith and prayer.

### **Jesus Cursed The Barren Tree And Finally Came To Set Us Free For He's The Fruit – Come Taste And See!**

Jesus got hungry – He wanted to eat  
He had a heart with rhythmic beat  
He is a man with hands and feet  
And yet He's more than man we meet  
He's God and man both full complete  
He is Yahweh on the street  
He sits as God on judgment seat  
He reigns forevermore elite  
He came and wanted figs so sweet  
Instead He found a tree deplete  
Like Israel – the chaff not wheat  
She's dead and dying – sad defeat  
Her sins so often on repeat  
So her great pride Christ will delete  
For He's true Israel complete  
And yet the Christ they would mistreat  
They spit on Him – His back they beat  
Nailed to the cross His hands and feet  
And there He died under God's heat  
But rose alive – the grave defeat  
And now He never will retreat  
But bear much fruit – the sweetest sweet  
So trust in Him – your doubt unseat  
He'll make your sins all obsolete  
And as your cry you will repeat  
“My Christ is all! - I am complete!”

Do you have leaves but bear no fruit?  
Bless God and praise just for the loot?  
Your praises God will finally mute  
And you'll be cursed down to the root  
But praise our Christ! - He's in pursuit!  
To save from loves that you pollute  
And grant You Him – the greatest fruit!  
Who died as cursed to you impute  
His righteousness just like a suit  
You put Him on – your sins are moot  
He rose death to condemn – refute

So now toward Him you make pursuit  
Delight in Him – you'll bear much fruit!

Jesus was the curse upon that tree  
Though He's the most fruitful you could be  
He's made a curse for you and me  
He is True Israel – the Key  
To true religion – love that's free  
Our glorious God – the One In Three  
He bids you come – from your sin flee  
Trust the Son – He'll set you free  
And cast your sins into the sea  
The Lord is good – come taste and see!

Christ Jesus Grows The Greatest Fruit  
His Perfect Holiness Salute  
He Loves And Serves And Saves To Boot  
There's No One Like Him, No Dispute  
From Olney, Gaza, To Beirut  
Sin Does And Has And Will Pollute  
Like Israel Who Bore No Fruit  
And Acted Like A Prostitute  
Christ Curses All From Head To Root  
But He Will Save And Death Refute  
For On A Tree He's Cursed And Mute  
He Bore God's Wrath Like Sinner Brute  
He Died Our Lamb And Substitute  
Then Rose Alive The Grave To Loot  
Of All His Loved Ones Hot Pursuit  
His Righteousness He Does Impute  
By Faith Alone We're Just, On Route  
To Pray To Him And Mounts Uproot  
For He's Our All, The Greatest Fruit!

**Spurgeon:** Jesus, Master, come and cast Your searching eyes upon us, and judge whether we are living unto You or not! Help us to see ourselves as You see us, that we may have our errors corrected, and our graces nourished. Lord, make us to be indeed what we profess to be; and if we are not so already, convince us of our false state, and begin a true work in our souls. If we are Yours, and are right in Your sight, grant us a kind, assuring word to sink our fears again, and we will gladly rejoice in You as the God of our salvation! Lord, take these poor sticks this morning, and make them bud. Lord, here we are, in a bundle, perform that ancient miracle in a thousand of us. Make us bud and blossom, and bear fruit! Come with divine power, and turn this congregation from a twig into a mighty forest. Oh, that our blessed Lord may get a fig from some dry stick this morning! at least, such a fig as this, “God be merciful to me a sinner;” there is sweetness in that fig as this, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” Here is another, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” — that is a whole basketful of the first ripe figs, and the Lord rejoices in their sweetness. Come Holy Spirit, produce fruit in us this day, through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen, and Amen.