

Nothing but Leaves
(Mark 11:13)

What a sad and trying time it had been for Jesus. Only yesterday He had rode into Jerusalem declaring Himself King amid crowds of followers who were all convinced that He was the Messiah. That is, all except the ruling hierarchy, the priestly class, and other biblical scholars of the day. They disbelieved even though He had done this on the exact day, which Daniel, over 700 years earlier, had so predicted. The many exact biographical proofs of His claim were also undeniable, as evidenced by the prophecies of Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, with which they should have been well versed. Yet the ruling hierarchy hated Him and rejected His claim, primarily because acceptance of His legitimacy would have weakened their stature and authority. Therefore they sought to kill Him and be rid of the threat. This is why He wept. (Luke 19:41) For even though in His Godly foreknowledge, He knew that this would happen, when it finally became the here and now in His very earthly experience, His great love and sorrow engulfed His human countenance, bringing forth this divine expression of human emotion. His tears were not only because of this unwarranted hatred and rejection, but also because of the terrible and tragic consequence that it would bring to Israel and its people for the next two millennia. We too, who are His, have cause for many tears, because all around us is what seems to be an even greater rejection and hatred of His sacred Being. Were He here today, as the Lamb of God, and the world had its way, there is no doubt that He would be crucified again.

But now it's the next day, and He is walking with his apostles from Bethany back towards Jerusalem, when He sees in the distance the beautiful green fig tree. I suspect that He chose this particular route by divinely appointed foreknowledge so that He could provide this action parable as an instrument of learning for His followers, including us. The tree stood as a symbol of Israel, full of the outward expression of a great God-given religion, but it provided nothing but leaves. There was no fruit. It was totally barren *"...for the time of figs was not yet"* (Mark 11:13). Notice in your Bible, the yet is italicized, meaning that it was not in the original manuscript, but was added by the

translators to provide clarity. Nevertheless, with our Savior's earthly presence, Israel's time of great decision had come, and they blew it. Now there could be no fruitfulness. Perhaps the "yet" is in a way appropriate anyway as we learn from Daniel 9 and Revelation 7, where we are told that descendants of the 12 tribes will be the first fruits in the final days, just before His second coming, and the beginning of the millennium. But this will not be a renewed, corporate Israel as represented by the fig tree, because Jesus cursed the tree saying "...no man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever" (verse 14). We are also told in verse 21, that the next morning as they again passed by, the cursed tree had withered away.

Thus the 144,000 who will come from the 12 tribes of Israel in Revelation 7 will not be a renewal of Israel, but will be supernaturally ordained individuals who are to evangelize the world during the seventieth week of Daniel (the tribulation), and they, along with the Jewish remnant who are saved, will all be believers in Jesus as Lord and Savior. We are told in Zachariah 11:10, that they will mourn for Him and shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, eager for His return.

One might wonder why Jesus would curse the tree for not having fruit when the time of the figs was not. It is my understanding that the fig tree bears fruit twice a year and that the first fruit appears before the leaves come. Apparently there weren't any of the first fruits, which could have been ripening as the leaves grew. Could it be stretching the intent of the parable too much to suggest that the tree, that is Israel, having rejected the Messiah, the first fruit of the resurrection, would, therefore, themselves remain a barren tree to be cut down? For it was cut down 40 years later, as Jesus predicted, when the temple was destroyed and over a million were killed during the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Then, there was a final "cutting" when in 131 AD Emperor Hadrian destroyed all of Jerusalem, totally dispersed the Jews, and even renamed the country, calling it Palestina from which later came the word Palestine.

Now let us see what else this parable contains which our Lord intended for our benefit. First, our Lord was hungry; He was most hungry for spiritual fruit, which He had every

reason to expect from His chosen people. But as was the tree was found to be barren, so were His people Israel totally lacking in spiritual fruit.

He had very little time left, for it was now only 2 days before He would pay the ultimate price, that great sacrifice of Himself. For this He had been ordained from before the beginning of time. But Jesus lives!!! And yet He continues to be hungry for spiritual fruit from His own people, even today. Leaves however, contain no spiritual nourishment; only such fruit can satiate His appetite.

It was a fruit tree on which our Lord focused His attention. Christians are also His people, and as such, are also required to be His fruit tree. So during the present dispensation, Christians are to be His fruitful people. In this context, the fig tree here is like the vine in the Gospel of John Chapter 15. Just as the unproductive vine is cut down and burned so is the barren fig tree caused to wither and die by His decree. So whether the analogy is a grape vine or a fig tree, if one is to be one of His, then fruitfulness is a basic requirement. In his epistle, for instance, James makes this very clear when he says in Chapter 2 verse 20 that "...faith without works is dead". We may equate works with fruitfulness, although I perceive fruitfulness as the spiritually evident result of genuine obedience- driven works.

Notice that Jesus didn't curse any other trees which only bear leaves, but only the tree which was ordained to bare fruit and didn't. He had nothing to say about the elm or fir or pine, because they were not fruit bearing trees, nor did they pretend to be so. But Israel was such a pretender as are many today who knowingly, or out of ignorance, pretend to be Christians. They cloak themselves with many leaves that are the outward appearance of faith, but bear none of the fruit, which is the evidence of faith. Isn't it interesting, and also perhaps part of the same full tapestry of God's word, that fig leaves were what Adam and Eve used to try to cover their nakedness? It didn't work for them either. In the context of Israel, it was the Pharisees and scribes and other pious pretenders who had only leaves. In today's world, it is the vast numbers of professors of the faith who are spiritually fruitless that Jesus is analogizing through the fig tree. They follow the signs,

but know nothing of the substance of faith. They have strong opinions, but not the faith, for their opinions are the result of hearsay and not from sound doctrine derived from the study of Scripture. There are those, like Mr. Talkative in Pilgrim Progress, who have much to talk about, but are absent of a contrite heart and genuine repentance. All of these produce only leaves. Regret for sinning is not repentance. Criminals seldom repent for their criminal behavior, but all regret the crime for which they were caught, because they were caught.

The great servant of God, Charles Spurgeon points out that where we see leaves, we have the right to expect fruit, as did Jesus. But because the fig, being a special tree where fruit precedes the leaves, he says, “...so in a true Christian, fruit always takes the precedence of profession.” He goes further to say, find anyone “...who is a true servant of God, and before he united himself with the church, or attempted to engage in public prayer, or to identify himself with the people of God, he searched to see whether he had real repentance on account of sin, he desired to know whether he had sincere and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ...” Here we have an expression of the way things are supposed to be regarding genuine Christian soul searching and conduct. Of course, Spurgeon was of the age (mid 1800’s) of the Philadelphian church, that church about which Jesus had nothing bad to say (Revelation 3:7-13). Therefore this description, typical of genuine Christian procedures and values, was clearly in accordance with Scriptural doctrine. Today as we sit smug and complacent in our “lukewarm” church of Laodicea, this expression of true Christianity exists in only a very small number of congregations, and probably most often in but a small remnant of the so-called Christian churches. As told to us by Jesus Himself, in Revelation 3:14-22, there is nothing good about this present day “church” and He will “spew” or vomit it out of His mouth. For us in this age He offers only one hope. In Revelation 3:20-21, having already damned the church, he offers salvation only to those individuals who will overcome the great apostasy, which the church of today represents. Thus there exists in some of the churches, which call themselves Christian, a remnant who will hear His calling and who will bear fruit among a vast forest of leaves, which is representative of the apostate church, the lukewarm church, and the whole of the visible church.

But how can one overcome in such an environment of half-truths and genuine, but cleverly concealed, apostasy as exists in the churches today? The answer, of course, is found in Scripture. Acts 17:11 spells it out most succinctly. We are to do as the Bereans did, for “...*they received the word with readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*” How many today in this final church period actually search the Scripture to verify what is preached or otherwise expressed to them regarding God’s Word? Not many. Without faithful and dedicated study of Scripture, how can anyone know truth? How can anyone even know whether or not he or she is providing genuine spiritual fruits, the kind for which Jesus hungers, or are simply scattering leaves while believing it’s fruit? Through prayerful study of God’s word, the Holy Spirit will help anyone who but asks Him to reveal the difference. Again, the beloved Pastor Spurgeon has an inspired remark to say about the professing Christian who provides only leaves.

And can it be, that when he hungers after fruit, to call thyself a blood-bought child of God, and yet to live unto thyself! How darest thou, O’barren tree, professing to be watered by the bloody sweat, and digged by the griefs and woes of the wounded Savior – how darest thou bring forth leaves and no fruit? Oh! Sacrilegious mockery of a hungry Savior! Oh! Blasphemous tantalizing of a hungry Lord! That thou shouldst 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.

Don’t his words reverberate in the very marrow of your bones and shame you as to the inadequacy of your Christian walk? They do me!! But to the world, this kind of talk is not only foolish at the very best, but to most it’s offensive and dangerous. So they will, not if, but when, they can, have it completely silenced.

Perhaps we might conclude with this summary observation. Jesus likened the fruitless fig tree to the state of Israel. Their Rabbis and other religious leaders preached hollow and false doctrine and useless rituals, thus providing only decorative leaves. These could not possibly be viewed as acceptable spiritual fruit, for which He hungered and had every right to expect. In cursing the tree, Jesus was saying, enough! It's over with!

Nevertheless, through His grace and mercy, He gave them 40 more years to repent before He destroyed their temple. Today we find that He has already spewed the present day so-called Christian church out of His mouth, there being nothing in it worthy of His acceptance. But again His grace and mercy have prolonged its existence in order to allow all who would, to hear His knock and come individually to the faith (Revelation 3:20). The rapture will end this current church period. Then finally, His grace and mercy will again manifest repeatedly during the seven plus years after the rapture and before His second coming. During this period, He will restore the opportunity for the Jews to again be fruitful and to finish what He has ordained for them to do, as outlined in Daniel 9. Certain divinely selected of the descendants of the 12 tribes will now profess and evangelize the true faith throughout the world, bearing much fruit by bringing millions of both Jews and Gentiles to salvation. But as Satan through Antichrist, will proceed to destroy the world and kill all converted believers, leaving progressively a hardened population of those who simply will not choose to believe, no matter how compelling the evidence. Then Jesus will again say, "enough," after which the end time will come quickly.

I pray that all who are willing, will achieve a true saving faith, and satisfy Jesus' hunger for fruit so that they will be able to watch these end times proceedings from box seats in God's heavenly mezzanine, instead of fearfully hearing about them much later when they are brought out of Hades to face the final judgment and to be told why their earthly show of only leaves was simply not enough.