

NOTHING BUT LEAVES!

By David Lee Burris

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BIBLE STORIES in PICTURES

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MONDAY TUESDAY

EARLY IN THE MORNING WHEN JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES LEFT BETHANY TO GO BACK TO THE CITY, HE WAS HUNGRY. IN THE DISTANCE, BY THE ROAD, HE SAW A FIG TREE WITH LEAVES.



Nothing but Leaves
MATT. 21:12-13, 18-32;
MARK 11:12-33;
LUKE 19:45-20:8, 21:37-38

HE WENT TO SEE IF HE COULD FIND ANYTHING ON IT, BUT HE FOUND NOTHING BUT LEAVES, BECAUSE IT WAS NOT THE TIME FOR FIGS.



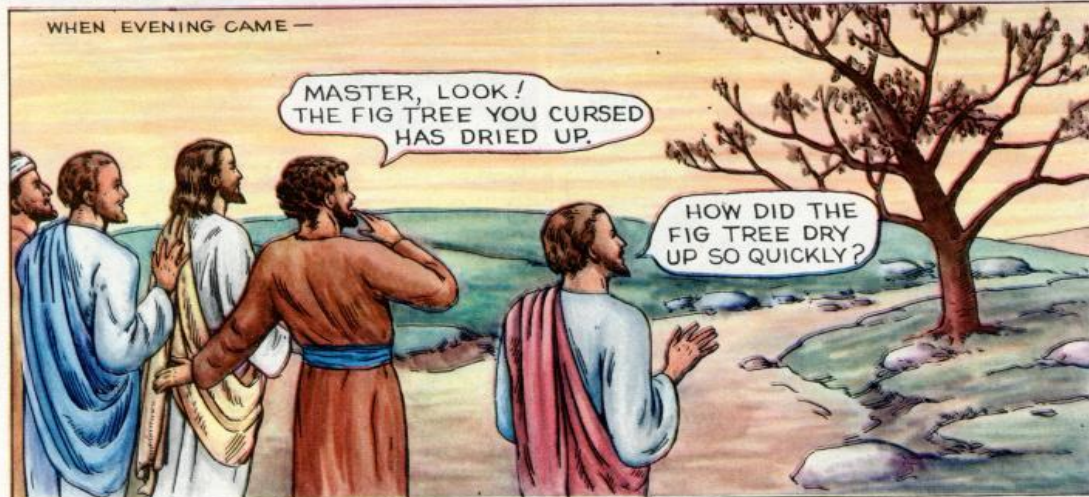
THE FIG TREE DRIED UP IMMEDIATELY.



WHEN EVENING CAME —

MASTER, LOOK! THE FIG TREE YOU CURSED HAS DRIED UP.

HOW DID THE FIG TREE DRY UP SO QUICKLY?



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Nothing But Leaves

THE CONTEXT – MARK 10:46-11:21

- ◆ Came & Left Jericho – 10:46
- ◆ Sent disciples into Jerusalem to find colt – 11:1-7
- ◆ Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem – 11:8-10
- ◆ Viewed The Temple, Then Went To Bethany – 11:11
- ◆ The Tree With Nothing But Leaves – 11:12-14
- ◆ Jesus Cleanses The Temple – 11:15-18
- ◆ Jesus Emphasizes The Need For Practical Faith – 11:20-26

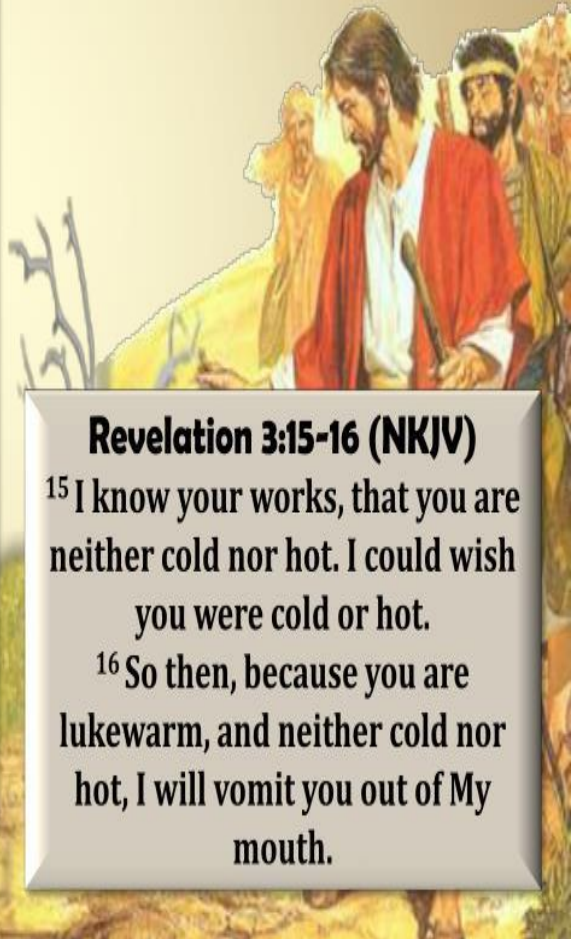


(House of figs); A village on the east slop of the Mt of Olives - 1 ¼ miles from Jerusalem

Nothing But Leaves

What Jesus Did & Will Do

- ◆ **Those who bear thorns & briars will be burned –**
(Heb 6:8; 2 Thes 1:7-9)
- ◆ **Those with no fruit will be “cut off” –** (John 15:1-6)
- ◆ **Those who are unprofitable will be cast away -** into “outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” – (Mat 25:30)



Revelation 3:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Nothing But Leaves

What Jesus Did & Will Do

- ◆ **With the fig tree** – Cursing
– “*Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.*” (11:14)
- ◆ **With Israel** – Warned them, (1 Kings 9:6-9; Mat 3:10), Cursed them(Mat 23:29-36); Destroyed them, (Mat 24; Luke 19:43,44); (*Josephus, 70 AD*)
- ◆ **With The Church?**



Of Times and Figs

by AP Staff

It is not uncommon for people who study the gospels to misconstrue matters of chronology that are contained within the four accounts. The fact of the matter is, the gospel writers never claimed to have recorded all of the events of Jesus' life in the exact order in which they occurred. Unless an action or event is denoted by a specific marker (like "the next day," "on the morrow," "on the Sabbath," etc.), there can be time gaps between the verses. One example of this is the account of the withered fig tree in Mark 11:12-14,20-21 and Matthew 21:18-20.

And on the morrow, when they were come out from Bethany, he hungered. And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season of figs. And he answered and said unto it, "No man eat fruit from thee henceforward for ever." And his disciples heard it.

And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away" (Mark 11:12-14,20-21, ASV).

Now in the morning as he returned to the city, he hungered. And seeing a fig tree by the way side, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and he saith unto it, "Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward forever." And immediately the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree immediately wither away?" (Matthew 21:18-20, ASV).

In Mark, the Lord cursed the fig tree, but the account doesn't say **when it withered**. The disciples saw it withered the next day, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said. Matthew's account says that the Lord cursed the tree, and it withered immediately, but it does not say **when the disciples saw it**. Matthew 21:20 merely says "And **when** the disciples saw it..." with no regard to the exact time. Based on the wording, the disciples could have seen it withered at the exact time Jesus cursed it, the next day, the next month, or even the next year. The verse in Matthew provides no time span between when it withered and when the disciples noticed.

However, Mark 11:12,19-20 does give the exact span of time between the curse and the time the disciples noticed it—one day. Since the gospels do not claim to be in exact chronological order, both Matthew and Mark offer a portion of the story. **The best thing to do then is to extrapolate—from both passages—exactly what happened.** Both Mark 11:12 and Matthew 21:18 record that Jesus was hungry, and both recount how He approached a fig tree and, finding no figs, cursed it. Matthew then records that it withered immediately (21:19), and Mark records that the disciples heard Jesus curse the tree, but he does not say whether or not they noticed the tree withered at that time (11:14). Mark then continues the narrative of Jesus cleansing the temple in the city of Jerusalem (11:15-19). Both writers then recount the astonishment of the disciples at seeing the fig tree withered, with Mark designating it as the next day (11:20-21) and Matthew not specifying how much time passed between 21:19 and 21:20.

Another question to consider (perhaps the one that is addressed most often in a discussion of the withered fig tree) is whether or not Jesus cursed the tree **before** or **after** the temple was cleansed. Since Matthew records this event before the cursing of the fig tree (21:12-19), and Mark places the cleansing of the temple after Jesus cursed the tree (11:15-19), it is supposed that one of the two writers was mistaken. **The truth is, however, Matthew's account is more of a summary, whereas Mark's narrative is more detailed and orderly. Christ actually made two trips to the temple (Mark 11:11,15), and cursed the fig tree on His second trip.** Mark reveals that the cleansing of the temple “did not take place on the day that he [Jesus] entered Jerusalem in triumph, but on the day following” (Barnes, 1997). Matthew, on the other hand, “addresses the two trips of Christ to the temple as though they were one event,” which “gives the impression that the first day Christ entered the temple He drove out the buyers and sellers as well” (Geisler, 1992, p. 354). Mark's more detailed account reveals that Jesus actually made two trips to the temple. Thus, as Albert Barnes noted: “Mark has stated the order more particularly, and has ‘divided’ what Matthew mentions together” (1997).

When viewed in this light, these alleged contradictions between Matthew and Mark are seen simply as a matter of Matthew's account being more summarized than Mark's. And while Matthew has no timetable for the events, Mark shows that the disciples noticed the withered fig tree on their return from the temple.

REFERENCES

Barnes, Albert (1997), *Barnes' Notes* (Electronic Database: BibleSoft).

Geisler, Norman L. and Thomas A. Howe (1992), *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Bks).

Mark 11:14 - Why Was the Fig Tree Cursed?

This incident is related by Mark and, in a more compressed form, by Matthew. According to Mark, Jesus and his disciples spent the night following his entry into Jerusalem in Bethany. Next morning they returned to Jerusalem. On the way he felt hungry, and “seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.” Then Jesus cursed the tree: “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” They continued on their way into Jerusalem, where that day he cleansed the temple; in the evening they returned to Bethany. Next morning, as they passed the same place, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” (Mk 11:20–21).

Was it not unreasonable to curse the tree for being fruitless when, as Mark expressly says, “it was not the season for figs”? The problem is most satisfactorily cleared up in a discussion called “The Barren Fig Tree” published many years ago by W. M. Christie, a Church of Scotland minister in Palestine under the British mandatory regime. He pointed out first the time of year at which the incident is said to have occurred (if, as is probable, Jesus was crucified on April 6th, A.D. 30, the incident occurred during the first days of April). “Now,” wrote Christie, “the facts connected with the fig tree are these. Toward the end of March the leaves begin to appear, and in about a week the foliage coating is complete. Coincident with [this], and sometimes even before, there appears quite a crop of small knobs, not the real figs, but a kind of early forerunner. They grow to the size of green almonds, in which condition they are eaten by peasants and others when hungry. When they come to their own indefinite maturity they drop off.” These precursors of the true fig are called *taqsh* in Palestinian Arabic. Their appearance is a harbinger of the fully formed appearance of the true fig some six weeks later. So, as Mark says, the time for figs had not yet come. **But if the leaves appear without any *taqsh*, that is a sign that there will be no figs. Since Jesus found “nothing but leaves” —leaves without any *taqsh*—he knew that “it was an absolutely hopeless, fruitless fig tree”** and said as much.

But if that is the true explanation of his words, why should anyone trouble to record the incident as though it had some special significance? Because it did have some special significance. As recorded by Mark, it is an acted parable with the same lesson as the spoken parable of the fruitless fig tree in Luke 13:6–9. In that spoken parable a landowner came three years in succession expecting fruit from a fig tree on his property, and when year by year it proved to be fruitless, he told the man in charge of his vineyard to cut it down because it was **using up the ground to no good purpose**. In both the acted parable and the spoken parable it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the fig tree represents the city of Jerusalem, unresponsive to Jesus as he came to it with the message of God, and thereby incurring destruction. Elsewhere Luke records how Jesus wept over the city’s blindness to its true well-being and foretold its ruin “because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Lk 19:41–44 RSV). It is because the incident of the cursing of the fig tree was seen to convey the same lesson that Mark, followed by Matthew, recorded it.¹

¹ Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). [*Hard sayings of the Bible*](#) (pp. 441–442). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

Cursing the Fig Tree

Can the incident where Jesus cursed a fig tree be explained so as to harmonize with noble moral principles? Did Christ have a right to curse a tree? What is the meaning of “curse”? Since the tree died, did Jesus destroy property that did not belong to him? Such a conclusion regarding this incident is quite misdirected and is the result of a lack of understanding of what was involved in this episode near the end of Christ’s ministry.

The situation involving the cursed fig tree is recorded in two places in the Gospel records—Matthew 21:18-19, 20-22 and Mark 11:12-14, 20-25. We will introduce Mark’s version for the purpose of this discussion.

And on the morrow, when they had come out of Bethany, he [Jesus] hungered. And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if perhaps he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season of figs. And he answered and said unto it, “No man [will] eat fruit from you from now on—forever.” And his disciples heard it And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance said unto him, “Rabbi, behold, the fig tree that you cursed is withered away.”

For brevity’s sake, we have taken the two references that refer directly to this event in Mark’s Gospel and combined them. We are omitting verses fifteen through nineteen, which provide some transitional information that occurred between the two successive days related to this scene.

Likewise, we are stopping short of the Savior's subsequent discussion of this matter (vv. 22-25). We will analyze this controversial text as follows:

(1) The term "cursed" is used only once in the two New Testament records of this incident. On the second day, as Christ and his disciples passed by the fig tree en route to Jerusalem, it was noticed that the fig tree was completely dead. This compelled Peter, speaking on behalf of the others as well (cf. Matthew 21:20), to comment: "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered" (Mark 11:21).

It should be noted first that the term "curse" is not used in biblical parlance in the **modern** sense of profanity. Rather, a curse was a pronouncement of judgment upon a person or object (cf. Matthew 25:41). In this case, words spoken by Christ caused the tree to die. It was not a purposeless act of intemperance. It represented a strong object lesson that the disciples needed to learn (and numerous others since that time as well).

(2) As to the charge that Jesus destroyed an object that was not his, several things must be noted.

First, it cannot be established that the tree had an owner. Matthew observes that it was growing "by the wayside" (21:19). It may have been a "volunteer" tree, as such are known in any land. It's worthy of notation that Peter didn't rebuke the Lord for destroying another's property, even though the impetuous apostle was not reticent to admonish his Master when he felt the circumstance warranted such (cf. Matthew 16:22).

W. M. Thompson, a scholar eminently familiar with Palestine customs, pointed out that it was common for travelers to pick fruit from roadside trees, or from any tree that was not enclosed; there was no censure associated with such (1863, 350).

(3) It must be emphasized that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He possesses the nature of deity (John 1:1; 10:30; 20:28). As deity, therefore, the earth & its fullness are his (Psalm 24:1). He has the sovereign right to use the elements of creation to accomplish higher goals which men, limited in knowledge, may not perceive and appreciate at a given moment in time. That includes the destruction of a tree, or even a herd of swine (cf. Mark 5:13). No man has the right to say of him, “What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35; cf. Romans 11:33-36).

(4) In order to put this situation into sharper focus, the student needs to examine the meaning behind this action by Christ. When the Lord first saw the tree, he was yet “afar off.” He could discern only that it had leaves (v. 13). One must conclude that this circumstance reveals that though he was deity, Jesus did not exercise the full range of his divine powers constantly; he did not know the details regarding this tree until he was in close proximity (v. 13b).

When the Savior arrived at the tree, he observed a curious thing—the fig tree was fruitless. Of what significance is this? Alfred Edersheim called attention to the fact “in Palestine the fruit appears **before** the leaves” (1947, 374).

Thus, to see a leafed fig tree (especially at an unseasonable time [v. 13b]), warranted the assumption that there would be fruit. But this tree was an oddity; the leaves were there, but it was fruitless. This phenomenon, therefore, served as a perfect visual aid for an important lesson the Savior wished to teach.

Centuries earlier, the Hebrew nation had been separated from the pagan peoples of antiquity to serve in a special role in the divine economy. In the days of Moses, the Israelites were designated as Jehovah's "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22), i.e., they were granted a priority status. God said to Pharaoh, who held Israel captive, "Let my people go" (Exodus 5:1).

Across the centuries, however, the Israelite people rebelled frequently against their Creator. Isaiah once characterized the situation in the following fashion: "The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib, but Israel doesn't know, my people do not understand" (Isaiah 1:3). Read the prophet's stirring rebuke of a wicked nation that refused to be governed by the Sovereign of the universe (5:1ff).

While there were occasional periods of spiritual revival among the Hebrews (as in the days of Josiah, a good king [see 2 Kings 22-23]), the tragic fact is, the nation was on a gradual, degenerative slide—a path of apostasy that would culminate with the bloodthirsty cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Luke 23:21). The Jewish people, through the influence they exerted upon the Roman authorities (Matthew 20:19; Acts 2:23), had Jesus killed. They murdered the very Messiah for whom they had waited across the centuries (21:33).

Though they had enjoyed every conceivable spiritual advantage, they had become, for the most part, a renegade nation—in the symbolism of the Scriptures, a fruitless, withered tree worthy of being cut down (cf. Psalm 90:6; Hosea 9:16).

“Withering” was a symbol of imminent death (Joel 1:12). In the blasting of this fruitless fig tree, the Son of God was suggesting this:

- The nation, as a political entity, had become a worthless mechanism in the sacred scheme of things. It thus was deserving of destruction.
- That destruction would shortly come (within forty years [A.D. 66-70]) with the invasion of the land by the Roman armies (cf. Matthew 22:7ff; 24:15ff).
- The punishment would be complete and final; the “tree” would be dead from the very “roots” (Mark 11:20).

There was a very good reason why Christ acted as he did on this occasion. It was not an impulsive deed; it was not a misguided, irresponsible gesture. It was a deliberate, highly instructive warning. Unfortunately, the lesson conveyed has been lost upon the minds of many.

This episode is a deadly refutation of the false notion that there will be a **revival** of the old nation of Israel in the “end times,” as advocated by dispensationalists and premillennialists. – *Christian Courier*

Nothing but Leaves

This is the only destructive miracle in the gospels, the destruction of the fig tree. It is a parable, an analogy, a metaphor, an illustration of the coming destruction of the temple. It is a preview of judgment and a prediction of judgment. In fact, this whole passage that I read you has two components: the fig tree component & the temple component. But they both are previews of the same thing. The fig tree's a prediction to the destruction of the temple by analogy. And the assault on the part of Christ is a preview of the destruction of the temple by action.

Now the temple sits at the heart of Judaism. And the curse that comes on the fig tree and thus on the temple demonstrates for us that God is not pleased with the temple. God is not pleased with the leaders of the temple. God is not pleased with the people who come to the temple. In a word, God is not pleased with Israel and the temple is the heart of Israel. If the temple is corrupt, the nation is corrupt.

The stories of the temple is the story of Israel's repeated cycle of apostasy. You build the temple to worship God. You dedicate the temple, you dedicate yourself, you fall in to false religion, hypocrisy, superficiality, pretense. And God brings judgment and the judgment comes at the point at the heart of Israel at the temple. The nation falls, but the temple is crushed. Once by the Babylonians, again it is for all intents and purposes, desecrated by Antiochus and again by Titus Vespasian, the great Roman general in 70 A.D. And as you well know, there has never been a temple in Jerusalem since.

What we have here is a preview of the destruction of the third temple.

Two aspects of this text. One, the curse previewed and portrayed in analogy and two, the curse previewed and portrayed in action. The analogy is the fig tree. Let's look at it. Verse 12, "On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry." He left the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus where He would go each night to rest and sleep. In the morning He leaves. He's hungry. What, no breakfast? Probably not. He was probably up very early praying, that was His pattern. And *this was the week of all weeks*. This is evidence of His true humanity!

He's coming in to the city. He knows He's got a formidable day ahead of Him. What He is about to do is going to take a great measure of human strength and human energy and He needs food. He's hungry. He's on His way back. His heart is racing with the passion that He feels for the desecration of the temple. He knows He is going to go into that temple and take action. He feels the hunger. He comes as the Son of God, full of divine wrath. He comes as the Son of Man, hungry.

"Seeing at a distance in verse 13 a fig tree in leaf." I'm going to stop right there and say that – that was a good indication of what He would expect because in the case of fig trees, the fruit comes first and the leaves come second. The fruit comes first, the leaves come second. The fruit that first appears on a fig tree comes in March and April, and that would be this time of year. **It should have had small fruits, very immature but edible**, according to Hosea 9:10 and Hosea 28:4. They could be eaten when one was particularly hungry. The harvest, the season for figs referred to in this verse is mid-August to October. That would be when they would be in full fruit and fully mature. But if there were leaves, there should be some edible fruit because the fruit comes before the leaves. And so He sees the tree in leaf. He has a right then to expect fruit. He went to see if He would find anything on it.

Now I just remind you, fig trees were everywhere in the land of Israel. This – this would be perhaps a fig tree growing by the side of the road, as opposed to a farmer's fig trees growing somewhere in his own private property. In fact, fig trees were everywhere. Numbers 13 says that when the spies went into the land of Canaan to check it out, came back and gave a report. One of the things they reported was the land is full of treasures, and among the treasures were the fig trees.

According to Deuteronomy 8:8, they were everywhere in the land of Israel and they could grow very large, 20 feet high, 20 feet wide. And you remember Nathaniel in John 148 was sitting in the shade of a fig tree. So, our Lord had a right to expect some fruit, even though it wasn't the full season for fruit yet. So, He approaches the tree. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves. And that really becomes a title for this message, "Nothing but Leaves." **False hope, pretense to fruit!**

His response is a parable, a parable. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Matthew reports to us because Matthew reports on the fig tree. Matthew says. "He said, 'Let no fruit grow on you from now on forever.'" Therefore, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. He basically pronounced a curse that killed the tree. That's why I say, it's the only destructive miracle in the gospels. How do you know it's a curse? Verse 21, "Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'"

The tree had the appearance of fruit but it had none, not the reality, it was a false profession. And this is a graphic illustration of the pretense of temple worship, religious leaves but no fruit, hypocrisy to the max.

Our Lord expands on this, do you remember, in Matthew chapter 23 when He speaks to the leaders of Israel and says, “You hypocrites, you hypocrites,” over and over and over. Throughout that entire diatribe recorded in Matthew 23. He addresses the hypocrisy of Israel’s religion. The whole temple operation was nothing but leaves. The Jewish temple is therefore cursed which means destruction & damnation is pronounced on it, and it came in the sweeping assault of the Romans 40 years later.

This needs to be tied in, this parable of the fig tree, with another parable of the fig tree that our Lord gave in the thirteenth chapter of Luke. In Luke chapter 13 verse 6, “He began telling this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and didn’t find any. He said to the vineyard-keeper, “Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! **Why does it even use up the ground?**” And he answered and said to him, “Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.””

There’s another parable of Israel, a fruitless fig tree. And the Lord says I’m going to cut it down. And the plea is made, Give it a little more time. Well, a little more time has passed and there’s been no change and there’s been no repentance and there’s been no turning to Him and so **the parable of Mark 11 picks up where the parable of Luke 13 ends. The temple is at last and finally a fruitless pretense of worship. That means that Judaism is spiritually bankrupt.** The whole system & the nation with it engulfed in that system is cursed by God. That’s why I say, this is one monumental day.

And “the disciples,” it says, “were listening.” Verse 14, they “were listening.” What were they thinking? Well, I asked myself, what would I be thinking? I might be thinking like Deuteronomy 28 that Israel’s disobedience, Israel’s idolatry, Israel’s unfaithfulness would produce curse after curse after curse.

From Deuteronomy 28, you remember when they first came in the land, and the blessings & cursings were pronounced and they were told what the future was going to be based on whether they obeyed or disobeyed. You remember from Deuteronomy 28:15 on, it’s curse, after curse, after curse on their disobedience, the disciples probably were processing that very familiar threat when they saw Him curse the tree and therefore curse the temple and therefore curse the nation.

The direct application of the curse is to the temple, but it expands to the temple leadership and then the temple participants and thus to the entire nation and becomes very personal.

Secondly, the curse portrayed and previewed in action. Then they came to Jerusalem & He entered the temple. Matthew adds, the temple of God, the temple of God, to give a clear contrast between the ungodly activity that was going on there. He was not going to attack Rome. He was not going to elevate Israel, like the populace would have wanted Him to do to fulfill their messianic expectations. Rather He set to assault Israel and to assault Israel right at its heart where the judgment of God seemed always to fall when it came in cataclysmic form on the temple, and from the temple reverberates to the nation.

Now remember, according to John 2:13ff, He did this to begin His ministry. Here He is doing it at the end which means in the middle He was trying to call them – listen – to true worship, true worship.

His whole ministry and all that concerns Christ and all that concerns God – listen – is focused on one issue and that issue is worship. The Father seeks, John 4 says, true worshipers to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The Son of Man came to seek for the Father those true worshipers. The church is made up of those who worship God in spirit, rejoice in Christ, and give no confidence to the flesh, Philippians 3.

Our Lord walks through the world & was absolutely aware of everything. To what degree He exercised His omniscience, we don't know. He put some restrictions on it occasionally. On other occasions it was clear that He knew things that couldn't be known if He wasn't God. But I'll promise you this. He could make an assessment of His day. And a deeper one than anybody else could have made. Nothing escaped Him. He saw every disturbing reality. He saw every successful criminal campaign among the tax collectors, who were basically stealing money from the people under sheer threat of life and limb. He saw that inequity. He saw the abuse of the poor who were deemed in the theological system to be under the curse of God and therefore to be left that way. He saw the terrible plight of the sick & the infirm who also were deemed to be under divine judgment and to be left that way. He saw all that.

But He never addressed any of that, none of it. He didn't talk about societal reformation, didn't talk about political changes. He didn't talk about changing the situation for poor people and for ill people, sick people. Was He disturbed by it? Sure, everything that wasn't righteous disturbed Him. But He never deviated from a true and dominating issue that occupied His entire life and that was worship.

A man's relationship to God was the issue with Him and nothing else ultimately could ever be corrected until that was corrected. Worship was always the issue. And so, He went to the temple at the beginning. He went to the temple at the end. And He confronted the corruption of Israel's religion all three years in between.

When the temple is corrupt, it's because the leaders are corrupt. When the leaders are corrupt, the people are corrupt. When the people are corrupt, the nation is corrupt. If it's bad in the temple, it's everywhere. And I say to you, in the general sense, the measure of any society is its worship. You cannot judge a people by their economic status. You cannot judge a nation by its economics. God doesn't. You can't judge a nation by its social equity. You can't judge a nation by its concern for protection of people from harm. That's superficial. You judge a nation by its worship. That's how God judges. And it's the worship to God that determines eternal destiny. The Lord always goes to the temple, to the heart of worship. That is why Peter said, and he got it, maybe he learned it this day, "**Judgment must begin at the house of God.**"

That's where judgment has to begin. And anyone who's a representative of Christ has to represent Christ on behalf of the purity of his house. Our Lord found that the temple was a place of hypocrisy and blasphemy. He always goes to the heart of a people's worship.

So, He entered the temple. Now where would He have gone when He entered the temple? Well, He would have gone in one of the gates and then the temple is a series of layers rising up to the top of Mount Moriah. At the very top of Mount Moriah is the naos, the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, the pinnacle, the high point, surrounded by a wall. Only the high priest goes in there once a year. Then, sequential courtyards go down the hill, lower than the naos at the top.

First is the Court of the Priest where they offer the sacrifice, then the Court of the Israelites, then the Court of the Women, then the massive, massive Court of the Nations, or Court of the Gentiles, which is where He would be this time. That would hold hundreds of thousands of people, a massive place.

And there would be all kinds of shops there, the bazaars of Annas they were called because the priests made money. These *bazaars* were in commiseration with business people, people who provided the goods for them. They needed oil and wine and salt for the sacrifices and they needed animals for the sacrifices. So, they had these vendors and they split the profits. This place was abuzz. It was a cacophony of noises made by people and animals & He went into it. And it says “He began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple and was overturning the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.” First, those buying and selling were buying and selling animals. There were people who were bringing their animals in, they were being bought and then they were being sold to the people who came to offer sacrifices.

It was a **scam of the rankest kind** because if you brought a sacrifice from home, let's say you brought a lamb without blemish and without spot from your own flock, and you brought that to the temple to give as a sacrifice, there – there would have to be a priest who would pass the animal. All the priest had to do was say, this animal doesn't pass. The animal is not good enough for sacrifice and you would be required to buy an animal from the vendors inside the temple at ten times the price.

Then, you would also be required to have the half shekel temple tax in a certain kind of coinage. And pilgrims came from all kinds of nations when they came in for the Passover, and if you didn't have the right kind of coinage, you would have to exchange your coins and the mark up was, according to one historian, at least 25 percent.

If you were poor, you could give a dove as a sacrifice. According to the provision of God's law in Leviticus 12, poor people could give a dove. And doves in their economy would sell for five cents at your local town but if you bought one in the temple, they say it would be four dollars. This is perversion, prostitution, travesty, extortion, monopoly, just a horrendous operation. Noise, traffic, it was anything but a house of prayer. Jesus went in and just ripped into all of this. He started driving out the people buying and selling, the people bringing in their animals and taking them out. There could be as many as a quarter of a million animals, lambs actually, slain in a Passover, we have a record of that in ancient records.

There would be animals all over the place. Rejected animals, acceptable animals, He drove them all out. And then He overturned the tables. He started kicking over stools on which the money changers sat, thrown over their tables, scattering their money everywhere, debris flying all over this massive courtyard with hundreds of thousands of people in it and throwing over the stools that the dove sellers were sitting on.

Every crook, every exploiter of the poor, and all the rotten Sadducees and priests that oversaw the operation fell under His attention and His authority. Pretty amazing when you think about it. It's a fulfillment of Psalm 69:9 as it says in John 2, "Zeal for your house has eaten me up. The reproaches that fall on you are fallen on me."

Jesus stopped them dead in their tracks, halted the entire operation. Kicked over stools, crates, tables, stopped people, brought everything to a halt, basically evacuated the place of all these people. It wasn't orderly. It would be full of debris everywhere. **It wasn't a cleansing. It was a cursing.** And in that, sends a warning of what is coming.

And he says, Instead, "You have made it a robbers' den." That's right out of Jeremiah 7:11, right from that verse, Jeremiah 7:11. Jeremiah is predicting the judgment, the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the first great temple and its coming has this house which is called by My name become a den of robbers in Your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, declares the Lord. The first judgment came about because of the desecration of that place and turning it into a den of robbers.

Verse 19 says, "When evening came, they would go out of the city." That's kind of every evening they would go back to Bethany. "As they were passing," – verse 20 – "by in the morning – this is Wednesday morning – "they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up, rotten from the core. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'" **They put it together.** From the core. **That's the temple.** Cursed from the core, kill Judaism at its core, its temple. Peter's comment is the affirmation that which our Lord had cursed would be destroyed. – *Grace To You*

Nothing but Leaves

"He found nothing but leaves."—Mark 11:13

By Charles Spurgeon

I. We will commence our exposition with the remark that THERE WERE MANY TREES WITH LEAVES ONLY UPON THEM, AND YET NONE OF THESE WERE CURSED BY THE SAVIOR, SAVE ONLY THIS FIG TREE. It is the nature of many trees to yield to man nothing but their shade. The hungry Savior did not resort to the oak or to the elm to look for food, nor could the fir tree, nor the pine, offer him any hope of refreshment; nor did he breathe one hard word concerning them, for he knew what was in them, and that they neither were, nor pretended to be fruit-bearing trees. So, dear friends, there are many men whose lives bear leaves, but no fruit—and yet, thanks be unto God, almighty patience bears with them. They are allowed to live out their time, and then it is true they are cut down and cast into the fire; but while they are permitted to stand, no curse withers them: the longsuffering of God waiteth to be gracious to them. Here are some of the characters who have leaves but no fruit.

Another very numerous class **have opinion but not faith, creed but not credence**. We meet them everywhere. They very vehemently denounce all those who differ from them in the smallest degree; and deal damnation round the land with amazing liberality to all who are not full weight according to the balance of their little Zoar, Rehoboth, or Jireh: while all the while the spirit of Christ, the love of the Spirit, bowels of compassion, and holiness of character are no more to be expected from them than grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. Doctrine, my brethren, is to be prized above all price! Woe to the Church of God when error shall be thought a trifle, for truth will be lightly esteemed; and when truth is gone, what is left? But, at the same time, we grossly mistake if we think that orthodoxy of creed will save us. I am sick of those cries of "the truth" from men of rotten lives and unholy tempers. There is an orthodox as well as a heterodox road to hell, and the devil knows how to handle Calvinists quite as well as Arminians.

Ye must bring forth fruits meet for repentance. "Every tree which bringeth not forth fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Stopping short of vital union to the Lord Jesus by real faith, we miss the great qualification for entering heaven. Yet the time is not come when these mere head-knowers are cursed. These trees have leaves only, but no fatal curse has withered them hopelessly. No; they are to be sought after; they may yet know the Lord in their hearts, and the Holy Spirit may yet make them humble followers of the Lamb. O that it may be so!

A third class have talk without feeling. Mr. Talkative, in "Pilgrim's Progress," is the representative of a very numerous host. They speak very glibly concerning divine things. Whether the topic be doctrinal, experimental, or practical, they talk fluently upon everything. But evidently, the whole thing comes from the throat and the lip; there is no welling up from the heart. If the thing came from the heart it would be boiling, but now it hangs like an icicle from their lips. You know them—you may learn something from them, but all time while you are yourself aware that if they bless others by their words, they themselves remain unblessed. Ah! let us be very anxious lest this should be our own case. Let the preacher feel the anxiety of the apostle Paul, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway; and let my hearers feel the same concern, lest, after talking about the timings of God, they should prove to be mere lip-servers, and not accepted children of the Most High.

Another tribe springs up just now before my eye—**those who have regrets without repentance.** Many of you under a heart-searching sermon feel grieved on account of your sins, and yet never have the strength of mind to give them up. You say you are sorry, but yet go on in the same course. You do really feel, when death and judgment press upon you, a certain sort of regret that you could have been so foolish, but the next day the strength of temptation is such, that you fall a prey to the very same infatuation. **It is easy to bring a man to the river of regret, but you cannot make him drink the water of repentance.** If Agag would be killed with words, no Amalekite would live. If men's transient sorrows for sin were real repentance on account of it, there is not a man living who would not, sometime or other, have been a true penitent. Here, however, are leaves only, and no fruit.

We have yet again, **another class of persons who have had resolves without action.** They will! Ah! that they will! but it is always in the future tense. **They are hearers, and they are even feelers, but they are not doers of the Word: it never comes to that.** They would be free, but they have not patience to file their fetters, nor grace enough to submit their manacles to the hammer. They see the right, but they permit the wrong to rule them. They are charmed with the beauties of holiness, and yet deluded with the wantonness of sin. They would run in the ways of God's commandments, but the road is too rough, and running is weary work. They would fight for God, but victory is hardly won, and so they turn back almost as soon as they have set out; they put their hand to the plough, and then prove utterly unworthy of the kingdom.

The great majority of persons who have any sort of religion at all, bear leaves, but they produce no fruit. As sure as you live under the sound of the gospel, and yet are not converted by it, so surely will you be cast into outer darkness. As certainly as Jesus Christ invites you, and ye will not come, so certainly will he send his angels to gather the dead branches together, and you among them, to cast them into the fire. Beware! beware! thou fruitless tree! thou shalt not stand forever! Mercy waters thee with her tears now; God's lovingkindness digs about thee still; still the husbandman comes, seeking fruit upon thee year after year. Beware! the edge of the axe is sharp, and the arm which wields it is nothing less than almighty. Beware!

II. Secondly, THERE WERE OTHER TREES WITH NEITHER LEAVES NOR FRUIT, AND NONE OF THESE WERE CURSED!

The time of figs was not yet come. Now, as the fig tree either brings forth the fig before the leaf, or else produces figs and leaves at the same time, the major part of the trees, perhaps all of them, without exception of this one, were entirely without figs and without leaves, and yet Jesus did not curse any one of them, for the time of figs was not yet come.

What multitudes are destitute of anything like religion; they make no profession of it; they not only have no fruits of godliness, but they have no leaves even of outward respect to it; they do not frequent the court of the Lord's house; they use no form of prayer; they never attend upon ordinances. Why is this? Is it not because there is not enough of missionary spirit among Christian people to seek out those who are in the *lowest* strata of society?

Alas! however, among those who have neither leaves nor fruit, there is another class which never bring forth either the one or the other; they live in sin and die in ignorance, perishing without hope. As these leave the world, can they upbraid us for neglecting them? Are we clear of their blood? May not the blood of many of them cry from the ground against us? As they are condemned on account of sins, may they not accuse us because we did not take the gospel to them, but left them where they were? Dread thought! but let it not be shaken off, there are tens of thousands every day who pass into the world of spirits unsaved, and inherit the righteous wrath of God. Yet in this life, you see, no special curse falls upon them, and this miracle has no special bearing upon them; it bears upon a totally different class of people, of whom we will now speak.

III. WE HAVE BEFORE US A SPECIAL CASE.

I have already said, that in a fig tree, the fruit takes the precedence of the leaves, or the leaves and the fruit come at the same time; so that it is laid down as a general rule, that if there be leaves upon a fig tree, you may rightly expect to find fruit upon it.

To begin then with the explanation of this special case, in a fig tree fruit comes before leaves. So, in a true Christian, **fruit always takes precedence of profession.** I am sure the true Christian is always afraid of anything like having the leaves before he has the fruit.

Another remark follows from this—where we see the leaves we have a right to expect the fruit. **When I see a man a Church-member, when I hear him engage in prayer, I expect to see in him, holiness, the character and the image of Christ. I have a right to expect it, because the man has solemnly avowed that he is the partaker of divine grace.** You cannot join a Church without taking upon yourselves very solemn responsibilities. What do you desire when you come to see us, and ask to be admitted into fellowship? You tell us that you have passed from death unto life, that you have been born again, that there has been a change in you, the hike of which you never knew before, one which only God could have wrought. You tell us you are in the habit of private prayer; that you have a desire for the conversion of others.

If you did not so profess, we dare not receive you. Well now, having made these professions, it would be insincere on our part if we did not expect to see your characters holy, and your conversation correct; we have a right to expect it from your own professions. We have a right to expect it from the work of the Spirit which you claim to have received. Shall the Holy Spirit work in man's heart to produce a trifle? Do you think that the Spirit of God would have written us this Book, and that Jesus Christ would have shed his precious blood to produce a hypocrite? Is an inconsistent Christian the highest work of God? I suppose God's plan of salvation to be that which has more exercised his thoughts and wisdom than the making of all worlds and the sustenance of all providence; and shall this best, this highest, this darling work of God, produce no more than that poor, mean, talking, unacting, fruitless deceiver? Ye have no love for souls, no care for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, and yet think that the Spirit has made you what you are! No zeal, no melting bowels of compassion, no cries of earnest entreaty, no wrestling with God, no holiness, no self-denial, and yet say that you are a vessel made by the Master and fitted for his use! How can this be? No; if you profess to be a Christian, from the necessity of the Spirit's work, we have a right to expect fruit from you. Besides, in genuine professors we do get the fruit, we see a faithful attachment to the Redeemer's cause, an endurance to the end, in poverty, in sickness, in shame, in persecution. We see other professors holding fast to the truth, they are not led aside by temptation, neither do they disgrace the cause they have espoused; and, if you profess to be one of the same order, we have a right to look for the same blessed fruits of the Spirit in you, and if we see them not you have belied us.

Observe further that our Lord hungers for fruit. A hungry person seeks for something which may satisfy him, for fruit, not leaves! Jesus hungers for your holiness. A strong expression, you will say, but I doubt not of its accuracy. Why did Jesus Christ die? " He gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity & purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Why have we been called but that we should be called to be saints? To what end are any of the great operations of the covenant of grace? Do they not all point at our holiness? O Christian, for this the tears of the Savior! for this the agony and bloody sweat! for this the five death-wounds! for this the burial & the resurrection, he makes you holy like unto himself!

And can it be, that when he hungers after fruit, you think nothing of fruit-bearing? O professor, how base art thou, to call thyself a blood-bought child of God, amid yet to live unto thyself! How darest thou, O barren tree, said 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? 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.

This brings us into the very midst and meaning of the miracle. There are some, then, who make unusual profession, and yet disappoint the Savior in his just expectations. The Jews did this. When Jesus Christ came it was not the time of figs. The time for great holiness was after the coming of Christ and the pouring out of the Spirit. All the other nations were without leaves. Greece, Rome, all showed no signs of progress; but there was the Jewish nation covered with leaves. They had professed already to have obtained the blessings which he came to bring. There stood the Pharisee with his long prayers; there were the lawyers and the Scribes with their deep knowledge of the things of the kingdom. They said they had the light. The time of figs was not come, but yet they had the leaves, though not a single fruit; and you know what a curse fell on Israel; how in the day of Jerusalem's destruction the tree was withered altogether from its root, because it had its leaves, but had no fruit.

In the case of individuals the moral of our miracle runs thus. Some are looked upon as young believers, who early join the Church. "The time of figs is not yet;" it is not a very ordinary case to see children converted, but we do see some, and we are very grateful. We are jealous however lest we should see leaves but not fruit. These juveniles are extraordinary cases; and on that account we look for higher results.

Again, professors eminent in station. There are necessarily but few ministers; but when men so distinguish themselves by zeal, or by louder professions than others, as to gain the ear of the Christian public and are placed in responsible positions—if they bring forth no fruit, they are the persons upon whom the curse will light. It may be with other Christians that "the time of figs is not yet;" they have not made the advances which these profess to have made; but since they yield it not, let them beware.

Or, take another case. You meet with others whose profession is not of so much love, but it is of much experience. Oh! what experience they have had! What deep experience! Ah! they know the humblings of heart and the plague of human nature! They know the depths of corruption, and the heights of divine fellowship, and so on. Yes, and if you go into the shop you find the corruption is carried on behind the counter, and the deceit in the day-book; if they do not know the plague of their own hearts, at least they are a plague to their own household. Such people are abhorrent to all men & much more to God.

Others you meet with who have a **ensorious tongue**. What good people they must be; they can see the faults of other people so plainly! This Church isn't right, and the other isn't right, and yonder preacher—well some people think him a very good man, but they do not. They can see the deficiencies in the various denominations, and they observe that very few really carry out Scripture as it should be carried out. **They complain of want of love, and are the very people who create that want. Now if you will watch these very censorious people, the very faults they indicate in others, they are indulging in themselves;** and while they are seeking to find out the mote in their brother's eye, they have a beam in their own. These are the people who are indicated by this fig tree, for they ought, according to their own showing, taking them on their own ground, to be better than other people. If what they say be true, they are bright particular stars, and they ought to give special light to the world. They are such that even Jesus Christ himself might expect to receive fruit from them, but they are nothing but deceivers, with these high soarings and proud boastings; they are nothing after all but pretenders. Like Jezebel with her paint, which made her all the uglier, they would seem to be what they are not.

IV. And now to close, **SUCH A TREE MIGHT WELL BE WITHERED**. Deception is abhorred of God. There was the Jewish temple, there were the priests standing in solemn pomp, there were the abundant sacrifices of God's altar. But was God pleased with his temple? No, because in the temple you had all the leaves, you had all the externals of worship, but there was no true prayer, no belief in the great Lamb of Passover, no truth, no righteousness, no love of men, no care for the glory of God; and so the temple, which had been a house of prayer, had become a den of thieves. You do not marvel that the temple was destroyed.

You and I may become just like that temple. We may go on with all the externals of religions, nobody may miss us out of our seat at Tabernacle, nay, we may never miss our Christian engagements; we may be in external matters more precise than we used to be, and yet for all that, we may have become in our hearts a den of thieves; the heart may be given to the world while external ceremonies are still kept up and maintained. Let us beware of this, for such a place cannot be long without a curse. It is abhorrent to God.

Again, it is deceptive to man. Look at that temple! What do men go there for? To see holiness and virtue. Why tread they its hallowed courts? To get nearer to God. And what do they find there? Instead of holiness, covetousness; instead of getting nearer to God, they get into the midst of a mart where men are haggling about the price of doves, and bickering with one another about the changing of shekels. So, men may watch to hear some seasonable word from our lips, and instead of that, may get evil; and as that temple was cursed for deluding men, so may we be, because we deceive and disappoint the wants of mankind.

More than this, this barren fig tree committed sacrilege upon Christ, did it not? **Might it not have exposed him to ridicule?** Some might have said, "How goest thou to a tree, thou prophet, whereon there is no fruit?" A false professor exposes Christ to ridicule. As the temple of old dishonored God, so does a Christian when his heart is not right; he does dishonor to God, and makes the holy cause to be trodden under foot of the adversary. Such men indeed have reason to beware.

Once more, this tree might well be cursed, because its bringing forth nothing but leaves was a **plain evidence of its sterility**. It had force and vitality, but it turned it to ill account, and would continue to do so. **The curse of Christ was but a confirmation of what it already was.** He did as good as say, "He that is unfruitful, let him be unfruitful still." If you have by diligence worked yourself into a high position among God's people; if you have mere leaves without the fruit, the more sure is the curse, because the greater the disappointment of the Savior. **The more you profess, the more is expected of you;** and if you do not yield it, the more just the condemnation when you shall be left to stand for ever withered by the curse of Christ. O men and brethren, let us tremble before the heart-searching eye of God; but let us still remember that grace can make us fruitful yet. The way of mercy is open still.

Gleaning from the Fig Tree

Text: [Mark 11:12-14](#) & [20](#).

Friends, let me have you know that, the spiritual truth in this article is beyond an ordinary cursed fig tree! Let me also have you know that Jesus is actually hungry for genuine souls to do exploit for the Kingdom. The application is actually in relation to a productive and transforming Christian life. You have to brace up yourself to see beyond the fig trees. And here are the spiritual truths to glean from this event in this Bible passage.

1. **This fig tree like many Christians today gave a false and deceptive appearance.** It gave a pretentious misrepresentation of its true nature. The Bible says, *“You shall know them by their fruits...”* Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? I say ‘No.’ Therefore, it is fitting to note that many *professing* Christians live **false and double standard lives**. They have a gentle, pious appearance with religious language when in the public, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. **They give a false impression of their true nature.** They exaggerate their own self-worth. And so, when Jesus cursed the fig tree, He was simply instructing His disciples (and that includes you), that **such will be the judgment of any professing Christian who is living a false and pretentious life.**
2. Again, Jesus was teaching us that you will know a false preacher or a false prophet by what proceed out of his mouth (Leaves-empty words, high sounding nonsense). The leaves represent outward attractions, show or ostentations. It represents shallow, weak Christian life. While the fruits refer to strong godly character and conduct. Fruit also refers to a man’s inner life – his thoughts, intents and nature. Jesus words here are powerful warning to the Church today and to you as well. So, as no man can see the content and the intent of the heart but only God, Jesus is teaching us here the signs to identify true Christians; *“You will know them by their fruits and not by their leaves”*. And this of course raises a further question – **what are leaves and what are fruits?**

This is very serious matter; hence you must desire the enduring power of God’s Word, and the inward renewing of your inner man which is able to deliver you to the uttermost.

- The next gleaning in this encounter with the fig tree teaches us that the leaves represent membership. But the figs (fruits) that Jesus was actually looking for was fruits-representing **Followership**. Friends, as good as membership is to a church in terms of statistics, organization etc., you must not settle only for this. You must consciously take deliberate effort to seek personal communion with the Lord. Seek out for a personal functional intimate relationship with God. Christ actually desires followership and not membership! [Luke 9:23](#) says, ***“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves (himself) and take up their (his) cross daily and follow me” (NIV).***

From this short but instructive verse quoted above, it is absolutely clear that what Jesus desire is actually '**Followership**'. The act of following Christ must be a deliberate and conscious, persistent and personal, and of free will. In seeking membership, wisdom is principal to seek '**followership**' of Christ Jesus. Jesus Himself said, '**... And follow me**'. When you seek to follow Christ, you will appreciate why He is hungry for your spiritual growth and development. You will also hate sin and sinful habits. You will become fruitful.

As touching the cursed fig tree, Jesus is saying that there are no short cut exists. God cannot bow to our jet pack lifestyle and a microwave age. He cannot bow to our hush and dash pattern. No man plants a seed in the morning and thinks it will grow and become a fruit the same day. No, but every seed must patiently take root downwards, and gradually bear fruit upward, in its due time and season and after its own kind. And the result of this patient will be fruitfulness and righteousness.

1.3 The Way Out

Here are the essential facts for our conclusion:

- The only person who is capable and acceptable to prune you is Jesus. The reason is that you may bear more fruit (even richer and finer fruit), and not leaves.
- The word '**prune**' in this verse indicates a life-long process of becoming like Jesus called Discipleship.
- To '**abide in me**' (inside Jesus) means to remain; to dwell deeply; to stay closer; to continue as His disciple; to withstand or endure without struggling, fighting or grumbling; to await the second and glorious coming of the Lord; and finally to pay the price or penalty of; or suffer for being a follower (Disciple) of Christ – The Vine.
- You can only bear fruit when (and not if) you remain in Christ and Christ remain in you. The lesson from the fig tree is that for us to bear fruit and be fruitful (producing evidence of our faith in Christ), we must dwell inside Christ. **However, note that death to self is the principle of life.**
- Friend, to abide means death; and for Christ to abide in you, it means eternal life. As for the fig tree, it could not remain in Christ (it could not wait for the due season of fruitfulness before giving out fruits), but instead gave out leaves out of season; hence Jesus cursed (judged) it because it was deceptive and misleading. The lesson here is that it is only in Christ that you can live a godly, righteous and sober life.
- The meaning of '**cursed**' indicate; cut-off, cast away from vital union with Christ. This is why Jesus cursed the fig tree. It is very crucial to bear in mind that you cannot function independent of The Vine. No one has a root of its own. And no branch can grow or bear fruit on its own without abiding in The Vine.
- The crux of the matter being addressed here is SELF. This is the seat of the problem of mankind. We live in an age of self-will, self-confidence, self-love. It is rather sad that majority of professing Christians are self-deluded.

Friends, if you do not want to be cut-off like this fig tree, **remain in Christ!** If you do not want to be thrown out like a broken branch, which withers and dies; gathered and dumped into the fire for burning, then ABIDE IN THE VINE – CHRIST. – *This New & Living Way*

1.1 What then are leaves in this context?

1. Leaves are not fit for eating.
2. Leaves are external like gifts, talents etc.
3. Leaves are attractions or entertainments; such that hucksters or peddlers of the Gospel (for example false teachers/false prophets and crafty men) with sweet-tongues employ to delude men.
4. Leaves are modern technology that cannot heal a sick soul. They have good ambience, but are destructive heresies. They are very dangerous to the soul.
5. They are church activities without unction. They are church promos instead of prayers.
6. Leaves are perishables meant for goats and cows.
7. Leaves also mean speaking many words with no power to convert souls.

1.2 What then are Fruits in this context?

1. Fruits are internal. They are of a pure heart and good conscience.
2. A fruit nourishes and nurtures the body.
3. Fruits have seed with fruit bearing capabilities.
4. Fruits can be likened to godliness, righteousness, meekness, joy, love, patience etc.
5. Fruits are edibles meant for human beings. They impact lives.
6. Fruits show that our words must be congruent with our lifestyles and the true teachings of Christ and the Scripture.
7. Fruits mean speaking much, but in few words, to convert the souls of men.
8. Fruits are passion instead of fashion. Life changing and destiny transforming.

Every Branch That Beareth Not Fruit

Bill Fling
Long Beach, California

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." (John 15:2.)
Jesus is speaking here of his disciples as branches on the vine. (v 8.)
No passage could be plainer in affirming the possibility of apostasy.

He is not talking about unbelievers; nor is He speaking of those who only "thought they were disciples." He is speaking of the real branches or disciples. The branch Jesus is talking about has been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) because he says "Every branch IN ME." This branch is IN CHRIST and the only way we get into Christ is to be baptized into him. So, this passage applies to Christians -disciples-branches IN HIM.

What Is The Condition Of This Branch?

It is an unfruitful branch. The only destructive or negative miracle Jesus performed was on an unproductive tree. "And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever. And his disciples heard it." (Mark 11:13, 14.) Notice this tree was not dead and dried up. In fact, **from outward appearances it looked as healthy and fruitful as any tree. From "afar off" one could see the leaves. This is so true of Christians. From afar off, they all look like they are active, faithful disciples.** Many members attend church services every week - at least one and maybe even all the services. They would not even think of "missing the Lord's Supper." They often lead prayer, wait at the table and some perhaps lead singing or even preach. One looking at such a congregation from afar off, would be lead to comment, "My what an active church!"

But notice when Jesus got closer to the fig tree, "he found nothing but leaves." "NOTHING BUT LEAVES." A fig tree is not for ornament; it's a fruit tree. Here's a fruit tree WITHOUT FRUIT.

What good is salt without savour? What value is a lamp without light? What use is a branch without fruit? It is no wonder that Jesus said he "taketh away" such a branch!

What Are Some Fruits That Christians Should Bear."

Like begets like, so every tree or branch brings forth "after its kind." Fig trees are to bear figs. Christians therefore, ought to bring forth more Christians. In New Testament days, the disciples "went everywhere preaching the word." (Acts 8:4.) Many converts were made and God was glorified. Are you bearing any fruit of this species?

Other fruit we need to bring forth is in our own life. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-3) Here again, we find in many Christians, **NOTHING BUT LEAVES.**

What Will Happen To The Unfruitful Branch?

"He taketh away" the barren branch. (John 15:2.) Verse six is more vivid; "he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." This refers to the fires of eternal hell-Gehenna. This means they are eternally and hopelessly lost. What a bitter end for a branch which was created to be fruitful unto eternal glory! How pitiful to contemplate this tragedy! And it was all caused by **USELESSNESS** and **FRUITLESSNESS** during these few short years here below. **The Christian life is a growth with the objective of mature fruit.** Growth comes only by work, study, and spiritual application of the Word of God. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (I Pet. 2:2.)

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God and **TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.**" (Acts 20: 32.)

Truth Magazine II:12, pp. 9-10
September 1958

The Barren Fig Tree

by Kyle Butt, M.Div.

Upon encountering the story of Jesus cursing the barren fig tree, the average Bible student is slightly taken aback by the “strangeness” of the events that occur. Mark’s account records the story as follows:

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, **for it was not the season for figs.** In response Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” And His disciples heard it.... Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away” (11:12-14,20-21, emp. added).

One prominent question naturally arises from a straightforward reading of the text. Why would Jesus curse a fig tree that did not have figs on it, especially since the text says that “it was not the season for figs”? In response to this puzzling question, skeptical minds have let themselves run wild with accusations regarding the passage. Steve Wells, the author of *The Skeptics’ Annotated Bible*, labeled this story as an absurdity and said in a sarcastic tone: “Jesus kills a fig tree for not bearing figs, even though it was out of season. He did this to show the world just how much **God hates figs**” (2006, emp. added). Louis Cable, another skeptic, responded to the story with this statement: “Now to curse a fig tree for not bearing fruit in March is not unlike kicking a dog because it cannot speak English thereby punishing it for the inability to do the impossible” (n.d.).

Is it the case that Jesus capriciously, out of anger, cursed the fig tree for not bearing fruit, even though the tree was incapable of producing? With a little research, one quickly ascertains that such is not the case. Not only does an excellent reason exist for the curse upon the fig tree, but an equally good spiritual application should be considered as well.

When Jesus approached the fig tree, the text indicates that the tree had plenty of leaves. R.K. Harrison, writing in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, explains that various kinds of figs grew in Palestine during the first century. **One very important aspect of fig growth has to do with the relationship between the leaf and the fruit. Harrison notes that the tiny figs, known to the Arabs as *taksh*, “appear simultaneously in the leaf axils” (1982, 2:302) This *taksh* is edible and “is often gathered for sale in the markets” (2:302). Furthermore, the text notes: “When the young leaves are appearing in spring, every fertile fig will have some *taksh* on it.... But if a tree with leaves has no fruit, it will be barren for the entire season” (2:301-302).**

Thus, when Jesus approached the leafy fig tree, He had every reason to suspect that something edible would be on it. However, after inspecting the tree, Mark records that “He found nothing but leaves.” No *taksh* were budding as they should have been if the tree was going to produce edible figs that year. The tree appeared to be fruitful, but it only had outward signs of bearing fruit (leaves) and in truth **offered nothing of value to weary travelers.**

In addition, anyone even slightly familiar with the character of Jesus knows He did not spend His time on this Earth eradicating barren fig trees as an ecological service to Palestinian farmers. **What, then, was the point of such abrupt action against the tree? When one notices the context of the event, Jesus' intention seems to become apparent and two-fold. First, in its immediate context, the barren fig tree seems to apply to the pretentious religion of the Jewish leaders in the city of Jerusalem. Following Jesus' curse upon the fig tree, the text says that Jesus went to Jerusalem and began to drive the money changers out of the temple (Mark 11:15-19). The activities in the temple that once had been fruitful and wholesome had become empty of value and useless. Allen Black commented: "The cursing of the fig tree symbolizes God's coming judgment on Israel for not bearing the fruit he wanted from the temple. It foreshadows the cleansing of the temple and ultimately the prophecy of its destruction in chapter 13" (1995, p. 200).**

Second, in a general sense, Jesus often insisted that trees which do not bear good fruit will be cut down (Matthew 7:19; Luke 13:6-9). The fig tree did not bear fruit, was useless, and deserved to be destroyed: the spiritual application being that any human who doesn't bear fruit for God will also be destroyed for his or her failure to produce.

Jesus did not throw a temper tantrum and curse the fig tree even though it was incapable of producing fruit. **He cursed the tree because it should have been growing fruit since it had the outward signs of productivity. Jesus' calculated timing underscored the spiritual truth that barren spiritual trees will eventually run out of time.** As for personal application, we should all diligently strive to ensure that we are not the barren fig tree.

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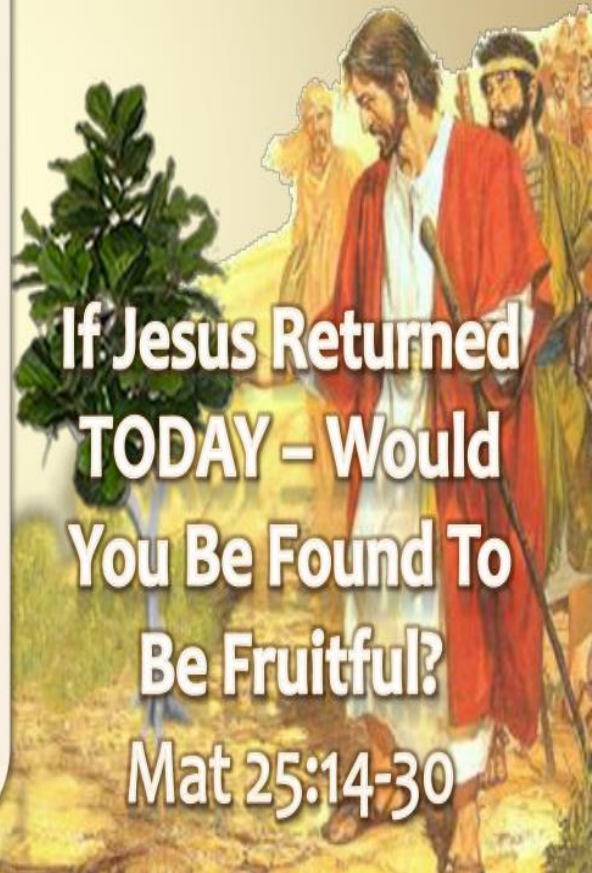
NOTHING BUT LEAVES!

Nothing But Leaves

What Jesus Found & Finds

What Does Jesus Find In His People Today?

- ◆ People who worship in Spirit & Truth? – John 4:24
- ◆ People who speak where the Bible speaks? – 1 Pet 4:11
- ◆ People who diligently seeks for truth? – Acts 17:11,12; 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Cor 13:5
- ◆ People who are bearing fruit for the Lord? – Mat 13:23



**If Jesus Returned
TODAY – Would
You Be Found To
Be Fruitful?
Mat 25:14-30**

Nothing but Leaves.

103

J. H. KURZENKNABE.

"Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"—Luke xiii. 7.

Rev. P. A. HRILMAN.

1. Nothing but leaves! no fruit have I, dear Lord, to bring to thee: No fruit to-day, how sad to
 2. Nothing but leaves! and must I be a cumb'rer of the ground? My life, so blest with loving
 3. Nothing but leaves! sin's gilded cup I drank in bitter pain. Lord, save!—I cry, with trembling
 4. Nothing but leaves! ah! who could dare To stand within thy way When thou shalt come to judge the

CHORUS.

know, My useless, misspent life can show Naught but a bar - ren tree. Nothing but leaves,
 care, Gave promise of a yield so fair, Yet now no fruit is found.
 breath; Cut me not down in sin and death; Spare thou me once a - gain.
 tree, With naught but leaves to bring to thee, In that e - ter - nal day.

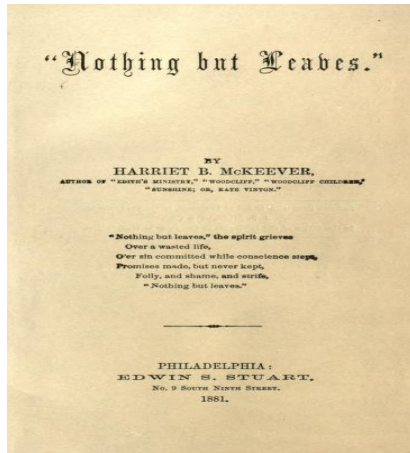
Nothing but leaves; Thy vengeance stay,—Cut me not down,—Spare yet to - day.

Copyright, 1882, by JOHN J. HOOD.

DO RE MI FA SO LA SI

“Nothing But Leaves”

Album – “Wonderful is He”
1958 Piedmont Bible College Quartet



“Nothing but leaves”

Nothing but leaves; the spirit grieves
Over a wasted life;
Sin committed while conscience slept,
Promises made, but never kept,
Hatred, battle, and strife;
Nothing but leaves!

Nothing but leaves; no garnered sheaves
Of life's fair, ripened grain;
Words, idle words, for earnest deeds;
We sow our seeds,—lo! tares and weeds:
We reap, with toil and pain,
Nothing but leaves!

Nothing but leaves; memory weaves
No veil to screen the past:
As we retrace our weary way,
Counting each lost and misspent day,
We find, sadly, at last,
Nothing but leaves!

And shall we meet the Master so,
Bearing our withered leaves?
The Savior looks for perfect fruit,
We stand before him, humbled, mute;
Waiting the words he breathes,—

“Nothing but leaves?” — *Lucy Akerman*

SNOPE'S DEBUNKS AN ENTIRELY PLAUSIBLE URBAN LEGEND:



Pastor Disguises Himself as Homeless Man

Legend: New pastor secretly poses as homeless man, then reveals himself to unsympathetic congregants.

- [David Mikkelson](#)



Claim

DID A NEW PREACHER DISGUISE HIMSELF AS HOMELESS IN ORDER TO TEST THE COMPASSION OF HIS CONGREGATION?

Pastor Jeremiah Steepok transformed himself into a homeless person and went to the 10,000 member church that he was to be introduced as the head pastor at that morning. He walked around his soon to be church for 30 minutes while it was filling with people for service....only 3 people out of the 7-10,000 people said hello to him. He asked people for change to buy food... NO ONE in the church gave him change. He went into the sanctuary to sit down in the front of the church and was asked by the ushers if he would please sit in the back. He greeted people to be greeted back with stares and dirty looks, with people looking down on him and judging him. As he sat in the back of the church, he listened to the church announcements and such. When all that was done, the elders went up and were excited to introduce the new pastor of the church to the congregation...."We would like to introduce to you Pastor Jeremiah Steepok"... The congregation looked around clapping with joy & anticipation. The homeless man sitting in the back stood up... and started walking down the aisle... the clapping stopped with ALL eyes on him.... he walked up the altar and took the microphone from the elders (who were in on this) and paused for a moment.... then he recited "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" After he recited this, he looked towards the congregation and told them all what he had experienced that morning... many began to cry and many heads were bowed in shame... he then said... Today I see a gathering of people... not a church of Jesus Christ. The world has enough people, but not enough disciples... when will YOU decide to become disciples? He then dismissed service until next week... Being a Christian is more than something you claim. It's something you live by and share with others.



Mixture

About this rating

Origin

This tale about a pastor who goes “undercover” as a homeless man is reminiscent of an urban legend based on the true story of an experiment conducted for a social psychology class at Princeton University in 1970, in which seminary students were sent on urgent assignments designed to take them past an actor posing as a person in need of assistance. Researchers measured whether (and how) students interrupted their pressing tasks to render help, and analyzed the results. In the story reproduced above, the actor portraying a homeless man is no psychology researcher, however — he’s Jeremiah Steeppek, the new head pastor of a very large church. After spending half an hour incognito in his new church prior to services and finding that only a very few congregants would even return his greeting (much less respond to his pleas for money to buy food), he reveals himself to his new flock and delivers to them a lesson in Christian compassion.

But as for this particular version of the “incognito clergyman” tale, it appears to be a fabricated story. No one has yet identified a real pastor by the name of Jeremiah Steeppek (or a similar variant of that name) or found any church, large or small, headed by a pastor with that name. Nor has anyone been able to verify the event described, even though it was supposedly witnessed by several thousand congregants.

Although this particular narrative about a Pastor Jeremiah Steeppek may be an invented one, the gist of the tale was expressed in some real-life incidents that took place in 2013. In June 2013, the Rev. Willie Lyle, the newly-appointed pastor of a Church in Clarksville, Tennessee, spent four and a half days living in the streets in the guise of a homeless man. He then transformed back into his role as pastor as he delivered a sermon:

Lyle felt challenged to experience firsthand just what it was like to have nothing — no home, no money, no friends, no food on even a semi-regular basis, no nothing. Pastor Willie’s wife, Suzette, dropped him off in downtown Clarksville early Monday morning, June 17, and he lived on the street through the morning of Friday, June 21. In those four and a half days, he learned a great deal about the homeless, the working poor who face hunger daily and those in need of spiritual and emotional help. It was not comfortable.

Early morning on June 23, Willie lay under a tree on the church lawn covered up by a big overcoat. He still had not shaved or combed his hair. He wondered how many people would approach him and offer him food, or a place to sit inside an air conditioned room, or just see how they could help. Twenty people spoke to him and offered some type of assistance.

While he preached, his daughter-in-law cut his hair and his daughter helped shave off his scruffy beard. He changed shoes, and beneath the overcoat, he was wearing his Sunday clothes. He put on a tie and his suit coat, all the while continuing to preach his message. Before the 200 people gathered that morning, he went from looking like a homeless person to the new pastor of the congregation.

The sermon title was “The Least Used Parts of the Body” and based on I Corinthians 12:12-15. According to Pastor Lyle, “Often the least used parts of the body are the ones that mean the most, like our heart and mind. We need to understand that there are no small or least used parts in the body of Christ.

“Too many of us only want to serve God one hour each week. That doesn’t cut it. That is not God’s plan.”