**Grace Guide**

**Mark 11 – The Withered Fig Tree**

Mark 11:12-14; 20-24

*“Our Lord on this occasion revives the old typical or picture-teaching with which the Hebrews were to that hour so familiar. He, as the greatest of prophets, adopts the significant and impressive method, frequently employed by the Prophets of Israel, who, in uttering startling and solemn truths, did so by means of symbolic actions. As Jeremiah of old dashed the potter's vessel down the Valley of Hinnom, to indicate the judgments that were about to befall Jerusalem; or, at another time, wore around his own neck a wooden yoke, to intimate their approaching bondage under the King of Babylon; or, as Isaiah "walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder to Egypt and Ethiopia," so did our Lord now invest a tree in silent nature with a prophet's warning voice, and make its stripped and blighted boughs eloquent of a nation's doom!*

*On the height of their own Olivet, looking down, as it were, on Jerusalem, that fig-tree becomes a stern messenger of woe and vengeance to the whole house of Judah. Often before had He warned by His words and tears; now He is to make an insignificant object in the natural world take up His prophecy, and testify to the degenerate people at once the cause, the suddenness, and the certainty of their destruction! Let us join, then, the Master and His disciples, as they stand on the crest above Bethany, and, gazing on that fruitless leaf-bearer, "hear this parable of the fig-tree."*

*Jesus, on approaching it (it seemed to be at a little distance from their path), and finding abundance of leaves, but no fruit thereon, condemns it to perpetual sterility and barrenness. A difficulty here occurs on the threshold of the narrative. If, as we have noted, and as Mark tells us, "the time of figs was not yet"—why this seeming impatience? why this harsh sentence for not having what, if found, would have been unseasonable, untimely, abnormal? In this apparent difficulty lies the main truth and pith of the parable. The doom of barrenness, be it carefully noted, was uttered by Jesus, not so much because of the absence of fruit, but because the tree, by its premature display of leaves, challenged expectations which a closer inspection did not realize. "It was punished," says an able writer, "not for being without fruit, but for proclaiming, by the voice of those leaves, that it had such. Not for being barren, but for being false."*

*Graphic picture of boastful and vaunting Israel! This conspicuous tree, near one of the frequented paths of Olivet, was no inappropriate type, surely, of that nation which stood illustrious amid the world's kingdoms—exalted to heaven with unexampled privileges which it abused—proudly claiming a righteousness which, when weighed in the balances, was found utterly lacking. It mattered not that the heathen nations were as guilty, vile, and corrupt as the chosen people. Fig-trees they were, also—naked stems; fruitless and leafless; but then the heathen made no boastful pretensions. The Jews had, in the face of the world, been glorying in a righteousness which, in reality, was only like the foliage of that tree by which the Lord and His disciples now stood—mocking the expectations of its owner by mere outward semblance and an utter absence of fruit.” –* John MacDuff

So far, this parable speaks to a lot of the same things we saw this weekend as Ed and Tom shared out of the Psalms of Ascents (120-134). As we looked at those chapters, we saw the Psalmist move from a place of unreality, to a place of total reliance on the Lord for all he needed. In the last year or so, I’ve been able to hear several testimonies from folks in our fellowship, and while the details are different, so many of them are the same in that we all experience the same progression. Many of our testimonies, as our brother Ed Miller often eludes to, are marked by years of “unreality.” We say and do things that *seem* spiritual. They seem like things we ought to be doing as Christians. We want to make God happy; we want to make God proud, we want others to see Christ in us….but, many of us find ourselves going through the motions to try and accomplish those things in our own power and ability.

Even on our best day, were we to share the Gospel with twenty people and live in twenty-four hours of obedience to the Lord and save a dozen kittens from a burning house, etc. God would look at all of that and it would still be as filthy rags. He isn’t impressed by our actions.

My point is this, if we were to take anything from the surface of this parable of the fig tree, it ought be that there is no room in the Body for pretend (unreality). That is one of the reasons I loved the final appeal from Joshua that we saw a couple of weeks ago. He looked at the people and he said “make up your mind, whom you will serve.”

**Was there a time in your life that was marked by “playing Christian?” How did God bring you out of that place of unreality?**

*Oh, that all such ungodly boasters and pretenders would bear in mind, that not only do they inflict harm on themselves, but they do infinite damage to the Church of God. They lower the standard of godliness. Like that worthless Fig-tree, they help to hide from others the glorious sunlight. They intercept from others the refreshing dews of heaven. They absorb in their leaves the rains as they fall. Many a tuft of tiny moss, many a lowly plant at their feet, is pining and withering, which, but for them, would be bathing its tints in sunshine, and filling the air with balmy fragrance!*

*Solemn, then, ought to be the question with every one of us—every Fig-tree in the Lord's plantation—How does it stand with me? am I now bringing forth fruit to God? for remember what we are NOW, will fix what we shall be when our Lord shall come on the Great Day of Scrutiny! We are forming now for Eternity; settling down and consolidating in the great mold which ultimately will determine our everlasting state. If we are fruitless now, we shall be fruitless then. The principle in the future retribution is thus laid down—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."*

*The demand and scrutiny of Jesus will on that day be, not what is the number of your leaves, the height of your stem, the extent of your branches! not whether you have grown on the wayside or in the forest, been nurtured in solitude or in a crowd, on the mountain-height or in the lowly valley! All will resolve itself into the one question—****Where is your fruit? -*** *MacDuff*

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| "If you endure chastening—God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chastens not?" "He *prunes* it, that it may bring forth *more fruit*." |