

## Review

We saw last Sunday Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Then, at the end of the day...

**Matt. 21:17 ...He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.**

The next day, He would be returning to Jerusalem.

## 21:18-19 The Fig Tree Is Empty

The next morning, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus is hungry and sees a fig tree. Now, fig trees in that region have two crops, one in the spring, called the breba crop, and the other in the fall. The fruit of the spring crop (the breba crop) comes out on the last season's growth, so it actually bears fruit before the leaves come forth.

Jesus saw that this fig tree was full of leaves. Fig leaves are bright green and very large, growing up to one foot long. From a distance, you wouldn't see the figs, but you would hope that some of the breba crop would remain. Breakfast may only be a few steps away!

But when Jesus approached this tree, there was no fruit. It had given the impression outwardly that it had fruit inwardly. But in reality, it had just been an empty promise. You could say that the tree had misrepresented itself with a false front, a misleading mask - it was being a hypocrite. The word "hypocrisy" means "to act on a stage, make pretend, to play act."

The Bible says that we are to be fruit bearers, bearing good fruit (Matt 3:8-10). Jesus said,

**John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."**

If we abide in Jesus, we will bear fruit. What happens if we fail to abide in Him? Well, isn't it interesting that when we think of fruit and fig leaves, we always think of Adam and Eve? They failed to bear the fruit of obedience. They disobeyed God and fell into sin by eating forbidden fruit.

**Gen. 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves to-**

## **gether and made themselves loin coverings.**

What were the fig leaves for? They were trying to hide their unrighteousness, to cover their nakedness, to disguise their fruitlessness with the fig leaves.

To me, this is a perfect picture of man's religion: Trying to disguise our sin by the works of our own hands. Playing a game of cover-up. "Don't repent, just pretend."

But guess what? The Lord isn't looking for leaves. He's expecting fruit. And when He finds the hypocrisy of disguise, it disgusts Him. As a matter of fact, when we get to chapter 23, Jesus will angrily use the word "hypocrites" seven times in just one sermon.

### **The Fig Tree Withers**

And so Jesus cursed this fig tree (Mark 11:21). It withered and died.

In light of His statements about fruitlessness, this can be somewhat worrisome. Remember, we've already read twice now in Matthew, **Matt. 7:19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."**

Jude also warned us against apostasy, saying,

**Jude 1:11-13 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.**

Are we in danger of being cut down for hypocritical fruitlessness? Remember that Jesus had earlier told this parable:

**Luke 13:6-9 ..."A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did**

**not find any. And 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.'"**

This reminds us that our God is longsuffering, and will do what it takes to give us every opportunity to bear fruit.

### **21:20-22 Ask, Believe, Receive**

The disciples failed to see the warning against fruitlessness. They just wanted to know how Jesus did the amazing miracle of saying a sentence and producing such a powerful result. They asked Him how it happened.

Jesus answered that it was all about having faith and not doubting. And then He made an amazing statement:

**Matt. 21:22 "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."**

"No way! That's not right, that could never happen! If I pray, I'm not going to get 'anything' I ask for," you might argue. You should know that I agree one hundred percent! If you say that, you absolutely won't.

But I believe there is such amazing power in prayer, and that most of us haven't even begun to fathom it.

Prayer is talking to God, Who is the Creator of all things - the universe, our sun, the nerves in your hands, and the heart that is beating within you. Do you think that He isn't able? He is.

And so we ask - not telling and demanding, but asking and inquiring. We ask believing, and Jesus promises that we'll receive in His time.

But we wonder, "How does it work?"

I have two answers for that. Number one, I don't have a clue. Number two, is even if I could explain it, then it wouldn't be about faith anymore, would it? Then it wouldn't work! Because...

**Heb. 11:1 ...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the con-**

**viction of things not seen.**

And so, we must have faith - asking in prayer, believing that we will receive. Let's leave this morning then with the words of James:

**James 1:5-8 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

Let us strive to be people of stable, single minds - full of faith.