

The Barren Fig Tree

Mark 11: 12-14; 20-21

Our text today follows Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He had begun what most consider the *Passion Week*, the final days leading up to His crucifixion on Calvary's hill. Most agree these events would have taken place on Monday morning of that faithful week.

This passage centers on Jesus' disappointment regarding a fig tree. Since it had not produced desired fruit, Jesus pronounced judgment on the tree, causing it to wither and die. Those who accompanied Jesus that morning likely were unaware of the significance of this event. Often in Scripture Israel was represented by a fig tree. Knowing He would be rejected and crucified with the consent of unbelieving Jews, Jesus revealed the judgment that would come upon Israel for their rejection of Jesus as the Christ.

This text was written primarily for the nation of Israel, but there is application for all in these verses. Those who claim to follow Christ are expected to bear fruit. In fact, fruit will always be present in the lives of those who have been transformed by Christ. The Lord examines our lives, expecting to find fruit. When fruit is produced, there is blessing; when fruit is lacking, there is judgment and chastening. As we examine the [details](#) of this passage, I want to consider: [The Barren Fig Tree](#).

I. The Lord's Anticipation ([12-13a](#)) – Here we discover the anticipation of Jesus as He made His way back into Jerusalem that morning. Consider:

A. His Hunger ([12](#)) – [And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry](#). This is a simple statement, one we wouldn't think much of at times, but it reveals significant truth. As Jesus journeyed from Bethany to Jerusalem, we discover that He was hungry. This was the eternal God, the Sovereign of the Ages, King of kings and Lord of lords, and yet He was hungry. In this we catch a glimpse of the humanity of Jesus. While He was fully God, He was also fully man. He felt the same physical needs and emotions as all men. In fact, there will be many glimpses of the humanity of Jesus in the coming passages. We will discover His great love for friends in Bethany, His compassion and commitment to the disciples within the Upper Room, the agony and great burden He felt in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the unimaginable sufferings of the cross. We serve one who has felt our pain and experienced the difficulties of human life. He knows where we are and how to provide for our needs! [Heb.4:15 – For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.](#)

B. His Hope (13a) – *And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon.* As they journeyed, Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance, which brought hope that He might find some figs to eat. Again, we see the humanity of Jesus. Being hungry, the anticipation of ripe figs brought hope for some nourishment.

- Clearly Jesus had power to create whatever He needed. He had proven His power over creation, calming the raging seas. He had proven His ability to provide nourishment in the wilderness, multiplying bread and fish on two separate occasions. He even had power over death, having raised the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus from the dead. This was not a situation that was in any way out of His control, but Jesus chose at times to limit Himself. I know it is difficult for us to comprehend, but Jesus laid aside some of His divine prerogatives as He came to earth in the form of a man. He never lost any of His deity, but He did choose to hide His glory and submit to specific limitations. He did all of this so He could identify with us and the struggles we endure.

II. The Lord's Dissatisfaction (13b) – *And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.* Mark revealed the dissatisfaction of Jesus as He came to the fig tree. Consider:

A. The Disappointment – Keep in mind that although Jesus was God, He was also man. He was hungry that morning. The sight of a fig tree and the hope of a meal brought joy to His heart. As He approached the tree, He was quickly disappointed though. This fig tree had leaves; it looked promising, but there were no figs on this tree.

- Mark stated that the time for figs had not yet arrived. This does not imply that Jesus was expecting anything out of the ordinary, or that He was limited in His wisdom. In fact, Jesus had every reason to expect to find figs on this particular tree at this time. While figs were more prominent at other times of the year, it was not unusual to find early figs at this time. Consider the thoughts of Dr. Alan Carr:

The fig tree in view here is not a bush, it is a tree. These fig trees can grow to a height of 20 – 30 feet with a trunk some three feet in diameter. The spread of a fig tree's branches can be 25 – 30 feet. In other words, fig trees can grow very, very large.

Fig trees are unusual in that they can produce as many as three crops in a single year. The first crop is produced on the old wood. Early in the year, green knobs or buds appear at the end of the branches. They are called paggim and while this fruit is not as juicy and rich as the later fruit it is still quite edible.

After the paggim appear, the fig tree will begin to grow its leaves and new growth. The fig tree is unique in that it can be in full fruit, full leaf and full bloom all at the same

time. The first crop becomes ripe in June, the second in September and sometimes, there is a third crop in December. ⁱ

B. The Deception (13b) – Jesus was disappointed because this tree had shown all the signs of having produced figs at this time. He fully expected to find figs available to eat. While it was in full leaf, showing great promise for fruit, the tree's looks had been deceiving. As Jesus approached, He quickly realized that there was no fruit to be picked. His hunger would continue.

- Although the disciples probably didn't see the connection, this was a perfect illustration for the state of affairs in Jerusalem at this time. It illustrated the heart of Israel, and their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. Passover was quickly approaching. Millions of Jews would gather in the holy city to celebrate. There would be sacrifices offered, and an abundance of religious activity, but they failed to see Jesus as the Christ. The fig tree of Israel looked good outwardly, but Jesus knew their looks were quite deceiving.

- As I said in the introduction, this passage is given primarily for Israel, but there is application for all in these verses. Even among Christian churches today, there is a lot of religious activity. We know the right words to say, the songs that reveal the Gospel, and even hear the Word preached regarding the sacrificial atonement of Christ and His glorious resurrection for our salvation. There are many trees that appear to be fruitful, but upon close examination, there is no fruit being produced. I pray that our commitment to the Lord is more than skin deep. We must be committed to Christ and sincere in our service to Him. The production of fruit reveals the true nature of the tree, not the showy leaves hanging on the branches!

III. The Lord's Proclamation (14) – [And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.](#) Following His great disappointment, Jesus proclaimed judgment on the fig tree. We can see that:

A. Judgment was Swift – Jesus didn't hesitate. He expected to find fruit; and since there was no fruit, He pronounced judgment on the tree. He had examined it and determined this tree to be of no future value. It was unable to produce fruit and therefore had no purpose for existence.

- Israel would soon face the swift consequences of their rejection of Christ. Some would believe, but most would reject Jesus as the Christ. Paul would be called to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Jerusalem would soon be overrun and destroyed by the Romans. Israel would be scattered throughout the world, being set aside of God for a season. Their rejection brought swift judgment from the Lord.

- The same will be true of those who stand before Christ in judgment at the end of the age. Those who have produced no fruit for Christ, never receiving Him as their Savior and abiding in the vine, will be cut off and cast into outer darkness and eternal judgment.

B. Judgment was Severe – This tree was immediately judged and would never produce fruit again. The roots would quickly dry up and the tree would die. Life had been removed from the fig tree.

- Israel would soon face severe judgment nationally, and those who rejected Christ would face it individually. Their rejection of Jesus brought swift and severe judgment. He had come as their Savior, and yet most rejected the only means of salvation. When grace is rejected, judgment is all that remains. The same is true for all who live today. Rejecting Christ will lead to severe judgment and eternal death. It is a serious matter to fall into the hands of the living God.

IV. The Disciples' Recollection (20-21) – Finally we discover the disciples' recollection of Jesus' judgment on the tree the day before. Notice:

A. The Recognition (20) – *And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.* Following the same path back into Jerusalem they had taken the day before, they passed by the fig tree again. The disciples immediately recognized the fig tree had died, literally drying up from the roots. Typically, as trees die, the root is the last to die. They usually show signs of death and decay from the top-down. This one revealed the opposite had happened. The roots had died and the tree immediately perished. It could not be denied that the tree was dead.

- When God's hand of favor and blessing are removed, it will become quickly evident. Israel would soon be known as a people who once enjoyed the favor of God but lost it due to disobedience and rebellion. People may be able to hide the truth for a while, but eventually what is on the inside will be revealed on the outside. We cannot fake or manufacture the blessing of God. If we don't possess His favor, it will be evident to see.

B. The Remembrance (21) – *And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.* Peter immediately remembered the curse of the Lord upon the fig tree the day before. He appeared amazed that it had withered so quickly. Peter knew this had happened because of Jesus' disappointment with the tree.

- Israel would soon deal with the warnings prophesied unto them regarding their rejection of the Lord. John the Baptist had warned of the decline to come. [Matt.3:10 – And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.](#) Those who denied Jesus as the Christ, refusing salvation in Him, would soon face the judgment of God for their rejection. A nation once blessed and preserved by the Lord would deal with His divine judgment due to their rejection of His Son.
- This truth applies to all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender. Salvation has been provided through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for our sin. There is forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ. Apart from Him there will be swift judgment and eternal condemnation. Jesus is the only way. Those who deny Him will perish in their sin.

Conclusion: Jesus knew the reality of the fig tree. He expected to find fruit, but it only had leaves. Fruit is natural for those who abide in the vine. He produces fruit through those who belong to Him. What does Jesus see in our lives? Are we producing fruit for Him or are there only showy leaves? Jesus knows the depths of our hearts. If there are needs of any kind, seek Him today!

ⁱ The Sermon Notebook - The Sermon Notebook – Mark.