

ii. Prayer is the substance of fruitfulness

It may seem strange that Jesus should talk about moving mountains at this point, yet this too is a part of the parable:

“Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mk. 11: 23 – 24

The disciples would be given the power to remove the mountainous obstacles which stood in their way – through faith - filled prayer.

iii. Christian Character is the content of fruitfulness

God is interested in our character. He wants to make us like Jesus in the way we think and behave. Character transformation is a combination of prayer, persistence and the work of the Holy Spirit.

iv. Concern for others is the outworking of fruitfulness

God wants to do His work in us and through us. This is where Israel failed i.e. they **failed to be communicators of God’s grace**.

We are to be for others what Christ has been for us – forgiving, approachable people, free from judgment and negative opinions.

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” Mk 11: 25

III. A Final Warning About Unfruitfulness:

“Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ⁸ “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.” Lk. 13:6 – 9

Q. What does the parable (Lk. 13) add to our understanding of God’s expectation of us? Who is ‘the owner’ in the parable and who is ‘the gardener’? What is the message of hope?

Perhaps our lives have been unfruitful for God. **We have another chance.** The poor ground around our lives can be loosened and fertilised.

We can still fulfil our potential and God’s plan for us to be fruitful.

Sermon Outline and Questions

Jesus Journey to the Cross

The Fig Tree

Mark 11:12 – 14, 20 – 26

The setting for this story, which took place in Easter Week, is important to a correct understanding of Jesus’ action against a defenceless fig tree.

In this story we witness a side of Jesus that we don’t often talk about – **his indignation and anger at what he found in Jerusalem.**

We would rather think of Jesus as ‘**gentile, meek and mild,**’ and of God as a benevolent God of love and forgiveness. Meekness is not weakness. God loves people too much to be indifferent to sin and injustice.

Jesus’ anger was/is always a righteous anger, which raises the question: What is the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger?

Definition.

1. Righteous anger - always other person centred. Anger directed against anything that:

- i. **Dishonours God**
- ii. **Exploits and abuses others**

2. Un-righteous anger - always self-centred. Arises out of the desire to defend or protect our own ego/pride.

Q. Jesus said there is no place for self-righteousness in the Christian life. What are we to do when personally offended? How do you feel about Jesus’ approach to personal offence? See Lk. 6:29 & I Peter 2:23

The cursing of the fig tree – ‘an acted parable of divine impatience’.

This is a difficult parable to receive because of its implications for us.

I. Life is God-Given for Fruitfulness

We are created to be fruitful. To make this point Jesus chooses the strongest picture or metaphors available to him.

Israel had always prided herself as being God’s tree or vine in the vineyard of the Promised Land. She had always thought of herself as privileged and special and so she was!

⁸ “You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.”

Jesus noticed a fig tree in full leaf, which we are told was very unusual.

For a fig tree to be in leaf this early leads us to the conclusion that it must have been planted in a very favourable position e.g. good sun, soil and shelter. But when Jesus went looking for the fruit, which should have come with the leaves, he found none.

“Jesus found nothing but leaves” vs 13

How very much like Israel – there were lots of leaves but no fruit to be eaten. Israel had been planted by God and given many privileges. She had the leaves of religious activity – rites, rules and rituals but the spiritually hungry people of the world who came to Jerusalem looking for meaning and purpose only ever found leaves. (Example - Story of the Ethiopian eunuch – Acts 8)

Q. What did God expect of Israel? See Micah 6:8 and Matthew 23.

Leaves are important to a tree but something had gone wrong – all the growth had gone into the leaves. Outwardly all this religious activity looked and sounded great but their resultant pride distanced Israel’s leaders from God and ordinary people felt excluded and exploited.

Q. What does this parable have to say to us? Are we any different? How can we be sure that our Christianity/Church life is more than just the leaves of religious activity? See Matt. 7:17 - 23

God has the same expectation of us and our Church that He had of ancient Israel - that we be fruitful.

If there is no fruit, can a believer/church expect to be treated any differently to Israel in the hand of our Creator?’

Paul wrote, “For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you (Gentiles) either.” Rom. 11:21

Jesus often spoke of the importance of living a fruitful life.

¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognise them... every good tree bears good fruit ... Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.” Matt. 7:15 – 20:

Another word for fruitfulness is stewardship – our management or care of the gifts and resources God has given us.

Our stewardship responsibilities include:

- i. **Care of God’s World** - we should all be ecologists.
- ii. **Care of Others** - We are our brother’s keeper.
- iii. **Care of Self** – our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

⁶ Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.” 1 Cor. 3:16 – 17

- iv. **Care of Family** – for whom we are given special responsibility
- v. **Care of Community** - what happens to those around us are our concern.
- vi. **Careful Choices** – we are responsible for the choices we make.
- vii. **Time management** - the years of our life are to be used wisely.
- viii. **Resource management** – possessions, talents and opportunities are all held in trust.

II. The Secret of Fruitfulness

“In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” ²² “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.” Mk 11:20 – 22

Q. The disciples were shocked by what happened to the fig tree. Jesus’ response to Peter is interesting. What does faith have to do with fruitfulness?

i. Faith is the key to fruitfulness

Faith is our response to God’s grace and love. It includes spending time with God and caring about the things for which He cares. Faith is allowing the fruit of the Spirit to grow on the tree of our life.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.” Gal. 5:22 - 23

The fruit that God expects to find from us is itself God’s gift to us, which we receive in faith.