

Leaves

Mark 11:12-13

1

12 On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. **13** Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

This is an interesting account. On the surface it might seem that there is no purpose for this miracle other than to satisfy the anger or frustration that Jesus felt at not finding any figs on the tree. On the surface that would be an entirely wrong conclusion. Our Lord did not capriciously use His authority, ever, for any reason. While it may not be readily seen or understood, I think once we crack the shell, the depth of what Christ has done here will become apparent. Jesus came to reveal God to man. He did this in His life, His teaching, His death, His resurrection, and also in His miracles. To think that He reacted on this occasion out of some pique would be inconsistent with His character. Christ was full of grace and truth, and in his miracles God is set forth to us as LOVE, in all His miracles. The raising of the dead, the feeding of the multitude, the stilling of the tempest, the healing of diseases all serve to illustrate...

2

A) The authority of Christ

Matt 28:18

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

3

B) The truth of His teaching

2 Cor 11:10

10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.

4

C) The love of God

Rom 5:8

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

When we consider the authority of Christ, the truth of His teaching, and the Love of God that He manifested to the world there can be only one conclusion, Jesus was the Christ and was truly, God incarnate.

John 1:1-4

5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. **4** In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

Christ was God on Earth and everything He did was a revelation of God to man, which is the point we have been making. Christ came to save sinners...

1 Tim 1:15 6

15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Paul emphasizes this point throughout his writings as we see in...

Rom 5:6 7

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Jesus came to save man, even though man had done nothing to deserve that free gift from God. Even when man had no relationship with God because of his sin, Christ died that man could be restored to his creator.

Titus 3:5-6 8

5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, **6** whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

So even though man did nothing to deserve the free gift of God, salvation, that doesn't mean he has nothing to do to receive it.

2 Cor 5:10 9

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The whole point of God sending Jesus to die for man, of Christ sending the comforter to His disciples to guide them into everything they would say and sending them out to preach the Gospel is so that man could know what he needs to know to be able to change how he lives his life. The deeds we do in this life, right here, right now, will determine whether or not we are judged to be in a right relationship with God.

10 1) What was it about this tree that made it so special that it was cursed

Notice that Jesus didn't try to find food on an oak or an elm, nor did He curse any of them. He looked at the fig tree, the one that is the source of food, for nourishment. The tree had the appearance of being a fruitful tree, but note again...

11 ***“It was not the season for figs”***

Do you think Jesus knew that it wasn't the season for the tree to even have fruit? Of course He did. Then, why the apparent disappointment, why the curse? The obvious answer is that He was using this tree to teach a valuable lesson to His disciples.

The tree in this analogy is man, specifically men that are apparently living their lives for God. That is what is seen in the fact that Jesus didn't go to a tree that isn't supposed to bear fruit, He went to the tree that is. 12

The leaves add to the deception of the tree. Now, please don't assume that I am saying that there was any intentional deception, there wasn't, this is after all just a

tree. But the deception was real, none the less. Christ went to the tree seeking fruit because the tree had the appearance of a tree that would have fruit. The point is that there are many men whose lives bear leaves, they have the appearance of bearing fruit, but there is no fruit. They want the world to think that there is fruit in their efforts, but there isn't.

John 15:1-6

13

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. **2** Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. **3** You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. **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. **6** If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

The analogy hasn't changed. The tree, the branch, is still man and it is man's responsibility to bear fruit, to do the deeds that the Word demands he do, that is what it means to bear fruit. Christ says that the criteria for bearing fruit is that the source of the fruit must be Him, His word, and man's commitment to being righteous in accordance to it. This is a vitally important point. Christ makes it clear that the fruit that man is to bear must be based on Him as the source. Fruit grows because of the nourishment that comes through the branch from the vine and the root system of the vine. If something happens to the root system or the vine then, the fruit that is produced, if any, is bad. Do you see the dynamic of this. In no way could Christ, who is the vine and the root system, ever be flawed. The nourishment that He gives in His word is perfect. It gives man everything man needs to produce good fruit. The only thing that can make bad fruit then, is when man corrupts the word, the nourishment, then the fruit of the efforts of man become corrupted and are not fit for righteousness.

2 Tim 2:19

14

19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

The point is that a branch that grows naturally from a grape vine can and will only produce that particular variety of grape. The Lord knows everyone that is producing the fruit of righteousness founded on His Word, the vine. Unfortunately there are many who think that they can graft whatever fruit they choose onto the vein and be OK. But when you graft an English walnut branch on to a black walnut trunk, you don't get black walnuts; the fruit you get is English walnuts. When man tries to graft his agendas and think so's onto the vine that is Christ, he doesn't get righteousness, he gets bad fruit. Good fruit is only that fruit that is produced by being born of the spirit through Jesus Christ. That is what we see in those that came to Christ claiming that they were servants of His in...

Matt 7:21-22

15

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Christ is very clear with what He says here. There are many people out there who are sincerely confident that they are doing the will of God, that they are following His word. But Christ tells them that they are acting without Law. They are following anything other than His Word, regardless of much of that Word they may incorporate into their actions. That is the point from earlier. You can try and graft a grapefruit onto a lemon tree to get more lemons or even lemon flavored grapefruit, but you will still only get grapefruits. People can try and combine The Word of God with whatever creed or set of tenets of man and they will only get the perversion of the Word and not the fruit of righteousness that the Word produces, regardless of their sincerity. I must admit that the idea of sincerity raises a question, at least in my mind. If someone is truly sincere about wanting to follow God's Word and be one of His children, why is it so difficult to follow the Word in its simplicity without trying to put his own spin on it?

There are so many who ignorantly follow the sign and know nothing of the substance. Look around at some of the religions that are out there and followed by so many. Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, even some of the so called community churches, so many don't ask their members to look into the Word to see for themselves what God has to say. In fact many of those will tell their members to don't bother to look at their Bibles, just ask and they will be told what it means. I have told this story before about the guy that I used to play basketball with at the Y in Visalia. He was a Baptist and one day he brought his "Pastor" with him. We had talks all the time about religion and afterwards, while we were all standing there talking, he asked what one of the major differences between the Church of Christ and the Baptist's was. I told him that the Bible teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation, his "pastor," said no it wasn't. I quoted Mark 16:15-16 to them and Mark, my buddy, looked at the "pastor" and said, "is that really what it says?" The answer was, we'll talk about it later," and they left. Mark didn't bring up religion again and when I asked him about it, he avoided any discussion. How sad that a deceptive agenda has so permeated into the fabric of some teaching that God's Word has been pushed aside and dismissed. They are wearing the leaves that might make them appear to be fruitful, but it's all just a deception.

The great majority of people who have any sort of religion at all, bear leaves, but they produce no fruit. Therein is a danger we all face. We must guard against living a deception, thinking that just because we bear the trappings we are right with God. One of the things that is seen throughout the scriptures is that the commandments of God are meant to help His people not only in their worship to Him but in their lives in this world. Attending services is important, it encourages others as well as encourages us, taking the Lord's Supper helps to remind us of all that Christ did for us in obedience to His Father, being kind and loving to others, especially those of the household of faith, helps us to live in harmony and in peace in a world that is full of discord and animosity. But we can do all of these things and if we aren't doing them for the right reason, we are just wearing the leaves of deception and will be burned up when Christ prunes the dead from His followers.

Remember our first point...

16 1) What was it about this tree that made it so special that it was cursed

The tree had the appearance of bearing fruit but had none. That's the danger.
The next point of discussion is...

17 2) How do we avoid the deception of leaves?

We are not constrained by the seasons or vagaries of harvest time. We are to bear fruit all the time. From the moment that we respond to the call of God through the Word, we begin, or at least should begin, to bear fruit. The example we set by beginning our commitment to be faithful in our obedience to the Word is seen by all. The changes we start making in the way we live is seen, or should be seen, by everyone who knew us before. That is what means to not just wearing the leaves of deception. Living the Word in everything we say and do is bearing fruit.

Paul addresses this idea of bearing fruit as well as a danger in bearing fruit in...

Rom 7:4-5

18

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. **5** For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

Fruit bearing is not restricted to just doing good, it also is seen in sin and bearing fruit for death. As we saw earlier in the passage from **Cor. 5:10**, we will be judged by the deeds we do in this life, whether for righteousness or for sin.

This raises an interesting thought. Consider the trees around us here in Oakdale. Some are there for no other purpose than to provide shade with their foliage, their leaves. I love the trees in the high country, the majestic pines, the stately redwoods, the shade they provide, the protection from the sun, and they don't drop leaves. Isn't it interesting that trees drop their leaves in winter when the shade and coolness aren't needed but grow them back in the summer when they are? But here is the impact of this lesson; in a fig tree, the fruit takes the precedence over the leaves. It really doesn't matter if a fig tree has leaves if it produces good fruit. Now I understand that for fruit trees the leaves are important to the production and protection of the fruit. This isn't a discussion of leaves and fruit, it's a discussion of recognizing what our Lord and Savior was trying to teach His disciples so long ago. Don't allow the leaves of deception to be all that we show. Bear the fruit of righteousness in the deeds of our lives for all the world to enjoy. In the life of a true Christian, someone who is truly following God's Word, fruit always takes precedence over profession. What I mean by that is this;

The true follower of God's fruit is not defined by their appearance, but rather their appearance is defined by their fruits.

Gal 5:22-24

19

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

God, through Paul, illustrates for us what the fruit is that we are expected to bear. He also sums up for us what we have been talking about in this lesson...

Gal 5:25

20

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

If are going to wear the leaves of living by the Spirit we need to produce the fruit of walking by the Spirit.