

Matthew ch 22 vs 18-46

Last week's text held within it the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, no longer is He seeking to remain silent concerning His identity, but the time has come as foretold by the prophet, for Him to be revealed to His people as their Messiah. Zech 9:9 says, "*Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.*" Here comes Jesus riding into town on a donkey's colt just as foretold by the prophet.

You say yeah but that's no big deal Jeff a lot of people probably rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, true, but how many people came riding into Jerusalem riding on a donkey on the exact date as foretold by Daniel the prophet hundreds of yrs in advance? and How many people came riding into Jerusalem on the exact day that was prophesied hundreds of yrs in advance with multitudes of people shouting at the top of their lungs from Psalm 118, a Messianic Psalm that was in reference to the exact day that Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem? and Had the elders and the chief priests done their home work they'd of known the exact day to be looking for the Messiah to come riding into Jerusalem. and The shouts of the people would've radically confirmed everything, and they could've received Jesus Christ as their King and Savior and He would've established His kingdom right then and their.

But they didn't receive Him; they rejected Him even as it was prophesied concerning that as well, as we'll read later this morning, "*the stone, which the builders rejected, became the chief cornerstone.*" and Because of their rejection of Jesus Christ God rejected them and grace was given over to the gentiles, so that you and I might be recipients of God's love and the salvation that's found in Jesus Christ Paul the apostle speaks expressly about this in Romans ch 10 and 11, lets look at it real quick together. (Look at ch 10 vs 19-21, then jump to vs 11 of ch 11 thru vs 22.)

In other words don't smile at the misfortune of Israel, because if God cut off the natural branches, don't think that you're something special, it's by grace that we stand, and the reason that God receives us is simply because we've received Jesus Christ and The only reason that God has rejected (for a season) the nation of Israel (not that there aren't Israelites who love Jesus Christ I've met some personally, God has His remnant that's what Paul was saying). But overall, is because as a nation overall they have rejected Jesus Christ But there will be a day, the bible is very clear when the age of the gentiles will close and God will again deal with the nation of Israel and they will see Jesus Christ for who He is in truth, the Son of God sent to suffer and die, and shed His blood for the sin of the world. Last week we seen Him revealed and rejected, we seen the cleansing of the temple with such profound application for you and me. Knowing that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and watching Jesus enter in and dispel and disperse all that was hindering the temple from operating as it was originally intended to.

How we need to be open to the Lords constant evaluation of our lives and His overturning of the tables in our hearts that we might be continually cleansed of all that clutters up our hearts and hinders us from “operating” as God would intend for us to. and We noted in conclusion some 4 characteristics of healthy body life for the corporate body of believers as seen in vs 13-16 of Matt ch 21. #1 That this is to be a house of prayer, #2 that this is to be a place where people are helped, that they can receive a meaningful and lasting work of God in their lives. #3 This is to be a place where power is released and the Holy Spirit is free to operate as He so chooses. and 4th and finally, this is to be a place where praise is expressed where we worship God freely and openly in Spirit and in truth. and After Jesus had rebuked the chief priests and the scribes for having a lower level of discernment than even the children, it says in vs 17 that He left them, and went and lodged in Bethany.

Vs 18-19

Now again remember that Matt’s gospel isn’t necessarily chronological, and with this event we find that he sticks to the main emphasis and basically telescopes the whole happening into 1 event as to where Mark tells us that this occurred over the period of 2 days. Mark tells us that this happened as Jesus was on His way to cleanse the temple, that He saw the fig tree at a distance having leaves and so He went up to it to see if He would find fruit and finding none He cursed the fig tree and the disciples heard it. Then we’re told that the next morning on their way into the city that when they saw they fig tree that it was withered and that it had dried up by the roots. But why did He do this, what was the point in it?

There are only 2 recorded miracles of Jesus that were destructive in nature, #1 the casting of the demons into the swine which in turn the swine ran down the hill side and drowned themselves. and #2 This event here, the cursing of the fig tree, but I would have you notice that neither one of them was aimed toward man, why? Because Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. But there are a couple of very profound and important lessons that we can learn from the actions here of our Lord. I see this as basically a parabolic action if you’ll allow me that term; He did this in order to warn both His disciples, the nation of Israel, and you and me today. We read in Likes Gospel ch 13 a parable that Jesus taught concerning the fig tree, turn with me quickly to Luke ch 13 and give your attention specifically to vs 6-9.

In the bible, the nation of Israel is often referred to as the fig tree, I would refer you to Jer 8:13, Hos 9:10 says this, *"I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season."* On down in vs 16 we read, *"Ephraim is stricken, Their root is dried up; They shall bear no fruit."* Jesus came to the fig tree seeking to find fruit and finding none He cursed it. and What made Him do this is the fact that upon looking at the tree from a distance, not getting to close to it, it gave the appearance of a healthy and fruitful tree. Here's how, it had leaves, you say gee Jeff what's so peculiar about that? Don't all trees bud leaves before the fruit is bore?

I have a couple of apple trees in my yard and you can always tell when they are getting ready to bear fruit because the leaves come in and there begins to be these little flower like buds on them that eventually turn to apples. But that's not the case with the fig tree, the fig tree strangely enough actually bears fruit before it brings forth leaves, so by the time leaves were able to be seen from a distance it was saying that the 1st fruits were already upon it. It was in reality falsely advertising fruit, or to put it another way, it was standing in hypocrisy. Giving the appearance of fruit from a distance, (standing there lush with leaves, looking healthy and vibrant) but upon close inspection there was none to be found.

So in essence Jesus was rebuking the tree and cursing the tree for its hypocrisy, how profound is that in that at the same time Jesus came to the typical fig tree, the nation of Israel. Who at a distance had the appearance of godliness, they had lots of leaves, they appeared so religious standing back and looking at them from afar. They had their temple worship, the traditions, the law of God, they had the religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, chief priests and elders, and the Sadducees. But when Jesus came to them looking for fruit, he found none, but rather He found hypocrisy and He said to them; *"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"*

It all looked real good from a distance, but upon close inspection, there was no fruit. and This was a solemn warning to the nation of Israel concerning what would happen to them, unless they repented. But we all know the story, they didn't repent and 40 yrs later Rome would destroy Israel and it would wither and die as a nation and remain without a national identity until 1948.

The application for the disciples and for you and me is quite obvious; God wants to produce fruit in the lives of His people. Jesus said *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain."* and In order for you to do that there's at least 3 things that are necessary in order for you to lead a fruitful life, turn to John ch 15 vs 1-8.

The 1st key is in vs 4, you must abide in Christ, there are 2 vital parts to your relationship with God, 1st of all there's God's initiative, and God is always faithful to do His part, He initiates the relationship. 2^{ndly}, there's human responsibility, and that's up to you as to whether or not you will be faithful on your end, and part of your responsibility is to abide in Christ, God won't force you to do that. Another way to understand that concept is "to remain united with Me" or "to live in fellowship/union with." You are to remain united, or unified with Christ, that means to be of the same heart and mind, going the same direction. Amos 3:3 asks the question, "*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*" That's a rhetorical question, it demands a no answer, 2 that are not agreed are not united, and you've heard the cliché, "United we stand, Divided we fall."

The same is true regarding your relationship with Christ, united with Him, abiding in Him you will stand, because He is able to make you stand. Divided from Him, no longer abiding in Him you will fall, and great will be that fall, and He will cut you off and cast you out as a branch that's been withered, to burn, that's what the bible says.

The 2nd principal (the 1st being abiding in Christ) is vs 7, His words abiding in you. Ps 119:9 and 11 "*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!*" In John 8:31 Jesus says this, "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*" and The 3rd principal needed for you to lead a fruitful life is found in Hebrews 10:25, it says this, "*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*" In the NASV it tells us in vs 19 that this fig tree was a "lone" fig tree, in other words it was off by itself. and with out other fig trees to cross-pollinate with, there was no way for it to bear fruit, no cross-pollination, no fruit, that's just the way it works. The same is true for you as a Christian today, no cross-pollination, no fruit.

Unfortunately I see this all the time, some people are "lone fig trees" and they get out there on there own, they are rarely, if ever in fellowship, there's no cross-pollination in their lives and as a result there's no fruit and eventually they just die off. They wither from the roots, and I would encourage you to allow the Lord to evaluate where you're at this morning, as He comes to inspect the tree of your life, does He find fruit? Or do you merely have the appearance of a healthy Christian experience, with all the leaves of right theology and spiritual vitality, and you have everybody fooled by your outward appearance, but as the Lord draws near to you, He finds no fruit. You've drawn near to Him with your mouth, and honored Him with your lips, but your heart is far from Him.

The summary of the lesson of the cursed fig tree is this, Jesus issues a warning concerning hypocrisy and the fact that He will not tolerate a religious façade, when in reality there is no personal loving relationship with Him. He is a fruit inspector and desires that His Father be glorified by the fruit in your life. and If there be no fruit, it's only evidence against you, that you don't abide in Him, and you need to repent, and get right with God. The bible refers to Jesus as the last Adam, the 1st Adam came to the fig tree not looking for fruit, but for leaves, to make an outward covering for Himself. The last Adam came to the fig tree, looking for fruit and finding only leaves, that which man used in order to try and cover his own sinful condition before God, He cursed it.

Only the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cover your sin before God, and He desires that you bear fruit. The fruit of holiness, which with out no one will see God, the fruit of righteousness and truth. The fruit of Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The fruit of, giving, the fruit of thanksgiving, and the fruit of our lips which is our praise to God. He's looking for those things in our lives, and He's looking closely to find that fruit and this is a warning concerning hypocrisy. Those who profess to know God (as Paul wrote to Titus) but in works they deny Him. Jesus rebuked that tree, and immediately it began to wither by the roots. Rev 3:19 Jesus said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.”* Let's move on.

Vs20-22

So we're encouraged to pray in faith, believing God for the things we ask, believing in advance Jesus says here, *“believing, you will receive.”* James said that when we ask of God that we are to *“ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* But what is so crucial to take notice of at this point (because so many people pull this scripture, ripped and bleeding out of its context) is that Jesus is speaking to His disciples. Because this at 1st appears to be a very broad promise, whatever I ask for in prayer if I just believe it I'll receive it!? So I think I'll ask for a new Ferrari or a million dollars or something. Wait a minute, if God allows you to have those things that's neat, but its not because you've laid hold of this scripture and God has honored that. To whom much is given the bible says much more will be required, the more you have the more accountable before God you are. This is not a license to ask for anything that your flesh desires, this is a word to increase the faith of His disciples.

In order to be a disciple, Jesus said you have to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Him. So you won't be asking things selfishly for yourself, but rather you'll be asking things that are in line with His heart and His desire, so that His will might be done on earth even as it is in heaven. James goes on to say in ch 4 that *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* So let's be careful not to pull God's word out of it's context, but rather let's make it our aim to rightly divide it and apply it accordingly to our lives. If you're asking God for things that are in accordance with His will ask confidently knowing that God wants to do that work, more than you desire to see it, God desires to do it.

Vs23

Notice that they couldn't deny the miracles, or the good things that He was doing, so instead they wanted to know by what authority it was that He was doing them. Because one thing was for certain and that was that they hadn't given it to Him, and they considered themselves (under God of course) the highest authorities of Israel. They were the chief priests, the elders, the Sanhedrin, those who governed Israel, who is it that gave you the authority to do these things?

Vs24-25

So Jesus says, hey, you remember that fella John the Baptist? Who was it that authorized his ministry, God, or man? (Finish vs)

Vs26

So all the people accredited John (and rightly so) saying that he was a prophet, sent from God, or authorized to speak to the people on God's behalf. Now that creates for these guys a real dilemma, because John bore witness over and over again as to Jesus being the Christ, that He was to prepare the way for the Messiah, and He regularly pointed Jesus out as the Messiah. He said (one day pointing to Jesus) "behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." and So if they say that John was truly a prophet, then they bear witness against themselves in discrediting Jesus. However if they say that John wasn't a prophet, they feared for their lives because all the people would stone them to death for purporting anything else.

Vs27

They bear witness against themselves, they knew, but they had too much pride to humble themselves and admit it. Now He gives them a parable that emphasizes His point.

Vs28-32

So Jesus really pounds them here, He couldn't have said something more offending even if He wanted to. The tax collectors and the harlots represent the reprobate sinners of society, the lowest of the low. They at 1st refused to serve God and be subjected to His will, but at the preaching of John they saw the depravity of their condition and repented of their sin and entered into the vineyard of service to God. and Yet here these guys, with their lip service put up a front as if they were serving God, but in reality, they were rebelling in there hearts.

Yet when they seen the wonderful works of God in drawing sinful man unto Himself and seeing them repent and give their lives to the Lord. Instead of falling on their faces and repenting of their self-righteous hypocrisy and saying God be merciful to me, a sinner. They stiffened up and were disgusted that anyone that would claim to be from God would associate with sinners like that. But Jesus said to them Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. He didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, those who are well have no need of a physician, but only those who are sick. But these guys failed to see their own wretched condition before God and as a result they were self-condemned.

Vs 33-37

Again this parable is pretty self-explanatory, the vineyard is the nation of Israel, the servants are the prophets, Jesus said in Matt 23:37 "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!*" and the Son, is standing there before them and again we'll see Jesus' prophesy concerning the way that they will treat Him.

Vs38-41

Again out of their own mouth's they condemn themselves.

Vs 42-43

A prophecy concerning the birth of the church and how the kingdom of God would be given over to the gentiles even as we read earlier in Romans. and I would refer you to 1st Peter ch 2 vs 7-10 as well. And also just so that you know vs 42 comes from the same Psalm that they sang from and shouted from when Jesus rode into Jerusalem the day before and now He's using it to bear witness against them.

Vs44

Jesus Christ is that chief cornerstone, and you can either be broken before Him, and allow Him to heal your hurts and use your life, or you can be ground by Him in judgment, either way you will deal with the Rock. He desires to be the rock of your salvation, but if you won't allow Him to be, then you will receive your just reward, and those who hate the light will be cast into outer darkness. Do you want grace and mercy or do you want justice? As for me, I'll take grace and I encourage you to do likewise.

Vs45-46

So when they finally got it, they still didn't repent but they grew harder against Jesus, and wanted to seize Him even then, but it's not quite time yet and so once again they did nothing.