

SESSION 1: THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Mark 11:13-14; Matthew 22:37; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Hebrews 11:6; John 17:21

QUESTIONS

1. How should our outward actions and behaviors connect to our inner feelings, thoughts, and motivations?
2. What does Jesus want to see when He draws near to us?
3. Is it possible to be in a continuous state of fruitfulness? If so, how?
4. What are some ways to foster the growth of spiritual fruit within your heart? What are some outward signs of this growth?
5. Why is self-examination of your behaviors and motivations necessary?
6. Besides what is mentioned in the video/script, what other kind of fruit is Jesus looking for in us?
7. Later in Mark 11, the lesson of the fig tree is further explained (Mark 11:20-24). Read these verses and discuss what Jesus is saying here.
 - a. How might this teaching connect to the idea that we are to have a living faith and be fruitful?
 - b. How has your understanding of "a living faith" evolved over time?
8. What have you learned about the kingdom of God from the parables of Jesus?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

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In the Gospels, we find 3 parables that Jesus told about a fig tree, but we also find what scholars call an “acted parable” – where Jesus is teaching us something through His actions AND words.

We can read of an actual encounter Jesus had with a fig tree that provides some important insight for us today.

In the 11th chapter of Mark, we can read about Jesus’s journey from Bethany to Jerusalem, where Jesus stopped along the way because He was hungry, and then it states, *“[and] seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’”*

At first, this seems rather harsh. From a human point of view, why would Jesus curse this tree and cause it to die, especially since it wasn’t even the season for figs? Let’s explore this parable more deeply.

Jesus wanted to provide an image of the people of Israel at that time, who were known to be a very religious people. For the most part, they observed the commandments and the Law of Moses, but wanted to make sure that everyone noticed it. Coming closer to them, Jesus could see that something was missing in their hearts. While they appeared to be faithful, they didn’t possess a living faith and a true love for God, which caused them to reject Jesus as the Messiah.

You see, the leaves of the fig tree represent what others can see, such as our outward behavior. We might “look the part” of faithful people, going to church on Sundays and joining a small group on the mid-week. Maybe we’re even dressed nicely when we go to church; we smile and greet everyone, and say “nice to see you.” Maybe we sing in the choir, clean the church, and appear to be serving God in everything we do. Just like the leaves on the fig tree, it all looks nice.

But when Jesus comes closer to us, what does He see in our hearts? Is there some fruit there? Can He see the fruit of faith? (Hebrews 11:6) And not just an outward display of faith in God, or calling upon Him only in times of difficulty. NO! Jesus wants to see a living faith and a true love for Him that drives our behavior. Beneath the leaves, He wants to find the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in us and transforming us to become like Him. He wants to see our faith in Jesus as the Son of the Living God, the One who laid down His life for us,

the Risen One, and the One who came to bring salvation for you, and me, and all of mankind. He’s looking for a faith that willingly professes that Jesus Christ is our Savior, who grants us eternal life. When we allow such a living faith to drive our behavior, then THIS is the reason we go to church, and is our purpose in being New Apostolic. We long to be with Him, for all eternity!

But faith is not the only fruit that Jesus would like to see in our hearts. He’s also looking for love (Matthew 22:37) – true love for the Lord Jesus. This too reveals itself in our desire to serve and bring our offerings. We don’t serve God for our own interests, expecting lots of blessings. Rather, we serve the Lord because we love Him. We commit ourselves to His work of salvation, and bring our offerings because we rejoice in Him and want to help Him.

He’s also looking for the fruit of oneness (John 17:21). This is more than simply coming to church, smiling and greeting others. An important aspect of Godly oneness reveals itself when we too suffer and ache from seeing division in the congregation. In such situations, we desperately want to contribute to the unity of God’s people by examining what we can give – or give up – to promote oneness.

These are some of the fruits that Jesus would like to see in us. Of course, both leaves and fruit are necessary; the fig tree cannot have fruit without leaves. Similarly, the content of our heart needs to match our behavior and vice versa.

So, in the case of this “acted parable” that Jesus has with the fig tree, it helps us understand what He is looking for in us, as His bride, when He comes again. You see, for Jesus, there is no such thing as a season of faith, a season of love, or a season of oneness. Jesus expects to see the fruit of faith, love, and oneness ALL the time. That’s the fruit He wants to find in our hearts everyday until the day He returns (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17).

There are many other parables that Jesus used which we can read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I encourage you to explore these as well, on your journey of becoming more like Jesus.