

# Fruit not just leaves

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Matthew 21, as Bo said, from verse 18, and we'll be reading to the end of the chapter. In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry.

! And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it, and found nothing on it, but only leaves. And he said to it, May no fruit ever come from you again. And the fig tree withered at once.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither at once? And Jesus answered them, Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen.

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith. And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority are you doing these things?

And who gave you this authority? Jesus answered them, I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man? And they discussed it among themselves, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say to us, Why then did you not believe him?

But if we say from man, we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know. And he said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

What do you think? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And he answered, I will not. But afterward he changed his mind and went.

And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, I will, sir, but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said the first.

Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him.

[ 2 : 2 6 ] But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him. Here another parable.

There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country.

When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did the same to them. Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

[ 3 : 2 6 ] When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they

held him to be a prophet.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Dave. If you're visiting, I'm the pastor here. A warm welcome to you. Well, let's pray as we come to God's word. Amen. Father, I ask that your word might break down wrong thinking in our minds and in our hearts, and help us trust you in that, that you want to help us live and thrive.

[ 4 : 58 ] Lord, we need your spirit's power to understand your word and what you're saying to us, and to have that spiritual discernment.

So I ask for it now in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this miracle of the cursing the fig tree, it's bizarre, isn't it?

Like, why Jesus would do it in the first place, like, is he just hangry? It's just, does he just, it's bizarre that he does it in the first place.

And then Matthew wastes ink and precious parchment to record this for us and our instruction, rather than all these other miracles he just sums up.

Like, oh, yeah, and Jesus killed many. Like, why do we need to listen to this cursing of the fig tree? If you're living in the same broken world that I am, most weeks we're just trying to keep our head above water.

[ 6 : 03 ] Wouldn't your time be better spent listening to a podcast about financial planning or parenting or look up the footy scores or something? A fig tree, like, who cares?

Like, why should you and I care about this? Well, let me ask a question. Obviously, I do think you should care. Please don't look up the footy scores.

But let me ask a question, and I don't want you to answer it too quick in your mind. Since God will only accept and is only pleased with fruit-producing people, as God looks at your life, will he find fruit?

Or just green leaves? Now, don't answer that too quickly, please. There's some in this room you're going to have confidence of many years of serving God, and others in this room you're going to feel like God could never find anything good in you.

Don't answer the question too quickly. We need to listen to this passage first. We need to know what the fruit is. What is the fruit that God wants?

[ 7 : 21 ] I've been asking myself that lately. Every now and then I'm just like, am I pleasing you, God? One of the things I'm learning going through Matthew this time is that the religious leaders didn't simply attack what Jesus came to build.

They are resisting him. But Jesus is on the offensive. He came to destroy something as well as build something.

Something insidious and deadly. He's condemning a counterfeit, a fake way of living for God, a fake love for God.

People who had false assurance, represented by these chief priests and rulers. Our passage today ends with the pronouncement in verse 43.

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. This section is within a bigger section that ends in chapter 23 with Jesus pronouncing judgments, woes on these leaders.

[ 8 : 43 ] He's come to destroy something. He's confronting something. Now he's not condemning Jews. This is not anti-Semitism. I need to say this given our current social environment.

Jesus was a Jew. The apostles were Jews. The blind and lame who came to Jesus were Jews. The children who worship him are Jews. He's come to attack a counterfeit way of expressing love for God.

So how do we know if we here today, as a church, if we're truly listening to God's voice and obeying him? How do we know? Because these leaders, they know their Old Testament scriptures.

They could recite it to you better than any of us in this room, except for maybe Don. They know their scriptures. They could probably enter in a debate and we'd be intimidated.

The DNA of this counterfeit religious type is, I think, trying to sum it up, Jesus uses one phrase repeatedly in Matthew's Gospel, and that's hypocrite.

[ 10 : 01 ] Now, all of us do not live up to God's ideals. I do not live up to God's ideals.

That's not hypocrisy. If our message is, I'm a sinner and I need a great saviour, that's not hypocrisy. Hypocrite is a word for a mask that an actor would wear.

It's a performance for people to see and applaud. But this section, I think we see how focused these leaders are on people and their praise.

We see it in this section as well. It starts and finishes with them. They're fearing the crowds. Their identity depends on the recognition of people.

So, like this fig tree bearing green leaves, there can be so much religious activity going on, but it's just making a show.

[11:03] It's a performance for people to see it. But as you look closer, as Jesus gets closer, there's no fruit at all. I was once at this trampoline park.

You know where everyone breaks their legs and things, but a trampoline park. And we were doing flips and stuff. Well, some people were. I was going to try and do a flip. And I was about to go.

And then I realized at the last moment, no one's watching. And I stopped. It was just this weird moment in my life where I'm like, why did I stop? Like, why didn't I just flip?

Or try to flip and probably land on my head. But why didn't I do it for the love of the thing itself? It was just this weird moment of introspection. But we know that feeling, right?

We can do all this thing just for people to see. There can be lots of religious activity. But if it's just for people to see, it's making a show of being alive when there is zero fruit.

[12:13] So as we, those of us who have grown up in the church and heard the Gospels many times, we've got a bit of a danger when we hear about the chief priests and the Pharisees.

When we hear these enemies of Jesus, it's like we're watching a performance and we all know now's the time to boo, hiss. Here's the enemy. They're not just characters like, oh, there's the problem out there.

I think so much attention is given to these guys because we need to look at the hypocrisy within ourselves. Our own tendency to do things just for people's sight and not for God.

So what fruit is God looking for? If you have your Bibles open, we've got a lot to go through today. So verse 23. What fruit is God looking for?

I want to come back to verses 18 to 22 at the end. So we're not skipping it. But verse 23 to 27. These leaders, they hold a legitimate office from God.

[13:24] They're responsible for correct teaching and correct religious observance. They sit on Moses' seat, Jesus says. So when they ask, by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?

In one sense, it's a legitimate question. It's their role to preserve true religion, to lead the way. But the context and Matthew's gospel overall make it really clear that their intentions aren't pure.

They know where Jesus thinks he's getting his authority from. The day before, he's ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey, declaring himself king.

He's gone into the temple and cleared out the outer court in the temple as if it's his own house. He's done miracles inside the temple.

He's received praise from children, redirecting praise from God to himself in the temple. And he's now teaching in the temple.

[14:28] There's no doubt about where he thinks he gets his authority from. But their question is saying, where's your authority from? Because it sure ain't from us.

We are God's appointed authority. We are God's authority. They're confronting him. But Jesus' response, I first thought he's kind of ducking and weaving like a boxer.

I don't think he is. I think that was a wrong assumption. He's not avoiding. I think he's answering their question with his question. He's not avoiding their question.

He's not like a school kid going, I'll tell you my secret if you tell me your secret. His question is turning the tables on them. His question is going to end up exposing why God is kicking them out of authority.

He's not on the defense. He's on the offense. Where did John the Baptist come from? Where does his authority come from?

[15:34] Heaven or from man? The highest office in the Old Testament was not priest. God ruled his people by prophet.

Prophet is the highest office. He rules by his word. He sends prophet after prophet. And he sent John. And they rejected John's message of repentance and forgiveness of sin.

They had no need of repentance, they thought. Jesus has exposed their problem. Even while implicitly answering their claim, like, John is from heaven and I've got the same source.

So what fruit is God looking for? Despite these religious people's green leaves, they did not listen. They didn't listen to God's prophet, his messenger. They weren't convicted to their heart by his voice.

[ 16 : 51 ] You can know the Bible really, really well and not be listening. And Jesus keeps pressing in on them.

He keeps exposing their problem. And he does it in a very surprising way, doesn't he? Like, if you want to take someone down in a debate, don't you find impressive, like, logical arguments? Someone who just, on the spot, can just bring an argument together and great rhetoric, great knowledge, attacks your point and tears someone down.

He uses stories. It's, it's, the weapon he uses is parables, stories. I love that because I think it just shows the theme through scripture.

God loves to work through what the world counts as of weak. He uses these little children's stories to bring them down. someone described the power of parables like if you're running 10 minutes late for a school musical you're running late you it's a bit dark outside you you think you're entering the back door so that you can just sneak in the back and and be in the audience watching the story but to your horror you walk in on stage and the lights are on you and you're the one being exposed that's the power of these stories you think you're just listening to this harmless story but then you find yourself the lights are on you you're drawn in in both of these parables Jesus draws a response from maybe from the crowds but maybe even from the chief priests themselves it's not super clear so here here's the first story what do you think a man had two sons and he went to the first and said son go and work in the vineyard today and he answered i will not but afterward he changed his mind and went and he went to the other son and said the same and he answered i go sir but did not go which of the two did the will of his father now we who have grown up in the west we love our personal freedom and we treat our parents poorly all the time nah i'm not doing that it's but i think if you if you've grown up in a traditional culture like a family where a patriarch matriarch is the center of the family your identity and your will for the day and agenda is is revolves around them you you get the offense here like to to to just go i will not it is so disrespectful whereas the second son is respectful i will sir i will but who does the will of his father who listened who is the father pleased with the disrespectful son who repents that's who the father is pleased with not this not making a show of being respectful to god now repentance means a change of mind which which we got in the story itself it changed his mind it's a change of intention it involves conviction of doing wrong and then changing so i don't think we should see this disrespectful son begrudgingly going and doing the will but changing wanting to do the father's will i remember this time as a teenager my parents are going to call me after this illustration later today but my parents needed to go out and um they were expecting someone to drop something off i think at our house and they told me just stay home um this is really important that uh we told them that you'll be home but as soon as they left i got on my push bike and rode as fast as i could to mackers which like it was only 10 minutes away i was pretty quick and as i waited across the main street who should be coming in the car but my parents i broke their trust pretty badly that day

[ 21 : 55 ] because to their face i was obedient i was respectful but in my heart i was preparing to go to mackers that's how god feels towards some of this so much religion going on who cares it's just green leaves he actually wants us to listen Jesus drives the point home when he says truly he says this is something you gotta hear you base your life on this truly i say to you the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of god before you it might be able to translate that and you do not go in you outwardly appear good you're not in the way of righteousness John showed you the way of righteousness you were too good to need forgiveness you you don't need to repent but hear me it's the disrespectful sons of the world who god is pleased with when they listen and receive forgiveness and change their mind and want to live for him repentance is the fruit god wants not a show actual conviction of sin is the fruit of listening to him he drives the point home for these chief priests he's like you saw the changed lives of these tax collectors this is the scum of society i don't know who you think the scum are maybe the CEO's making 300 million dollars i'm not sure who you picture but the scum come in ahead of you you saw their changed lives only god could have brought that about and you still didn't listen to John in their goodness in their sense of superiority to others they rejected John's message of god's free grace his forgiveness i wonder who the kinds of people are you think god can't love as much as you it's going to be different for all of us i won't get your response by the way just have a think about it but whenever we think like that it can only come

from a belief that i'm offering god something more than them i'm superior we've got to grow in this message of grace if we actually hear the message of grace i'm the worst person i know because i know my own thoughts i don't know your thoughts i know mine and here's the good news such hopeful news of this parable is god cares where you end up some of some of you might some of us have these huge sins in our past that you think god can never forgive you he can he cares where you end up the past grace means the past i've got to be careful i'm just going to go for it

and correct me later but it doesn't matter it's where you end up he has the power to change it's the disrespectful sons of the world who hear god's voice and are convicted and repent they're the ones god's pleased with that's the fruit he's looking for a broken a broken heart is the kind of worship he wants psalm 51 tells us jesus keeps going he's on the offensive he tells another story from verse 33 now he's he's already mentioned vineyard and he sticks with that theme he's not just plucking this out of nowhere vineyard was hugely significant to describe israel let me read i should have had a bookmark here but isaiah 5 my beloved speaking of the lord my beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill he dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines he built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it and he looked for it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes for the vineyard of the lord of hosts is the house of israel and the men of judah are his pleasant planting and he looked for justice but behold bloodshed for righteousness but behold an outcry these hearers would have known what jesus was saying the purpose of israel of god creating israel was to create a holy nation godly lives the owner of the vineyard creates it himself he owns it it's a gift he does everything for it it's pure gift he leases it out to tenants who should be paying the rent of giving the fruit in its season the master is owed it but they beat kill stone the servants sent to it the prophets sent and this story draws the hearers to pronounce their own judgment what will the master of the vineyard do to such tenants he will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their season i think there's three things we learn from this parable jesus is answering the original question of his authority where's your authority come from as you know australia expelled the iranian ambassador recently now how you treat an ambassador is how you treat the supreme leader but jesus is inferring a world of difference for himself when the vineyard owner sends his son he's the he is the owner he he is the heir it's he's not just an ambassador he's the owner that's his authority so he is not holding his punches he's he's he's saying

his authority the second thing i think we learn from this parable is something of the fundamental sin of the religious leaders why they don't like to listen they're tenants they forgot it's all gift and god is owed everything they have is owing to god and but when they see the son coming come let's kill him and he'll be ours they want to be the owners they're refusing to be tenants they hate anyone who reminds them that they belong to god everything is gift pure gift from him and everything we have is for him and so they killed the prophets every time they bring that message every human heart even religious hearts naturally wants to forget that all is gift and all is owed to god and i think the third thing and the most surprising thing we learn from this parable is the heart of the master after sending many servants whom they beat and kill and more servants whom they beat and kill this owner has the law on his side he should have sent soldiers that's that's what he should have done i don't know if you've seen seven news the spotlight interview it's there's this gripping interview of a father denny he comes face to face with samuel who got drunk and high and crashed his car killing his three kids and another child i don't know if you've seen it but it is it is a moving story of forgiveness i'll go look it up but denny's asked about justice for samuel and denny's response says if it was up to me i'll bring him out of prison tomorrow justice is to have my kids back i found that quite moving because no amount you can't pay it back it's it's such a big sin you can't pay it back and yet he's chosen to forgive and apparently he talks on the phone with samuel from prison on a weekly basis he's visited sam's parents he says he's gonna have sam over for a barbecue when he gets out of prison like you gotta watch it for yourself and see it's incomprehensible i'm struggling to believe he's fully forgiven him but it's it just doesn't it's incomprehensible his forgiveness this father in this parable is more incomprehensible than that who would send his son knowing the danger who would do that if he just wants the rent send soldiers he wants he wants the tenants back they will respect my son he wants the relationship i think it's this little little picture god's love for rebellious people is incomprehensible!

that he would send his son knowing he would be thrown out of the vineyard and killed in verses 42 to 46 jesus presses the implications of all this he changes metaphors from vineyard to building

quoting psalm 118 now it's not so abrupt a picture if we remember they were in the temple this isn't quite a temple we're never going to call it a temple but they're in the temple their identity as a people of god was in these beautiful stones around them the centre of their life was bound up here the psalm the picture is the builders are looking for stones to build and they find this one it's ugly it's useless and they chuck it in the rubbish piles it's worthless and it's that stone that the whole building ends up depending on now the original context is

Israel is that stone and Jesus is saying I'm that stone he's building a whole new people on himself therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits when Jesus curses the fig tree it's a metaphor for Israel eagles in America apparently are protected by law because eagles represent the nation the government the people I heard a comedian joke that an eagle made a nest in his backyard and he looked at it from his deck and he could do nothing about it he's not allowed to do a thing it's like the eagle was just looking at him going this is my land that's that's the metaphor that's the kind of significance this fig tree had [ 36 : 27 ] Jesus is saying may no fruit ever come from you again this is the end of an era of salvation history centred on this temple building now how is he going to replace it here's the wonder of it he's not going to turn the crowds against the religious leaders he had the crowds in his pocket he could have easily done that he creates it by being rejected himself by taking the curse himself he only cursed a tree he didn't curse them in that moment he's actually giving them a warning still it's a loving warning he takes the curse Jesus isn't a strong saviour who welcomes the morally strong and the morally religiously superior he welcomes the tax collectors and the prostitutes that's the kingdom he wants he wants it full of prostitutes he wants it full of people who are cut to the heart and look at his son who was rejected and go this was the

Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes this is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it that's the temple he's building that's the kingdom he's building repentant people who just marvel that he would take the curse for you for your lack of fruit and my lack of fruit the fruit the father is pleased with is listening to his son to the point of being convicted in our hearts of having no fruit to offer accepting the forgiveness and marveling that you are in the people of God simply by faith I want to return and finish in that second lesson of the fig tree in verses 20 to 22

Jesus says truly I say to you he's talking to the disciples if you have faith and do not doubt you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree but even if you say to this mountain be taken up and thrown into the sea it will happen and whatever you ask in prayer you will receive if you have faith now I think we're pretty good in this church I don't suspect we're tempted to go okay if I pray for a million dollars and I truly believe it I'll get it that is now some churches are saying that kind of message and it's it's wretched now I don't think I'm not suspecting we're in danger of that I kind of don't like how much Jesus is promising us here I feel a bit uncomfortable I don't know about you you can move a mountain this is not the power of positive thinking and it's not saying you need to just work yourself up

I'm going to believe against what I don't actually believe it's not saying that there are massive mountains that are impossible for me to move on my own I can't produce fruit on my own like the hypocrisy in my heart still where I want people's applause rather than serving people that is a mountain I can't actually change I don't think I can change my own heart or when you're feeling powerless to change knowing you sinned this week the same you did last week and for months and months and you think you would never change it is a mountain you can't produce fruit on your own or we're raising money for missionaries do we really think money on its own is going to make any headway in people being convicted of their sin and trusting in a place that is totally hostile to God that is a mountain! I think we absolutely we must believe this promise I don't think it's an option if you want to produce obedience to God in your life you have to believe this promise we have no power but when we look to Jesus if we want to produce good fruit that's pleasing to God if we look to him he's saying you have every divine present power not to be victorious like the world counts victory this is the rejected stone remember he's in the line of the suffering prophets expect God to work through weakness and pain but we need to be assured when we look to him we we have divine power for real change to actually produce fruit he's pleased with and that's the kind of fruit he loves praying when we say in the name of

[ 42 : 52 ] Jesus it's not just this sincerely add on we're saying we're helpless God but we're dependent on you in the name of Jesus and we have present power now may not be in our timing but we must believe this it's a wonderful promise he will produce the fruit that's the kind of fruit he

wants listening to his word repentance marvelling at his son and prayerful dependence on him so can I finish with the question as God looks at our church when God looks at your life is he is he just going to find green leaves or is he going to find fruit that he's really pleased with look to

Jesus and the father will be pleased let's pray our father thank you that we can call you father thank you for your incomprehensible love that despite our hard hearts that refuse to be tenants knowing that all our life is from you you sent your son knowing we would reject him and reject you that you did it in love to win us back lord my words have no power to reach into our hearts but I know your word does have power I pray that you would move us to marvel fresh that you would send your son and

I pray that especially for those who feel helpless at the moment and guilt ridden and shameful lord I pray that your words of grace that the tax collectors and sinners are the ones you're pleased with lord please speak into their hearts lord pray for all of us that you would help us to depend entirely on Jesus to please you not on put