

A Promising Sight ends in a Disappointing Discovery

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[0 : 00] Let's begin our worship now, beginning first of all today by singing to God's praise from Psalm 105. Psalm 105, that's in the Scottish Psalter version. The page number is 374.

We're singing verses 1 to 6. Give thanks to God, call on his name to men his deeds make known. Sing ye to him, sing psalms, proclaim his wondrous works, each one. See that ye in his holy name to glory do accord, and let the heart of everyone rejoice that seeks the Lord. If you're able to stand, please stand. We'll sing verses 1 to 6.

Give thanks to God, call on his name.

Sing ye to him, sing psalms, proclaim his wondrous works, each one.

[1 : 14] See that ye in his holy name to glory do accord, And let the heart of everyone rejoice that seeks the Lord.

The Lord almighty and his strength with steadfast hearts seek ye.

His blessed and his gracious face seek ye continually.

Think on the works that he hath done, which admiration breathe.

His wonders and the judgments of which from his mouth proceed.

[2 : 54] For ye that are of Abraham's race, his servant will approve.

And he that is of Jacob's children, whom he chose for his own.

Let us join again now briefly in prayer. We're going to pray particularly for the children and the young folks. Lord, our God, we thank you that these words you have given us to sing, That we have sung in your praise, do remind us again of the many benefits we receive from you.

And among the many benefits we receive, Lord, we place so high the benefit of the gospel. The benefit of that teaching we have in your word that comes to instruct our mind of whatever age we're at, In regard to God and his ways, in regard to ourselves and our need.

We pray today, Lord, for our young people. We pray for the younger ones. We pray for the Sunday school. We pray for the creche. We pray for the youth fellowship.

[4 : 20] We pray for the Bible class. We pray for our young folks, Lord, of all ages. And we pray that you would bless them today, whether here or not. We crave your blessing for them.

And we ask, Lord, again, that you would bless your word to them. And make them today, O Lord, to think upon those things that are taught. So that they may receive them into their hearts.

That they may live by them. That they may glorify your great name. And live in such a way as seeks to love you with all their heart and with all their soul. Bless them then, we pray today.

Bless their teachers as well. Bless those who look after them in creche and also in the tweenies.

We pray that you would bless them. And bless the Sunday school teachers and the Bible class teachers themselves.

Be with them, Lord, we pray. As they come to the end of this current term, we give thanks for their contribution. We give thanks for the encouragement it gives us as a congregation to see so many of them.

[5 : 18] And to see the dedication of those who give of their time and of their talents to teach the young folk. Bless them, we pray. And be with us today as we further wait upon you now.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Hands up. How many would like a Roscoe story today? Oh, how many of the older ones would like a Roscoe story today?

Wow, what a popular lad he is. Okay, well, I've got a Roscoe story for you today. I haven't had one for quite a long time. Nothing much has happened other than what I've been telling you previously in Roscoe stories.

But I've got another one for you today. About two weeks ago, guess what? He managed to escape again. And I'll tell you a bit about the background of it. I had a Zoom meeting with some other ministers throughout the country that were involved in training.

Training ministers such as Scott, a trainee minister. So we had a meeting on Zoom. And I said quickly to Donna, when I was going up to the meeting, quickly said to her, I'm going to start a Zoom meeting.

[6 : 24] I'll be there for a wee while. Roscoe's in the garage. So like I said, I'd rushed off to the meeting. What I meant was Roscoe's in the garage and the door is open. So I can get in and out the back garden.

Be safe there. The side gates were closed. Donna had to go out. Her car was in the back. And she thought that I'd said he was in the cage. So off she went with the car.

Left the gates open. She was only going to be away a few minutes. And she came back. Closed the gates. Thinking Roscoe was either with me or in the cage. Got a chair out. Sat out in the nice sunshine.

And I was busy at the Zoom meeting. And then a phone call came through. And I picked up the phone so as not to disturb the meeting. And a lovely young lady said, hello, this is the vet. Are you missing a dog? I said, I don't think so, but let me go and check. So I went downstairs quickly, rushed off, opened the back door.

[7 : 20] And there's Donna sunning herself in the sun, oblivious to any emergencies. And I said, where's the dog? She said, is he not with you? No, I said, he's not. The vet have just phoned.

You've got to go and pick him up because they've still got a meeting. So off she went. And once she got to the vet, there was Roscoe. And the girls in the vet's office there in the vet's reception area, absolutely enthralled with him.

They said, oh, he's just so lovely. And saying that he'd just been wagging his tail all the time since he arrived. Anyway, he got back home. So what's the message in Roscoe's story today?

Well, it's about communication. Communication is important. Speaking and listening, in other words. When I rushed off to my meeting, I should have taken a bit more time to explain to Donna where Roscoe actually was.

And I'll maybe get around for it afterwards, but she should have taken a wee bit more time to ask more details as to where he was. So the communication works both ways. And if it's not the way it should be, if it's not really detailed enough, then something's going to go wrong.

[8 : 29] Now, that's important for you yourselves as young people. When you come to speak to God, take time in telling God what you see your needs to be, asking for his forgiveness, asking for his guidance, asking for his help.

And you can bring anything to God that you feel you need to have help with. God will always listen to our prayers. And we don't need to be afraid that somehow it's just too trivial or not important enough.

God knows everything about us already, but he wants us to come and tell us what's on our heart.

And to do that, we need to take time. Sometimes we do have to rush about, but we need to try at all times, as far as possible, make time to speak with God, to pray to God, to set out your heart before the Lord.

That's what I didn't do. And that's why Roscoe escaped. But on the other hand, you have to make time as well to listen to God. How do we listen to God? Well, you listen to God, especially when you read his word, when you hear his word preached.

That is God speaking to you and to the older ones as well. Every time we come to the Bible, we're coming to the word of God. We call it the word of God because that's what it is.

[9 : 49] And we should think every time I come to read my Bible, I'm hearing God's voice because this is God's word. And I need to prepare to listen to it properly.

And to listen carefully, to listen in such a way as seize this message that God has for me as so important. So there you go, Roscoe still teaching us things.

And today I want you to think about speaking to God, taking time to pray, and listening to God, taking time to read your Bible, to listen to what he's saying there, and then try and apply that in your own lives as well.

Okay, so may God bless these thoughts to us. Let's say the Lord's Prayer now together. Amen.

We're going to sing again to God's praise this time. We're singing Psalm 61. Psalm number 61. That's in the Sing Psalms version on page 78. We're going to sing verses 1 to 5.

[11:19] O hear my urgent cry, my God, and listen to my plea. From earth's remotest bounds I call when my heart faints in me. O God, conduct me to the rock that's higher far than I.

For you're my refuge from the foe, my tower of strength on high. Here is the psalmist speaking to God and taking time to ask God for these important things that he's asking in prayer.

So, we'll sing verses 1 to 5 to his praise. O hear my urgent cry, my God, and listen to my plea. From earth's remotest bounds I call when my heart faints in me.

O God, conduct me to the rock that's higher far than I.

[12:45] For you're my refuge from the foe, my tower of strength on high.

O let me dwell within your tent, forever there to live.

O for the shelter of your wings, the refuge which they give.

For you have heard my verse, O God.

And you have given me the heritage of those who fear.

[14:09] Your name continually. Let's turn now to read God's Word.

Reading today is from Mark's Gospel. Gospel according to Mark and chapter 11. Reading from the beginning down as far as verse 26.

Matthew 11, from Mark 11 at the beginning. Now they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives.

Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, Why are you doing this? Say, The Lord has need of it, and will send it back here immediately. And they went away and found a colt tied at the door outside in the street, and they untied it.

[15:17] And some of those standing there said to them, What are you doing, untying the colt?

And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.

And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before, and those who followed, were shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple. And when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it.

When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to them, He said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again.

[16:23] And his disciples heard it. And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered the temple, and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the money changers, and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them, and saying to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers. And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and were seeking a way to destroy him. For they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

And when evening was come, they went out of the city. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

And Jesus answered them, Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, Whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, And does not doubt in his heart, But believes that what he says will come to pass, It will be done for him.

[17:35] Therefore I tell you, Whatever you ask in prayer, Believe that you have received it, And it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, Forgive, If you have anything against anyone, So that your Father, Who is in heaven, Your Father also, Who is in heaven, May forgive you your trespasses.

Amen. May God follow with this blessing our reading of his word. Let's again call upon his name in prayer. Lord, our gracious God, We thank you for the privilege of being gathered here today in your name.

The privilege of having your word open before us. The privilege of being able to speak to you in prayer, And call upon you for your blessing. We have so many privileges, O Lord, In the course of life, And we acknowledge, That today we experience one of the greatest you give us.

The privilege of the gospel, And our relationship with the gospel, And with you through it. We thank you, Lord, Today for every prospect of your blessing. You promise your blessing to your people, As they gather together in your name.

You tell us that even where two or three are gathered together, In your name you are there in the midst. And we bless you, O Lord, Today that we know your blessing, That we have known your blessing in the past.

[18 : 54] And we pray that from that, Lord, We may confidently ask that your blessing will be with us today. That you would take up your word and show us, Lord, Its meaning, Its importance, Its relevance to our own lives.

We ask, Gracious one, That your blessing may truly give us the desire to hold forth your word, As the word of life, Before the world in which we live. We thank you, Lord, For every opportunity, You give us, To speak of you, To the people that surround us.

And we thank you, Thank you especially, That you have promised that the witness of your people will not be in vain. And today we pray that you would further prepare our hearts, Prepare our minds, Give us, We pray, That desire inwardly to make Christ known to the people around us.

We ask that we may know this individually for ourselves. Lord, Help us, Help us, Help us, Help us, Christ in our manner of life to the world in which you have placed us. Be merciful to us, Lord, we pray as a generation. Once again, we bring before you the needs of our day. And while we cannot, Lord, adequately describe them before you, we thank you that you know them in detail and in perfection.

And we bring before you especially, Lord, our concern over the way in which so many have turned from your ways, the way in which so many have taken up teaching and opinions and ideologies that are in conflict with your word, in conflict with the gospel. And we know, Lord, that this has come to infiltrate our schools, our places of education, so many other avenues in our society, Lord, that people frequent. We ask, O God, that you would turn us into your ways, that we may know the breath and the spirit of revival and of power, coming to empower ourselves as a people, first of all, and spreading out, Lord, into our districts and communities. We ask that your blessing today will be with those who face challenges in the education of their children, challenges in the teaching of children. We thank you for all, Lord, who teach in our schools that fear your name. We thank you for all parents who desire to bring up their children in the ways of the Lord. We ask that you bless them in their homes, bless them in the testimony they bear to their children. Bless our teachers, bless our schools. Lord, our God, we pray that through all of these challenges and challenging times, we may know the guidance of your spirit, the blessing of your word in our lives. We ask your blessing for our young people themselves. And we ask that you would be with them today, Lord, those of them here in church, those of them who are not able to be here, those of them who attend Sunday school, tweenies, the other older age groups and youth fellowship and Bible class. Be with them all, we pray.

[22 : 09] Encourage our hearts, Lord, we pray, and enable us today to further contribute to your cause in whatever way we can. We thank you for the support that we receive, Lord, from your people here, as those who preach the gospel, as those who are in the leadership of the congregation as elders and as deacons. We thank you for the many prayers that are set up for us, Lord, from day to day.

We pray that you would hear us as we cry to you for your blessing further to be evident among us. We pray today, Lord, for your people not only here but throughout the world. Remember those who face real difficulty and trauma today, those who are seeking to recover from natural disasters, from disease, from poverty, from war, from conflict, from persecution, from many things, Lord, that blight human lives throughout the world.

O gracious one, have mercy upon us, we pray, as a generation. Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from darkness, from the powers of darkness, from the ways in which the evil one seeks to carry people's minds away from the gospel and persuade them that alternatives are equally valid.

O Lord God, be with those who carry your word into different parts of the world, not only people in your churches throughout the world, but people also who serve in various agencies. We pray for our own Muriel. We ask that you bless her, Lord, during these days. We thank you for her, for her place in Cambodia. Pray that you'd continue to encourage her and all who are with her, Lord, in the work there, and all the young ones that she has contact with. Lord, we pray that you would protect her and keep her and be mindful of her during these times.

[23 : 59] Bless those who mourn the passing of loved ones. Lord, we know that our bulletin sheet today bears evidence of the passing of those that were well-known amongst us and those that came so faithfully to church when they were able. Bless them, we pray, and bless those who mourn over their passing.

Be with those too who are seriously ill in the congregation. Lord, be with them and with their families today. Lay your good hand upon them, and if it is not your will, that they be healed from whatever is afflicting them at this time. Lord, prepare them, we pray, to take that step out of time into eternity so they may do so safely in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so receive us now. Hear us in our prayer and continue with us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let's sing some more verses before we turn to Mark chapter 11. Singing the whole of Psalm 1 in the Singed Psalms version on page 1.

Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk, who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock. Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight. He makes the precepts of the Lord his study day and night. The whole of Psalm 1a to God's praise. Christ. Paul's verse 2. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk, who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mope.

[25 : 57] Instead he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight.

He makes the precepts of the Lord, his study day and night.

He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a stream.

And in due season yields its fruit, its leaves are always green.

Not so the wicked they are like the chaff that's blown away.

[27 : 17] They will not stand when judgment comes or with the righteous day.

the righteous day. It is the Lord who sees and knows the way the righteous go.

but those who live an evil life the Lord will overthrow.

Now please turn with me to Mark chapter 11 where we read earlier.

And there are two sections of that chapter or the passage read I want to look at this morning with you. First of all from verse 12 down to verse 14. And then the related verses to that from verse 20 down to verse 26.

[28 : 34] So verse 12 to 14 and then verses 20 to 26. What you find really in these verses verses 12 to 14 is at one and the same time a miracle and a parable.

It's an unusual miracle because a lot of Jesus' miracles were to do with life and with giving life and with healing. This is one that really cursed this fig tree. It's normally called the fig, the parable of the fig tree.

And when he Jesus cursed the fig tree so that it would not bear fruit again, it proves to be a most unusual parable. And it's not the kind of thing you would expect Jesus normally to do.

But it's a miracle because the fig tree withered and died within a short time following the Lord's announcement to it. So both things are important for us to bear in mind as we look at these two passages today.

There is both a miracle and a parable in what it represents and what Jesus taught by it we'll see in the second passage. First of all, let's look at the promising appearance of the fig tree.

[29 : 47] Here we have in verse 13a there, So we'll look at the promising appearance of the fig tree.

And then from verse 20 to 26, the application which Jesus made of it, which really is in regard to two things especially that he mentions there.

First of all, have faith in God, which he then relates to prayer, but also the need to forgive others when there is a need to forgive them.

And that's also in relation to prayer, as you see from verse 25. So faith and forgiveness following our view of the previous passage, the promising appearance of the fig tree.

Now you can see here in the following day, when they came from Bethany, following the story through as we did, Jesus was hungry. And he saw in the distance a fig tree in leaf.

[31 : 00] He went to see if he could find anything on it. He found nothing but leaves. And then it says, for it was not the season for figs. Then why would Jesus expect to find figs on this fig tree if he knew it was not yet the season for figs?

And expositors and commentators take different views as to what is really meant by these references there. Some will say that fig trees actually bear fruit before it comes to bear leaves. Others disagree with that. Some will say some fig trees are not fruit bearing anyway. They just bear leaves. Whatever you actually say of the actuality of that in terms of its agriculture and so on, what is important is that despite it not being the season for figs, this fig tree seemed to be an exception. And it seemed to be an exception so that Jesus had every right to expect that he would find figs on it. It was very promising in its appearance.

What he saw there from a distance really led him to expect and others to expect fruit on this tree, given its situation, given its appearance.

[32 : 14] That's an important point in the message that Jesus actually then brings from it. It was very promising in appearance. There was every reason to expect fruit from it.

And yet it only had leaves. There was no fruit, just leaves. And then look at the placement of that passage.

Because the placement is important to understand its meaning. It's placed in between verses 9 and 10, and I'm especially referring to the content of these verses rather than just these verses in number.

verses 9 and 10, which have to do with the praises that were being wrung out, the exclamations that were being made as Jesus came towards Jerusalem.

All of these hosannas. Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest. There, you might say, is exclamations, soundings of praise, that look very promising.

[33 : 19] But there's no fruit. Because as he then comes to the temple, Jesus proceeds to cleanse the temple, to overturn the tables of the money changers, to drive out those who are misusing the temple for profitable gain, financial gain.

That's not, he says, the purpose of the temple. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. There's the evidence of the lack of fruit. The hosannas are the very promising leaves. The cleansing of the temple is the evidence of the lack of fruit. Now, this was particularly something that referred to Israel at the time and the disciples having heard it.

It's important that we see in verse 14, his disciples heard this when he spoke to the fig tree. In other words, he's drawing our minds firstly to its application to the people of Israel, to the Jewish people at the time.

Because what it's saying is that these people were promising because they had so many advantages, they had so many benefits, so many privileges. Here were the people to whom God had actually given himself in his revelation down through the years of the Old Testament.

[34 : 35] Here were the people to whom God had spoken so, so frequently, who had seen the miracles, and indeed people who had seen the miracles that Jesus himself had been doing up to this stage.

This was a people who had all the advantages and you would expect them as God had given them everything necessary to produce spiritual fruit, yet they were not of that caliber.

Their history, God's covenant promises to them, the prophecies that God had given them regarding their future, regarding their relationship to himself, regarding the intake of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God.

So when Jesus, in verse 14, speaks so condemningly to the fig tree, he's really, in a sense, doing what the Old Testament itself did at many times, pronouncing over the people who were fruitless, pronouncing God's condemnation.

Pronouncing over them, why have you not produced fruit? I mean, there are two passages especially that come to mind. First of all, Isaiah chapter 5, which speaks about a vineyard. And Israel is his vineyard, and there's a lot of labor being expended on that vineyard, and yet it kept on just being fruitless.

[35 : 53] It produced no fruit. And Israel, God says through the prophet Isaiah, you are my vineyard. I've taken such labor with you. I've given you so many advantages.

Why are you still fruitless? Why, when I come looking for grapes, do I find nothing but sour grapes? The other chapter is Jeremiah chapter 24, which speaks about two types of figs, two baskets of figs. One is ripe and beautiful and luscious. The other is rotten. And God through Jeremiah is saying to the people, the fruit that you're seeing, the luscious fruit, is what I would expect you to be like. But instead I'm finding you're like the rotten figs, like the rotten fruit, which really have not lived up to the expectation and the advantages that I've given you. So you can see that's why this passage is so important in its context to the people that Jesus was speaking to directly at that time, to his own people, to the Jewish people.

Here they were making all of these exclamations, these hosannas as he came riding on the colt, as he came to enter Jerusalem. And all looked very promising. It all looked very much as if they were going to receive him gladly and just welcome him with open arms as their Messiah, that this was indeed the case.

[37 : 14] But then he came to the temple and it was obvious then that that's not what the case was. They were fruitless by and large. And so he drove out in a condemning way those who had misused their privileges.

Now Jesus looks for fruit on our lives today. There's no use leaving this and just saying, well, that was for that age. That was for the context Jesus was directly working in.

We have to actually remember this is the word of God to us today. We try and put these things together in such a way that draws from it lessons for ourselves today. Things which apply in our own context here today in Stornway Free Church.

Jesus expects you and I to bear fruit. Why does he expect you and I to bear fruit? Because he's placed us in such a favorable environment, hasn't he?

Where could you be placed more favorably than under the gospel for your life to develop spiritually and morally? Where more advantageously could Jesus have placed you, could God have placed you than where you are today as you belong to a gospel congregation, as you belong to a gospel fellowship?

[38 : 26] You have his word, you have his worship, you have his teaching, you have his encouragement, you have prayer and here is Jesus coming today to you and to me and he's looking for fruit.

He's seeing the very promising lives that we are outwardly but he's coming to look for ripe spiritual figs. and he's looking for things like faith and love and hope but he's looking for real faith and real love and real hope.

He's not looking for the kind of faith in your life and my faith that might indeed be the case but it's not primarily the greatest faith that exists, it's not primarily the greatest love that exists that he looks for, it's not that you would be able to say or he'd be able to say of you, you're the best Christian in the world today, you're the best Christian in the congregation, you're the best Christian in the district.

What he's looking for is real faith, real love, real grace. And even if you think today it's really such a small thing, never mind is it real, that's the important thing.

God is looking for real fruit in your life. You might think it's hardly worth noticing, hardly worth mentioning. You see it yourself as so small when you compare yourself to others which really is not advisable for us to do anyway.

[39 : 53] But you might say, well my faith is tiny, I can hardly see it and I don't really believe my love for other people is really to any extent the way it should be. And God is saying, fine, but is it real?

You see, a lot of people come to this passage and it scares them. And there's an element of why understandably that should be the case because it is a very solemn thing to have people with so many advantages, to have the leaves that are promising about their lives and yet there's no fruit. And you might be saying today of yourself, well I think that's me. If it is you and if this is me, then God is kindly showing us today, well I'm showing you this so that you can actually do something about it.

so that you will not be just a pile of leaves but you'll have the real fruit that I desire to see in your life. But if you're saying today, well I'm just, I just don't see myself hardly as a Christian at all.

Do you pray? Yes. Well you're a believer then. Do you read your Bible faithfully, knowing it to be the word of God? Yes. Well, will a believer, will an unbeliever just do that regularly?

[41 : 10] Do you love the gospel? Yes, of course I love the gospel. That's why I'm here today, you're saying. Well isn't that itself an evidence of fruit in your life? Isn't it more than just leaves that you actually have a love for the Lord, that you would never speak disparagingly of Him, that you love to be with His people, that you love to be under the gospel, that you pray to God for yourself, that you seek His forgiveness, that you want His guidance in your life, that you bring these concerns to Him, that maybe you can't put into words adequately, but you still actually say them as the desire of your heart?

Isn't that fruit? Don't actually dismiss things like that as if that's not really fruit at all. But whatever fruit there is, seek the Lord's help for it to increase.

It's not that long since we had the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Supper is one of the primary ways by which God provides for us a situation by which we will come to bear more fruit.

Sadly, some people, maybe you're one of them, and our heart is with you. We want to see as many people as possible, all of you indeed, coming to the Lord's Supper to benefit from the Lord's Table, to profess your faith, but it's not primarily a means of professing your faith, it's primarily a means of advancing your life spiritually.

And so many people come and say about the Lord's Supper, however much we encourage people to come that are real believers, well, I'm not, my faith is not at that stage yet.

[42 : 47] I've not reached that level of fruit yet that I see in other people, so I can't go to the Lord's Supper, I can't go to the Lord's Table, I've not yet reached that level. Well, you see, the Lord is saying to you today, if that's your situation, if that's your conviction, the Lord is saying, but that's what the Lord's Supper is for.

It's not so that you can conclude now, I don't have enough fruit to warrant my going to take communion, it's so that you'll say, well, my fruit is so small, I need the Lord's Supper to bring it on. Isn't that how it is? We're all reluctant to speak of ourselves, to acknowledge truthfully, openly, the work that God has done in our lives, the fact that there are elements of fruit in our lives, and sometimes we feel that if we were just going to confess that, well, you know, we're just getting into a situation of pride, and we're just afraid to elevate ourselves.

Never be afraid to confess to yourself or to others what you see as a real work of grace in your life. It's dishonoring to God if we're reluctant to confess that, to follow that through.

So lovingly, I say to you today, don't be afraid of using the means God has given you to produce more fruit in your life compared to what you may see now.

[44 : 16] That's what this passage is really about too. It's not there to discourage anyone. It's not there to reach wrong conclusions about yourself.

It's there so that you'll say, well, God has been good to me. God has placed me so advantageously in the gospel. I must make sure now that I go and produce more fruit than I've got, and I must use every advantage God gives me so that that will be the case.

There's the promising appearance of the fig tree. But you might be here today and genuinely not be bearing any fruit yet. And we mustn't just pass over this as if everybody here was bearing so much fruit that just needed to be multiplied.

There are some people who are familiar with the gospel, who know the gospel, who are planted, if you like, in the ground in which God places people advantageously under the gospel, but who don't bear fruit, who have not yet come to repent of their sin, who have not yet come to embrace Christ by faith and thankfully.

Please, if that is you today, if you know that that is the case with you today, you have the advantage today of doing something about that too, of coming to say to God, Lord, whatever's gone past in my life, I would like to start today in a way that would bear fruit to your glory, in a way that would actually bring honor to your name.

[46 : 04] In other words, you would come to God and say, Lord, please, please don't leave me fruitless. don't leave me just at a show of leaves. Don't leave it just as an outward promising life.

Give me fruit. Give me real life. Give me real faith. Give me the hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. But then you see the application which followed.

We'll just finish with the second point which is the application followed from verse 20 to 26. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered

and said, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

And Jesus answered them, Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Then he mentions that in relation to prayer. Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received or that you are receiving it and it will be yours. Whatever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone.

[47 : 16] So two things in that. Have faith in God. Peter is amazed. He's obviously taken up with the fact that this fig tree has withered away to its roots. It's died virtually overnight.

And that's really striking as far as Peter is concerned and he remembers the words the Lord spoke. But the Lord turns what you might say is that negative comment of Peter into a very positive one. He is saying effectively whoever says to this mountain be taken up and does not doubt in his heart it will be done for him. Now what is he saying really there?

Because this is a perplexing thing for many people as well and a lot of people face this false teaching in the world today in the church today that says you know if things are not really advancing as they should in your life if you're not able to do this or to do that it's your fault you don't have enough faith.

What Jesus is saying here is look at this mountain think of it being moved from here to the depth of the sea. In other words Jesus is saying think of what appears to you to be impossible and then think of God and for God it's possible.

[48 : 31] What appears impossible to us it's not impossible with God. It's not about what to pray but the mindset that we need to have in prayer.

The mindset that is absolutely convinced that God is able to do what we will bring before him and even sometimes that he will do when he gives us that conviction that he will do what we're asking him to do.

It's really all about himself and your view of himself. It's about his capability and his power that he is able to do the things which we think are impossible.

You're praying for someone today. You've been praying for them for a long time. They're still not converted as far as you know. You may be saying in your heart when you go to pray for them time after time and think this is just impossible.

It's not going to happen. Well here is God saying to you that's your opinion. How do you see me? What do you think I'm able to do for them? Have you lost your vision of what I can do?

[49 : 45] Are you just looking at it from your own perspective? Friends, today whatever we're praying for and we're praying for the congregation and we're praying for the blessing of the Lord and the congregation and we pray for the individuals.

We're praying for the work with the young folks. We're praying for so many things. Catch this vision of God that is before you in the passage and say don't doubt God.

Have faith in God. Have faith in God. But when we're praying he says in verse 25 whenever you stand praying forgive.

If you have anything against anyone so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. Very like what you find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel.

Remember there in chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel at verse 14 where Jesus said if you forgive others this is after the Lord's Prayer which we've said together earlier if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

[50 : 54] But if you do not forgive others their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. If you take that along with Mark he's not saying that God's forgiveness is conditional or that the ground of God forgiving us is our forgiving others.

In other words that we constrain God or persuade God to forgive others by our forgiveness of them or forgive ourselves.

What he's saying is when you come to pray and ask God's forgiveness search your heart. And if you have in your heart something there and then against someone that you're conscious of in your heart then deal with that.

Because that will actually blight your prayer. it will if you like shrivel your prayer. If you come before God and you know that there's something you need to forgive someone about.

If you have anything against anyone just stop. Before you ask anything of God come and forgive that person first.

[52 : 07] That person may not be willing to confess their fault between you and themselves. And forgiveness in a sense is always consequent upon confession.

It's the same for ourselves. We come to God and don't automatically receive forgiveness. We need to come and confess our sins and then we have the warrant of God's word that he will hear our prayer and forgive our sins.

But sometimes you'll find someone not prepared to confess that they've done anything wrong even if in your heart of hearts and maybe in theirs they know they have. It might be the other way about it. It might be that something we've done has hurt others and we're not prepared to confess that we're at fault with it.

Either way we need to be seriously honest with the issue. And if the person we go to says look if I've done anything forgive me and you go to them and say well look you've done this and I think it's wrong so we're here to be reconciled to each other maybe the person will say I don't want to be forget it I don't want to speak to you.

What do you then do? Well you're still in your heart come say to the Lord Lord they're not prepared to confess I confess if I've done wrong that I need your forgiveness Lord and even if they never confess to have done wrong Lord help me in my heart to forgive them in my thoughts as if they had confessed.

[53 : 37] Because it's so vital to our ongoing spiritual relationship to God that we don't hold anything against anyone when we come to prayer at any time indeed but he's confining it here to the issue of prayer.

And that's why in Matthew 18 remember Matthew 18 where Peter said to Jesus Lord how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him will it be up to seven times and Peter thought seven times surely that's enough because the law of the rabbis at that time the regulation of the rabbis was well four times is quite sufficient and Peter was thinking well if I go to seven surely that's going to be enough.

What did the Lord say to him? No he said I don't say to you seven times but I do say seventy times seven. What did Jesus mean? He meant that however many times you have to forgive then you forgive.

There are no limits to it. You don't actually put something around it so that you say within a certain time or after a certain number of times we forgive somebody then it's okay not to forgive and then hold it against them.

No. We always have to forgive whenever there's something that we know needs to be forgiven. something we need to confess that we've done or that's been done against us.

[55 : 06] Jesus replied you can't impose limits on confession or forgiveness. It's open ended.

It's there throughout the whole of life. So many personal relationships and personal relationships developing to spread the influence into a congregation or community or family have all started with a reluctance to forgive.

A reluctance to confess faults a reluctance to forgive when we're asked to forgive. Let's be fruitful Christians.

Take from today three words easy to remember three words that begin with F. fruit faith forgiveness because each of them and together are the essence of the life of Christ's people.

Let's pray. Lord we thank you that we can come to you and confess our sins to you and that we can be people who show that our desire is to forgive whenever there is a need to forgive.

[56 : 29] We thank you for the advantages you give us that are all designed that we should bear fruit to your glory and we pray especially under the gospel that our lives may be such.

hear us we pray and accept our worship now. Continue with us throughout this day be with us in the evening bless Reverend Calmurdo as he preaches this evening and help us Lord as we spend this Lord's day in relation to your word and to your worship help us we pray to further advance our relationship with you all for Jesus sake Amen.

We're going to now conclude our worship today this morning singing to God's praise in Psalm 92 and that's from the Scottish Psalter singing verses 12 to 15 that's on page 353 But like the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one he shall like to the cedar grow that is in Lebanon those that within the house of God are planted by his grace they shall grow up and flourish all in our God's

holy place and in old age when others fade they fruit still forth shall bring they shall be fat and full of sap and a be flourishing to show that upright is the Lord he is a rock to me and he from all unrighteousness is altogether free these four verses in conclusion but like the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one he shall like to the cedar grow up that is in Lebanon those that within the house of God are planted by his grace they shall grow up and flourish all in our God's holy place and in old age when others fade they fruit still forth shall bring they shall be fat and full of sap and they be flourishing to show that upright is the Lord he is a rock to me and he from all unrighteousness is altogether free I'll go to the door to my left this morning now may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father Son and Holy Spirit be your portion now and evermore Amen her Thank you.