

OUR FIG TREE – barren or fruitful?

Mark 11

July 2025

Philip Shields

All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.

KEY WORDS: fig tree, barren, leaves, house of prayer, bear much fruit.

**** *** *******

Have you ever wondered why Jesus cursed a barren fig tree when it wasn't even the season for figs? There's so much in this story that Philip unpacks for you. Yes, it's about you and me too, as well as others.

Big warm hello to all of you.

Turn please to Mark 11:7-11. There's a story in Mark 11 that **we can tend to read right over.** It's easy to miss a deeper message that is in the story that applies to the nation of Israel, the leaders of the temple, and to the people of God and to each of us therefore. Let's dig deep into this story together.

The story begins with Jesus securing a young colt to ride into Jerusalem from Bethany, about 1.7 miles away. This is known as Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" and it's pretty much the last week of his life before it ends at Golgotha. Mark 11:1-6 is about securing the young foal of a donkey for him to ride on as he enters Jerusalem just before the Passover season. This was a very HUMBLE entry – not like the big white spirit charger He rides on the next time (**Rev. 19:11-16**).

Mark 11:7

"Then they brought the COLT (the foal of a donkey) to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it".

This was first prophesied in **Zechariah 9:9. I'll read it to you:**
"Rejoice, O daughter of Zion, Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, Behold YOUR KING is coming to you, just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey".

My Jewish friends, this prophecy was fulfilled by the Jewish man named Yeshua – Salvation, Savior. I'm so thrilled more and more of you are seeing it.

Let's continue in Mark 11:8-9 now.

"And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

9 Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:
"Hosanna!

'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'

¹⁰ Blessed is the kingdom of our father David

That comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!"

The Matthew 21 account says "Hosanna to the Son of David."

Hosanna, a Hebrew word originally used as *Hosiana* from Psalm 118:25 meaning, **"SAVE US, we pray, O Lord"**. It developed over time to not just be a plea for salvation but also an exclamation of adoration, of **PRAISE. It came to mean "PRAISE to the One who saves"**. It had become, by Jesus' day, **a JOYFUL cry of celebration and praise**. Both meanings – to praise and to save, are packed into this one word "Hosanna".

Jesus' final week started so well – with the crowds singing and shouting Hosannah to Him. And it ended at the cross days later at Golgotha.

In Mark 11:11- Jesus proceeds on to Jerusalem, and In Mark's account, checks things out at the temple complex briefly – and then back to Bethany for the night as it was already late in the day. Bethany is about 1.7 miles away from the Temple complex.

So let's pick up at Mark 11:12-14. You know the essence of the story that comes next, but WHY is this even in the Bible? This story is packed with meaning for Israel, and for us believers too, and that's what we'll cover today.

Frankly preparing for this topic drove me to my knees a few times. You'll see why shortly. I hope it drives you to your knees too.

Mark 11:12-14

"Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.

13 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.

14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

WHY did Jesus curse the barren fig tree when it wasn't the season for ripe figs? Was he just upset? Was it fair? What's going on here?

From afar it looked like a great, healthy fig tree with lots of leaves.

Remember verse 13 says Jesus hoped to find *something* on it.

Usually for fruit trees, we first find it's growing leaves -- then the flowers that develop eventually into fruit – then next, the fully ripe fruits themselves.

But in Israel, though it wasn't the season yet at Passover for the fully ripened figs, **there should have been proto-figs called "TAKSH"**, which are the early though still unripe figs – but that are EDIBLE, though not fully ripe as they'd be by late August or September. The first sign of figs is seeing them start to be seen at the same time as the LEAVES.

With NO proto-figs – this tree was done. It wasn't going to ever produce, at least not that year. It was useless.

BIG point here: This was an important TEACHING moment. We need to get that! It was a lesson for the nation of Israel first, but also for the 12 disciples – and now even for us.

GOD wants to see HIS FRUIT in our lives, NOT just showy leaves that make us LOOK good, look righteous or religious. And not just any fruit. God wants to see HIS fruit, as I'll explain more as we go along.

Now, AFTER the fig tree incident, he goes to the Temple Complex and then he's talking about the TEMPLE – God's house of PRAYER. Understand, this is the ONLY HOUSE OF GOD in the whole world.

By the way, remember that when we read of Christ going into the temple, it was referring to the temple complex. Only priests could enter the building.

Mark 11:15-19 IN The TEMPLE COMPLEX

So they came to Jerusalem. **Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers** and the seats of those who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

17 Then He taught, saying to them, **"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a HOUSE of PRAYER for all nations'?** But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

V 18-19 – religious leaders feared him and then Jesus went back out of the city.

Jesus is making it clear: the temple is also the House of God. And the temple should be well known primarily as a HOUSE OF PRAYER for all nations.

He was disappointed with what he saw. He saw worshipers, and those getting ready to offer sacrifices, but to Yeshua it was all mostly for SHOW – like the leafy fig tree. Lots of leaves, but no fruit. *This came right after cursing the fig tree, in Mark's account. The timing sequence is significant. **The Jews' worship in God's house was minus any true fruit.*** Do you see the connection? So where do you and I come in?

1 Cor. 3:16 and 2 Cor. 6:16 say WE believers with God's spirit in us, are now the temple of God, housing the Holy Spirit of God. **WE are now “the HOUSE of God”** according to **1 Timothy 3:15**.

1 Timothy 3:15

“but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know **how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God**, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

And that House of God, God's Temple – Yeshua said – was to be a HOUSE of PRAYER (Mark 11:17).

Would YOU and I be called, by others, a HOUSE OF PRAYER – because we obviously, evidently, PRAY so much? Because we have such a strong and EVIDENT connection with Almighty God?

This deep connection with our God is central to the story here too. We must be ROOTED in God. *That closeness is CENTRAL to us bearing GODLY fruit.*

Public displays of being religious don't matter if our souls are fruitless. **We must not just *appear* alive spiritually, we must BE alive, in Christ.**

THIS is what drove ME to my knees: Would Jesus – inspecting ME for HIS FRUIT – see only LEAVES? So I had to go pray. We're busy with church, I was busy preparing a sermon here and for my website; you may prepare and help at the Feast. ALL those things are wonderful, but are we lacking in spiritual FRUIT of God's Spirit?

Let's continue in Mark 11:20

Mark 11:20-26

Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to **this mountain**, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and in does not doubt his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

24 NASU translation: Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you HAVE RECEIVED them, and they will be *granted* to you.

MOST TRANSLATIONS SAY V 24 – "...believe *you already* HAVE RECEIVED the things you ask for" – this is *even before you see what you prayed for*.

FRUITFULNESS includes tremendous FAITH IN GOD and believing he's answering you, lives in you and you in Him, and knows all about you.

FRUITFUL LIVES are full of faith and confidence in PRAYER.

Here are examples of how Jesus believed he had already received something He had prayed for, even before He could see the evidence:

- Jesus prayed and blessed the food of bread and fish before the evidence of answered prayer – while it was still just 5 loaves and 2 fish (Matthew 14:17-21). He still blessed it in prayer anyway!
- Jesus THANKED GOD for having already heard him regarding Lazarus – while Lazarus was still very much DEAD (John 11:41).

Do WE have such faith to **thank God before we see** the miracle happen, believing God will do his will in his time, sometimes suddenly, sometimes over time? This is part of the fruit of the kind of FAITH, of the kind of relationship with God we have. You may wish to read Philippians 4:6-7 again too.

So what's the lesson of the barren fig tree for us today?

- **The FIG TREE was a symbol of Israel itself**, first of all (**Hos 9:10**). Remember that. Israel was often described as a FIG TREE, even in **Matthew 24:32** – "when you see the leaves, know summer is nigh".
- **And the story of the unfruitful fig tree includes what He did at the house of God.** WE are the HOUSE OF GOD today – so it's also about us – as events in the TEMPLE are tied to this story.

SO the SHOWY, leafy fig tree devoid of any real fruit is telling us something. Jesus cursed it. This story is not just about fig leaves. It's much more. It's about Israel. But more: It's about you. It's about me. It's about God's church. It's about the leaders of the Jews and the temple – and US, called to be leaders in the Kingdom of God.

In the same week, Yeshua also blasted the leaders of the Jews – comparing them to **beautiful whitewashed tombs**, “but inside you're just full of dead men's bones and uncleanness.”

Matthew 23:27-28

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every impurity. 28 In the same way, **on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**”

The fig tree Jesus cursed outwardly appeared healthy, leafy, beautiful – but when examined, it was just leaves, nothing else.

When God examines you and me, will he see HIS righteousness, HIS life – or will we display our religiosity, our busy-ness with church things – but really little fruit OF A LIFE developing more and more into the image of Christ, the son of God?

By extension, Jesus was also cursing the nation of Judah-Israel. They had the temple, they had priests and sacrifices, they had religion – but were EMPTY. They rejected the Son of God. The people at the temple complex were there to worship God, looking spiritual – but were bearing no fruit.

As I have often talked about recently, God wants us to be righteous with HIS righteousness that HE imparts, credits, gives, imputes to us. It's the GIFT of righteousness (Romans 5:17). That's so hard for people to accept, but we must. Nothing else will be good enough except God's own perfection that he offers to us, if we believe.

WHOSE FRUIT: The fruit we are to bear is not our own, but one that comes up to us from the ROOTS, which is Jesus the Christ.

Colossians 2:6-7

“As you therefore have **received Christ Jesus** the Lord, so walk in Him, **7 rooted and built up in Him** and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Remember, the fig tree died from the roots, which should have actually given it life, but Jesus cursed its roots because it had nothing to offer.

We speak of “the FRUIT OF The SPIRIT.” It’s not the fruit of Philip. It’s the FRUIT of *the SPIRIT*, GOD’S spirit. It’s God’s fruit in us. And true fruit of God’s righteousness comes through Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:11

“having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”.

So the fruit God seeks in us does not come from our own efforts but by faith in God, giving it to us through faith in Jesus.

Be turning to 2 Cor 5:21. **God credits, imputes, gives us HIS very own righteousness. It is HIS work, not ours. OUR role is FAITH in Jesus the Messiah. Our role is believing.** God takes our sins, forgives them ALL when we repent (1 John 1:9) and in return FILLS us with His own perfect righteousness. HIS fruit. HIS goodness.

2 Cor. 5:21

“He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that WE might become the **righteousness OF GOD -- IN HIM.**”

Even Colossians 2:12 – about working out your own salvation with fear and trembling – means working with GOD, for it goes on to say in verse 13, “For it is GOD who works in you both to will and to do.” GOD does the work of saving us, of making us truly righteous. In fact he gives us HIS own perfect righteousness.

That’s evident all through Romans 3, 4, 5, 8 etc. Study those chapters. Turn now to Philippians 3:7-12

Philippians 3:7-11

“But what things were gain to me, **these I have counted loss for Christ.** 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, **that I may gain Christ**

9 and be found in Him, NOT having my OWN righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

You should read and re-read Phil 3:9-10 until you really believe it.

That's one of the hardest concepts for believers to fully accept: that God gifts us, credits us with HIS very *OWN righteousness* through faith in the Messiah.

This doesn't happen unless we are rooted and completely connected to the Messiah. **In John 15:1** – “I am the TRUE Vine, and my father the vinedresser”.

In verse 5 he says WE are the branches, and HE is the vine. Remember that.

John 15:4

“ABIDE in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, UNLESS you abide in Me.”

Read verses 4 and 5 several times. All our hard work efforts to bear spiritual fruit pleasing to God won't amount to much without it coming FROM GOD, through faith in Jesus Christ.

John 15:5-8

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears MUCH fruit; for without Me [or APART from me] you can do NOTHING.

6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

I already read Phil 1:11 that what we must have must be the righteousness OF, by, and through Jesus Christ. John 15:4-5 says the same.

This happens only after TOTAL SURRENDER to God. Instead of telling God or Jesus what we want, we SURRENDER our hopes and dreams to what HE wants for us. **We must want HIS will in our lives.** But most of us tell God in our “gimme this, gimme that” kind of prayer what we hope his will is for us: what WE want.

Paul had to surrender his entire former life before God could use him. He also had to accept “**the thorn in the flesh**” God gave him – and

then it was evident that everything Paul was doing was really by God's power, not his own.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

"Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for MY strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**"

Peter had to step out of the safety of the boat to experience God's power.
AND you and I have to also totally surrender to God now!

FRUITFULNESS IS The NATURAL OUTFLOW OF life in the spirit, attached so closely to Jesus.

You're praying constantly, without ceasing. This means you're in touch with him many times a day. You ask for his presence, his power, his way, his life – IN YOU. Paul said to pray always, without ceasing. Try the "**constant contact**" idea where you talk to our Father and to our Savior frequently throughout the day in short 30 second prayers or 1 or 2 minutes – making frequent contacts with the Almighty. I mean we can do this 10-15-20 times a day while you're walking, driving, cleaning up, showering... talk to God.

And learn also to LISTEN to God while you pray. Prayer should not just be your monologue or a filibuster from you. Once in a while in prayer stop and ask God to speak to you. And say, "I'm listening, Lord. Tell me what you want to say to me" – and you be silent. Be ready to even write down those thoughts that will come sometimes right then and there, and other times it may take a few days. *But learn to listen to your God in prayer. HE DOES still speak to us.*

John 15:7-8

7 **IF you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**

8 By this **My Father is glorified, that you bear MUCH fruit; so you will be My disciples.**

NOW GET THIS: our God who expects fruit is the same God who PRODUCES His fruit in us, HIS fruit. He's the one who gives the

increase. (REPEAT) ***God does not demand or expect from us -- what He does not provide. IF... IF WE ABIDE IN Christ 100%.***

Abide in Jesus. And it's OK to pray to Jesus! Stephen did as he was dying (**Acts 7:59-60**, exclaiming “**Lord JESUS, receive my spirit**”. John does at the end of Revelation—Come Lord Jesus” (**Rev. 22:20**). And MUCH of the conversation between prophets and God in the Old Testament was not with God the Father but Jesus! Like in **Genesis 18**. That whole story was about Abraham praying to the YHVH who later came as the Word, as Jesus the Messiah.

Yeshua himself said, “I told you to ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). Jesus TOLD them to pray in his name and yes, even to him. We are to marry Christ. You never speak only with the FATHER of the bride groom but to the groom and father! I pray to our Father, yes. But I also include Jesus! **Col. 3:3-4** says HE is now *our* real life.

Mark 11:25-26 – Jesus attaches forgiveness to our prayers, as in Matt 6. This is our heart check. **Powerful prayers do not come from hearts that carry grudges.** **Unforgiveness POISONS the root systems of faith.** We must be people of humble reconciliation and forgiveness.

What kind of fruit are we really showcasing, displaying from God for others?
What real fruit is growing from the roots of my soul? This story invites us to SEARCH our hearts. Are there places in our lives where we are more concerned with APPEARING righteous than being truly transformed?

Are we OK with having spiritual performance – without full spiritual surrender? Is my faith merely conceptual – or is it the kind that produces fruit that allows me to forgive, help, and bear fruit TO GLORIFY GOD our father.

So it was a lesson for Israel of his day. And it was a lesson for you and me today, to search our hearts and surrender to, AND bear HIS fruit from the roots up.

The branches just BEAR and DISPLAY the fruit the vine or whatever the tree produces. We display the work of the Vine and happily let others benefit from the fruit of God in our lives.

Let's be sure we are not just spiritually speaking, just good looking leafy fig trees with no fruit – but that we are accepting the fruit of God in our lives by faith.