"A FRUITLESS PEOPLE"

Matthew 21:18 - 22:14
10/7/2018

INTRODUCTION: A fruitless fig tree represented the barrenness of unbelieving Israel (21:18-22).

***Why didn't Israel accept Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior?**
(And why do people today refuse Him and the fruitful life He gives?)

I. **FEAR** (21:23-27)
(Many are too intimidated to acknowledge the truth)

II. **STUBBORNNESS** (21:28-32)
(Many are too stiff-necked to repent from unbelief)

III. **IRREVERENCE** (21:33-46)
(Many are too impious [disrespectful) to accept God's Son)

IV. **INDIFFERENCE** (22:1-10)
(Many are too preoccupied to be concerned about spiritual matters)

V. **SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS** (22:11-14)
(Many are too self-satisfied to see their need for Christ's righteousness)

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INTRODUCTION: A fruitless fig tree represented the barrenness of unbelieving Israel (21:18-22).

Nothing is quite as good as sinking your teeth into fresh, juicy fruit!

Even our Lord had such a desire when He walked this earth.

V. 18

"He returned in the city" - The Jewish capital - Jerusalem

"He hungered" - In His incarnation, Jesus' physical body needed food. What humiliation for the Creator to become dependent and to experience the pangs of hunger.

V. 19

"Leaves only" - Normally figs and leaves appear at the same time (actually, the figs would sprout first).

--It was the time for fruit as evidenced by the leaves. The tree should have produced!

--The tree had an <u>outward</u> show, but when inspected closely it had no fruit (it was promising, but had no produce).

"The fig tree withered away" - Jesus is not in the ministry of cursing fig trees. Why then such a severe miracle?

Answer: The barren fig tree was symbolic of the barren nation to whom Jesus ministered.

Frequently God used the fig tree to symbolize the nation of Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hosea 9:10, 1b; Luke 13:6-9).

"Let no fruit grow on thee" - The curse on this tree was actually an illustration of the Lord's judgment on the nation of Israel. A nation to whom Christ came, expecting fruit but finding none (Jn 1:11 - *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not.")*.

In the context, this account of the fig tree was an object lesson of the fruitlessness of the nation of Israel (cp. 21:41,43).

The Lord came to the nation hungry for fruit, but found none from that generation as a whole.

Their fruitlessness was an outward indication of their faithlessness. *"By their fruits ye shall know them."*

They refused to be connected to the Vine (Jesus Christ) so as to be fruitful (Jn. 14).

V. 20-22

Although the main point of the cursed fig tree was to illustrate Israel and her rejection of Christ, Jesus incidently responds to the disciples' wonder by teaching them a lesson on faith (Note: v. 21-22). Here is a lesson within a lesson. A lesson on faith within a lesson on the absence of faith (by the Nation of Israel).

***Why didn't Israel accept Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior?**
(And why do people today refuse Him and the fruitful life He gives?)

I. **FEAR** (21:23-27)
(Many are too intimidated to acknowledge the truth)

V. 23

***"By what authority doest these things"* -** They are no doubt referring to His cleansing of the temple (21:12-13), His healing in the Temple (21:14), and now His teaching in the temple (21:23).

***"By what authority"* -** What right do you have? What a question to ask the Creator of all things! (It's a bit like asking the president of a company what right he had to make decisions in that company).

***"Who gave you this authority"* -** It was God, the Father!

V. 24

Jesus offers a pre-requisite to giving His answer to them.

Christ's response was a quick and efficient way to trap these religionists in their hypocrisy and inconsistencies.

V. 25

Christ is asking: "Who gave John his authority to preach repentance and to baptize -- God or men?"

If John the Baptist received his authority from Heaven, then they should have believed him. And if they would have believed John, they would have believed in Christ, because John (as the forerunner) pointed men to Christ.

They were afraid of Christ's response if they answered one way, and they feared the people's response if they answered the other way. So they bailed out with a response of dumb ignorance.

Prov. 29:25 - *"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putting his trust in the LORD shall be safe."*

John 7:13 - *"Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews."*

(cp. the cowardice of the parents of the man born blind - John 9:21 - 22 - *"But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue."*)

The first word God uses to describe those who will be in the Lake of Fire is *"fearful"* (Rev. 21:8).

To this very day, many Jews stay as far away from Christ as possible for fear of what their family, friends, peers, and religious associates might think and do!

The only One we should fear is God (Eccl. 12:13; I Pet. 2:17).

V. 27

Why wouldn't Jesus tell them that His authority was from Heaven? If they would not accept John's authority and message, neither would they accept Christ's.

Jesus doesn't give answers to those who really don't want answers.

II. **STUBBORNNESS** (21:28-32)
(Many are too stiff-necked to repent from unbelief)

V. 31

The dishonest publicans and the immoral harlots originally rejected God's prodding in their lives, but eventually they surrendered and obeyed; whereas the Israelite nation as a whole had lip service to God and His ways, but did not do His will (God's will was that they come to repentance and turn to Christ - II Pet. 3:9).

V. 32

"When ye had seen it?" - Although they saw the life-changing transformation that God did in the lives of the publicans and harlots (through John's witness and example), they did not repent.

They had seen a real, bonified man of God; they had witnessed the wicked becoming righteous (through the power of God), and yet their hearts were unyielding, unbending; they would not give in to the convicting work of the Spirit who empowered John's message and showed the authenticity of Christianity by the miraculous changes it produced.

Dt. 9:13, 10:16 - *"Furthermore the Lord spake unto me, saying, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people. . . Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked."*

Acts 7:51 - *"Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."*

To you who may have been too proud to humble yourselves before God, II Chronicles 30:8 says, *"Now be ye not stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord. . ."*

Beware of being mule-headed, obstinate, set in your ways, impliable (like hardened clay); don't allow a hard shell to cover your heart and prevent God from moving you and convicting you, etc.

When was the last time you wept over your sin?

How open are you to God's voice (Word)?

III. **<u>IRREVERENCE</u>** (21:33-46)
(Many are too <u>impious</u> [disrespectful) to accept God's Son)

The interpretation:

1. ***"Householder" =*** God the Father

2. ***"Husbandmen" =*** the nation of Israel

3. ***"Servants" =*** the Old Testament prophets, up to John the Baptist

4. ***"His Son" =*** Jesus Christ

5. ***"Other Husbandmen" =*** the Gentiles (v. 41; cp. <u>v. 31-32</u>)

V. 36

As Jesus said, they had killed all the prophets from A to Z (See: Mt. 23:33-35).

V. 37

"Last of all" - Note: There was <u>no</u> Messiah to follow after Jesus Christ. He is the only and final voice for God (not Muhammed, Joseph Smith, etc.)

V. 41

They put their foot in their own mouths with their answer.

V. 42

Jesus is the Cornerstone!

The builders evaluated Him and did not want Him to reign over them.

V. 43

"A nation" - (*ethei*) the same word as "Gentiles"

V. 44

Whoever stumbles over Jesus shall be broken; and if people do not repent, Jesus will crush them in judgment (cp. Dan. 2:44).

Is Jesus your Cornerstone, or your Judgment Meteor?

V. 46

They had no power to take Him until His mission was fully accomplished (Mk. 14:41).

Note verse 37 again.

Today such irreverence and dishonor is aimed at Christ.

--His name is cursed by many.

--He is profaned and viewed as a mere man or prophet.

V. 37

"They will <u>reverence</u> my Son" - Did they respect Jesus? He who was and is worthy of equal honor with the Father (Jn. 5:23) was dishonored.

IV. **<u>INDIFFERENCE</u>** (22:1-10)
(Many are too <u>preoccupied</u> to be concerned about spiritual matters)

V. 2
"King" **-** God the Father

"Son" **-** Jesus Christ

"Servants" **-** prophets and apostles

"Them that were bidden" **-** the Jewish people

V. 5

In some cultures it is much more of an insult and offence not to come to a wedding upon being invited.

"But they made light of it" **-** They paid no <u>attention</u> to the invitation; they could "care less"; it was of <u>no interest</u> to them. It was no big deal. They no doubt yawned at the invitation. Other worldly things had captured their attention and interest. The affairs of this life had such a grip on them that spiritual things did not matter.

Just as Lot's family ignored him *"as one that mocked"* (Gen. 19:14) and were crushed by the destruction of Sodom and Gommorah, so will those who don't take seriously the Gospel of Christ face destruction.

Many times I've witnessed to people who clearly did not give two cents for what I was saying. They would stare at me glassy-eyed, their mind somewhere else. Many times they would even call the message "Nonsense" etc.

Many today are too pre-occupied with education, career, money, pleasure, houses, etc. The "Wall Street Journal" gets their attention, but not the Scriptures. Christ has no appeal to them.

But those of us who know Him, we would rather walk through the Arabian Desert with no water than not to have the water of life. Nothing matches the surpassing greatness of knowing christ and being part of His wedding bride.

V. 6

Not only were they indifferent, they were downright antagonistic toward Christ and His servants (*"He that is not with me is against me"* - Mt. 12:30).

One way of striking out at Christ is to strike out at His servants (this is their attempt to extinguish the message they hear).

V. 7

"Wroth" - God's wrath is on the unbelievers (Jn. 3:36).

"His armies" **-** Even the pagan army of Rome was God's tool to accomplish His judgment

"Burned up their city" **-** Jerusalem was burned in 70 A.D.

V. 9

"Go ye therefore into the highways" **-** The first time the "Great Commission" is hinted at in the New Testament.

V. 10

"Both bad and good" **-** Both moral and immoral; both ethical and the despicable; both kind-hearted and the evil-hearted. Technically none are *"good"* (Mt. 19:17); none righteous (Rom. 3:10); all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

"The wedding was furnished" **-** One day a wedding will occur in Heaven and believers will comprise the Bride (Rev. 19).

V. SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (22:11-14)

(Many are too self-satisfied to see their need for Christ's righteousness)

V. 11

Don't press every detail of a parable; God is not teaching that people will make it to Heaven and then be kicked out. The point is that they will not inherit eternal life.

V. 12

"Friend" - This word shows the affection God has even for those who do not come to Him on His terms.

"A wedding garment" - The only suitable garment we can wear is the imputed righteousness of Christ (II Cor. 5:21; Rev. 3:5, 6:11, 19:8-9; Is. 61:10 - *"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.")*.

"He was speechless" - No alibies, excuses, or pleas are offered! This one knew better.

V. 13

This teaches the awful fate of those who don't have on a wedding garment.

Hell will be a place of:

1) Bondage (***"Bind him"***)

2) Separation (***"Take him away"***)

3) Darkness (***"outer darkness"***)

4) Regret (***"weeping"***)

5) Torment (***"gnashing of teeth"***)

V. 14

"Many are called" - Invited, summoned

Salvation is offered to all, but is only given to those who are dressed in Christ's righteousness.

"Few are chosen" - In the parable, this man was not chosen because he thought he could make it without meeting the qualifications (SEE: Rom. 10:1-4).

Many who think they are right with God and clean are dressed in ***"filthy rags"*** (Is. 64:6).

--the rags of religion
--the rags of baptism
--the rags of morality

CONCLUSION: