

# Christ Reformation Church

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*You Must be Born Again!*

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## *The Gospel of Matthew*

### *Faith and a Mountain: Judgment Upon a Fruitless People*

*January 12, 2020*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 21:18-46

**Scripture Reading:** Isaiah 5

Mat 21:18-19 In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. (19) 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.

By way of review from last time, listen as I read Matthew Henry's comment on Jesus cursing the barren fig tree and thoughts about its application to the visible church today:

(A.) This cursing of the barren fig-tree, represents the state of hypocrites in general; and so it teaches us,

[1.] That the fruit of fig-trees may justly be expected from those that have the leaves. Christ looks for the power of religion from those that make profession of it; the savour of it from those that have the show of it; grapes from the vineyard that is planted in a fruitful hill: he hungers after it, his soul desires the first ripe fruits.

[2.] Christ's just expectations from flourishing professors [ie, those who profess to be Christians] are often frustrated and disappointed; he comes to many, seeking fruit, and finds leaves only, and he discovers it. Many have a name to live, and are not alive indeed; dote on the form of godliness, and yet deny the power of it.

[3.] The sin of barrenness is justly punished with the curse and plague of barrenness; Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. As one of the

chiefest blessings, and which was the first, is, Be fruitful; so one of the saddest curses is, Be no more fruitful. *Thus the sin of hypocrites is made their punishment; they would not do good, and therefore they shall do none*; he that is fruitless, let him be fruitless still, and lose his honour and comfort.

[4.] A false and hypocritical profession commonly withers in this world, and it is the effect of Christ's curse; the fig-tree that had no fruit, soon lost its leaves. Hypocrites may look plausible for a time, but, having no principle, no root in themselves, their profession will soon come to nothing; the gifts wither, common graces decay, the credit of the profession declines and sinks, and the falseness and folly of the pretender are manifested to all men.

(B.) It represents the state of the nation and people of the Jews in particular; they were a fig-tree planted in Christ's way, as a church. Now observe,

[1.] The disappointment they gave to our Lord Jesus. He came among them, expecting to find some fruit, something that would be pleasing to him; he hungered after it; not that he desired a gift, he needed it not, but fruit that might abound to a good account. But his expectations were frustrated; he found nothing but leaves; they called Abraham their father, but did not do the works of Abraham; they

professed themselves expectants of the promised Messiah, but, when he came, they did not receive and entertain him.

[2.] The doom he passed upon them, that never any fruit should grow upon them or be gathered from them, as a church or as a people, from henceforward for ever. Never any good came from them (except the particular persons among them that believe), after they rejected Christ; they became worse and worse; blindness and hardness happened to them, and grew upon them, till they were unchurched, unpeopled, and undone, and their place and nation rooted up; their beauty was defaced, their privileges and ornaments, their temple, and priesthood, and sacrifices, and festivals, and all the glories of their church and state, fell like leaves in autumn. How soon did their fig-tree wither away, after they said, His blood be on us, and our children! And the Lord was righteous in it.

Henry, Matthew. Unabridged Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (best navigation) (Kindle Locations 264971-264993). OSNOVA. Kindle Edition.

How many visible, local churches through the history of the church have ended in just such a way.

Mountains into the Sea

Now, let's see if we can understand what Jesus told the disciples immediately after the fig tree withered:

Mat 21:20-22 When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" (21) 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. (22) And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Christ's kingdom has come and is coming. The disciples, like their countrymen, probably had grown up with the worldview that Israel, the Temple, the mountain upon which Jerusalem was built, *would always exist and continue*. For it to be otherwise, for them, would be impossible. The Messiah and His rule and dominion was all wrapped up in their thinking with this earthly Jerusalem.

The mountain Jesus is talking about being cast into the sea here is not just any mountain, but a specific mountain. Mountains in scripture often represent kingdoms and Jerusalem sat on a mountain. The Jerusalem, the earthly

kingdom of Israel, was going to be cast down. The new heavens and earth would come.

"The reference to 'this mountain' in verse 21 refers to either the Mount of Olives or Mount Zion, depending upon where Jesus and his disciples were as they journeyed from Bethany to Jerusalem. If Jesus pointed to the Mount of Olives, then the disciples may have been meant to recall Zechariah 14:4 in which the Messiah's coming to that mountain triggers eschatological [ie, last days] upheavals. If he was pointing to the temple mount, then he could have been prefiguring the destruction of that building and the entire sacrificial system for which it stood...". [Commentary on the NT use of the OT; Beale and Carson, Baker Publishing]<sup>1</sup>

Could it be, and I simply propose this question, that when they saw Jesus curse the fig tree that they began to just start to see that their thinking about Jerusalem was wrong? In other

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<sup>1</sup> Zec 14:3-4 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. (4) On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.

words, could it be that they were not just astonished at the miracle of the withered fig tree, but were unsettled about what Jesus was communicating to them in it as what He was saying began to sink in.

These men would soon demonstrate that they still needed to see it and believe:

Mat 24:1-2 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. (2) But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* This is what Christ taught them, and us, to pray.

So consider our own world today and in particular consider the thinking of most who claim to be Christians – *is this not how most think about this present world? They talk a lot about Christ’s return perhaps and run to all kinds of prophetic conferences, but in practice do they show that they really believe Christ’s promise of His kingdom coming?*

*We as Christ’s people are instructed to pray, Thy kingdom come. And we are*

*to pray in faith without doubting that Christ’s promises are true. We must not be unbelieving like the world:*

2Pe 3:3-13 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. (4) They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

(5) For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, (6) and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

(7) But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (8) But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (9) The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

(10) But the day of the Lord will come

like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

(11) Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (13) But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

By faith, you see. *This* mountain will be cast into the sea. Many times, in fact most times, this passage is superficially interpreted and applied so that it becomes some kind of name-it-and-claim-it formula, and its real meat – a promise of the certainty of Christ’s kingdom coming – is totally missed.

### Jesus Exposes the False Kingdom

Here is the central message of verses 23-46,

Mat 21:43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

Let’s elaborate on this theme a bit and then we will end by seeing it in the rest of this chapter. Consider these verses:

Mat 13:12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Mat 25:24-30 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, (25) so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ (26) But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? (27) Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. (28) So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. (29) For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (30) And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Mar 4:24-25 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. (25) For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Luk 19:26 ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Joh 15:2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

This is the principle of the cursed barren fig tree. It can be stated this way:

*Christ’s true people are joined to Him, the true vine. Therefore they bear the fruit of righteousness, fruit of the Spirit. The person who claims to belong to Christ but who, like that barren fig tree has no fruit when He comes to them, is going to be cursed. His or her false claim will be exposed. To the one who has fruit will be blessed with even more knowledge of Christ and His life and fruit. But for the hypocrite there will only be a curse and any grace or privilege he or she had will be taken away forever.*

And that is what the rest of this chapter teaches. Listen to Christ’s words:

Mat 21:23-46 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?”

(24) 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.

(25) 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?’ (26) But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

(27) 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.

### Two Sons

(28) “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.’ (29) And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. (30) And he went to the other son and said the same. And

he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. (31) 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. (32) For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, 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.

### The Wicked Tenants

(33) "Hear 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. (34) When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.

(35) And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. (36) Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. (37) Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' (38) But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his

inheritance.' (39) And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

(40) When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" (41) 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."

(42) 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 marvelous in our eyes'? (43) **Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.** (44) And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

(45) When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. (46) And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Is Christ evident in your life? Is His Spirit in you bearing fruit? Are you born again? May no one here be a

barren fig tree on the Day when Christ comes to judge the world in righteousness.