

The Hidden Sin of Hypocrisy

Mark 11:12-14, 20-21

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How does hypocrisy manifest itself in your life and mine? We can go through the mere motions of prayer, singing the psalms, listening to the reading and preaching of God's Word, and our hearts yet be lukewarm, and even cold toward the Lord. We can outwardly profess our love for the brethren, but in our hearts despise and disregard them. We can be a model of moral purity before others, but secretly feed on pornography and every lustful thought. We can receive the forgiveness of sin as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, and yet refuse to forgive those who have sinned against us. We can commend the preaching of God's Word, but then neglect to live out the truth of the Lord which pierced our hearts by the Word and the Spirit. When hypocrisy takes root in our hearts, it brings with it a blindness and self-delusion, so that one may think all is well when really all is not well. Hypocrisy deadens the pangs of the conscience and sends one whistling all the way to hell.

The Lord Jesus displays in the text before us the sin of hypocrisy that had engulfed not merely an individual, but the Visible Church of the Jews at the time of Christ. Dear ones, this same delusion of hypocrisy will likewise encompass us if we do not carefully heed the warning of our Lord found in our text. The main points from our text are these: (1) The Hypocrisy of Israel (Mark 11:12-13a); (2) The Fruitlessness of Israel (Mark 11:13b); and (3) The Curse upon Israel (Mark 11:14,20-21).

I. The Hypocrisy of Israel (Mark 11:12-13a).

A. Our text begins on Monday morning—the week that would end in Christ's crucifixion and burial. Mark 11:12 states that the day after Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Lord left Bethany and walked to Jerusalem (a distance of about 2 miles away). As the Lord and His disciples walked that short distance, Jesus became hungry.

1. Let us not pass too quickly by this amazing statement, "he was hungry." For by that statement is revealed the astounding truth that He who was the eternal Son of God assumed to Himself human nature. All of the physical weaknesses of man, God the Son assumed, yet without sin. Think about it. As a man, the almighty Son of God who has no needs became weary and hungry. As a man, the holy Son of God who cannot sin was tempted by the devil. As a man, the all-powerful Son of God suffered as no man has ever suffered. Why? That He might manifest His infinite love and grace in making lawless rebels into dear friends. It is as important to defend the humanity of Christ as it is to defend the deity of Christ. For if He was not truly man, He could not have suffered as our Mediator in bearing the full wrath of God against us. It is because He came as the Second Adam, fulfilled all righteousness as the Second Adam, and suffered the infinite wrath of God as the Second Adam, that we are delivered forever from the condemnation of a holy God.

2. Let us never forget that our Great High Priest in heaven who is at God's right hand is fully God and fully man. He IS one of us (not merely WAS one of us); for He is now and forevermore one of us. He, therefore, knows from His own experience our temptations, our pains, and our sorrows. Let us never accuse the Lord of being so infinitely above and beyond us that He cannot sympathize with us. Yes, God is infinitely transcendent, and yet in Jesus Christ, He has come near to us—in fact, He has become one of us in order to redeem us from destruction and to bestow upon us the riches of heaven. Here is One to whom we can flee in our deepest pain/sorrow and in whom we will find comfort/peace.

B. As Jesus and His disciples walked to Jerusalem, He saw a fig tree along the way that was full of leaves at that time in the spring, and He approached it, desiring fruit to satisfy His hunger.

1. Fig trees were one of the most prominent trees for nourishment and refreshment in the

land of Palestine. The fig was a great delight to the taste of the Jew and the large leaves of the fig tree provided a shady haven from the hot scorching sun. After the leaves of the fig tree had fallen off at the onset of winter, there would appear in the spring leaves with the “early figs” upon the trees. Although the “early figs” in the spring that were not yet fully ripened were not the tastiest figs for which the fig tree is known, nevertheless, they were yet eaten for nourishment by the people of the land. Thus, for the Lord to see leaves on the fig tree at this time of the year would lead Him to believe that there would also be some early figs (that were not yet fully ripen) upon the tree to satisfy His hunger. In other words, leaves upon the fig tree imply fruit upon the fig tree (even if it was early, unripen fruit).

2. A second observation about the fig tree is that it was used in Scripture to signify/represent the nation of Israel (Hosea 9:10; Luke 13:6-9). Israel is signified by the grape vine (Isaiah 5:1-7), by the olive tree (Romans 11:16-24), and also by the fig tree.

C. Thus, Jesus was not angry here with a fig tree, nor did He curse it simply because He was hungry and found no figs on the tree. Jesus was teaching His disciples something more important. He was teaching them that He came to Israel looking for the fruits of a true faith in Christ, repentance, love, and obedience and found none (John 1:11).

1. The leaves upon the fig tree signified the outward displays of religion that were practiced by Israel. Israel at that time had the temple, the priesthood, the Old Testament Scriptures, the sacrifices, circumcision, her holy days, and the covenants made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel gloried in these grand leaves as outward displays of her privileged status among the nations.

a. In fact, Israel boasted in these external ceremonies, but neglected what was more important: faith in the God who had given her these ordinances as signs of His covenant love for her.

b. It would be like a husband who must be away from his wife for some time and who gives his wife a special ring to wear so as to draw her close to himself and to remind her of his love for her. But instead she falls in love with the ring and glories so much in the ring that she forgets her husband.

2. Is there anything more dangerous than hypocrisy, wherein we go through the mere motions of religion without faith in and love for Jesus Christ? We all as Christians have hypocrisy to varying degrees in our lives wherein what we profess, we do not faithfully practice (we are inconsistent). But true Christians see those hypocrisies, hate them, repent of them, and seek God’s forgiveness for them; whereas, the hypocrite doesn’t care. He doesn’t repent or seek God’s forgiveness. It is merely a game to the hypocrite to fool those around him/her.

3. If we would see the sin of hypocrisy crucified in our lives, let us give heed to these means of grace.

a. **Let us embrace Christ as our only hope of eternal salvation**, and as our only hope of peace, joy, contentment. Only He can purge our minds, hearts, and lives from all hypocritical dead works to serve the living God. He died to set us free from hypocrisy.

b. **Let us not be strangers to Christ**, but desire and seek communion with Him through fervent prayer and study of His Word. Worship without God’s Spirit will become a mere ritual. Worship without due preparation will be a mere outward form.

c. **Let us grow in hating our hypocrisy** as an enemy of God and as an enemy of our soul that would seek to destroy us. Let us hate it not only for what it will do to us (its consequences), but for the very nature of the sin—a lack of sincere faith in and love to Christ.

d. **Let us not justify “little sins” in our lives**, for if we are unfaithful in little we will be unfaithful in much. A little hypocrisy tolerated in our lives will inevitably lead to a lot of hypocrisy.

e. **Let us realize that hypocrisy will enslave us** and become a way of living two different lives, but the truth of Christ will liberate us and set us free to live as those who see their hypocrisies, hate them, repent of them, seek God’s forgiveness for them, and grow in Him.

II. The Fruitlessness of Israel (Mark 11:13b).

A. When Jesus came near to the fig tree, He found leaves, but no fruit. The explanatory note emphasizes that it was not yet the time for figs, that is, it was not yet time for the fully ripen figs (even though unripen figs might be seen in the spring). The Lord did not expect to find fully ripen figs upon a tree this early in the spring, but He did expect to find some early figs especially with the great show of leaves that adorned the fig tree. But He found no fruit at all on the tree.

B. The desire of the true Christian is to be fruitful (30, 60, or 100 fold). When we prefer fruitlessness over fruitfulness, there is something wrong. And when we don't care about our fruitlessness, there is something really wrong. That is the complacency of unbelief, not faith.

C. What fruit ought to be evident within the church, the ministry, and your Christian life?

1. **A sincere and growing faith** in Christ alone rather than faith in our works, our abilities, or in men. It is not the size of your faith that saves you (even faith the size of a mustard seed will save you). It is in whom your faith is placed that saves you. Is your faith in Jesus alone?

2. **A humility** that bows before God rather than exalting himself/herself above God; that desires to be taught by Christ; that views service to God and others to be a badge of honor, not a sign of scorn.

3. **A repentance** that evidences itself in godly sorrow for sin (and more for it being an offence to God than for the consequences it brings). A desire to know one's hypocrisies (not hide them), that they may be mortified and forsaken (Psalm 139:23-24).

4. **A love** for the Lord and for our neighbor. A love that is sacrificial (that gives when it hurts) and issues from the heart, affects our speech, and directs our actions to obey His holy commandments. A love that is forgiving even when you are treated with contempt or lied about.

5. **A zeal** for the Lord and His truth (like that of Jesus).

D. We must remember that we cannot produce fruit for the Lord in our own strength (without Him we can do nothing, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us). Thus, we can never lawfully take credit or glory for the fruit He produces in us (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

III. The Curse upon Israel (Mark 11:14, 20-21).

A. Here we are to understand the curse that befell Israel for its hypocrisy. God gave Israel over to blindness and sent the Roman troops against it in 70 a.d. to wither its tree nationally and ecclesiastically.

B. This cursing of the fig tree reminds us of the curse upon the hypocrite (Job 27:8) and the eight "woes" in Matthew 23 (verses 27-28).

C. Let us not forget the mercy of the Lord demonstrated in the cursing of Israel—the branches will be grafted back into the olive tree (Romans 11:7-12,15,25). Though Israel as a nation was cursed for her rejection of Christ, Christ was not finished with Israel, for the Lord will yet graft her back into the Visible Church (the olive tree).

D. There is hope for us in spite of all our hypocrisies and inconsistencies! Turn to Jesus Christ who alone is able to deliver you from your hypocrisy this day. Let not hypocrisy reign in your lives. For the fruit of hypocrisy will not only affect you, but will affect your children as well. As our children come to us to look for fruit upon our fig tree, do they find just leaves that are filled with many religious words, or do they also find true fruit of the Spirit in faith, repentance, love, obedience, and zeal?