



## Sermon – The Fig Tree and Prayer That Works

Preached at Cloverdale Church 7/14/24

Matthew 21:18-22

**<sup>18</sup> Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. <sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away.**

**<sup>20</sup> And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"**

**<sup>21</sup> So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. <sup>22</sup> And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."**

The situation:

Jesus is returning to Jerusalem, and he is hungry.

He purposely comes to a fig tree by the road and he is expecting to find fruit on the tree.

He sees the leaves on the tree, so he expects there should also be fruit on the tree, but he doesn't find anything on it.

Since the fig tree doesn't meet expectations, Jesus curses the tree so that it would never grow fruit again. Before the disciples' eyes, the tree withers away.

Jesus' response to the disciples' amazement is to use what happened to the fig tree as a teaching example.

Truly if they have faith without doubting, they can duplicate what he did to the fig tree. He explains they can do even greater things if they ask in prayer.

The formula he provides and teaches is:

- Pray, believe, expect to receive what you asked for.

Application:

As I was reading through the scriptures, I immediately thought of the church and my own Christian life. If the church is the fig tree, will travelers on the road to the Kingdom be fed and find fruit?

As time draws near and ever so much closer to the return of the King, will he find fruit in my life that supports the Kingdom?

- Can someone find encouragement from my ministry, or just leaves?
- Can someone be strengthened along the way?
- Can someone find their way to the Kingdom if they are lost along the way?
- I don't want to just look good on the outside like the leaves, I want to produce fruit.
- Christ is coming back and looking for fruit.

Then I thought about Cloverdale Church. If Cloverdale is a type of fig tree, are there any leaves? If there are leaves, is it accompanied by any fruit?

- We have leaves on this tree. The church looks good on the outside and recently there are many more leaves in the parking lot to indicate that there is or should be some fruit in the area.
- What about 11 AM on Sunday at Cloverdale? There are fewer leaves, but is there any fruit?
- I see some fruit. It might not be as abundant as I would like. But there is something there.
  - If one comes by they can expect to be fed an encouraging word of truth.
  - If someone stops by, they can expect to be strengthened with love and a smile.

As I looked at the application of this story, I asked myself, how much fruit needed to be on the fig tree for Jesus not to curse it? I mean, did he need a bushel, or would three or four figs alone have saved the tree?

I realized that we shouldn't downplay or be discouraged that the tree doesn't produce a tremendous amount of fruit. We should celebrate that there is indeed fruit and perhaps that is why Cloverdale has not withered away. Jesus said some produce 30 fold, 60, or 90 fold. There are varying degrees of fruit bearing and success in the Kingdom.

I think the church and especially we as individuals need to be careful that the business of church doesn't adversely impact the ability to produce and bear fruit. The order of worship is important, the songs and worship is important, the preaching and teaching is necessary. But if it doesn't lead to fruit on the tree, then the church is incomplete in its mission and falls short of the Kingdom expectations of Christ.

You can be busy and yet not fruitful. See Galatians 5 to determine what fruit looks like.

#### How to pray for results:

Finally, as I pondered what Jesus says to the disciples about the power of prayer, I asked myself, if I desire more fruit from Cloverdale and from my life, what needs to be done? I have been praying, and expecting so where are my leaves and the fruit?

So, I asked myself, am I doubting while I'm asking for increase? I'm sure we have all asked God for something in our prayers and didn't see the desired results. I wonder why?

Some possible reasons may include (Source is ChatGPT AI):

1. **Lack of Faith:** The Bible emphasizes the importance of faith in prayer. James 1:6-7 states, "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord."

2. **Wrong Motives:** Prayers that are driven by selfish or impure motives may not be answered. James 4:3 says, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."
3. **Unrepentant Sin:** Sin can create a barrier between an individual and God. Isaiah 59:2 states, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Additionally, Psalm 66:18 notes, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."
4. **Lack of Persistence:** Persistent and sincere prayer is encouraged in the Bible. Luke 18:1-8, the Parable of the Persistent Widow, illustrates the value of persistence in prayer.
5. **Not Praying According to God's Will:** Prayers that align with God's will are more likely to be answered. 1 John 5:14-15 states, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."
6. **Lack of Reconciliation:** The Bible encourages reconciliation with others before praying. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus teaches, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."
7. **Not Abiding in Christ:** John 15:7 emphasizes the importance of maintaining a close relationship with Christ: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."
8. **Timing and God's Sovereignty:** Sometimes, prayers may not be answered immediately or in the way one expects because God's timing and understanding are different from human expectations. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

These biblical principles suggest that the nature of the relationship with God, the intent and content of the prayers, and the alignment with God's will and timing are critical factors in whether prayers are answered.

### Summary

My prayer is that Cloverdale produce more than just leaves, but fruit, much fruit. But before I pray, I will follow the process. It is a divine process of belief and relationship with Christ like the disciples have.

- Leave my pride behind and come humble before God. Make sure I have the right motives.
- Turn from trying to produce fruit in my own way and strength. Leave self and sin behind.
- Turn to God by faith in Jesus Christ for the results.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will in the matter.
- Pray and wait for God to answer.

These are the same steps in the natural that one goes through to produce fruit. There is a seed, the ground is broken up, the seed is buried, new growth appears, and then we water abundantly. I have just



described the Gospel which is a spiritual and divine process; the cross, the grave, the resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit. I encourage us all to follow these same steps before praying for ourselves and others.

I don't want to finish my season like the peach tree we had in our yard growing up. It started out slow, but had many years of huge harvests. But later to our disappointment, it stopped producing anything except leaves. I pray expecting that my life and efforts will always produce fruit for the Kingdom.