

Nothing But Leaves

by

Ellis P. Forsman

Nothing But Leaves

by

Ellis P. Forsman

October 13, 2011

Nothing But Leaves

Mark 11:12-14

Mark 11:12-14, *“And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.”*

Mark here records a human characteristic of Jesus — *“he was hungry”* (verse 12).

Hunger was a part of His humiliation. Though He was the Bread of Life, yet He hungered; though He was the Water of Life, yet He thirsted.

Mark 11:13, *“And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: ...”*

Fig trees were plentiful in the neighborhood of Bethphage.

“Having leaves” upon it was an indication that there might be fruit also upon it, for the fruit begins to appear before the leaves do.

Mark 11:13, *“... and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; ...”*

It would be expected that on this tree, with its leaves fully developed, there might be found at least some ripened fruit. Jesus, therefore, approached the fig tree in His hunger, with the expectation of finding some fruit. But to His great surprise *“he found nothing but leaves; ...”*

As Jesus approached this fig tree full of leaves, but destitute of fruit, there stood before Him the image of the Jewish nation, having a show of leaves, but yielding no fruit.

Mark 11:13, *“... for the time of figs was not yet.”*

“for it was not the season of figs” (Revised Version)

That is, it was not the time of full ripe figs, not the season for harvesting them, not the ordinary time for full ripe figs.

Fruit on the fig tree forms before the leaves and should be full before the leaves appear; so this tree, by putting on its foliage before the time for figs, was proclaiming itself superior to all other fig trees.

This made it a striking symbol of the hypocrite, who, not content with appearing to be as good as other people, usually puts on the appearance of being a great deal better.

Hence, Jesus cursed this fig tree. Mark 11:14, *“And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.”*

Our text presents three things:

- What Jesus sought and seeks.
- What Jesus found and finds.
- What Jesus did and will do.

What Jesus sought and seeks

Fruit.

Of the fig tree — fruit.

He had a right to expect it because it displayed leaves, the sign of some fruit.

Of the Jewish nation — fruit.

He had a right to expect it because God had made Israel a *“special people unto himself.”*

Deut. 7:6, *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.”*

He had cared for and protected them by His providence.

Of Christians today — fruit.

John 15:8, *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”*

Today, as the Lord looks down from heaven upon the church, He expects fruit of the lives of His disciples, but sometimes He finds *“nothing but leaves.”*

- John 15:2, *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”*
- John 15:5, *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”*

Therefore, when we see a Christian today we expect to see fruit in him.

We expect to see a new creature.

- 2 Cor. 5:17, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*
- Eph. 4:22-24, *“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”*

We expect to see the likeness and image of Christ.

- Phil. 2:5, *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”*
- Rom. 8:9, *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*
- 1 Pet. 2:21, *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:”*

We expect to see a holy character.

1 Pet. 1:15, *“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;”*

Holy — sanctified, pure, separated from sin.

We expect to see self-denial.

Luke 9:23, *“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”*

Our Lord hungers for fruit in us; He yearns to see us useful in His service.

What Christ found and finds

Nothing but leaves.

In the fig tree — “nothing but leaves.”

In the Jewish nation — “nothing but leaves.” Matt. 23:25-28, *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is*

within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

In Christians today — in some He still finds “nothing but leaves.”

Let us examine ourselves here:

We profess to “preach the Bible”. 1 Pet. 4:11, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

This requires study.

- 2 Tim. 2:15, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*”
- 1 Pet. 3:15, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*”

But, do you know what the Bible teaches?

If not, you are “nothing but leaves”.

We profess to observe the Lord’s Supper every Lord’s day.

Acts 20:7, “*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*”

Do you attempt to teach this to others, and then neglect to practice it? On the Lord’s day, do you stay at home and entertain company, or become involved in some other activity? If you do, then you are “nothing but leaves”.

We profess to worship God “in spirit and in truth”.

John 4:24, “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*”

Some go to worship, but do not worship. They think that going into a place of worship, sitting down for a certain length of time, and coming out again is worship; hence, they mistake formality for worship.

Some are strict to partake of the Lord's Supper; they would not dare miss it; but they do not observe it worthily. 1 Cor. 11:27-29, "*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*"

Some contend that we should "upon the first day of the week ... lay by him in store," but they do not give "as God hath prospered" them. 1 Cor. 16:2, "*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*"

"Lay by him in store" does not mean "lay by at home", but "putting by him in the treasury". The NIV translation was soundly criticized by Biblical scholars for indicating that it was stored at home.

"Upon the first day of the week" in the Greek means, "Upon the first day of every week."

Nor do they give purposefully. 2 Cor. 9:7, "*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*"

Some affirm that we should praise God in song without the use of mechanical instruments of music; yet, they do not sing "with the spirit and with the understanding". Eph. 5:19, "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*"

Some commend the preaching, but do not profit by putting it into practice.

In all this they are "*nothing but leaves*".

There are those, both in and out of the church, who have regrets without repentance.

Many, under a heart-searching sermon, feel grieved on account of sins, and yet never have the strength of will to give them up.

- They say they are sorry, but they go on in the same sinful course.
- They resolve without acting.
- They have a will, but it is always in the future.
- They see the right, but always permit the evil to rule them.

Such are "*nothing but leaves*".

What Christ did and will do?

To the fig tree — He cursed it and it withered away and bore no fruit forever thereafter.

To the Jewish nation — they were cut off. 1 Kings 9:6-9, “*But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people: And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.*”

Thus, Israel was scattered to the four winds of the earth.

To unprofitable Christians — they are burned. John 15:1-6, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*”

Here we learn the fate of both the faithful and the unfaithful Christians.

Conclusion

What about your life? Is it fruitful, or empty and barren?

If Christ were to come today and look upon us and see a mere profession, a great show of leaves, and yet no fruit, what would be the result?

If that is the case, He would not say, as recorded in Matt. 25:23, “*His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*”

But He would say, as recorded in Matt. 25:41, *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”*

We need to tremble before the heart-searching eye of God.

Let us remember that by God’s grace we can yet be fruitful in His service. 1 Cor. 15:10, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”*

