

The fig tree had the appearance that there would be fruit, but when Jesus reached the tree there was no fruit. What is the statement made about Jesus' physical condition in Matthew 21:18?

There was a strong desire to see figs on the tree. There is a strong desire in the heart of God to see fruit in our lives.

The point of appearing godly but having little or no fruit is illustrated in the history of the church at Ephesus. Turn to Acts 19. In Acts 19 Paul is ministering in Ephesus and the message of the Gospel is accomplishing great things. The church is growing and thriving. How does verse 20 sum up what was happening in Ephesus?

What does verse 10 tell us is the result of this church in the region?

The church was having a tremendous impact on the region and the culture. As we read the book of 2 Timothy about 15 years have passed from the time we read in Acts. Complacency has set in and people have lost passion for the message of Christ. This church that at one time was a change agent for the entire region has experienced a power outage.

In the book of 2 Timothy you find one pastor, Paul, encouraging another pastor, Timothy. Timothy is a young pastor and he is the pastor of a difficult church, the church at Ephesus. Most theologians believe that there was a letter written by Timothy to Paul in which Timothy asks to be reassigned. Ephesus is a hard place to pastor and Timothy would like to minister somewhere else. 1 & 2 Timothy are Paul's response to that request. Paul does not reassign Timothy, instead he encourages him to continue on in the work. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul acknowledges that pastoring the church will get harder instead of easier. He tells Timothy an amazing truth about people in the church in verse 5. Paraphrase that verse here:

There will be people who will look godly but not have power in their lives. There will be leaves on the tree but no fruit. The word translated denying in verse 5 is the Greek word *arneomai* and it

means not just ignoring the power but to reject the power. In other words, it means to consider what the power is and to decline. I recently purchased a new television. When I bought the television the clerk carefully explained the 2 year extended warranty and all the benefits of the warranty. I declined the warranty. After hearing what the benefit would be I decided it was not worth the cost. That is what was happening in Ephesus. After hearing the benefit of being a passionate follower the Ephesians decided it was not worth the cost of discipleship. We have the added benefit of seeing a picture of this same church another 25-30 years after Paul wrote Timothy. In the seven letters to the seven churches the Lord Jesus tells us what has happened to this once influential church. Turn to Revelation 2 and read verse 4. What is the result of *denying* the power of God in the life of a person?

Prayer Primer: Pray that you will not just be a person of leaves, but a person of fruit as well.

Week 3, Day 14

Matthew 21:28-32

The parable told by Jesus in today's Scripture was in reply to the question posed by the chief priests and elders in the passage from yesterday's study. Better, really, is that His telling of this parable was in reply to the leaders' inability to answer the question Jesus presented.

Jesus started the parable by stating a question, "But what do you think?" It reminds me of being in school. In the classroom, the teacher or professor gives a problem and expects the students to figure it out or come up with the solution. The working it out or searching for the solution is a good way for students to learn. Sometimes we need to find the answers for ourselves. That is exactly why personal Bible study is imperative. You can go to church and listen to the pastor or a small group Bible study and listen to the teacher. However, some of the most valuable lessons are learned when you find the answer on your own. So, keep up the good work and keep digging in God's Word for those valuable treasures!

Jesus presented a story to the religious leaders. We can assume they would have been familiar with Old Testament references to a vineyard. Let's take a look at a couple of those examples. For each reference listed, investigate what the symbolic meaning of *vine* or *vineyard* is in the context.

Psalms 80:8-9

Isaiah 5:1-7

Jesus used the imagery of the vine and vineyard in other teaching. Just last week in your study you learned what the vineyard represents in another parable told by Jesus. (day 7) What was it?

Let's look one last place before we get back to the parable in today's Scripture reading. How did Jesus use the metaphor of the vine and branches in John 15:1-8? What is absolutely essential for the branches?

Looking back at the parable in today's text, what was the response and action by each of the sons?

1st son –

2nd son –

Since the vineyard stands for God's Kingdom, for anyone to accomplish any work for the kingdom, he or she must be dependent on God. The work starts with obedience. When God calls us to work in His kingdom (and, by the way, if you are a believer and follower **you are called**) we must follow with both word and deed.

Sometimes we have good intentions but we fail to follow-through. Can you relate to that in any way? Can you think of a time when you said you would obey but failed to actually do so?

On the other hand, can you think of a time when you were unwilling to be obedient at the beginning but then thought better of it and walked in obedience?

When asked, the religious leaders responded that the one who did the Father's will was the first son. Jesus related their answer right back to their own lives. What does the answer Jesus gave the religious leaders mean?

While this parable had a definite meaning aimed right at the chief priests and elders that were in conversation with Jesus, we can also make application in our lives. Read back over the text and ask God to reveal His message to you through His written Word. What might God be saying to you through this particular passage?

Prayer Primer: Ask God to give you the desire and ability to walk in obedience when you are called to do kingdom work.

Week 3, Day 15

Matthew 21:33-46

Read over the text and determine who or what is represented by each of the following:

Man/landowner –

Vineyard –

Tenant farmers –

Slaves –

Son –

Using the information you wrote above, what is the meaning of the parable?

Just as the landowner gave the tenant farmers everything they would need to have a successful crop, God had given Israel everything they needed to obey and produce a crop. On day 13 in this week's study, you studied about fruit. There was the bad fruit of disobedience and rebellion by the people of Israel and the fruit of complacency represented in the church at Ephesus. God, during the time of the Old Testament, had sent prophets to warn the people to turn from their rebellion. Look up the following Scriptures to see their response:

Isaiah 28:12

Isaiah 30:9-11

The words you just read are chilling to me. But, they are also convicting. While I have not rejected Jesus Christ in my life, I know there have been times when I have refused to listen. I can think of times when my own children have refused to listen to their parents' instructions; when they knew better but chose not to obey. How can you relate that in your own life?

Jesus then quoted from Psalm 118:22-23. Look up those verses and read them in their context.

In contrast to those who refused to listen, Jesus said that the kingdom would be given to those who were willing to listen and obey. Read Proverbs 8:32-36. What do these verses tell us about the one who is willing to listen?

Oh yeah, the Jewish religious leaders got it; they knew Jesus was talking about them. They were fuming, to say the least. They were looking for a way to shut Jesus up. Their plan was already in motion. They just had to wait for the right time. It won't be too long in the timeline of Scripture until we get there.

As you close this week of Bible study, reflect back on all that you have studied this week. What one thing sticks out in your mind as the most important lesson of the week? Now, how will you apply that to your life and will you be different as a result?

Prayer Primer: Ask God to reveal how He might change your life through the power of His Word.