

The cursing of the fig tree

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Date: 18 October 2020

[0 : 00] If you'll please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew and to the 21st chapter, Matthew 21. Matthew 21, and today we're looking at verses 18 through 22.

So if you look there with me, Matthew 21, verses 18 through 22. In the morning, as he, and that's Jesus, was returning to the city, he became hungry.

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.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither at once? 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.

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith. Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, and we pray that you would help us to understand your word now, that you would apply it to our hearts, that Christ would be glorified in the preaching of your word, that we would understand this meaning behind what's going on with the tree and even what Jesus teaches afterwards.

[1 : 45] That we would live by it, that it would affect the way we pray, the way we live. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You may remember we've now moved into the last week before the cross, or the week of Jesus' crucifixion.

So far, we've seen the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple, and that's as far as we've really made it in the week. And we've also talked about, as Jesus entered the triumphal entry, we talked about those hosannas that were proclaimed, and how quickly those hosannas would become, crucify him, as the people would cry later in the week.

Their expectations of a kingdom and what the Messiah would look like were not realized in Jesus. They were disappointed by what they saw in him, and they quickly turned against him.

And so here Jesus gives an example of judgment, and he teaches his disciples about prayer. And so both of these really fit under the larger theme of what we might call a theme of judgment in this first chapter, this week leading up to Jesus' death.

There's a theme of judgment here on the people of Israel, on the Jewish people. We see this all throughout the chapter. We see it at the end of chapter 21. We see it at the beginning of chapter 22, which is actually what we read today in our reading earlier, 22 verses 1 through 15, the wedding feast.

[3 : 09] Those who are invited aren't coming to the feast. And so we see Jesus continually teaching this chapter judgment, or even living out examples of judgment upon the people of Israel.

And so we see that continuing theme today. So I want us to look first at what happens with the victory and the lesson that's being taught in that. And so we see in this that God will judge, this is our first point, God will judge all fruitless religion.

All fruitless religion. And so that's really what this account symbolizes, God's judgment on this kind of fruitless religion. The leaves here advertise that the plant was, or that the tree was doing well, and even that the tree would have fruit.

There's much discussion about this because Mark in his text actually says that it wasn't the season for figs. And so there's great discussion about, well, why would Jesus expect figs? And it seems that Mark's saying that it wasn't the season for them to be fully ripe.

And there's actually two stages in figs, and I'm no expert on fig trees, but there should have been something showing that there's fruit. There should have been something even edible at this point on the tree.

[4 : 18] And the leaves seem to be advertising, I've got fruit, I'm a healthy tree. You might have expectation that it would produce if you see this. But what it's advertising, it's not actually producing.

And in many ways that we think about this in terms of religion, we see in this really a clear example of what hypocrisy really is. It's this outward advertisement that I've got something, and under closer examination, it's not really there.

The fruit's not there. The content, what we look for, what we might profit from, is missing. So God says in Isaiah 29, 13, speaking of his people, he says, This people draws near with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, while their heart is far from me.

Again, that's really just an example of what hypocrisy is. With the lips outwardly, everything proclaims, I'm a follower of God. But inwardly, the heart's not there. The heart's not really following God.

And so this is what's being symbolized to us in the fig tree. Even again, as we said before about the hosannas. The hosannas, the praises of God.

[5 : 22] Salvation has come. Those were great, weren't they, when Jesus entered in. But no sooner does he enter into, not Jerusalem, but as he enters into the temple. Do you remember what he proclaims?

What we just saw a couple of weeks ago? In verse 17 of chapter 21, if you want to look back there, he said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer.

But you make it a den of robbers. So there's a temple that outwardly looks like it's praising God. But when you go in, it's a den of robbers. And so Jesus here is pointing again to this reality of what's going on in Israel.

Of the hypocrisy that's there, of the problem with outward religion that has no heart, no fruit to it. At another time, Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree.

This is from Luke 13, 6-9. He says, And he told this parable. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. And he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

[6 : 23] And he said to the vine dresser, Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?

And he answered him, Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good. But if not, you can cut it down.

And so here we have this example of this fruitless fig tree. And the owner of the vineyard wants to cut it down. And the vine dresser says, One more year. I'm going to dig around it and make sure it gets water to it.

We're going to put some manure around it. We'll see if we fertilize it, if we water it, will it grow? Will it produce? But if it doesn't, it gets cut down. And really this is an example of exactly what's being lived out for us here in Jesus' coming.

All the preparatory work has been done. And now here's Jesus entering in himself. If we can imagine any more fertilizer to the tree. What might enliven God's people but to have the presence of the Messiah there with them.

[7 : 29] But if no fruit is being produced even when the Messiah enters into Jerusalem, what hope is there for the tree but that it be cut down and burned? As we understand, in many ways this could be carried forward and we could say, is this not true as well for when the vine dresser returns?

Excuse me, when the owner of the vineyard returns. When Christ returns to earth. Is this not now even a time of fertilization, an opportunity for there to be fruit?

But if the owner of the vineyard returns and there's no fruit, it's going to be cut down and cast into the fire. And so we must understand that the judgment here symbolized what was currently happening for the Israelites.

Jesus is representing exactly what he's seeing as he enters into Jerusalem. J.C. Ryle says, That fig tree, full of leaves, but bearing a fruit, was the striking emblem of the Jewish church when our Lord was upon earth.

The Jewish church had everything to make an outward show. It had the temple, the priesthood, the daily service, the yearly feast, the Old Testament scriptures, the rituals of the Levites, the morning and evening sacrifice.

[8 : 40] But beneath these goodly leaves, the Jewish church was only destitute of fruit. It had no grace, no faith, no love, no humility, no spirituality, no real holiness, no willingness to receive its Messiah.

And hence, like the fig tree, the Jewish church was soon to wither away. It was to be stripped of all its outward ornaments and its members scattered over the face of the earth.

Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The temple was to be burned. The daily sacrifice was to be taken away. The tree was to wither away to the very ground, and so it came to pass.

Never was there a type so literally fulfilled. In every wandering Jew, we see a branch of the fig tree that was crushed. And so what we see lived out for us here in what Jesus is doing is preparing his disciples for what's about to take place, that they might understand.

Because again, we talked about they have struggled to understand that Jesus is coming as a spiritual Messiah, and the kingdom is not going to look like what they expect it to. So when they see Jerusalem destroyed, well, even before that, when they see their Messiah, the Christ, crucified, Jerusalem destroyed, the temple destroyed, how are they to interpret these things?

[10:04] Matthew Henry echoes this sentiment. He says, It represents the state of the nation and people, the Jews in particular. They were a fig tree planted in Christ's way as a church.

Now observe 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, but his expectations were frustrated.

He found nothing but leaves. Now you can imagine this is not true only of the Jewish people, is it? It's a warning for all of us.

Even as Matthew Henry explains it, is that not what we might expect Jesus to expect with the church today? He's come among it. He's planted this plant. What is his expectation for the church? We could say, what is his expectation for people? I want to say Christians, but let's not narrow it. But God's expectation for his people is that they might show fruit that's glorifying to him.

[11:08] And what happens if there is no fruit? Now remember what immediately precedes this account is the cleansing of the temple. And when we combine this with what we see here, we see that they together speak of the judgment both on the temple and of the nation.

God's people, at least outwardly, will be judged for their lack of fruit. And so as I'm saying, it's not only true of the Jewish people in that day, though it also speaks to us today.

For the visible church, if we have all the forms of religion, if we have everything outwardly that looks religious and spiritual, but there's no fruit that flows from the faith, then we too face the same judgment, don't we?

And I'm saying the church broadly, but we could say for every individual in this room that we must examine our own hearts. J.C. Ryle, who I quoted earlier, he went on to say, is not every fruitless professor of Christianity in dreadful danger of becoming a withered fig tree?

So though Jesus' immediate context is what he's beholding in Jerusalem, in the Jewish people who he had planted so much into, is it not true for everyone who would profess the name of Christ, who would say they're a believer, but they have no fruit in their life, that the same result will happen to them?

[12:33] In other words, there may be some of you in this room who you're that fig tree. You've got the leaves and outwardly you look to show, but if there's no fruit, what's going to happen?

Maybe if I were to say this positively, we might say that the only evidence of true salvation is the fruit of the Spirit in one's life. Let me say that one more time.

The only evidence of true salvation. We have all these outward evidences. Someone can come to church every Sunday, get perfect attendance at the end of the year. We don't really give that out, but you know what I mean.

Perfect attendance at the end of the year. They may attend prayer meeting. They may read the Bible every day. They may pray every day. They may do all the outward things that look so spiritual. They may serve every opportunity possible. But none of those things tell us that someone's really converted. In fact, in many ways, there's not a way for any of us to know the heart of anyone else.

[13:39] But the true evidence that God does give of salvation is spiritual fruit. The Spirit produces fruit in one's life. And so do we have the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?

If we're not producing that spiritual fruit, then we're in danger. Here's what Jesus says. This is from John 15, 1-6. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser.

Now we've transitioned from fig tree to vine, but you can still see the picture, right? Same thing. He's the vine dresser. He's investing into this crop or into this plant to produce a crop.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. 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.

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine. Neither can you unless you abide in me.

[14:45] I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered together, thrown into the fire, and burned. And so here we see a very close parallel with what we've seen in the fig tree.

And what is the one and only difference between a plant that produces fruit from one that doesn't? What's the one difference? We might use the phrase abiding in Christ.

It's the connection to Christ. It's union with Christ. It's what we might say salvation. It's faith, but it's being connected to Jesus Christ. If we're connected with Christ, then we produce fruit.

If we're abiding in him and we're living in him, we produce fruit. That's the inevitable result. And in fact, we're told that God the Father prunes us, so there's a spiritual work of sanctification going on, that we might, over time, produce more and more fruit.

[15:52] And so not only do we produce fruit, over time, we're continuing to grow and produce greater fruit. Just like you might imagine a healthy tree you might grow and each year produce a more abundant crop over time.

And so that's true. But it says, if anyone does not bear fruit, well, they're not abiding in Christ. And so they're cut off. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers and the branches are gathered together, thrown into the fire and burned.

And so here, the example is taken even further than what we see with the fig tree that Jesus does and the fact that they're gathered together and burned. And here we have, I think, a very clear representation of hell.

That Jesus here is speaking of what's going to happen when he returns. That there will be a final judgment upon people. Is there fruit in someone's life? Are they truly abiding in Christ?

Or are they cut off and thrown away? And then there's that key thing that Jesus says, apart from me you can do nothing. And there's the reality of the difference. Are we in Christ?

[17:05] Are we trusting in him? Is he our hope? Or do we think we can do it on our own? And the reality is we're not going to produce fruit on our own. And so here's Israel trusting not in Christ but in themselves and producing no fruit and he's saying symbolically they're about to wither away to be thrown into the fire to be consumed because they're not producing fruit.

Now I want to shift gears a little bit because Jesus does in this and I think it's important we don't miss the first point because I think that's there. It's interesting that as we continue on that's not what Jesus stresses.

It seems like the obvious context to me in the fact that we just said the cleansing of the temple and I said we're going to move on in chapter 21 and into chapter 22 and what we're going to see is Jesus continuing to talk about judgment on Israel.

And so I think what I've just said to you is correct. That's not where Jesus focuses and it may be even Jesus is reflecting on the question that's asked him by the disciples why he goes the route he does but he gives this picture of judgment and then the disciples don't ask well who's the tree? They don't ask what does this represent? What is this symbolizing? What are you trying to teach us here? They're caught up in the fact that Jesus just made a tree wither in an instant. How'd you do that?

[18:26] Which I think is a very human question. Right? It's a question any of us might wonder how'd you just make that I mean just picture you think of even we're in fall now. You think of all these trees out here who some of them bore fruit this year.

The apple trees and they're turning colors and you have this gradual process of then they stop producing the fruit and the leaves turn and they fall off and it takes a few weeks we get to enjoy the pretty colors and in an instant Jesus said you're not going to produce fruit again and the tree withers.

It's gone. And the disciples are amazed that they've never seen anything like this. How did you do this? And so the second point that I want to focus on in the message and maybe it seems a little disconnected but when we look at the passage it's where Jesus goes and that's to say that there's power in prayer or excuse me prayer in faith is powerful.

So prayer in faith is powerful. And so this isn't the the point of judgment isn't what Jesus stresses in his answer or his teaching. The disciples are amazed they marvel at what Jesus has done and they question him over what's just happened.

Look at verse 20 when the disciples saw it they marveled saying how did the fig tree wither at once? And Jesus answered them and he answers directly to them and the question he says 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 and whatever you ask in prayer you will receive if you have faith.

[20 : 07] You may remember earlier in our study of Matthew back in chapter 17 Jesus said in verse 21 there truly I say to you if you have faith like a grain of a mustard seed you will say to this mountain move here from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you.

And so this isn't the first time Jesus has taught them this idea now he just happens to bottle it out before them but Jesus has already said that with faith that they can do it says nothing will be impossible for you.

I think as we look at this we can consider this essentially the opposite of the dead faith of Israel that produces no fruit. So if I want to make a connection how is this connected with what just happened apart from the question the disciples asked that might be the connection that I make.

Here's Israel who the majority of which have an outward appearance of religion but are dead spiritually and so they're producing no fruit.

By contrast if you abide in Christ by faith nothing is impossible to you. You'll produce fruit. What example of that will be in how you pray and how God answers prayer through your prayer.

[21 : 27] Back in John 15 we read the following Jesus said if you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. Truly truly I say to you whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do and greater works than these will he do because I am going to the Father.

Whatever you ask in my name this I will do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name I will do it. And so here again as we tie together all these teachings of Jesus if we think about again this idea of abiding in Christ that we saw in the Gospel of John that I read earlier.

If you abide in me you'll produce fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing. And we think about what we just saw in Matthew 17 with a small amount of faith you can do what seems impossible you can move mountains.

And then combine it with what we see here again that same idea if you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you wish that will be done for you. And he goes on and specifies even whoever believes in me also will do works greater than me.

And he says if you ask this in my name which I think again it's just an expression not that if we say the right terminology but we ask in accordance with God's will and we're asking in faith and his name is that we're depending upon him we believe he will do it he will answer he will hear.

[22 : 47] Such prayer like that reflects abiding in Christ. This is what abiding in Christ looks like. If we're living in Christ if he is our life then we pray by faith believing that he hears and answers our prayer.

That is the opposite of the dead fig tree who outwardly tries to look good but there's no fruit there there's no real faith there's no dependence upon God there's no trust in Christ.

And so even as we see when we went back and looked at John 15 I think Jesus is doing the same thing here. Jesus said in John 15 whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do and greater works than these will he do do you remember why he said you'll do greater works?

Because I'm going to the Father. Now that is that opposite assumption I think most people would make. Jesus is with me I can do whatever you know there's power there we've got Jesus with us watch out fig trees he calms storms right?

This is Jesus but when he goes away power diminishes but what Jesus says is actually the opposite and back in John 15 we know that Jesus was preparing the disciples for his imminent departure and I think the same thing is happening now.

[24 : 09] He wants them to see that though he's about to leave this earth power hasn't diminished. I'll be bold enough to say he's multiplied. He says greater things will you do than I do because I go to my Father.

power. And we know he's not actually absent from us either absent physically spiritually we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us the Spirit of Christ dwells in believers and so we're encouraged that even though Christ is going away from them that power is not diminished.

They're not going to be somehow missing out on some blessings from Christ because of his departure. And so he will meet their needs even though physically he won't be present he doesn't cease to meet the needs of his people.

I think that's crucial that's important for us to understand. It's encouragement for us as well isn't it? I mean obviously we're living much longer after the days of Jesus. Should we expect the same things?

Can we believe that Jesus is still working as powerfully? Is his power somehow diminished? Is God's power somehow diminished because he's not physically present on earth?

[25 : 24] By no means. In fact somehow in the way God's worked things out his power is multiplied in the presence of his spirit working in the hearts of his people throughout the world. And maybe we'd even go as far as to say as the gospel is multiplied as it goes to the ends of the earth as more people believe that power also is multiplied.

And so we're encouraged to pray. And likewise I think we can conclude that doubting in our prayer is contrary to faith and it negatively affects our prayers.

Now I want to qualify that in some ways because I think there ought to be reasons we would doubt sometimes our prayers, right? I think if I remember correctly back when we were looking at John 15 or excuse me Matthew 17 maybe when we were looking there I think I remember telling you if you're praying for a Maserati don't assume God's going to answer that prayer.

Right? It's not saying you pray for whatever you want to and you're going to get it. As far as I know there hasn't been a Christian since Christ who has prayed for a mountain to move and it happened. I don't know that Jesus is specifically trying to say here's a literal example you'll move a mountain. I think what he's saying is what is humanly impossible will be done through prayer.

[26 : 47] That which we cannot accomplish God does through prayer. And likewise we go back to if you pray in my name if you're praying in faith there ought to be things that we pray that we know are in accordance with God's will that we ought to have complete faith that God's going to answer.

We ought to believe that he's going to answer. And if we doubt and what I mean primarily by doubting is we doubt God's going to answer. I mean for some reason why would we doubt?

Well I've given you one example because we ought to doubt if we think we're praying for something that we know is just not really God's will for us. God hasn't commended us to pray for nice cars.

We might say I need a car to be able to get to work that I may feed my family and maybe that's a reasonable request that we might pray with boldness but maybe not for the Maserati.

So maybe we can qualify some things and maybe there's reason to doubt because of what we're praying for. But if we're praying for things that we know in God's word let's just take for example what we've seen already.

[27 : 52] What do we pray God work in me that I might produce fruit for your kingdom. That you might be glorified in me. Do we then walk away and say I don't know if that's really going to happen.

Our full expectation should be God's going to answer that. He's bid us to pray for this. He's commanded us to pray for this. This is his desire for us in our lives. We should pray expecting God to work and accomplish these things.

Ask whatever you wish. This is John 15 7 again. It will be done for you. Again John 15 14. If you ask me anything in my name I will do it. That ought to be our expectation.

And that's what Jesus I think is encouraging his disciples here. Look he's not going to be there physically present with them. But they can still pray to Christ. They can pray to God the Father and know that Christ is interceding for them with the Father.

Another reason we might say that our prayers the power of prayers multiplied. Our Savior is there interceding for us on our behalf. God. I said already that doubting is contrary to faith and negatively affects our prayers.

[29 : 10] So we can conclude from that we're to come with boldness to God. Believe that God will answer those prayers. I think that's exactly what genuine faith is and what we see modeled for us is genuine faith in God's word.

And so we have for example a person like Abraham. And here's what Romans 4 20-22 says. No unbelief made him, made Abraham waver concerning the promise of God.

But he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness.

So here's an example of faith. Here's what real faith is. Believe that God is able to do what he promised. I think it's beyond ability. Abraham believed God would do what he promised.

And again we have that example of the faith of Abraham with Isaac. He believed that God was capable of raising his son from the dead. If God said that it's through Isaac that my seed will be reckoned, Isaac is untouchable.

[30 : 14] He's invincible. He's going to be raised by God. God will keep his promise. That's what faith is.

And so that is what our prayer life ought to look like. God is a promise keeper. He doesn't change. Look, there's not one of us in this room who's a promise keeper.

Right? All of us break promises at some point. We may seek to keep a promise, but we've all made promises we didn't keep. God's never said something that he hasn't accomplished.

He doesn't follow through with. What he says, he does. He keeps his word. He doesn't change. And so that ought to affect how we pray. Not to encourage us to pray in power.

So how do we apply this? How do we or what might we conclude from all this? Well, going back to our first point of our message, I want you to understand as we go from here that all false religion will be judged.

[31 : 22] God's going to judge false religion. That's what he's proclaiming here. It's not how good the tree looks on the outside, but is it really producing fruit? Here's what James 1, 22 through 25 says, but be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

So we just pause there for a second. What's God saying there in James? There are some, and where will we find this some?

It's primarily not going to be outside the church, is it? I think we're safe to say there are some who are in the church who are hearers of the word only, who are deceiving themselves into thinking that they're Christians, but they're not doing the word.

And if I were to paraphrase, what is doing the word? Is that not just another way of saying they're bearing fruit? And so he says, be doers of the word, be those who bear fruit, be those who follow God's commands, and not those who only hear them and deceive yourselves.

For anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer. He is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and he goes away, and at once he forgets what he looks like.

[32 : 43] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. So how foolish is a man who looks in the mirror and forgets what he looks like?

And Jesus says, or God's word says here in James, that's exactly what happens to those who look at the word of God, and they walk away and they forget what God's word says, and they don't live by it.

And so are there some of you in this room who are deceiving yourselves? who are like this foolish person, looking in the mirror and forgetting themselves. You look at God's word and you go away and you forget about it.

Maybe you don't forget exactly what it says, but you make no effort to live by it. It's not what's guiding your life. After the morning devotion's done, it's gone. Check that off the list.

I heard it, but I didn't do it. Maybe you've heard that distinction before. Maybe in the home or in school, but between hearing and listening, you can hear something, you can kind of tune it out, right?

[33 : 55] I know no husbands in this room ever do that, right? Just kind of, yeah, I heard what you said. Or repeat it back to me. I knew you were saying, I heard something coming out of your mouth.

I just, I mean, there's this difference in that. And do we treat the word of God like that sometimes? That we read it, and look, this happens with any reading to some extent. We were talking recently with the kids who were saying, you know, sometimes I can be reading something and I get on like a few pages and I read it, where did that come from?

I have to go back and reread the last two pages. Look, it can happen with any kind of reading that we read it and we just, you know, we can do it mentally without ever registering what's said. But how much more so, with the word of God, can we treat it like that?

Or can we read it and then we go and we live our lives as though it doesn't matter at all? And he says, if we do that, we're deceiving ourselves. We're the fig tree. We've got the leaves without the fruit.

And so God is calling us to bear fruit consistent with true faith. back in Matthew 3, Jesus said, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father.

[35 : 13] For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

So Jesus speaking to Israelites who are claiming, Abraham's my father. I'm a Christian because daddy was. And his daddy before him. And Jesus says, no.

I can raise up Christians from anywhere. It doesn't matter who your parents were. It doesn't matter what your connection is to the faith. It doesn't matter even what your attendance is like at church or who is believed before you.

And then even in the picture of the tree, every tree that doesn't bear fruit is cut down. So each of us will be judged and the calling for us is that we bear fruit in keeping with repentance. We bear true fruit consistent with genuine faith.

And then in Matthew 7, Jesus says, you will recognize them by the fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[36 : 21] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

And so our fruit really determines if we're in Christ or not. Are we truly saved or not? And maybe we're already thinking, if that's true, how do I get some fruit?

Right? I mean, that ought to be what we desire. God tells us to bear fruit. Bearing fruit determines if we get into the kingdom or if we're cut down and thrown into the fire. How do I get some fruit? And what's Jesus' answer that we saw earlier?

He says, apart from me, you can do nothing. So let's just go ahead and say, every system, every methodology that we might come up with to bear fruit, every form of self-improvement, I'm going to try to be nicer, I'm going to read the self-help books, I'm going to be a better person, I'm going to be the best me I can be, none of that works.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. The only way that we're going to produce fruit is what? Abiding in Christ. It's what we saw earlier. So the command to us is bear fruit.

[37 : 35] The means that we bear fruit is what? Abiding in Christ. And so we can conclude as well, the command is we've got to abide in Christ. That's what we're being called to in this passage, is abiding in Christ.

And then along with that, abiding in Christ results in producing fruit, and one means of that we might say is that we're encouraged to pray. we're to pray in faith, we're to pray in boldness, we're to pray trusting and believing that Christ will do what he's promised he will do.

I had a hard time picking between two hymns, which one we would close with today, and so I chose one, and I'm going to quote to you the other one. So, we have one hymn that we often sing that says, Come my soul, thy suit prepare.

Jesus loves to answer prayer. He himself has bid they pray, therefore will not say they nay. And I think this is what we see here in this passage.

Jesus is telling us to pray. Our expectation ought not be that he's going to tell us no. No. Jesus loves to answer prayer.

[38 : 48] He's encouraged us to pray because he delights to answer our prayer. I think one reason is because our prayers demonstrate our utter dependence upon God. We're acknowledging I can't do this on my own.

That is an act of faith in itself. I need you to do it in your power. I believe you can do it. I can't do it. And so that kind of him.

And if he's the one bidding us to come, we ought not expect him to say no. Maybe I should have said it positively. He's the one bidding us. Jesus is encouraging us to pray.

And so our full expectation ought to be that he will hear an answer. And so that ought to encourage us. So as we close, I encourage you to abide in Christ. And do what even humanly speaking is impossible.

We're not depending upon our strength. If so, we know it wouldn't happen. But we come to God in prayer believing that he is omnipotent. He is all powerful and that he loves to answer the prayers of his people.

[40 : 04] Let's pray together. Lord, we've reached really almost a scary point in our service right now because we all run the risk of being that man who looks in the mirror and forgets his face.

Who's heard your word but walks away and isn't a doer of the word. Oh Lord, we pray that you would guard us, protect us, that that would not be true of us today.

We pray for all who are in this room. Lord, that they would be doers of your word. We pray that you would work in us, that we may abide in Christ and that there would be much fruit produced in our lives, that we would be glorifying to you.

Lord, we pray that you would encourage and bless our prayer, that we would be those who would be regularly and often praying by faith, trusting and believing that you would hear an answer.

Lord, we pray that you would change even our corporate prayer life on Wednesday nights, that we would gather together, many of us, gathering to pray, and that you would hear an answer, and that you would use those prayers to change our church.

[41 : 29] Lord, even as we change our focus in those times of prayer, focusing upon ministries of the church and things that's going on, Lord, that you would use those times to hear and answer our prayers and that it would reshape who we are.

Lord, we pray even that as we pray in those ways and as you answer that the result would be fruit in our lives and in the church corporately that there would be greater fruit for your kingdom glory we ask all this in Christ's name amen