

In Matthew, as we draw closer and closer to Easter, it becomes more and more obvious, **why** Jesus was crucified. The animosity between Jesus and the religious leaders, is bubbling away, and of course, it finally boils over with His trial and crucifixion.

And once again, today's reading is an example of this. In its context, it's all about the rejection of Jesus by Judaism, and especially by its leaders. Prophet after prophet had been rejected by Israel. John the Baptist was their most recent rejection. –A righteous man sent by God, and the religious leaders rejected him, but ordinary folk were different. The sinners – tax collectors and prostitutes, believed John, and repented of their sin... It was a grass-roots movement of the Spirit.

And this was being repeated again now in Jesus Christ. Jesus was being rejected by the religious leaders, but sinners were repenting and turning to God.... Remember last week, we read “The last shall be first, and the first shall be last”. Well, this is it – unfolding – those who where supposed to be near to God, rejected God, while those who were far from God, were turning their hearts towards Him.

That's what it's about. But I reckon we've heard enough about how the Jews rejected Jesus. And today, we're going to talk about being fruitful for God.

And I'm going to start out with this heading:

Showy religion without fruit is condemned.

When I used to be part of a certain denomination, nearly every year, when I'd go away for church meetings, there'd be all

sorts of 'green' motions put forward for us to vote on, and they'd always be approved. I remember one time, someone led us in the prayers – and they prayed against those who cut down forests, and who cleared trees for financial gain. And I didn't make any friends amongst the environmentalists, when I questioned why the church was getting caught up in these environmental/political matters... I said, "I don't remember Jesus saving any trees, but I do remember Him killing one."

*I'll tell you what – that got a few hackles up. But why **did** Jesus kill the fig tree?*

Early in the morning, Jesus was hungry. He saw a tree that was nice and leafy – it should've had figs on it, but when He went over, looking for a feed, there were none there, so Jesus cursed that tree, and instantly it died. ... Do you think Jesus being spiteful or angry because He didn't get what He wanted? ... Why **did** Jesus kill that fig tree?

Well, I can tell you, it's not because He hates trees. On the third day of creation, He created trees that bore seed and other trees that bore fruit, and He saw that it was good.

When Jesus killed the fig tree, this was a living, breathing (or maybe gasping) metaphor of Jesus' judgment on fruitless, showy religion. You see, the religious leaders were like a leafy tree – all show, but no fruit.

And it's possible for us Christians, to be like that fig tree – all showy leaf, and no fruit.

We can be Christians who turn up for church, sing all the songs. Stand at the right time. Sit at the right time. Put our hands up at the right time... We can have the Christian sticker on the car, and the "WWJD" band on the wrist. We might

know all the big theological words, so that we can speak Christianese with the best of them... We can make all sorts of moral judgments on society and tell everybody else what's wrong in their life – we can do all of this, and yet fail to live a Godly life ourselves.

Jesus condemns and judges, those who do not bear fruit, but make a show of their religion. What does it mean to bear fruit?

To bear fruit, means to respond to Christ... That doesn't mean to say "Yep, I'll follow Christ" – it means to actually do it. Discipleship – being a disciple of Jesus Christ, is much more than just words – It's words, and action.

Jesus told the parable of 2 sons. A father said to his 2 sons "Go out to the paddock and work." The first one said "Nup", but later on he changed his mind, and went and did it. The second one said "Yeah, I'll do that.", but didn't. So which one did the will of the father?.... The first one.

And Jesus concluded that story by saying, to these religious leaders, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Jesus is pointing us **back** to the message of John the Baptist – and what was John's message? "Repent, for the Kingdom of

God is at hand". What did John say about fruit? He said
Matthew 3:8 **Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.**

Bear fruit, in keeping with repentance.

You see:

God loves you as you are, but He loves you too much, to let you stay as you are.

Disciples of Jesus Christ, must be transformed, so that
Godliness, is part of who we are.

One of the downfalls of us evangelicals, is with our understanding of "by grace alone" and "by faith alone", we tend to put it as a matter of words, instead of actions. And so we tend to believe, if we can get someone to say 'the sinners prayer', they're saved... But it's not a matter of words – it's a matter of the heart. I could teach a budgie to say the sinners prayer – but that's not going to save it.

And way too often, people view the 'sinners prayer' as some kind of life insurance policy. "Yep, I'm a Christian, and if I die, I'll go to heaven..." but nothing's changed in their life. – they're the same old person they always were, living in the same old ways – sin still ruling their lives....

Well, let me give you a heads up: Jesus Christ came, and gave His life, as a ransom, to buy us **out** of slavery to sin. And He demands a return on His investment. ... Jesus told another parable – the parable of the tenants:

33 " There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a

winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Now, once again, He was talking about the Christ being rejected by the chosen people.

But listen to the punch line: "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants **who will give him the fruits in their seasons.**"

Alright, we are those tenants. Disciples of Jesus Christ, **WILL GIVE CHRIST THE FRUITS** in their seasons.

And what is the fruit? The fruit of repentance... The fruit of the Spirit... A transformed life.

We are not saved, by doing more stuff. We are saved by the grace of God, but we are saved, to become objects of His pleasure – a holy people – a people belonging to God, in more than just words alone....

Have you ever had a new car? - It doesn't even have to be a brand new one with that new car smell – just a new car to you. Whenever I've gotten a new car, it all starts out with the very best of intentions – I've made a big investment, and I want to look after it: And for the first couple of months, I've kept it washed and polished and vacuumed... It's nice and clean... But then after a while, it doesn't seem so important, and so I begin to let it slip. The vacuum doesn't come out quite so often. No polish – ever... If you do wash it, there's no chamois. And before long, it's getting pressure cleaned whenever the insects are too thick on the headlights to let the light out.

That's what I'm like... But some people are fastidious with their car. I used to work with a fellow who kept his old car, looking brand new.

Now, what care and attention, do you put into your Christian life?? Is it like a new car, where the condition of your life matters? – where holiness matters? Or is your faith, getting old and tired, and holiness .. isn't something you worry about any more????

Jesus condemns fruitless, showy religion. Discipleship, must be a fruitful experience, where the Holy Spirit regenerates us, into the holy people that God desires.

And sometimes, I get a bit frustrated, that I'm slipping into the old-car syndrome – do you know what I mean? I get frustrated when I don't seem to be acting like this new creation that Christ has made me to be. – Do you get frustrated like that? Frustrated that you want to be a better person for God, but you keep falling into those same old sins??? Holiness seems to be like an insurmountable mountain...

Well guess what... Faith **moves** mountains...

When Jesus nuked the fig tree, the disciples were absolutely amazed – as would I be. And Jesus said to 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.

²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Some people take this little passage right out of its context, and create the 'name it and claim it' theology. You want a pay rise? Ask God. Believe that you've got it – believe it and don't doubt, and it'll happen. You want a new Mercedes? Ask God. Believe that you've got it – believe it and don't doubt, and it'll happen. You want to be healed? Ask God. Believe that you've got it – believe it and don't doubt, and it'll happen. You want more rain? Ask God. Believe that you've

got it – believe it and don't doubt, and it'll rain, just like you asked...

The trouble of course comes when 2 believers want the opposite things – when the cow cocky prays for rain in the middle of wheat harvest, and his neighbour is praying for fine weather until the harvest is all done.

This is not a 'name it and claim it' promise for whatever you want. This promise that Jesus made, about answered prayer, is in the context of fulfilling God's will. If a mountain needs to be moved for God's will to be fulfilled, well you pray for that, and you ask in faith, for Him to move that mountain. Believe it, and God will move it.

Do you believe that God will do anything, to see that His will is done??? Too right He will – if only we pray and ask.

You see, the key, is to know what God's will is, so we can pray and ask for that... Because when we pray and ask for something that is in God's will, well that's a prayer that He answers.....

Do you believe, that it is God's will for your life to be fruitful – for your life to be a display of God's righteousness???? Well, of course it is. So pray, and ask God, exactly for that. Believe, that God will change you for the better.... Forget about asking for the money and the rain and the fancy car. God knows what you physically need, and He'll give you what you physically need... Seek first, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you as well.

Let's start praying for the big things.

- Let's start praying that God will begin to change you and I, into the fruit of His sanctification.
- Let's start praying for a revival of the Holy Spirit, in this little town of ours, and in this district.
- Let's start praying for the Love of God to be seen in us, as we relate to those who are around us.
- Let's start praying for the return of Christ – that He would come back to claim His children.

The Kingdom of God will be given to a people producing its fruits.... Let us be that people. And let us pray for God's fruit to be produced in us.

Questions.