

Fig Newtons for Jesus

Mark 11:12-21

Luke 13:6-9

January, 11 2026

Please open your Bibles today to Mark 11 and Luke 13. It's a bit unusual to have two different scriptures as our main texts for a sermon but they are both closely related. Chain saw joke. Like living life without power of the Holy Spirit, but we'll be applying it a different way.

Last week we kicked off our 2026 Theme for Antioch. What is it? Bearing Fruit for Jesus. We looked at Jesus' analogy in John 15 where He told us He was the true vine, His Father was the gardener, and we are the what? The branches! If we're saved. We noticed how Jesus emphasized His desire for us, as His branches, to bear MUCH good fruit for Him. Fruit that will last, endure, persist, as our theme verse for the year emphasizes. We talked a bit about what that kind of fruit this looks like and noticed that Jesus especially mentioned love 7 times in that brief passage. If you missed last week, you really need to go back and catch it since it is the kickoff for this year's theme. And you need to get you a cluster of grapes to remind you of it!

But today, we want see what else Jesus had to say about fruit bearing and so we're going to start in Mark 11. It is Palm Monday. The day after Palm Sunday just days before His crucifixion. If you are able, please stand as we read Mark 11: 12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. (Skip down to verse 20) In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

What in the world? It sounds like Jesus is being very impulsive, using His miraculous powers to kill an innocent fig tree that didn't meet His wishes. What's next? Striking a black cat dead that happens to cross His path? No real loss. Don't send hate mail. It's a joke. You get the point. It seems that Jesus is being very reckless, random, and selfish with His power. Just taken by itself, however, helps us understand His desire for **all** of His creation to be fruitful and multiply which, by the way was the very first command God ever gave us.

But, as we've said before, look at the context. Say context. Don't yank Scripture out of its context. Let's go back and see what happened in between early Palm Monday and early Palm Tuesday. Vs 15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of

the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" 18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. 19 When evening came, they went out of the city.

So what does that have to do with the fig tree? Only everything. Another Sunday, we're going to look at Jesus' parable about the vineyard in Matthew 21 which is all about how the Jewish people had all God's benefits, all the prophets, all the teachings, and all the favor of God like a well cared for vineyard but failed to give Him any fruit. In fact, they hijacked it for themselves. And that's exactly what was going on in the Temple that Palm Monday when Jesus cleared it out.

Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were streaming into Jerusalem from all over the world for Passover. They were making preparations and bringing their lambs for approval only hear the priests say their lamb was unacceptable. The priests then bought those unacceptable lambs for a little of nothing and then sold them someone else's lamb that had been unacceptable a moment ago, suddenly now holy, and for a price that will put a hole in their money bag. In addition they were exchanging money and cheating the pilgrims out of fair exchange rates. The Temple, that was supposed to be a place to worship, pray, and glorify the great God of the universe, had become a den of thieves, a rip off joint, worse than the Vegas Strip. And the people in charge of these shenanigans, the priests, were the ones who knew so much better.

The fig tree of the priesthood, of Judaism, of the Temple and all it represented, that was supposed to be producing clusters of love, joy, peace, comfort, blessing, sanctification, truth, prayer, etc. was producing nothing of the sort. It was barren. Useless. Even worse, it was producing bad fruit instead of good. Sour persimmons instead of sweet figs. Jesus' real hunger that Palm Monday was not for figgy pudding, but for righteousness and holiness. For honesty, integrity, and love, especially for the poor and oppressed. But His hunger for holiness was unmet and the curse on the fig tree foreshadowed what He was about to do later that morning up yonder in the Temple when He effectively cursed the whole establishment by turning over the tables and driving out the animals. The fig tree's not the only thing that got cursed that day and it's not the only thing that withered. To go back to Jesus' comments last week about the vine, He was about to cut off those non-productive branches in the temple and throw them into the fire. Luke tells us He wept as He approached Jerusalem that week because it would be destroyed for its fruitlessness.

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, He had told a parable about another fig tree that had the same problem. Turn over to Luke 13:6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree,

planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, **then** cut it down.'"

We have here another vineyard, another fig tree, but the same old problem. No fruit. Notice what the owner of the vineyard said, "Cut it down!" The tree might have been well shaped, nice green leaves, with thick healthy bark. None of which are the purpose of fig trees. That owner, like all of us, had limited resources. In his case, he had limited space in his vineyard and if a tree was just taking up soil, just sucking nutrients and water out of the ground, just soaking up sunlight and not using it to produce any good fruit, it was time to get out the chain saw. What's that noise? The fig tree's about to find out. But... the caretaker pled mercy. Give it another chance! Another year. Just one more opportunity to prove its worth. Then, if it still fails to do so, crank up the chain saw and get er done.

My dear friends, the Jews were living in that grace period of "one more year." Jesus had been digging around the roots and fertilizing during His ministry, but still they were fruitless. And in 70AD, the Jewish Temple and whole Jewish establishment was cut down by the vineyard owner, God the Father, using the future Roman Emperor Titus as His chain saw. It's interesting that Jesus uses the time frame of three years in this parable, which is what is generally considered the length of His earthly ministry. He came to Jerusalem for the Passover for three years as Messiah and each year found no fruit. In fact, persimmons, bad fruit.

Are you producing figs for Jesus? Or are you just using up the soil, sunlight, and space God graciously gives you each day? Are you bringing glory to **His** name or to your own? Are you using what He's entrusted to you to care for those who can't care for themselves? To spread the good news of salvation? To produce the Holy Spirit fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, righteousness, holiness, etc? Certainly this applies to us as individuals but it also to us as a congregation, to every congregation, and beyond that to the Covenant Brethren Church and every denomination. Next Sunday, we're going to take a deeper dive into various varieties of fruit the Bible mentions, but today, I want us to get serious about wanting to bear His fruit. Without the heart desire, it will never happen. And the consequences will be **very** great. We may be living in borrowed time of an extra year right now. A season of grace as the Vineyard Owner, the Gardener, patiently waits for our promises, our baptismal vows, to develop into fruit that will last.

So what can we do to bear fruit for Jesus? Turn over to 2 Peter 1. Most of you know how trees grow and add rings each year. The more rings, the older, more mature the tree is and hopefully, the more capacity to bear fruit the tree will have. Peter describes

the rings we should be adding to our Christian lives. 2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness. Now goodness is the first ring, but faith is the core. Say faith. Fruit bearing has to start with our faith in Jesus as the Messiah, God's Son, our Savior. His sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection. But sadly that's as far as some people ever grow. And if that's all you have on your trunk, you can't bear much, if any, good fruit for Jesus. So Peter says we've got to add some rings and the first one is goodness. Say Goodness. Doing good things. Being good. My dad used to say there's two kinds of good, good and good for nothing. Good for nothing means we're not bearing fruit, we're just taking up His space. But being **truly** good results in good deeds which **are** good figs for Jesus.

Then he says to add to goodness, knowledge. Say knowledge. Knowledge is the 2nd ring. Knowledge of God, His will, His ways, which comes through His Word. We build our knowledge through Bible reading, Bible Study, preaching and teaching, Sunday school, etc. Vs 6 and to knowledge, self-control. Say Self-control. This is the 3rd ring and it's a hard one, isn't it? Trees have wider and narrower rings depending on the moisture, sunlight, and other growing conditions. Many of us have a narrow ring of self-control- Oh Lord, grow us.

And to self-control, perseverance. Say perseverance. This is the 4th ring. Don't give up. Keep going for Jesus. Keep on keeping on in Jesus. In spite of drought, in spite of heat, in spite of pests that get on our tree and aphids that suck out our sap. Persevere! And to perseverance, godliness. Say godliness. Godliness is the 5th ring- to be godly- to be holy, in the language we use, in the way we think, the way we treat other people, the way we conduct our affairs, godly in every way.

Vs 7 ..and to godliness, brotherly kindness. Say kindness. This is the 6th ring- being kind to others, not to gossip about them, not to blame them for things that may not be their fault, or to say unkind things to them or about them. It doesn't mean there's never a time for firmness. You can be firm and still be kind. Look at Jesus. But some of us need to thicken our kindness ring.

And to brotherly kindness, he says, add love. Say love. This is the 7th ring- seven is the Biblical number of completeness and perfection and love is the ultimate quality every Christian should possess. If we truly love we will be kind and good and control ourselves, etc. Love is not only a ring on our fig tree of faith, it's also the fruit we are to produce. Genuine love for others that wants their best and sacrifices and works to make their best happen in spite of personal cost. Love that lays down its life for its friends. Seven rings on our fig trees of faith.

Vs 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Say increasing. Growing. Expanding, Thickening each ring. Real trees can't do that. Once a

year is done, the ring is done. It's in the books. The 2025 ring is as big as it's ever going to get. But in our tree trunks of faith, we can continue to grow our rings, amen? Which of your rings needs the most growth in 2026? For if we possess them in increasing expanding measure, Peter says, in growing quantities, they will enable us to be effective for Jesus. And to be productive. To produce fruit in our Christian lives. The ESV says these qualities will keep us from being unfruitful, which as we found from our two fig trees, is something we want to avoid.

Now before we finish, let's come back to the fig tree in Luke 13. They're going to give it another year, remember? What happened? Did it get cut down and thrown into the fire? Or did it turn over a new leaf, :), did it turn a corner and start providing the owner with figgy pudding, fig preserves, fig jam, fig jelly, and fig newtons? Oh, we don't know, do we. Jesus left the parable open ended as if to say, "It's up to you!" And it is. Just as it was up the priests in the Temple to bear good fruit for the Temple's Owner, it's up to us to bear good fruit for our Gardener. Sadly, the Jews didn't turn the corner and they got cut down. The Disciples, on the other hand, used the soil, sunlight, and fertilizer of Jesus' teachings and the power of the Holy Spirit to produce much good fruit that fills the book of Acts and hangs heavy throughout the rest of the New Testament.

The most important question for us, however, is not what happened to the fig tree, or to the priests, or to the Disciples. But what will we do with all the good soil God has given us? The Sunlight of His Son, the nutrients of His Holy Word, the same power of His Holy Spirit. And with the rich soil of freedom we enjoy in the US? The spacious environment. Income that is higher than most of the rest of the world. Opportunities galore. The nourishing rain of good teaching. Are we, as God's fig trees today, even concerned about bearing fruit for Him, or do we only care about our own comfort and pleasure? Beware, is that a chain saw I hear in the distance?

The Fruitless Fig (George Bowers)

The owner walked his vineyard, to see what he could see,
And came across a fig tree, as barren as could be.
For such unfruitfulness, he ordered it cut down,
It was a waste of space, and just using up his ground.
The gardener pled, however, and made a stirring case,
To give it just another year, a season yet of grace.
And if it still did fail, to bear a crop of fruit,
He'd saw it down himself, and pull out the useless root.
The owner gave consent, extended mercy's hand,
And gave another chance, to stay the harsh command.

The Master doesn't tell us, what happened to that tree,
If it bore good figs at last, or remained in futility.

It's a warning to us all, my friend, to use our gifts and grace,
To bear fruit for our Owner, and put smiles upon His face!

Are you using all, that the Master's given you?
Producing much good fruit, doing all that you can do?
Or are you squandering time, just taking up your space,
Wasting opportunities, and frittering away His grace?
Take your chance today, use branch and trunk and root,
To glorify your Owner, and to grow for Him, much fruit!

God has planted Antioch in fertile soil. He has planted each of us in fertile soil in a beautiful location. He's given us the fertilizer of His Word and the sunlight of His rich love. What will you do with it? May we bear much good lasting fruit for Jesus this day, this week, this year, and for the rest of our lives.