

# Nothing but Leaves

by Harold Vaughan

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*The sermon explores the lessons from the cursing of the barren fig tree, emphasizing the importance of genuine faith, prayer, and the dangers of religious pretense.*

**Duration:** 1:00:02

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Matthew 21:17, Mark 11:12-14, Luke 13:6-9, John 1:11, 2 Timothy 3:5, Titus 1:16

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of practicing what we believe rather than just giving lip service. He criticizes the current state of the church, stating that it has become more like an audience watching actors on a stage rather than a congregation of worshipers. The preacher highlights the need for a genuine relationship with God and a burden for souls in order to bear fruit. He also warns against the danger of becoming too intellectual and polished in our worship, losing the power of God to save lost souls. The sermon calls for a return to true worship and ministry, where the focus is on bringing forth fruit rather than just leaves.

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## Transcript

Well, Pastor Oldman said if I started throwing up from the mouth while I was up here, he'd start shooting from the hip and start preaching in my place. So I hope I don't have George Bush's luck along that line, but we're fixed either way. I'd like to thank Robert and Bob and my boys and Mark and the men that came and got everything in order here.

I just want to say I appreciate that very, very much. And I'm thankful to God to be associated with good men. And I'm just tickled for you men and thank God that you're here.

I'm glad that you've come and taken three days to seek the face of God that says something about you men. And I just thank God for you. And I have a word today that I'd like to try to speak to you if I could.

The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 21. If you have your Bible, the book of Matthew, chapter 21, beginning in verse 17. Anybody a little warm in here at this point in time? And we can open some doors or fix something back there.

Appreciate that. Matthew, chapter 21, verse 17. Note carefully the word of God.

And he left them. Jesus left them and went out of the city into Bethany and he lodged there. Now, in the morning, as he returned into the city, he hungered.

And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it and found nothing there on but leaves only nothing but leaves and said unto it, let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, how soon is the fig tree withered away? I want you to notice four things about this barren fig tree that our Lord cursed.

First of all, he saw it. Second of all, he searched it. Thirdly, he cursed it.

And fourthly, he destroyed it. The scripture here says that he saw this fig tree and the gospel of Mark said he saw the fig tree from afar having leaves. It's my understanding that many fig trees actually produce fruit or produce fruit before they even produce leaves.

So it's only natural that when the son of God saw this leafy fig tree, it was only natural for him to assume that it had fruit on it, because many fig trees have fruit before they even put forth their leaves. But Jesus not only saw the fig tree, he searched the fig tree. When he saw it, it provoked his attention.

And when he searched it, it invited his inspection. But the scripture says here that when Jesus searched this fig tree, he found nothing but leaves, nothing but leaves. Now this barren fig tree, it had foliage without fruit.

The barren fig tree, it had a bountiful appearance, but in actuality, it was barren. It had the resemblance of fruitfulness, but it lacked the reality. It held out the probability, but it came up short in product.

In this barren fig tree, it aroused Christ's interest, but it disappointed him in results. It had nothing but leaves. He not only saw the fig tree and searched the fig tree, but Jesus cursed the fig tree.

Understand that this is the only miracle of judgment our Lord ever, ever committed. In fact, as I study the scriptures, this is the only destructive act that Jesus committed. I find it very interesting that Jesus did not curse the briars.

He did not curse the poison vines. He did not curse the thorns from which his crown that would be placed on his head were made of. He did not curse the tree from which his cross would be hewn.

He cursed a barren fig tree. This lesson here is not to illustrate Jesus' power to save, but rather, this is an example of Jesus' power to destroy, because the barren fig tree became the blasted fig tree. G. Campbell Morgan said these words, Jesus perpetuated the condition he found by making the sin of barrenness its own punishment.

Jesus saw the fig tree. He searched the fig tree. He cursed the fig tree, and Jesus destroyed the fig tree, for the text says that the fig tree withered away.

I want to talk to you this afternoon about the lessons that we can learn from the cursing of the barren fig tree. Surely there's a wider meaning here in this text than simply cursing a useless, fruitless tree. I want to speak to you this afternoon concerning the lessons we can learn from the cursing of the barren fig tree.

The first lesson I believe it's obvious that we can learn, it was to teach the disciples the power of faith and prayer. It was to teach the disciples the power of faith and prayer. In verse 21, notice what Jesus said, the disciples are marveling that he has destroyed the tree, but verse 21 says, Jesus answered and said unto

them, Verily I say unto you, if you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done.

And to all things, and to all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive. Mountain-moving faith is available to any and to all that would dare to believe God. Jesus said, all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, not doubting, you shall receive.

My dear men, prayer can do anything God can. I want you to understand it was prayer that opened the Red Sea. It was prayer that caused the sun to stand still.

Prayer has healed the sick and prayer has raised the dead. It was prayer that brought fire from heaven upon Elijah's sacrifice. Prayer can do anything that God can.

Listen to this quote, intercession is a ballistic missile that can be launched from a launching pad, no larger than a place to kneel, travel at the speed of thought, land precisely on target thousands of miles away, and there is no defense against it. Prayer can do anything that God can. You recall in the Gospel record how Mark tells of a woman who came to Jesus and she said in her heart, as multitudes throng the Son of God, she said, if I can only touch the hem of His garment, I will be healed.

And the Bible says that Jesus immediately, when she touched Him, He knew that virtue had gone out of Him. He knew power had gone out of Him. And He turned to the crowd and He said, who touched me? And the disciple said, Lord, what in the world are you saying? There's multitudes of people thronging you.

What do you mean, who touched me? My dear people, multitudes thronged the Son of God, but it was only this dear woman in need that touched Jesus Christ. I believe that multitudes of people throng Jesus every Sunday in our churches, but how many of us really know how to touch Jesus Christ in the secret place of prayer? My dear people, the lesson from the barren fig tree is to teach us the power of faith and the power of prayer. And I believe the power of prayer has largely been untouched by our prayerless, scheming, clever generation.

But there's a second lesson this afternoon we need to look at concerning the lessons from the cursing of the barren fig tree. And that second of all is to illustrate the barrenness of the Jewish nation, to illustrate the utter barrenness of the Jewish nation. Early in the chapter here in Matthew 21, the Bible teaches that Jesus entered Jerusalem.

And when He did, the Jews hailed Him as a great political, military Messiah. They had hoped that He had come to deliver them from the bondage to Rome. And the Bible said they spread their garments on the ground.

They cut the branches out of the tree, as it were, to make a carpet for the Son of God to come into town. And they shouted out when He came in, Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna. You know the word Hosanna means, oh, save. And when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, they were really saying in their hearts, oh, save us from our bondage to Rome.

But I find it very interesting when Jesus entered the city. The Bible says the entire city was moved. The entire city was moved.

Don't you find it intriguing this afternoon, dear men, that Jesus never spoke once directly against Rome? Don't you find it fascinating that the Son of God did not have one negative comment to say about Caesar or the corrupt Roman Empire? The Son of God is an incarnate state. He did not establish a militia. He did not organize vigilantes.

He didn't attempt to overthrow an unjust government. In fact, the only thing He ever said was, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and render unto God the things that are God's. Jesus Christ did not attack Rome.

He attacked Israel. Jesus did not overthrow Rome. He denounced His own people, and this is not what they were anticipating.

My dear people, it says in chapter 21 and verse 12 that when Jesus cleansed the temple, you know, He went in and threw a fit and cleared out the money changers. It was a denunciation of Israel's worship. But when Jesus cursed the barren fig tree, it was a denunciation of Israel as a nation.

The fig tree was empty and the temple was corrupt. When Jesus came to the fig tree, He found nothing but leaves. And when Jesus Christ came to religious Israel, He found nothing but leaves.

He condemned the temple, or He condemned the tree, and He cleansed the temple. How many of you men think that perhaps the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God? Don't you think the time has come, men, to cleanse our hearts, our homes, our churches, our ministries in these days? Oh, my dear people, if the Son of God was outraged at the shenanigans going on with the money changers in the temple, how do you think He must feel about what's going on in His name, in our churches, in our day? I'm telling you, He was absolutely irate with what was going on. You know, the pulpit in a lot of cases in America has become a stage rather than a pulpit, a stage for blowhards and showboats.

Dear people, I want to tell you, a lot of what's going on is not for the driving force behind it. It's not the glory of God. Let's face it, Hollywood has more control in some churches than the Holy Bible.

Dear people, before the Bible came in Chronicles, the Bible says that God, the man Hezekiah, He first of all repaired the doors of the temple of the Lord. He had to repair the entranceway back into the house of God. And after He repaired the doorway into the house of God, the Bible says He cleansed the holy part of the temple.

And it took them days to get the filthiness out of the holy part of the house of God in those days. You know, I just wonder, in some cases, if we're not condemning the pagans many times and essentially doing the same thing in our own hearts. What's amazing to me is that the political activists are so upset at the government, but they're not upset at the corrupt denominations of America.

They're trying to hold Bill Clinton to a higher standard than they are their own people. And something is wrong with this sort of emphasis, dear ones. Dear men, don't you think maybe the time has come to cut off the cable once and for all? Hadn't the time come to pull the plug on uncensored internet? You can't handle it.

And if you can't handle it, your children can't handle it. And nobody ought to have that temptation before them anyhow. Isn't it time to lead our families in prayer and the worship of God? You know, Paul preached daily from house to house.

I ask a man to come to my house in the near future and preach to my family because that's what they did in the book of Acts. Isn't it time to just cry out to God for mercy? Isn't it time for heart and house cleansing? Dear man, isn't it time to cleanse the house of God? We're bringing a lot of things into the house of God that has no business there. Oh, dear people, the Jews had the word of God.

The Jews were the object of the grace of God like no other people. Israel had received special privileges as an elect nation and as a chosen people. I want to ask you, was there ever a people, was there ever a people ever who had enjoyed such privileges? Was there ever a people who had enjoyed such promises? Was there ever a people who had witnessed such power? Was there ever a people who had known such protection from God? Was there ever a people who have been destined for the purpose of blessing the world? Was there ever a people who have been led by the very presence of God, the very glory cloud of God? Was there ever a people who had witnessed such miracles, covenant privileges, covenant promises, covenant hopes.

God desired fruit from his own. God deserved fruit from his own. But Israel had failed to bear fruit for God.

You know, it says in Proverbs chapter 27, these words, Who so keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof. Who so keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof. But Israel had failed to bear fruit for God.

There was nothing but leaves. In the Gospel of Luke, our Lord said this. He gave a parable of a certain man who planted a fig tree in his vineyard and he sought fruit thereon.

But the Bible says he found none. And the scripture says that he said unto the dresser of the vineyard. He said, I've come three years looking for fruit.

He said, why cumbereth this barren fig tree? Why cumbereth the ground? Cut it down. And the vine dresser interceded and said, let it alone. Let me dig about it.

Let me dung it. And if it bear fruit well, and if not, then thou shall cut it down. You see, the owner had expectations of the fig tree that he had planted in his vineyard.

But all this tree did was take up time and space. And after three years of fruitless fruitlessness, the man was ready to cut it down. But the vine dresser appealed and he said, let me fertilize it.

Let me cultivate it. Let's give it one more chance. I want to tell you, dear man, that God expects fruit from His own.

God has sown so much into His covenant people. He's sown His law. He's sown His promises.

He's sown His prophets. He's sown His Word. And He's sown His patience.

But the Scripture teaches us that His law they violated. His promises they ignored. His prophets they killed.

His Word they disobeyed. And His patience they tried. What more could be done for any people? And the Bible says that when Jesus came unto His own, they received Him not.

And when He came unto His own, He found nothing but leaves. Nothing but leaves. I wondered this afternoon how many of us are similar to that barren fig tree.

Nothing but leaves. Year after year, God has sown His Word into our hearts and lives. He's patiently drawn us by His Spirit unto Himself.

He's arranged circumstances to drive us into His very bosom. My dear people, His Spirit has driven us, has striven with us time and time again. He has given us chance after chance for repentance and full surrender.

What more? What more could He do? All the care, all the provision, all the sufferings, the warnings, the exhortations, the checks of conscience. And after all that investment and many, many cases, nothing but leaves. Oh, I believe that the lessons from the barren fig tree are to teach the power of faith and prayer.

Second of all, to illustrate the barrenness of the Jewish nation. But I believe there's a third lesson here. And that's to demonstrate God's hatred of presumption.

To demonstrate God's hatred of presumption. I remember back before I entered elementary school. I found one of my brother's math books.

He was older than I was. And it was one of those math books that had triple digit addition and subtraction. And he had worked many of the problems in the book.

And then he'd taken an eraser and he had erased the answers out of the book. So I found the book and I got my pencil sharp as I could. And I went in there and carefully went over every answer my brother had put in there and retraced every one of those, those numbers and retraced the answers and showed it to my mother.

I wasn't even in, I was six years old, man. I handed this thing to my mother and my mother thought she had a child prodigy on her hands. She found out different later.

But she thought, man, he must be a mathematical genius. And you know how mothers like to believe the best that they can, you know. And she was so excited.

Oh, my son is miraculous what he's doing here. But you know, you know, you know, dear people, she went wild. She went wild.

But you know something? It was all a lie. It was a design deception. I was presuming to be something that I wasn't.

Now, you know, childish pranks can be humorous, but there's nothing funny about the way that God Almighty deals with the sin of presumption. The fruitless tree represented Israel's barrenness and the leaves represented their outward religiousness. When Jesus Christ walked on planet Earth, there had never been more religion and less salvation.

God hates the sin of presumption. The Jewish people had an impressive pretense of religion. You know, they know how to make long prayers in the marketplace, strict rituals.

Their teachers love to be called rabbi. I wonder if that's the old fashioned word for doctor. I don't know about that.

But they love to be called by these titles, you know. By the way, I was out in Iowa and a fellow took me out for lunch one day. He said, Brother Harold, I want to ask you a question.

He's real serious. He said, Brother Harold, do you have any formal education? I said, yes, brother, but I try to conceal it as best I can. Well, they like to be called rabbi.

They love to be called. They had a smorgasbord of religious traditions, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the conservatives and the liberals and everything in between. They had a bureaucratic leadership which existed for its own benefit.

They did not exist for God or for the people. The time of Christ was ripe with the leaves of religious ceremony, but there was no fruit for God. They professed much, but produced nothing.

It was a huge practical lie. It was the embodiment of a falsehood. And God got fed up with their phony religious services, their worship services.

You know what He said to them on one occasion? He said, don't bring any more vain oblations to me. He said, do not bring any more of this stuff. Your incense, even your prayers are an abomination.

This is strong. Your new moons and your Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies. I cannot away with it.

It is iniquity. Even the solemn meeting. You understand that God even got fed up with their solemn meeting.

The best meeting they had was unacceptable to God. And God said, I'll have nothing to do with it. Why? Because it was all a sham.

It was a pretense. Dead religion always makes a lot of the outward trappings, clerical garments, ornate buildings, rituals, stained glass, mood music, symbols and banners. We're going back to Rome with a lot of this mess.

Therapeutic messages. And now we've got interpretive dance. God help us.

Maybe we don't have it. And I hope we don't get it. You know what happens? The worship aids become a substitute for real worship rather than an aid to worship.

Is there any doubt, my brethren, is there any doubt today that much that passes from ministry and worship today is nothing more than sheer entertainment that you've got to pay to get involved in it? Is there any doubt that it's anything more than that? It's not a ministry. It's a substitute for real ministry in some cases. Listen to this little verse.

Thy pretentious leaves extending far and wide and empty show kept the sunshine from descending on the humbler plants below. I wonder if a lot of this pretentious stuff doesn't just cover up the glory of God rather than magnify the glory of God. Kind of like the lady at the counter in the Wendy's commercial years ago, staring at a giant bun and a little piece of beef there.

And she's standing at the counter looking around, you know, where's the beef? Where's the beef? And I think the question today is, where's the fruit? You know, the abundance of leaves sometimes can conceal the fact that there is no fruit rather than indicate that there is fruit. My son, Brandon, loves to go out hunting. He's got camouflage.

He's got every kind of camouflage you can think of. All these camouflage hats and face masks and gloves and suits. And then he's got camouflage to cover up body odor.

And he even has a camouflage deodorant. I mean, he's got the whole thing. And he wants to blend in.

He doesn't want the animals to see it. He's out there camouflaged. But dear people, dear people, you know, some plants that produce beautiful foliage is not indicative of fruit, but it's just a concealing of the fact that there is no fruit there in the first place.

I grew up in southern Virginia on a tobacco farm. And I want to tell you, friends, if you've ever grown up on a tobacco farm, you're not going to be stupid enough to put one of those cancer sticks in your mouth after you see what goes into it and all the junk that's on it. But you know something? We'd plant those tobacco plants.

And in that case, the leaf was the fruit. But you know what would happen between the leaf and the stalk? There would come a little growth, a little shoot. You know what they call that? That little sprout? You know what they call it? You know, Tracy, what they call it? They call it a sucker.

Why? Because that little sucker, you had to pluck it off or you had to put some poison on it to kill it. Or else it would suck the life out of the plant. And the energy that was supposed to go into the fruit or the leaf would be drawn off and go into the sucker.

And it would just suck the life clear out of the plant. Now, dear people, I believe that this is the lesson we need to learn here. That a lot of times, a lot of energy is going into the leaves and there's no energy left for the fruit.

May God deliver us from the temptation to try to make a fair show in the flesh. May God deliver us from cultivating leaves. I'll tell you something about human trees.

They love to be noticed. They'd rather be noticed than be fruitful. I want to ask you something.

Had you rather be known as a man of prayer or really be a man of prayer? Had you rather be a godly, humble servant of Christ or be known as a godly, humble servant of Christ? Had you rather your church be known as a live church or really be a live church from God's point of view? There's some harsh Scriptures, you know. It says there in the New Testament in Titus, they profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him. The Bible says in 2 Timothy they had a form of godliness.

I think we need to be cautious of this. Had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. You know, once you get a little established and you get some money in the bank and all these kind of things and get enough people on stage, you better be careful because what you wind up with if you're not real careful is a form of godliness, but there's no power.

And we work to maintain the show just to keep the machine going. God help us, there's got to be more to it than that. Sardis had a name to be alive, but was dead.

It was all a pretense. You know, at the time of Christ, the Jewish people, they prided themselves in their nominal, external, hereditary connection with the people of God. They prided themselves in their nominal, hereditary, external connection with the people of God.

And I fear there are millions today who pride themselves in a nominal, external, hereditary connection with the church of Christ. You know, in any religious community, you will find a little nucleus of real, earnest, God-fearing people. And generally, you'll find a great host of individuals whose Christianity is teeth

outward.

They have a nominal, external connection with the truth. Their religion consists of going to church on Sunday, or they've been baptized, or they've said somebody's sinner's prayer. They endure the pastor's sermon.

They join in mouthing the hymns. But dear people, they leave the weightier matters of the law, of righteousness and judgment and love of God untouched. Nothing but leaves.

Leaves but no fruit, men. Leaves but no fruit. Appearance but no reality.

Perfection but no performance. Perfection without practice. They name the name of Christ, but do not depart from iniquity.

But you see, the problem is, this is not only fruitless, it's pretentious, which makes it all the more worse. Jesus said something in Matthew 23. He said this, he said, The scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat.

And all therefore, whichever they did you do, that observe and do. But do not after their works, for they say and do not. Doctors practice medicine.

Lawyers practice law. And Christians practice Christ. But here's a crowd, they had a whole lot of saying, but didn't have a whole lot of doing.

Do you know there's more to Christianity than giving mere lip service to belief in the truth of God? Dear men, I'm not trying to be an alarmist. Yeah, I am trying to be alarmist. Maybe we'd better come back to a consensus of what it means to be saved by the grace of God.

I think we'd better get back to square one. You know, in Christian America, in evangelical and fundamental circles, if you have a positive opinion about Jesus, you are saved beyond a shadow of a doubt. Just a mere positive opinion of Jesus.

Or if you've repeated the sinner's prayer, then that is a sure fire evidence, brother, regardless of whatever's happening in your life, that you're in the kingdom for sure. Another mistaken idea about salvation is that if you can give mental assent to key Bible doctrines, if you can give nodding agreement to the facts of the gospel, then you're saved beyond a shadow of a doubt. I want to tell you something, friend.

Salvation is not a few doctrines in your head. It's the life of God in your heart and in your soul. I know a pastor that's knocked on 700 doors, about two miles from our house, knocked on 700 doors in the last seven months, and he said he only found four people that admitted they were lost.

They live in sin, brother. They look at filth. They live like the devil.

They divorce. They drink. They smoke dope.

They do it all. They lie. But yet, somehow or another, they've gotten assurance from some preacher somewhere along the line that because they gave nodding agreement to the facts of the gospel, that they are saved, we're going to give an account to God for the sloppy way we deal with careless sinners in these days.

I'll tell you another false idea about salvation as an outward sign is the surefire evidence of salvation. Walking the aisle, lifting a hand, praying a prayer, filling out a card, making a decision. I was with a pastor the other day, and you know what he said? He said, I don't want any more decisions.

He said, I'm looking for disciples is what I'm looking for. What about an emotional experience? You know, can I say this? The tears are not an infallible proof of conversion. I know godly sorrow works repentance, not to be repented of, brother.

And many times there are emotions involved, but tears alone don't signify a person is saved. I'm dealing with a man right now. He came to me.

I've not seen him in three years. He came to me. He told me about his situation.

On the brink of divorce. Cussed like a sailor. Called his wife every kind of a name you can think of in my presence.

Told me smoke dope and did a few other things. But he assured me when I told him he needed to be converted, he said, well, you're shocked. I'm already saved.

When I was nine years old, he said I was in a meeting and I had a whoosh. That's his word. I had a whoosh, an emotional whoosh come over me.

And that whoosh he interpreted as the Holy Spirit of God. And because of that whoosh, he thinks he's converted. My dear man, I want to tell you that we're living in a day where we're going to have more and more difficulty getting people lost because so many people have told them they're saved, even though there's not one ounce of fruit in their life.

God hates the sin of pretense, claiming one thing and doing another thing. You know, you know, the goal, the goal today seems to not to be developing cross carrying disciples, but just to get them to show up. You know, our concept of reaching people is getting them, getting them to get a ticket and show up.

And once they come and once we decision them and then they go on and we expect nothing else from them, but we claim I had 100 saved. I don't believe it anymore. Man, I want to tell you something.

If there's no fruit in your life, there's no root in your life, then you better make your calling and election sure. And I'm telling you without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. I don't care what we believe in these days, my brethren.

We'd better get back to a clear understanding of what conversion is all about. I'm not talking about going off the deep end on this side. I think you understand that.

But I'm talking about, dear people, understanding that good preaching and giving commissions and great fellowship, and as long as the preacher can stand up and say the right words and we can say amen, that doesn't prove a thing. If we are not practicing what we say we believe, my dear people, it's all an embodiment of falsehood. This fig tree looked really good.

If it could talk, it would have talked a good talk. But it had no fruit. It had no fruit.

So the church today is no longer a congregation of worshipers, but more and more it's becoming an audience. Watching what the actors are doing on stage. Somebody described the football game as 22

players down on the field, desperately needing rest and 40,000 people sitting in the stands, desperately needing exercise.

There's more to church than going. Amen. It reminds me of the Republican Party platform, you know, where they go to a great deal of trouble to draw up their, map out their strategies and their stands on moral issues.

And they talk about the platform. And then after they adopt it and elect the candidate, nobody even refers to it back again to four years later when it comes time to write another one. Remember the last election, Bob Dole, the commentator, asked him, said, have you read the Republican Party platform? He said, I've not read it.

And I have no intention of reading it. It's just a sham. Oh, we're pro-life.

But brother, they say they're pro-life, but don't live and vote pro-life. It's a sham. It's a pretense.

And brother, we need more of the conservatism in our churches today. Go ahead and say amen on that one. I believe that's about the way the average church deals with the Bible.

Lip service to the truth. Let's face it, man. The type of ministry that's been carried on in my generation and your generation by and large has not produced the godly men of old.

The type of ministry we have been involved in for decades now has not produced churchmen. Men, when they get to be 50, 60, 70, 80 years of age, know the ways of God and the works of God and the power of God in the secret place of prayer. That's the exception.

And that's not the rule. And if something is going on that's wrong, I think we need to change. Let's quit trying to be a surrogate to everybody in the whole town.

And let's try to teach our own fathers how to walk with God and train their own children to walk with God instead of doing it for them. Oh, my dear people, I heard of a church down in Georgia where they watch Andy Griffin on Wednesday night, an episode of Andy Griffin, and then they have a discussion on the moral lessons and implications learned from it. What do you think they're going to get out of Otis Campbell on the moral lessons learned? George Barnard said, Fewer than one out of ten born-again Christians possess a biblical worldview that impacts their decisions and behavior.

Fewer than one out of ten. I want to tell you, my friends, and I'm trying to say this as compassionate as I know how, if there's no effort in the life to bring ourselves under the discipline and authority of the Lordship of Christ and the Word of God, that is bogus salvation, it's nothing more than hell insurance. It's just hell insurance.

And if all you got is hell insurance, friend, I hope you get in a corner up here on the hill somewhere and get under a tree and meet with God in these days. When you go home, you'll be a new creature in Jesus Christ. It can happen.

It can happen. Well, it demonstrates God's hatred of presumption. There was nothing but leaves.

But let me give you this fourth point. It provides a drastic warning concerning the doom awaiting a barren life. Another lesson of this cursing of the barren fig tree.

It provides a drastic warning of the doom awaiting a barren life. W.P. Nicholson was a fiery evangelist in Northern Ireland decades ago. He got in a meeting one night.

You know what he said? He said, I know what's wrong with this meeting here tonight. There's too many hypocrites in the meeting tonight. He said on the verse first of the next hymn, will all the hypocrites please leave? And 30 or 40 people got up and left the service.

You know what he said in one meeting? He said, now, hypocrites, go back to your women and cigarettes. Go back to your women and cigarettes. I'll tell you something about W.P. Nicholson.

He might have been rough as a cob, but he had the power of God on him, brother. And multitudes found Jesus Christ because of his boldness. You know, there's coming a day when God's going to say to every hypocrite, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.

I never knew you. This is scary. Understand in Matthew chapter 7, that there's going to be a crowd that's going to show up and say, Lord, didn't we do this? And Lord, didn't we preach? And God, didn't we believe? But Lord, what do you mean depart from me? I never knew you.

There's going to be a crowd that shows up at the kingdom, brother. They've got assurance of their salvation, but they don't have salvation because they have a counterfeit assurance that didn't come from God. I'm not trying to make anybody doubt it's in the kingdom.

But brother, we do need, we do need to examine ourselves at times and see whether we'd be found in the faith. Old Peter Cartwright, the old Methodist circuit riding evangelist. Here's another character.

He was in a meeting one time preaching. I've been reading his biography. He was in there preaching.

He said, oh, big old husky burly sinner came to the altar and began to cry out and wail and weep and carry on. And he said a young seminary guy came up beside him and put his hand on his back and said, Compose yourself, brother. Compose yourself.

Old Peter Cartwright took the seminary student and shoved him out of the way and said, Pray on, brother. There's no composure in hell where you're going. Let me tell you something.

Peter Cartwright was a Wesleyan holiest Armenian evangelist, but he didn't believe in the new measures. He believed in the regeneration by the Spirit of God. Conversion.

Had a man in church yesterday morning. He lifted his hand to be saved. And I'm sitting there thinking, and I don't want to get to the point where I can't believe anything, but I'll tell you something, friend.

I didn't want the healing of the wound slightly. I want that man to get in and get thoroughly lost and get thoroughly saved. And they're never going to get thoroughly born of God until they get utterly lost in the presence of God.

A drastic warning of the doom awaiting a barren life. The kingdom was taken from Israel because it was fruitless. I believe this whole episode is a visual parable that graphically illustrates the divine curse of God.

If the fig tree was the symbol of prosperity and blessing, then the absence of the fig tree is the symbol of judgment and deprivation. Under whom much is given, much is required. Many of you men come from some of the best churches in the world.

In the country. You know what the Bible says in Romans 11? For God spared not the natural branches, taking heed lest he spare not thee. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Brother, that's to God's people.

And when God said to Adam and Eve, be fruitful and multiply, I believe the greatest blessing that God can give the human race is fruitfulness. And then God said to the fig tree, he said, be barren and die. The greatest curse that God can pronounce is barrenness, is barrenness.

You know, when Adam and Eve sinned, they put on, they covered themselves up with these fig leaves. I find it intriguing. It was a leafy fig tree that the Son of God cursed.

God's not interested in outward appearances. What God wants is reality. You know, it says in Luke chapter six, every tree is no match fruit.

For thorns men do not gather figs, and you don't get grapes from a from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringing forth that which is good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure, bringing forth that which is evil. Every tree is no match fruit.

And I'll tell you another thing. A tree is known by its lack of fruit, by its absence of fruit. Now listen, Jesus said this, Herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit.

Listen to this. Romans six, being now made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness. Listen to this.

John 15. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain. I want to talk to you this afternoon for just a few moments now about the keys to fruitfulness.

And I want you to look in John chapter 15 at what Christ had to say. The keys to fruitfulness. John chapter 15, verse one.

Jesus himself is speaking. Notice these words of Christ. John 15, verse one.

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, purging hurts, but it doesn't harm. It's really beneficial in the long run. Now, you 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, he can do nothing. If a man abides 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. For if ye abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit.

So shall you be my disciples. Men, do you think we've had too much emphasis on the branches and not enough emphasis on the vine? Hadn't we had too much talk about the clay and not enough talk about the potter? If we're going to bear fruit, you know what? First of all, if we're going to bring forth fruit unto God, the fruit of holiness, the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of souls. First of all, we've got to be grafted into the vine.

We've got to get out of Adam into Christ. We have to get out of our self-dependence into God-dependence. We've got to be born from above.

The old hymn says, Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. Foul I to the fountain fly.

Wash me, Savior, or I die. You know why there's nothing in that guy's hand? Because there's nothing in his hand that he could bring to merit, to favor and grace of God. Salvation is of the Lord.

It's God's mercy and God's grace. And dear people, only those with the right root can bear fruit. Somebody said one time, you know, the human race is not a bunch of people who happen, good people who happen to do some bad thing.

But rather, the human race, according to the Bible, teaches that we are sinners through and through. Our family tree has been bad. We cut out of bad stock, friend.

Ever since Adam messed up, we've all followed suit. And I want to tell you, there's been nothing but leaves in the human family since Adam. And if we're going to bring forth fruit unto God, we've got to get out of Adam.

And we've got to get placed into Christ. We've got to get translated, my friend. We've got to be delivered out of ourselves before we can bring forth any fruit that honors God.

Now, I wonder today, have you ever been grafted into the true vine? I wonder today, my dear one, have you ever been born from above? I want to ask you this. Does the fruit of your life indicate that you are a child of God? If you're going to bring forth fruit unto God, you've got to get tapped into the vine full of holiness. No man shall see the Lord.

But second of all, you must learn to abide in the vine. If we're going to bring forth fruit for God, you know, men that come to a prayer advance by and large the vast majority, practically all. I know you're here because you long to bear fruit for God.

You long to glorify God with a fruitful life. I know that. And brother, when we hear these words, I am the vine, you're the branches, I know you're not interested in a superficial attachment.

I know what you're looking for is vital union with Jesus Christ. Brother, we've got to get over our self-dependence before we can get into God-dependence. And what I'm saying today is I think we need to get in touch with God in these next three days to the point where God's concerns become our concerns.

What breaks God's heart breaks our heart. What God loves, we love. What God hates, we hate.

We need to get in touch with God like that. And we need to get in touch with God, brother, to the point not where we're just thronging Jesus, but where we're touching the hem of his garment. And if that's going to happen, we're going to have to have what Malachi says ahead, because it says in Malachi chapter one that the burden of the word of the Lord came to him.

Now, just hang with me for a moment. The burden of the word of the Lord unto Malachi. You know, it's interesting.

It's called a burden. And I think the reason it's called a burden is because it was a heavy message. This burden of the word of the Lord was the message that God had given Malachi for Israel.

It was at times judgmental. My dear people, it carried a serious warning. There was weight in that message.

It was a burden. And there was a weight in his own heart because of that message. Malachi, the prophet, he saw the future.

He saw the effect of what God was going to do to Israel. And a great burden from God came over him. And I believe that when the burden of the word of the Lord comes to a pastor, to a missionary, to an evangelist, to a child of God, to a father, I believe when the burden of the word of the Lord comes to him, then that is the beginning of becoming fruitful for God.

Because until we have this burden from God, we can go through the motions, but by and large, we will be ineffective and unfruitful in our ministries. Can I say to you that giftedness alone is insufficient? Talent alone will not suffice. Ability and great sermons are meaningless unless the burden of the word of the Lord is upon us.

It's good to be dependable. But brethren, dependability alone will never bear fruit for God. Hear me.

The Bible says as soon as Zion prevails, she brings forth. Pastor John Cartwright called last night, and he said he wasn't going to be able to come to the prayer dance. His daughter, Jenny, is going to be in the hospital today giving birth to their grandchild.

And he couldn't come. And I'll tell you, before that kid shows up, there'll be some labor. There'll be some pain.

There'll be some travail. And brethren, before we're going to bring forth fruit, the fruit of souls and the fruit that glorifies God, I really believe there's going to have to be some soul travail in the secret place of prayer. The pains of labor precede birth.

And brethren, when we labor in our spirit, it's called a prayer burden. The old timers used to call it about the spirit of prayer, the burden of prayer that would come upon them. It's like Jesus, you know, when he looked and wept over the city.

You know why? Because he had a burden for it. When's the last time you ever wept over your city? You ever stand up on a mountain somewhere? If there's a mountain, you look out over it. You know why Jesus wept? Because he had a burden for it.

Abraham, he pleaded with God for Sodom and Gomorrah. He said, God, if there's 50, will You spare? God, if there's only 40, God, don't be mad. But what about 30, Lord? What about only 20? What about 10? You know, God never quit answering his prayer until he quit praying.

Do you think Lot would have made it out of Sodom had it not been for the intercession of Abraham? Why, the burden came on him. He didn't want to see his nephew destroyed. If he could be interceded, he'd begin to pray.

It's like Rachel, when she said to her husband, Give me children or I die. There was a burden. There was a burden involved in his spirit.

And I believe that our fruitfulness is determined by the burden of the word of the Lord. In intercession, like Daniel and Nehemiah, they prayed themselves into their prayers. They prayed themselves right into their prayers.

I was up in Van Wert, Ohio. Every night we'd go to a meeting, we'd have a prayer meeting. In this church, mainly older people showed up for the prayer meeting.

Thank God for older people that show up for prayer meetings. Thank God for anybody that shows up to prayer meetings. But the Barker Church, young people show up for meetings.

Say hallelujah. But they came, these older people. And you know, it was interesting.

We'd get in little huddles every night and they'd begin to pray. There was a Hindu girl there as an exchange student. They had a burden for her.

They had all witnessed to her. And she said, I cannot become a Christian because I have to go home. And my parents are Hindu.

I cannot become a Christian. Well, they prayed. And every night in prayer meeting, they'd psalm and they'd weep.

She came the first night, she listened. She came the second night. And every night, this went on for about three or four nights, these people in there praying and psalming and weeping.

She came the second night and heard the message. She was the first one to respond to the gospel. And after she had received the Lord, she said, now the first thing I've got to do is I've got to sit down and write my parents a letter and tell them I have become a Christian.

She counted the cost. You know what I believe? I believe that Hindu girl will still be on her way to hell if it hadn't been for some praying people, old people in that church. That's what I believe.

I was in Mount Airy, Maryland. Some of you brethren are here. They prayed for this Jewish person to be saved.

They witnessed to her. They plead over her. Brother, they bled over her, as it were.

And there that night, that Jewish woman came to Christ. You felt like rejoicing in the house of God, brother. You know what I believe? I believe nothing would have happened if it hadn't been for the labor and the burden that preceded that.

That's what I believe. Brother Barker's here. Remember that prayer meeting when old Mickey came into the prayer meeting? Remember that one? This little guy had been saved five months.

Big old kind of guy. Went up to scout out some deer signs and fell into a prayer meeting and messed up the whole woods, rolling all over the woods. That's what he said.

He came and broke up our prayer meeting. And he was so excited how he met the Lord. You know, the night before his Camelite wife and daughter had come to services.

And she came to me that night. You know what she said? She said, well, I don't know what to do. She said, if I go with him and he's wrong, we'll go to hell.

If I'm wrong and he goes with me, we'll go to hell. She said, I don't know what to do. She was confused.

She believed in baptismal regeneration, which she'd been taught. Well, the second night she came to the meeting, and after old Mickey had that prayer meeting up there in the woods, brother, or all over the woods, romping all over the leaves, messing up the deer signs. Oh, that night, that night, who were the first ones to come down? But his wife and daughter.

Brethren, what I'm saying to you is this. I believe we can get to the point where we're so intellectual, we'll forget how to weep and supplicate and intercede for souls. And if the church is going to be fruitful, somebody's going to have to get under the burden.

Listen to me. When the gospel increases in polish, it loses in power. And we're so polished today.

But where is the power of God to save lost souls in here? The burden of the word of the Lord. I believe the prayer burden must be translated into practical action because God's given us the ministry of reconciliation. The Bible says we're co-laborers together with Christ.

Somebody said, pray like it all depends on you, or pray like it all depends on God, and work like it all depends on you. And I don't believe in this type of sovereignty today that we're just going to scribe everything to God and sit back in our wheelchair and smoke pipes and split doctrine, split theological hairs, brother. Paul said, I labor more abundantly than they all.

He said, of the Galatians, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you. He said in the book of Thessalonians, he said, brethren, remember I labor and travail, laboring night and day. You know what I believe this means? I believe we sow sparingly, we'll reap sparingly.

But if we sow abundantly by the grace of God, we can reap abundantly. I believe the effectiveness and the fruitfulness of our ministry will not only be the prayer burden, but will also be the labor that we put into it. You know what I fear? I fear professionalism.

God deliver us from it. God deliver us from putting in time and piddling and trifling with eternal things. Brother, when the burden of the Lord is upon us, it's all for God and there's nothing for self.

You know, when you deal with lost people who are involved in sensual sins and addicted to pornography and homosexuality and all these kinds of things, that when you deal with people like this, do you understand it can have one of three effects upon you? Number one, it can defile you. It can tempt you, allure you, draw you, conquer you and defile you if you're not careful. Have we not heard of unprecedented number of pastors falling into moral sin in these days? When we deal with people caught up in these kinds of sins, it can defile us.

The second effect it can have is it can disgust us. It can disgust us. These dirty people.

How could anybody be so low? These people are the scum of the earth. And I want to tell you with that kind of attitude, we're the exact type of people that our Lord denounced in the gospel record more than anybody else. You know, if you're not careful, you can have an attitude of condemnation in your mind that will reach people before you show up and turn them away and turn them off before you ever approach

them.

Years ago, I had a friend. He was a lost friend. He was a friend too.

He was a good friend. He happened to be living with somebody he wasn't married to. I kept on thinking I ought to invite him over to our house for dinner.

But I said, no, I can't invite him over the house for dinner. He's living with somebody he's not married to. And I got these children here.

And what will I say to them? You know, in my mind, I was trying to do the right thing. And I was kind of torn. You know what I'm saying? And I didn't want to look down on him.

But I think that that's what he sensed from me. And it wasn't long after that that he drew away. And he's never been drawn back.

You know what I wonder? I wonder if it wasn't my attitude of condemnation, of looking down on him. Friend, let me tell you something. I want to tell you something.

I want to tell you something. If the sins of sinners disgust you, you are void of the love of God in your heart. I'll tell you a third thing it can do.

It can not only disgust and defile, but I'll tell you a third effect it can have. It can put a desperate desire in your heart to see them saved. You can become so burdened that you yearn and crave to see people saved.

And I believe that when your heart is broken, you won't be disgusted and you won't be defiled. But you might just bear fruit for God. William Booth was a revival trailblazer.

But you know what they said of that man? They said that he was so emotionally upset at the drunks and the London gutters that he couldn't eat and sleep for an entire week. And that's where the army was born. You know, the big men who shake the world for God? It's the men who had the burden of the word of God come on them.

And his heart was absolutely broken. I was in Tulsa this fall at a church. One night we had a lesbian at the altar pray.

We had a drug addict in the prayer room making a professional faith in Christ. We have a drug dealer on the second row with his wife who had just gotten out of prison sitting there on the front row. A little bitty Baptist church out in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

You know what I thought? I said, man, this is the kind of place that Jesus would show up because Jesus Christ is a friend of sinners. I said, I'll pitch in my towel with this crowd. Lesbians, dopers, drug addicts, slaves to sin.

Yes, this is precisely the type of people our Lord died for. Did he not? God deliver us from our yuppie professionalism. God deliver us from our cold, stale, stale, just, just, just antiseptic type of rigid religion that has no heart for people.

Brother, that's not the heart of God. The reason these people act like they do is because they're lost. Lost.

My heart weaves too little for the lost. Asking God to break my heart for the lost. There are some people in our life lately, lost as you can get.

You couldn't get any more lost than these people. You couldn't get any more filthy than these people. You couldn't get any lower than these people.

You know what I'm thinking? I'm hoping they'll get saved. I'm working as best I know how to cooperate with God in this thing. I know God's got to do it, brother, but I got to be there too, you know.

Man, you want to bear fruit for God, you wouldn't be here if you didn't. I know you want to bear fruit for God. Brother, every branch that needs to bear is not fruit, he takes it away.

And every branch that bears fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit. You know what we're going to get in these days? Some of us are going to get a lot of purging. Some of us are going to get a lot of purging.

Some might get tapped into the vine. But brother, it's imperative before we bring forth fruit. Now listen, non-fruit bearing branches are taken away and cast into the fire.

Did you hear what this sentence is? Every branch that bears not fruit is taken away and cast into the fire. If I didn't believe in an eternal lake of fire, if I didn't believe in hell, literal hell fire, I'd get an honest job and quit faking it and quit presuming to be something I wasn't. Brother, some of our family members and friends and neighbors and workmates and associates are just as sure bound for hell as if they were already there.

And brother, if we're not doing a blooming thing about it, our hearts are not right with them. The problem isn't with them, the problem is with us. Let's quit cussing the government and the Democrats for a little while, amen? I hope you're longing to bring forth fruit for God.

I hope some of you, God, will turn your hearts to your children. I hope God will do for some of you men what God did for some of us many years ago and turn our hearts. I hope your heart's burning.

I hope your heart's hungry. First thing you forgot, Jesus saw the fig tree, searched it, cursed it. He destroyed it.

In the barren fig tree there was nothing but leaves. God searches our hearts, man. He ought to be finding fruit, ought he not? Let's cooperate with him and we might bring forth fruit for God.

What are the lessons? Well, the lessons from the cursing of the barren fig tree is to teach the power of prayer and faith, to illustrate the barrenness of the Jewish nation, to demonstrate God's hatred of the sin of presumption, and then to provide a drastic warning of the doom awaiting a barren life. Jesus said, my father's glorified that you bear much fruit. Brother, if you're going to bear fruit, you got to be attached to the vine.

You got to be born of God. You got to have a work of God in your heart. And you got to abide in the vine and cooperate with God.

And brother, that burden, that burden of the word of the Lord will drive you to seek souls for the glory of God. And brother, we can bring forth fruit. May it be so.

May it be so. May God purchase, cleanse us that we all might bring forth fruit. Brother, you can do it.

You can do it. If my five-year-old boy can hand out a tract, you can. Fruitfulness for God, let's pray.

And we want you to have liberty in these sessions, of the prayer advance to respond to God when God speaks to you and where God speaks to you. The whole prayer advance is an invitation. You feel the liberty to respond at any time God speaks to your heart.

Friend, you can go to your room, go to your car, get under a tree, get out on the hill and pour your heart out to God. This afternoon, we're talking about fruitfulness versus leaves. Jesus found nothing but leaves.

What does he find when he looks in your life today? I know you want to bring forth fruit for God. Let God purge you. Let God purge you in these days, friend.

Some of you men here in this meeting, you might have come and you might have slipped into the building. Oh, you give mental assent to the facts of the gospel. You believe in Jesus and all this kind of stuff.

But brother, you've never had a work of God, of regeneration, of new birth in your soul. Friend, seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. He that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.

I'm telling you, Jesus can save you. He saved us. He can save anybody.

I want you to think about this. The fruit of holiness, the fruit of the spirit and the fruit of souls. Tell God you're going to cooperate with him and do whatever is necessary to become fruitful, that you might be a fruit bearing branch.

This year for the glory of God. Lord, I thank you for this text and thank you for these lessons. Lord, we learn here the power of faith and prayer.

Oh, God, in these days, would you just enable us to believe your book and father to practice what we say to believe by the grace of God and father, would you make us fruitful for your name's sake? Lord, make these men fruitful. Oh, I pray. Oh, I pray.

Oh, God, the burden of the word of the Lord would come to every one of our hearts and our sphere of influence and our part of the kingdom, that God, we might bring forth fruit that would honor our God. We want you to be glorified, Lord, and we want to bring forth much fruit. And God, we're looking for the type of fruit that remains.

So, Lord, would you just do this kind of work in our souls in these days? Now, father, thank you for speaking and what you're going to be speaking through the rest of this advance. We can make this time to be. With Thanksgiving.

In Christ's name, we pray. Amen. Men, if you have not registered, you need.

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