

## Jesus Teaches A Real Time Parable: The Cursed Fig Tree

As Jesus' time on earth was winding down, and his crucifixion less than two weeks away; we find he and his disciples in the area of the ancient city Jericho. The LORD and Israel have quite a history with this town. When Joshua led Israel through the Promised-land they sent two spies out to survey the new land. An inhabitant there, Rahab, saved the spies from capture by hiding them. They returned with their report and told Joshua to spare Rahab and her family. They then came to the Jordan river opposite Jericho. It was there God spoke to Joshua how to cross the river and conquer this heavily fortified city.

The Levite priests carried the arc of the covenant to the edge of the river, and as soon as their sandals touched the water, the waters piled up on one side and stopped flowing on the other side of the river which dried up for Israel to cross over on dry ground. The heads of each tribe were commanded to take a stone from the river and stack them up as a reminder of the power of God when he let Israel cross over on dry ground.

This was done also to engender respect and awe towards Joshua as they had for Moses who was no longer with them. For forty years they wandered in the desert until all those who complained and murmured against God had died out. Joshua 5:6-7 (NASB) "...they did not listen to the voice of the LORD,... He would not let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey. Their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised."

So the covenant was in a state of suspension during those forty years and now is reinstated. Did you notice that it said that God raised the children up in the wilderness?

He was making a people for his own possession. A people that would follow him without complaint.

While they were healing they celebrated the Passover which hadn't been done in years and on the next day, they ate of the produce of the land, and the manna that God provided for them ceased. What happens next is quite amazing when you think about it. Joshua's gaze is fixed on Jericho and he sees a man.

The man has his sword drawn in his hand and Joshua approaches him and asks, "Are you for us or our adversaries?" He said, "No; rather I indeed come now *as* captain of the host of the LORD." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" The captain of the LORD'S host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. Yeshua was speaking to Joshua- YHWH SAVES.

If you recall, Moses' commission started in a similar way. Moses saw a bush on fire that was not consumed and went up to look at it, and the Holy Being in the bush told him to remove his sandals because the place where he stood was holy ground. And with proper bible exegesis, you see that the two characters are one and the same persons but in different forms. It is the pre-incarnate Jesus.

The LORD, as the Captain of the Host of Heaven commissions Joshua, and tells him that he would deliver their enemies into his hands and then gave him the instructions to follow in order to obtain the victory. For six days they marched once around the walled city, Jericho, being led by the seven priests with the shofar, which are the rams horns, and with the arc of the covenant, and all the men of war following, encircling Jericho.

On the seventh day they marched seven times around Jericho and after the seventh time around the priests blew the shofar, with one long blast, and the men shouted and the walls fell down flat.

The soldiers rushed in and destroyed everything except Rahab and her family, they were spared and lived amongst the Israelites the rest of their days. Rahab herself married Salmon, an Israeli man from Judah, and they had a son named Boaz, who married Ruth the Moabite woman who had a son named Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David. Jesus line.

So you can see God's providence at work by protecting his bloodline. After their victory, Joshua curses Jericho, "cursed is anyone before Jehovah who gets up and builds Jericho, this city. At the cost of his firstborn he will lay its foundation and the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates."

Centuries later, during the reign of evil king Ahab, Hiel rebuilt Jericho and lost his oldest son Abiram and his youngest son Segub disregarding the widely known curse because Israel had turned its back on God and didn't believe in him anymore.

Later, in 2 Kings 2:18-22 the people of the recently rebuilt Jericho asked the prophet Elisha to help them because their water was poisonous and the land was unproductive because of it. He told them, "Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it." So they brought *it* to him. He went out to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.'" So the waters have been purified to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke." Friends, when these words were penned, the plain of Jericho became fruitful because of God.

Understand this, Jericho is Israel's Death Valley. They are 1,200 feet below sea level, and the temperatures are crazy hot in the day and even to this day, now, the plains of Jericho, which are in a desert, are like an oasis with an abundance of water and is one of the most fertile areas of modern Israel, even the ancient aqueducts are in excellent shape, all by the power of God's word.

From this telling of Jericho's history we have a people entering a promised land and into covenant with God. We have miracles done by God which created faith in the God of Israel. We see a city destroyed and cursed, later to be rebuilt and the curse visited on the man who ignored the prophet's warning and his two sons paid the price for their father's disbelief with their lives. And then a prophet of God who healed the waters of Jericho and the land became fruitful and life giving again.

So the very land that Jesus and his disciples were traveling through, Jericho, Jesus had an intimate knowledge of its past and made some rather interestingly unique miracles there. It was here that our Lord took his disciples aside and for a third time told them bluntly what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem.

Mar 10:32-34, 'Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him:

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Though afraid, the disciples were in awe of their master, who had his jaw set like flint to go to Jerusalem and become the perfect sacrificial lamb of God. He had a job to do and was going there to redeem mankind from sin.

They followed Jesus into Jericho and they came upon two blind men, one named Bartimaeus; who when he learned that it was Jesus passing by began to shout, " Jesus son of David have mercy upon me!"

The crowd actually shooshed him and sternly rebuked him to be quiet, but that didn't deter the blind man, it made him shout out all the more, "**Jesus son of David have mercy on me!!!**" Jesus stopped and commanded that Bartimaeus be brought to him. Bartimaeus showed great faith and determination to get Jesus' attention and knew how to properly address him.

By calling him 'Jesus son of David', he was acknowledging him as being the Messiah. He was standing in front of the Messiah, the King of Israel with his blind friend, and Jesus asks the blind men what it is that he wants him to do for them. Jesus knew full well what Bartimaeus wanted, but Jesus wanted him to ask, and ask with faith.

"What do you want me to do for you?"

"Rabboni, I want to regain my sight." By addressing Jesus as Rabboni was a title of great honor, Rab means; master, rabbi means; my master, but rabboni means; my great master. I'm sure the other blind man was probably shaking his head violently in the affirmative wanting his sight as well, and the Lord said, "Receive your sight, your faith has made you well.'

Bam!!! They see Jesus, the first image their new vision beholds, a vision that Bartimaeus and his companion would remember for

the rest of their lives. They were praising God and followed Jesus, and those who saw what happened were praising God too.

While walking through Jericho the crowds were gathering to see the Lord pass by. A man named Zaccheus who was the chief tax collector, wanted to see the Lord as well but couldn't because of his size, he was a small man. So he ran ahead and climbed a tree along the road where Jesus would pass by.

As Jesus passed, he looked up and said to Zaccheus, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must come and stay at your house." Zaccheus did as ordered and received the Lord gladly.

But again there were people who judged the Lord and the tax collector contemptuously, saying that he was going to be a guest of sinners. Zaccheus was honored to have the Messiah stay at his home and not just honored, but moved by Jesus kindness so that he immediately repents and pledges half his wealth to the poor and that he would restore to anyone he defrauded fourfold.

Jesus, who will one day judge us all, said to Zaccheus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which is lost."

The next day is Sunday, Jesus and the disciples leave the home of Zaccheus and head for Jerusalem. It is a fifteen mile journey, so most of the day would be spent traveling by foot, so they would arrive in Jerusalem late in the day.

When they got to Bethany by the Mt. Of Olives, just outside of town, Jesus gives two of his disciples instructions to bring him back a colt that was never ridden, and that it was tied up and

where to find it and what to say to the owners who may object at first. He was going to ride it into town as King of the Jews.

Only domestic animals that were never used for service could be used for sacred purposes. Kings in the Holy Land would ride white donkeys and that is what the Lord is doing here.

As Jesus rides into town, Jerusalem greets him with coats and palm fronds spread on the road for him to ride over and shouts of Hosanna! And Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! This was what we call Palm Sunday, it was the start of the four day period in which Israel was to put their living spotless year old lamb on display for all to see, they were going to sacrifice it on Passover. It was to be a perfect specimen for atoning for sins, it was a type of Christ.

So Jesus, our perfect Passover lamb was to be observed by all for those four days as well. So he then entered the temple and observed what state it was in, and since it was late, after the evening prayer time, he would return the next day. They returned to Bethany for the night, perhaps at his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus' house where he often stayed.

The next day, Monday the 11<sup>th</sup> of Abib, Jesus and his disciples leave Bethany to return to Jerusalem. Along the way he becomes hungry. He sees a fig tree in the distance and goes up to it, looking for fruit to eat but it was spring time and only leaves were on the tree. Jesus cursed the tree, "May nobody ever eat fruit from you again.", and the disciples heard him.

They spent the day in Jerusalem. Jesus entered the temple and drove out the people who buying and selling as if it were a market, and turned over the money changer's tables and the

seats of those who were selling doves. He didn't permit people to carry merchandise through the temple.

Now, if you were thinking Jesus just had a bad case of the hangries, you would be wrong. Jesus had a true zeal for his fathers house and was simply purging the common and profane out of it to keep it sacred and holy. So Jesus spent most of the day in the temple teaching the people, and said to them, "Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?" But you have made it a den of robbers."

When evening came they left the city.

The next morning, Tuesday, they headed back to Jerusalem. On the way Peter noticed the tree that Jesus cursed by saying, "Look, the tree you cursed is withered from the roots up." It was completely dead. Now why would Jesus do that? Jesus gave his disciples a 'real time' metaphor, so to speak. I guess you could call it an object lesson.

In Jericho, Jesus restored the sight of two sons of Israel, by the living waters he spoke to Zacheaus, he brought life to his household

That lesson is this, there comes a point when a child of God must bare fruit for the Lord or we too can be cursed and lost. David said in the first Psalm when talking about the person devoted to God, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

When you meditate on God's word throughout the day, you have very little time for worldly matters, they become less important and the time you spend with God in; prayer, reading his word, studying his word, practicing what you learn and worshipping

with the saints, is what is truly important to you. When you honestly pursue God's way, he will transform you into his image, and it will show in your life. You can't help but bare fruit for him. He will see to your needs when you put your trust in him.

Fruit doesn't instantly appear on a tree. When a tree is planted, it takes time to mature, sometimes years before it finally produces fruit. That too is reflected upon by the Psalmist. David further says, " He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers."

A tree firmly planted by a river will be able to remain rooted when the waters rise to raging flood levels; likewise in our lives when life becomes a raging river of problems, when we are securely planted in our faith in God, we will stand up under the torrents of life's challenges as well. God will see us through them and we will come out of them stronger than before.

Listen to Paul's words confirming this, Romans 5:1-5 (NASB)  
"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

It is the work of the Spirit to change us into the image of God, and when we become more and more like God, we bear fruit for

him, good fruits of all kinds, and having a like character with God we can better weather the storms that come our way.

Once saved, do not slip back into the sinful way you were before, our old nature has been nailed to his cross and we have been born again into a new creature, who by the Spirit we received at baptism is transforming into Jesus image. Again, listen to Paul's words.

Rom.12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

To be conformed to this world is to be transformed into Satan's image. So do not backslide into the sinful things you did in the past. You can't fool God, pretending to be a Christian and practicing sin. Doing so changes you back into his image. Through knowing God's word AND putting it into practice enables the Spirit to make the change in us to be like Jesus, and bear good fruit for him.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NASB)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

So Paul again credits the Spirit as making the change in us to the image of Jesus.

When the Jews responded to John the Baptist's preaching of 'repent for the kingdom of God is at hand', the people asked him, "What must we do?" , and John told them what the fruit of repentance is,

"The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him,

"Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about* us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages."

We see that doing good for others and modifying our behavior to that of decency are fruit for God. But if you resist the Spirit and grieve the Spirit and continue practicing sin rather than good works, your soul is in mortal jeopardy.

Jesus used the idea of God being a vinedresser, and the he as the main vine planted in the soil, and Christians as its branches. John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; showing yourselves to be My disciples."

When we are in fellowship with God, walking in his light, entering through the narrow gate, we receive nourishment from the root of the vine and we produce fruit for the Vinedresser. If we are not producing fruit even after being pruned, we can expect to be lopped off the vine.

Israel found that out the hard way, they turned their backs on the One True and Living God, and after rejecting warning after warning from countless prophets to get them to repent from serving false gods, they reached the point when God punished them for their sins.

Those whose backs that received the stripes which had their intended effect- a contrite heart and broken spirit which led them to repentance, God gladly grafted back into the vine where they would once again draw nourishment from the root and produce fruit for God. This idea is seen in the prophet Hosea's words.

Hosea 14:8 "Ephraim *shall say*, What have I to do any more with idols? I have answered, and will regard him: I am like a green fir-tree; from me is thy fruit found."

The fruit God is talking about is the fruit of good will and deeds to others, loving God and fellow man, and showing in your character the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness gentleness, and self control. Heed Paul's warnings!

Rom 6:21 What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

Rom 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, worked in our members to bring out fruit to death.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB)

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

If you are not producing fruit or the fruit you are producing is bad, you are in danger of being lost forever. And I will say it right now, STOP! CHANGE! Get right with God.

Rom 11:22 Behold then the kindness, and the severity of God; on those having fallen, severity; but on you, kindness, if you continue in the kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

By Paul's words here we see there is no such thing as once saved always saved. What kind of fruit are you bearing for the Lord? If you need to respond to the invitation for any reason, come.