

Matthew 21:18-46

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 September 2022

[0:00] Matthew chapter 21, as we just continue to make our way through the gospel of Matthew, we'll be finishing up the 21st chapter this morning, but we'll start in the 18th verse.

So Matthew 21, verses 18 through 46 will be our text this morning, as we just continue to make our way through the gospel of Matthew.

We know chronologically that we're in the Passion Week of Christ. We have seen the triumphal entry. We are now in that last week of Christ leading up to His betrayal, arrest, crucifixion.

We can compile this with the other gospel accounts, specifically those in the synoptic gospels.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are your synoptic gospels.

Synoptic just means same. And we can kind of reconcile how things happen there. I will tell you, because I believe that God's people need to be students of the Word, not just listeners of it.

[1:02] So as you open up Scripture and you read, there are some things that may appear contradictory. While they're not contradictory, they fit the purpose of the intended audience, or the intended author and the audience.

As we see things, even in our passage this morning, we'll read of the cursing of a fig tree, and how it takes place immediately. You go open the Gospel of Mark, you'll read that He curses the fig tree one day, and the very next day the disciples notice that it's withered.

And it would seem to contradict itself. One thing you need to know about Matthew, and we'll say this in opening, because I expect you to read Scripture, and I expect you to see these things and scratch your head, and I want you to have an understanding.

Matthew does not claim to write chronologically. That is, he's not trying to put things in a consecutive order. He puts things around a topic.

That doesn't mean he's topical. That means that this is fitting his purpose as he writes. He's being led of the Lord. He's being moved of the Spirit of God to write the Word of God to the people of God.

[2:08] But his leading has him grouping things together in topics, and Mark is a little bit more chronological in the last days. Luke is very chronological.

He's a physician. He's technical, right? And he says, you know, he wants to get things very specific there, and we see that. So we don't see any contradiction.

We just see the full picture. This is why if you want a four-dimensional view of Christ, not a three-dimensional, four-dimensional view of Christ, you need to read and study all four Gospels and see how they reconcile one another.

Scripture never contradicts Scripture. Rather, Scripture interprets Scripture. So we see these things, these themes. Matthew writes with a thematic emphasis, and these themes point together, and a chunk of verses we have this morning revolve around a certain theme that hopefully we will see with one another in which the fig tree is just the very tip of the iceberg.

So if you are physically able and desire to do so, I'm asking if you would join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God found in Matthew chapter 21, starting in verse 18 and going down to verse 46.

[3:20] Now in the morning when he was returning to the city, he became hungry, and seeing a lone fig tree by the road, he came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only. And he said to it, no longer shall there be any fruit from you.

And at once the fig tree withered. Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, how did the fig tree wither all at once? And Jesus answered and said to them, truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, be taken up and cast into the sea, it will happen.

And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive. When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him while he was teaching and said, by what authority

are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?

Jesus said to them, I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source?

From heaven or from men? And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, if we say from heaven, he will say to us, then why did you not believe him? But if we say from men, we fear the people, for they all regard John as a prophet.

[4 : 26] And answering Jesus, they said, we do not know. And he also said to them, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, son, go work today in the vineyard.

And he answered, I will not. But afterward, he regretted it and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing. And he answered, I will, sir. But he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?

They said, the first. Jesus said to them, truly, I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him.

But the tax collectors and the prostitutes did believe him, and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterwards so as to believe him. Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and rented it out to vine growers and went on a journey.

When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine growers to receive his produce. The vine growers took his slaves and beat one and killed another and stoned a third. Again, he sent another group of slaves larger than the first, and they did the same thing to them.

[5 : 33] But afterward, he sent his son to them, saying, they will respect my son. But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.

They took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of this vineyard comes, what will he do to these vine growers? They said to him, he will bring those wretches to a wretched inn and will rent out the vineyard to other vine growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper season.

Jesus said to them, did you never read in the scriptures the stone which the builders rejected? This became the chief cornerstone. This came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust. When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they understood that he was speaking about them.

And when they sought to seize him, they feared the people because they considered him to be a prophet. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this day. God, we thank you for your faithfulness and your goodness towards us.

[6 : 40] We thank you for the opportunity we have together as your people and to read the very word of God. Lord, we pray now that as we have heard it and we have read it, Lord, that you would open up our hearts and minds to a greater understanding of it.

Lord, may the truth of Scripture penetrate us to the very depth of our being. And Lord, may it lead and guide us to become your people for your glory and your honor and yours alone. And we ask it all in Christ's name. Amen.

You may be seated. Matthew 21, verses 18 through 46. I want you to see this morning a rebuke for fruitless living. A rebuke for fruitless living.

The account of the fig tree and the parables that follow it really are teaching one great theme. And it is this rebuke that comes from a fruitless living. If you remember during this Passion Week, as Christ has come in during the triumphal entry, he has come to the shouts of Hosanna to the Son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And literally they're crying out, save us, save us, save us. And there's all this praise that is resonating from the people that are around him. And a number of people are going before him bearing palm branches.

[7 : 42] And he goes into the temple and he overturns the money changer tables. And he casts out all those who are buying and selling and doing business. And he rebukes the people for what they

have made a spectacle out of the house of the Lord.

And how it was supposed to be a place of prayer, but it has become a den of robbers. And he runs them out and then he goes back to Bethany and he stays at night. And he comes back in and we are now entering into the second day.

Really we have an overflow of the second and the third day here, if we reconcile it with the other gospel accounts. But if you remember, I told you that it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to enter Jerusalem at the time he did.

Because he is the lamb that will be slain as the Passover lamb. It is absolutely essential to biblical chronology. It is absolutely essential to the biblical picture that we have in the Old Testament.

That Jesus himself will be crucified on the Passover day. For that is the day appointed for the slaying of the lamb for the sin of man. And we see that Christ fulfills that picture that is really resplendent for us all throughout the Old Testament, starting in the book of Exodus.

[8 : 46] It is just this picture of what is going to be. By the way, it never was about a lamb chosen from the flock and putting blood over the doorpost of your house. It never was about the shedding of the blood of a lamb.

Really, it was always about the coming of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, who is Jesus Christ. And he is already giving us the time of when it would happen. But we understand from the picture in the Old Testament that the lamb must be examined, must be looked at, must be washed, must be observed.

For you must know for certain that this lamb is absolutely perfect. There could be no spot. There could be no wrinkle. There could be no defect. There could be nothing hidden from eyesight that could be evident in this lamb.

Because for it to be accepted, it had to be perfect. Jesus had to go through a number of days of observation. And we see those here in that Passion Week.

Jesus is questioned. He is cross-examined. This is where we have a lot of his teachings. This is where we have a multitude of people coming to him. This is where we have people coming to him talking about eternity.

[9 : 49] And we have people coming from all nationalities really representing this one time. And here, more people than at any other time in the ministry of Christ have the opportunity to behold the lamb.

And therefore, to rightly declare on the day of Passover, he's perfect. He's worthy. He is fitting to be the sacrifice for the sin of man.

And we see this. And it just resonates throughout the entire week. But in this, there is also, as man observes him, man is rebuked by him.

Because the longer we look at Christ, the more we see of ourselves. The longer we look at Christ and we spend time with Christ, and the more we know of Christ, really the greater revelations we have of ourself.

Well, the great teachings we have in the New Testament, and I've told you this before, when you read the letters of Paul, and you read the letters of Paul in the order he wrote them. So if you start, some of his earliest writings are 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and you progress, and you go on, and you look at the dates of the time of when they were written, and you just read kind of Paul in his own words.

[10 : 57] The way Paul describes himself, Paul starts out describing himself as apostle born out of due season. He was chosen of God, appointed of God to be an apostle to men. He is an apostle born out of due season.

By the time you get to the last letter written by Paul, Paul refers to himself as the chief of all sinners. He goes from an apostle born out of due season to a chief of all sinners.

And there are a number of things in between the way he describes himself, but this story is really good. The longer he walks with Christ, the more time he spends with Christ, the more clearly he sees of himself.

And he understands he's not just an apostle born out of due season. He is the greatest of all sinners, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. And now there's this great fervor, because not only is he just someone called of God and appointed by God, he himself is the most desperate of individuals, redeemed by the Lord.

And the longer he walks with Christ, the more he understands of himself, and there's this greater rebuke. So as we see Christ present with the people, and we see him being examined and observed by the people, we also see the rebuke that he has towards them.

[12:07] And this one in particular is the rebuke for fruitless living. The first thing we see is an illustration. Just three things you'll see this morning, and I promise we'll make our way through it. The first one is an illustration.

It says that as he was going along in the morning, he becomes hungry. Culturally, it tells us that the Jewish people would probably eat about once a day. So it wasn't really astounding that they would get hungry throughout the day.

But we also know there's this great biblical practice of having food beside the roadside. That is, if your field was beside the roadside, it was very permissible for individuals to go into it and pick up your produce. They just could not carry a bunch away.

This is what we see Jesus' disciples doing as they're moving through the grain field, and they're getting grain in their hand, and they're sifting it in their hand, and they're eating it. Remember the Pharisees said, oh, they're sifting, they're working on the Sabbath. They can't do that.

No, they were hungry, so they were eating. So we see that it is permissible, according to the Old Testament teaching, for people to go through your field and to pick a little produce. This one is right beside the road.

[13:03] This is a fig tree right beside the road. Now, if we go and we read the Gospel of Mark, we'll see that from a distance, Jesus saw this fig tree, and he noticed that it was in leaf. This is important. We need to pay attention to this because Mark also tells us that it was not the season for figs.

So this used to bother me. I'm just going to be honest with you a little bit. Jesus rebuked a tree that didn't have figs when it wasn't supposed to have figs. And that's the way my mind thinks, right?

Well, if it wasn't the season for figs, then why did he expect figs?

And if he didn't see figs, why did he curse the tree? Because it's not the season for figs. This is the stuff that I used to wrestle with. But until you begin to understand also the agriculture of the land, the fig tree begins to produce its figs the moment leaves come out.

So from a distance, when he saw this tree, that it was, as Mark tells us, in leaf, full of leaves, there should have been figs. And we know, historically, that in that region where Christ was at, around Mount Gethsemane and all these other areas that he's traversing from, as he goes from Bethany to Jerusalem, there were fig trees that were early bloomers.

There were fig trees that came out early. You see this in some fruit trees even today. And there were those in particular. All of a sudden, he becomes hungry and he sees this tree at a distance. Now, he's not taken by surprise at this because he is the creator, right?

[14:23] He knows all things, so we don't need to see that Jesus was let down or disappointed. He's using this as an illustration. Everything, I believe, everything that Christ did in his life, especially those things that are recorded for us in Scripture, were done intentionally.

There were no accidents. There were no surprises. There were no, oh, well, since this didn't happen and I thought it would happen, we need to do this. There's no change of course. There are intentional illustrations.

Of all of those walking with him, and this, by the way, is a private illustration. Only his disciples are with him. Everyone who saw that tree would have expected fruit to be on that tree because that tree was in full leaf.

It was in full bloom. And it should have had fruit on it. And the illustration is this. It was giving the appearance of being fruitful, but when he walked up to it, he found none.

It was putting on a good show, but it actually wasn't doing any work. It should have been fruit bearing, but in all actuality, it was fruitless.

[15:27] And therefore, Jesus makes this declaration. No longer will anyone ever get any fruit from you. And it withered up.

It tells us in the Gospel of Matthew, it withered up immediately. And they saw it in the book of Mark. It says that they notice the next day they come by and it's dead. Well, that's pretty explicable too because something can die immediately, but it takes a little bit of time for it to show its effects, right? People, something can die instantaneously, but it takes a little bit of time for it to come through. We had a storm pass through last night. If any leaves or any limbs blew down off anybody's tree when

the storm came through, it was one of those great illustrations I think I saw one time driving down the road.

Here's this big branch that's laying in the road and it's full of leaves. Actually, I think on a Sunday morning I saw it when I was pastoring the church prior to that, and I grabbed that limb and I took it with me. That was a good thing to walk up into the pulpit with, right?

I had this limb that was full of leaves and the leaves looked beautiful and the leaves were full and healthy and they were bright green and everything was awesome. But the reality is, is it was dying. It was dead because it was detached from the tree it should have been on.

[16:33] It was going to take a little bit for that to show, right? It was going to take just a little bit for that to become evident. But what we see here is the death is immediate because Jesus pronounces this curse. Now, the illustration is very clear and we don't have to dig very deep.

We don't have to be scholars to understand this. Jesus tells us it's not the appearance of fruitfulness that matters in our life. It is the actuality of bearing fruit that matters in our life. Which means we can put on a good show all day long, but unless there's actual fruit being produced, it really doesn't matter. We can dress the part.

We can look the part. We can know the words. We can know what to say, when to say. We can even know how to pray. We can have a good reading plan. We can have a great study. We can have a Bible that's worn out from the amount of time that we carry it around with us.

But unless we are genuinely, as John tells us in John 15, abiding in Christ and bearing fruits, then we are much like this tree by the wayside, giving a hope of fruit but not producing any thereof.

[17:40] See, it is not looking the part. It's actually doing the work. I've seen some very ugly apple trees have some wonderful fruit on them. I've seen some very beautiful.

Now, it's no lie. Everybody here knows I love apples, right? I've seen some very beautiful apple trees that had terrible fruit on them. I have been known to walk around and pick fruit. There is, in this city here, one of the best-tasting pear trees I've ever tasted.

Now, I'm sorry if it belongs to you. That's just the way I am. Somebody's going to get mad at me, right? If I'm walking by a fruit tree and I see fruit hanging on it, I'm going to try it. I can tell you which trees to eat from in this town of Wartrace and which trees not to eat from.

I know people say, you're a thief. It's biblical, right? It's right there on the wayside. I can do it. And this one in particular, there's no houses around. It's one of the ugliest-looking trees I've ever seen. This thing is horrendous.

I'm not going to tell you where it is because I don't want you going and picking the fruit next year. I just so happened to be walking by it not too long ago, and I said, I'm going to see what that tastes like. It is the best pear I've ever eaten. It's like, that is amazing.

[18:38] Now, next year, if it lets me down, if it disappoints me, then I'm going to be upset. And I've seen some very beautiful trees that look like they had great fruit, and I've picked them, and they're terrible, and I'll throw them away. Because it's not the appearance that matters.

It's actually the fruit that it bears. Friend, listen to me. There are a lot of people who give a great appearance for Christ, but when you dig deep into their life, there's actually no fruit there.

And that's a very dangerous place to be. The question is not, will you bear fruit? The Bible boldly declares to you that you will. Jesus says in John 15, he who abides in me will bear much fruit. So the only reason we have for not bearing fruit for the kingdom is not that we do not have the opportunity, is that we're not abiding in Christ.

You say, well, what fruit should I bear? That's good. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And then we can keep going on and on and on. That's the baseline, right? There ought to be love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and kindness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

[19:45] And I can stop at that baseline and go, whoa, woe is me. I need more of that fruit hanging from my limbs, right? And then I need all these other things. And there ought to be this bearing of fruit in the life of the individual.

I don't care how good we look on the outside. I don't care how much good, beautiful leaves we put out there for everybody walking down the roadside to see. If when they walk up to us, they do not find the fruit they expect, then we have failed.

And this is the illustration. And Jesus curses this thing. Because let's just be honest. Christ is not concerned about how good we look.

He's not concerned about how well we go through the motions. Christ is perfectly content with us being a bruised and battered and scarred up and twisted tree as long as we're bearing fruit for the kingdom.

Because the fruitless one ends up in a worse state of existence than before. We don't want to paint a good picture. We don't want to bear good fruits. There's the illustration. The second thing we see in the text before us is an examination as we're looking at this rebuke of fruitless living.

[20 : 51] So he comes into the city and says, and when he goes into the city and goes into the temple and he's there teaching. This is what he does. He goes and makes himself. We've talked about this. It's a time for the quote unquote messianic secret has long passed.

Right? He's went into the temple and people are crying out, Hosanna. Bless is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Bless is the son of David. There's this public declaration of who he is. And then he goes back to the very temple and he's there.

And here we see that the lame and the blind and the mute are coming to him and he's healing them. And there's so much great teaching in this final week. Jesus is making himself public. And you need to pay attention to that because he is putting himself out there for people to look at and to observe and to question and to challenge.

And he's openly receiving these challenges. But it says as he goes into the temple, it tells us in verse 23, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. This is the leaders, the chief priests and the elders.

We need to know who this is that's coming before him because it's amazing in that final week exactly who it is that examines Christ and observes him. It is the people who should have known. Right? It is the people who should have at least an understanding.

[21 : 55] So here we have the leaders and those in places of authority are coming to examine Christ. Now this is a pretty good mandate because not just anyone could stand up and start teaching in the temple.

Not just anyone could stand up and start telling people an interpretation of the word of God. They were pretty good and pretty right and accurate in trying to guard who was teaching. By the way, we ought to be jealous for those who teach one another, teach us.

There are some teachers that I would say, well, hey, I would rather you not sit under that teaching or rather you not go under this study. And so I wouldn't necessarily say it publicly.

But if I was talking to you one on one and you're like, hey, I'm I'm looking into this. And I would if I thought that that was wrong, I would tell you I'd be honest with you. Right. And we would set forth. And because we need consistent theology and consistent and we need accurate teaching and understanding of scripture.

We don't want to be led astray. And the leaders are doing the same thing. They want to make sure that nobody's leading the people astray. But we know scripturally they are the actual ones who are leading the people astray.

[23 : 03] But these who are in a place of authority are going to question the one who is now standing up. I mean, think of what he has done. He has overturned the money changers and ran people out of the temple. He has declared that that was his house.

He has declared that it was his father's house, which therefore makes it his house. He is standing up and declaring to the people the understanding and interpretation of the word of God. It is here that he will say he is the light of the world.

It is here that he will tell them that the fountains of living water pour out of him. He is giving a new interpretation for their history. He has seen that everything culminates within him. And they come to him and they ask a legitimate question.

By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority? Now that question is stating whose feet did you sit under and study at? It would be our equivalent of saying which college did you go to?

Where did you graduate from? Right? Who taught you? And therefore, who has given you the authority to teach others? Now, I love this because these are the ones who are examining Christ.

[24 : 03] And what we find out is quite often, anytime someone comes to examine Christ, Christ often examines them. The very moment we think we're going to test Christ, he begins to test us.

So as they come to him and they ask him this question, he always, and it's a wonderful thing. Every time we come with a question, he also responds with a question. He says, I too will ask you one

question.

And that's a really legitimate discourse in that day. Teachers would do that with one another. This is how Paul works, even when he stands up and he teaches in Athens on Mars Hill.

So he says, you have a question for me, I have a question for you. And my question for you is John the Baptist. The teaching of John, was it from heaven or from men? And he makes this declaration. He says, if you answer that, then I'll answer your question. Now, this is really the examination being turned around. Those who came to examine Christ are all of a sudden sitting under his examination.

[25 : 03] Because he's putting them in a very peculiar spot. They did not respond to the teaching of John the Baptist. They did not respond with repentance. And they did not come with confession. They did not come with a broken heart and a broken mind.

As a matter of fact, they despised him. John himself called them the brood of vipers, right? They denied him and they wanted nothing to do with him. But a multitude of the people did. And the wonder of it all is, is that those who did respond to John had a radical life change.

The tax collectors and the prostitutes and the harlots and all these people. I mean, their life was radically different. And you kind of had this problem of how do we wrestle? If John is wrong, then why do these people's lives look so righteous now?

And this is what he's asking. And they wrestle internally with themselves. Say, well, if we say he was from God, because the fruit appears to be from God. If we say he's from God, then he's going to say, then why didn't you repent?

But if we say that he's from man, we fear the people, the multitude. Because everyone here regards him as a prophet. And they don't know what to do. They don't know how. So they think they have this cop out. And they come to him and say, we don't know.

[26 : 06] We do not know. And that answer is a self-condemnation answer. Because think about this. Those who were to be interpreters of the law and authorities of the things of God, all of a sudden don't know something this simple.

They're not even in the position to tell you where John the Baptist came from. And yet John the Baptist came with a word from God. And those who were in authority did not have the capability. We understand that they could have made an opinion, but they did not want to answer the question. They say, we do not know. And Jesus says, neither will I tell you. That's important. Jesus did not say, I do not know.

He says, neither will I tell you where I come from. Because the examination is this. It is not necessarily where Christ gets his authority from.

It is if we will accept who gave Christ his authority. Because just like John, Jesus' authority was derived from his Father, Lord God Almighty, not from man.

[27 : 10] So many people come trying to test Christ and to look at Christ and to examine Christ and to see if he is worthy, quote unquote, of their obedience and following.

And Jesus quite often, and I think very rightfully so, turns the question around and examines us. The ultimate question is not, is he worthy?

Because we've seen that resonating throughout scripture. The question is, are we willing? Are we willing? There's the illustration and the examination.

The third and final thing we see finally is a condemnation. A condemnation, and it's illustrated in the last two stories. Still carrying with it this theme of fruitfulness or fruitlessness.

The fig tree gave the appearance of being fruitful, yet when you came upon it, it was fruitless. John the Baptist's ministry was fruitful, and Jesus says that.

[28 : 09] He says that these people who came to him will enter into the kingdom of God before those who are examining him because we see that the tax collectors and the prostitutes responded, but the fruit wasn't received by the leaders, quote unquote, because it says that they did not even feel remorse even after seeing the fruit, yet their lives were still fruitless.

And now we come to this final condemnation because not only were they given an appearance of fruit, even when they saw that there was a ministry bearing fruit, they wouldn't respond to that ministry, and now Jesus gives two illustrations of what it looks like.

He speaks first of the illustration of a man with two sons, and the man goes out to his first son. He says, son, go out and work in the vineyard, and his son says, I won't do it. I'm not going to do it. I'm not doing anything for you, Dad. Now, I know I'm adding a little bit to it.

He says, I will not. He says, later he regrets and says, well, I guess I better, and he goes and works in the father's vineyard. He goes to the second one, and the second son says, I will, sir. Yes, sir, I'll go to work today, but he never does.

And Jesus says, which one did the will of the father? He says, well, it's the first one. Again, staying with our picture that we have, it really doesn't matter what they say. It's what they did, right? It doesn't matter the appearance they gave at the first.

[29 : 22] It's the fruit that is born out in the rest of their life. It is not so much that one said, I will not, but actually did, and one said, I will, sir, but actually did not. It wasn't what they said at the initial encounter.

It was what happened in their life, the fruit afterwards. And this is where the condemnation comes with the religious leaders, because while they were saying they were living lives of righteousness, when they saw a ministry bearing the fruit of righteousness, they would not respond to that. And therefore, they were forsaking their rights to the kingdom of God, because they were saying all the right things. They were, I will, sir, I will, sir, I will, sir.

The tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners, you know, every one of us at the first were saying, I will not, I will not, I will not. And then later, with that conviction and that breaking of our hearts, I better go.

Those who were saying, yeah, I'll do it, and then live their lives however they want, Jesus said, there's condemnation there, because it doesn't matter what you say. Friend, it doesn't matter what vows we say around our altar, or what discourse we have with one another, brothers and sisters in Christ in this room.

[30 : 37] Really, the fruit is born in the world. It's how we live our life. And light is, I don't, it doesn't matter how many times standing here, and we sit under the word of God, and we sing the praise of God, and we're joined together with the people of God, and the Bible says that the spirit is among us, and there's conviction, and there's all this.

I mean, listen, I understand it, and the Holy Spirit's moving our lives, and we say, even if to ourselves, Lord, I'll give you everything, I will, sir. It is easy to say, I will, sir, here, but it's when you go out there, and you're the only one bearing the spirit with you.

You're on your own. You're living on this island of isolation. It is easy to say, I will, sir, and here the question is, but do you actually out there? It's real easy also to sit here and go, I'm not going to do it, God.

I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to do it. And then he won't leave you alone, and eventually your heart breaks. You say, I better do it. I've been there as well. I won't, I won't, I won't, I won't. Okay, I better.

See, God says it's the fruit that he's looking for, not the verbal commitment, not what you say. It's the fruit, and the condemnation comes as when we fail to live right out there, no matter what we see and hear.

[32 : 00] And then we get to this final parable, and he tells this great parable, and again, here is this kind of final stake in the reality. He tells this parable of a landowner who has a field.

By the way, this quotation, much of this quotation about planting a vineyard, building a wall, digging a wine vat, it's found in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 5, verses 2 and 3. How do we introduce the book of Matthew?

With the book of Isaiah, right? Because Isaiah is speaking of the coming king, the king that will be, the king that will reign over us. Matthew quotes more of the Old Testament than any other gospel authors, more of it, because he's writing to the Jewish people.

And he brings this illustration that the prophet Isaiah declares to the nation in Isaiah 5, before his encounter with Isaiah 6. In Isaiah 6, you know, that's when Isaiah himself finds himself in the courtroom of heaven.

And starts beating on his breast, saying, woe is me, woe is me, because I live a people of unclean lips, and I am a man of unclean lips. And so we see this, but the first original condemnation is the fact that God had planted this vineyard.

[32 : 59] A picture of a vineyard is always the nation of Israel. He had done all this preparatory work, and here Jesus tells the same illustration. There's a landowner who bought a field, did all the work, right? He planted the vineyard, he dug, he built the walls, he dug a wine vat, he built a tower.

There are great theologians over the ages who have discussed who is the wall, who are the towers, and who are the wine vats in history. I'm just going to say this, frankly, it doesn't matter. Really, what we need to see here is that the owner did everything necessary to make the land productive. The owner did everything that was needed, right? The people were not given a raw piece of land and say, go be productive. The people were given a land that had the fruit already planted in it, the walls already around it, the wine vat itself was there, the tower was already built.

All the preparatory work was already accomplished. All that was needed for bearing fruit had been finished. And then they were entrusted with this.

And in being entrusted with it, they were just attendant. It says, and the season came that would be fruitful, and the owner sent to his servants wanting some of the produce of his land, but when he sent the slaves, the slaves were killed and stoned and thrown out and beaten and mistreated.

[34 : 13] And this repeats itself a couple of times until eventually the sun comes. And it's not coincidence, by the way, in this account that the sun is cast out of the place because Jesus is crucified out of the city.

They cast out the sun and they kill the sun. But what is the landowner going to do? And we see here this condemnation. And Jesus is very clearly teaching those before him, and he's very clearly teaching us, all that needs to be done in order for fruit to be produced in their lives has already been accomplished.

All the work, all the means, all the effort, all we need to have for fruitfulness has already been done. All the owner ever requests is for us to provide back to him that which he's already given us the means to do. But the sad reality is too many of God's people say, no, I like it better my way.

I want the fruit of my labors to be for me, not for you. I want the fruit of my labors to be for myself, not for you. And Jesus here declares this condemnation. They will be cast out.

[35 : 31] He says, the stone, he's referring to himself, which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone. This came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore, I say to you, here's this final condemnation to the leaders.

The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to the people producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on the stone will be broken to pieces, and whomever it falls, it will be scattered in him like dust.

That's just a good way of saying, if you try to knock Jesus off and you try to push Jesus out of the way and you try to pull Jesus down from his rightful position of cornerstone, it is you who's going to be destroyed, not him.

The stone remains unchanged. We see this theme all throughout the New Testament. We're getting ready to go to retreat.

At least a number of us are, and that's okay, and I don't mean to keep bringing this up. I've told some, the reason those are near and dear to my heart is because that was the very first place I ever put an outline together for a message.

[36 : 36] The one who was heading up the retreat was putting a book together and really wanted an outline. I had to put an outline together, much like I still preach today from an outline. And I'll never forget, the theme for that one was fruitfulness.

And I remember the message I preached, the very first outline I ever put together, was on allowing Christ to prune us and to make us.

And it was from the parable of the owner who had planted a fruit tree, and he went to it time and time again, and the fruit tree never bore fruit. And the tender of the farm said, give me one more year.

Let me dig around its roots. Let me prune it. Let me do the work that's necessary, and then come back next year and see if it's bearing fruit. And if it's not bearing fruit, then we can cast it out.

Because see, Scripture teaches us, those who don't bear fruit are cast out. God is patient. He is kind.

[37 : 37] He is gracious, and He's merciful. But the work of the Holy Spirit, it comes into the believer's life to prune and to cut away and to remove and to disrupt the soil around our life where we think we're planted firmly and we would rather stay and be left alone, to cause a little bit discomfort from cutting off all those sucker branches we don't really need anymore.

Some sucker branches need to be cut off of our life, and let's just be honest. There are things sucking the life out of us that are keeping us from producing fruit for the kingdom of God. If we don't

allow those things to take place, then the kingdom will be given to those who will bear the fruit thereof.

He is a jealous God. He's left us here to be fruitful for His glory. Listen, the apple tree does not boast in the size of the apples or the amount of apples it produces.

It just does what it was intended to do. And the moment it doesn't, we cut it down. The believer doesn't boast in the fruit that he bears. We just do what we are intended to do.

And we say, Lord, here am I. Use me as you see fit. Because there is a rebuke for fruitless living. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much for this day.

[39 : 00] God, we thank you for your faithfulness to us. Lord, may our hearts and minds be broken before you. And may we say, here we are, oh God. Use us as you see fit for your glory and yours alone.

Lord, we pray that you would lead us as we go through the remainder of this service. That we would be sensitive to your leading. Lord, responsive to your calling. And giving you all the praise and the glory for all that takes place.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.