

## FIRST THINGS:

- Welcome & Connect Card
- Please check out the QR code or [fathomchurch.org/info](http://fathomchurch.org/info)
  - for everything that's happening
- **SLIDE** NEW FACILITY email & Town Hall Meeting May 19 @ 4pm
- **SLIDE** NEW MEMBERS commissioning

## INTRODUCTION **MATTHEW SLIDE**

Hey, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to Matthew chapter 21.
- I'd encourage you towards a paper Bible if possible...
- You can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
  - under every single chair.
  - You'll find Matthew 21 on page **826**.

**Today is my 300th sermon at Fathom Church!**

## INTRODUCTION: APPLE TREES

So, a few weeks ago,

- after my David and Bathsheba sermon...
- I got some very interesting feedback from some of y'all.

No one was upset that I called Bathsheba the victim in that story.

No one was upset that I said you should RUN from an ex-gf in a mini-skirt.

No one was even upset with my sermon title: HOW TO HAVE AN AFFAIR.

The ONLY PUSHBACK I got to ANYTHING in my sermon...

- Was when I said...that apple trees are the worst!
  - You remember that?
  - I was up here munching on poisonous apple seeds?

Well, apparently some of y'all love your apple trees!

- So, sorry...
- NOT SORRY!

I'm standing by my take:

- I hate apple trees!
- Apple trees are the worst!

I'm calling today's sermon: **SLIDE CUT DOWN**

## TRANSITION

And that's actually going to lead us into our text today.

In Matthew chapter 21:

- Jesus has made his Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem...
  - inaugurating the final week before he will die.
- Last week we saw him make his way to the temple...
  - and he finds that the religious leaders...
  - have turned the sacred place for the worship of God...
  - into a corrupt place of business.
- So, Jesus gets ticked, drives people out and turns over tables...
  - confronting the religious authorities...
  - and giving them another reason to conspire to kill him.

But then in verse 17...

- he left Jerusalem at the end of day,
- and lodged in Bethany,
  - which is about 2 miles away from Jerusalem.

So, that sets us up for our text today.

Matthew 21, starting in verse 18:

## MATTHEW 21:18-19

[18] In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. [19] And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.

### EXPLAIN: DESTRUCTION

Now, this event has confused me for much of my Christian life.

- Why would Jesus curse a tree?
- Why would he curse a non-sentient, natural object?
- I mean, he essentially says, "*You should be CUT DOWN!*"

This is a strange miracle.

- Normally, when Jesus flexes his miracle muscle...
  - it's to heal someone,
  - or provide something,
  - or protect someone.

But in this case, he curses...a tree.

In fact, one commentator calls this a "miracle of destruction".

- I feel vindicated that my hate of fruit trees is actually Christ-like!

### EXPLAIN: FIG TREES

But, let's work to figure this thing out.

- Jesus sees a fig tree...
- and the text says he can see leaves.

Now, leaves appear on fig trees AFTER fruit has come.

- So, the presence of leaves...
- would make Jesus think fruit was available.

This is why he diverts his course to the tree.

- But upon arrival, there were no figs...
- only leaves.

And friends, this is directly connected...

- to what has just happened in last week's passage...
  - where Jesus sees the hypocrisy of the temple...
    - and he freaks out.

This is an object lesson in the same vein.

- The tree is SUPPOSED to be producing fruit.
- It even shows some signs that it is FRUIT BEARING,
  - specifically the leaves.
- But once Jesus gets close enough...
  - there is no fruit.
- It advertised that it had fruit,
- but the advertisement was false.
  - It's all been an act.

And so, Jesus essentially says, *"It deserves to be CUT DOWN!"*

## ILLUSTRATION: TREES

Now, my next-door neighbor, Phil, doesn't have any apple trees...  
But in his front yard...

- Phil has two, what are called, Flowering Pear Trees.
- They are non-fruit-bearing pear trees.
  - Again, praise God, because...
    - I'd probs feel the same as I do about apple trees...
    - if there were pears lying all over my lawn.

They are known as ornamental trees.

- And listen to me...
  - they will NEVER give him fruit.
  - They are genetically modified NOT to bear fruit.

If Phil wanted his trees to start producing pears....

- no matter what fertilizer...
- no matter how much water...
- no matter how much sun they get...
  - those trees will not bear fruit.
  - They are incapable of bearing fruit.

## APPLICATION

But, Christian, all through the Bible,

- the analogy of bearing fruit...
- is EXPECTED of genuine Christians.

In fact, it's how you know you actually ARE a Christian.

Here are just a few passages from the Bible:

### SLIDE JOHN 15:2

[2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

### SLIDE COLOSSIANS 1:10

walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

## **SLIDE MATTHEW 7:16–17, 19**

[16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17] So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

## **SLIDE GALATIANS 5:22–23**

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

## **TRANSITION**

Christian, you are not meant to be...

- an ornamental,
- flowering,
- non-fruit-bearing tree.

You are meant to BEAR FRUIT.

- Jesus cursed the tree,
- because it made a show of life that promised fruit,
- yet was bearing none.

It needs to be **SLIDE CUT DOWN**.

And look at the disciple's reaction. Verse 20:

## **MATTHEW 21:20**

[20] When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" [21] And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done

to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. [22] And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

## EXPLAIN: EXCHANGE WISH

Now, here's where people get really confused. Because they read that last sentence and they say,

- "Ok, so I've just gotta have faith...
- and then anything I ask for in prayer...
- I'm gonna get!"
  - So, I really didn't need to cut my apple trees down...
  - I just needed more faith...
  - and then I could pray them down?
- Now...that's silly...but it's kinda what some people believe!

But note the context:

This is in the context of bearing fruit.

- So, now, prayer...
- is being directly linked to fruit bearing.

The Greek word here for *prayer* is a compound word.

It's actually two words joined together.

- The first is *pros* (praws).
  - Meaning *towards* or to *exchange*.
- The second is *euchomai* (you-kh-mai).
  - Meaning *wish*.

So a real literal translation is that **prayer is an exchange of wishes.**  
**Prayer doesn't mean that we wish to get something from God.**  
**It's to exchange our wishes with God's.**

- It literally means interacting with God...
- and exchanging our human wishes...
- with his divine wishes.

You're like,

- *"But, I don't want to do that, Chris.*
- *I want to tell God what I need...*
- *and I need him to do it for me.*
  - *I don't want what HE WISHES...*
  - *I want what I WISH!"*

Do you hear the selfishness baked into that?

But you see, in the context of the passage:

- as a Christian bears fruit...
- and asks for things "in prayer"...
  - Exchanging our wishes for God's wishes.
- It will be done.
  - It's not a guarantee to get anything one wishes...
  - It's that one's Godly wishes are guaranteed.

## TRANSITION

So, Jesus uses the fruitless fig tree as an illustration...

- of how Christians OUGHT to bear fruit...
- what our prayers can accomplish IF we bear fruit...
- and what will happen to us if we DON'T bear fruit.

And the theme of bearing fruit is such an important one in the Bible, that I'd like to spend the rest of our time talking about it specifically.

What does BEARING FRUIT entail? I've got 4 points:



## POINT 1: PRODUCING

Let's start like this.

BEARING FRUIT is about **SLIDE PRODUCING**.

It's about PRODUCING something...namely, fruit.

Now, I'm not taking works-based righteousness here, so bear with me.

But when you go to the grocery store,

- and you go to the fruit section,
  - what's it called?
- It's called the PRODUCE section.

Because fruit is PRODUCED from raw materials...

- like seeds, and dirt, and water, and sunlight...
- and then fruit GROWS from the inside out.

**It's not manufactured artificially...it's produced naturally.**

A fruit tree must be...

- Rooted...
- and nurtured...
- and watered...
- and taken care of...
  - and then over time...
    - not overnight...
  - but over time...
- if it's an orange tree, then it will produce oranges,
  - cause that's what it's been created to do.
- And if it's an apple tree, then it will produce apples,
  - cause that's what it's been created to do.

## APPLICATION

Christian, you and I have been created to bear fruit.

- So, are you PRODUCING?
- Are you actually producing inside-out transformation fruit?

You're like,

- *"Well, what kinda fruit do you mean?"*
  - *Cause I'm here...*
  - *and I give...*
  - *and I serve...*
  - *and I'm doing the stuff."*

But hey, listen, the stuff isn't the fruit.

- Hopefully the stuff HELPS you produce fruit.
- But you can do the stuff without producing the fruit.

So, what is the fruit that we should be producing?

Well, I already quoted it, but here's Paul's definition:

### SLIDE GALATIANS 5:22-23

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

## APPLICATION: CHARACTER

So, that's the fruit.

- Are you producing that?
- That is what naturally grows from a relationship with Christ.

They're character traits.

And by the way, you can't just, like, grit your teeth, and muster those things!

You can't just say,

- “JOY!!!!”
  - And, like, get it.
- “SELF-CONTROL!!”
  - And it just miraculously appears.
    - Maybe it will for a minute...
  - But not sustained, Holy Spirit enabled, self-control!

That fruit come from inside out **SLIDE PRODUCING**

### ILLUSTRATION: STAPLES

So, back to my neighbor, Phil.

- Imagine I go out to my front yard...
- and there's Phil...
  - with a bag of pears from King Soopers...
  - and a staple gun...
- and he's on a ladder...
- just stapling pears...
- onto the branches...
- of that non-fruit-bearing pear tree.

And then he just waves to me and goes, “Check out my pear tree!”

That'd be insane!

But, God help us...that's what some of us are doing!

- You might be stapling fruit up...
  - so it looks like you're bearing fruit!
  - Just hoping everyone sees...and thinks well of you.
- Or maybe you're hoping that the external fruit you staple up...
  - will actually change you internally.

But that's not how it works!

Fruit must be PRODUCED.

Are you PRODUCING?

## POINT 2: ABIDING

Second, BEARING FRUIT is about **SLIDE ABIDING**.

- In John's account of this passage,
- he uses the word ABIDE.

A branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the tree.

- So, if you want to be PRODUCING fruit...
- you'd better be ABIDING...
  - staying connected to the tree.

Actually, here's what John says specifically:

### **SLIDE JOHN 15:5**

[5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

## EXPLAIN: TRY HARDER

Did you see that last word? **Nothing**.

- If you try to bear fruit on your own,
- you'll just wear yourself out.
  - But if you're **SLIDE ABIDING**...in Christ
  - you WILL bear MUCH fruit.

This flies in the face of what I call the "try harder" method of Christianity.

- And listen, if you grew up in church,
- you've probably heard the "try harder" method...

The “try harder” message is:

- God is good.
- You are bad.
- Try harder!

But the “try harder” method will only lead to two places.

- It will either lead to pride...
  - if you think you’re doing well...
- or it will lead to shame and exhaustion...
  - when you know you’re coming up short.

And BOTH of those...

- will lead you away from ABIDING...
- in a relationship with Christ.

Apart from Christ you can do nothing!

## ILLUSTRATION: KICK BOARD

I’ve illustrated the “try harder” method like this:

When I was a kid I took swimming lessons.

And my favorite part of the swim lessons were the kick boards.

- Those foam boards that float...
- and you can hold onto them and kick around the pool.
  - It’s like lazy man’s swimming...

Well, my friends and I would play a game with the kick boards.

- We’d push them under the water,
- and see how long we could hold the very buoyant board under.

And how long you could hold the kick board under water depended on...

- how strong you were,
- how tired you were from swimming lessons,
- and how greasy you were...
  - from the copious amounts of sunscreen...
  - momma lubed you up with.

But it really didn't matter,

- because eventually that kick board...
- was coming back up out of the water.

And listen, a kick board doesn't just gently float back up out of the water.

- Nah, it explodes violently out of the water,
- sometimes just jacking you right in the grill.

## TRANSITION

That's the TRY HARDER method.

But Jesus isn't saying,

- *"Try harder!*
- *Come on bro.*
- *Grow some fruit!*
- *Try harder!*
- *Just grit your teeth and hold that thing under the water!"*

No, he says,

- *"If you try on your own...*
- *you can do nothing...*
  - *And, listen, you'll likely get jacked in the face."*

ABIDING is HOW we PRODUCE.

So, are you ABIDING in Christ?

### POINT 3: PRUNING

Third, BEARING FRUIT requires **SLIDE PRUNING**.

Again, John's Gospel says **every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

### ILLUSTRATION: MY TREE

So, those apple trees that I cut down in my yard.

- Those apple trees were a good example...
- of what happens when someone does NOT...
- properly prune a tree.

Now, I don't know what the previous owners did to these trees...

- actually, I do...
  - they did nothing!
- But when you do nothing to an apple tree,
- what happens is that it literally grows in on itself.

Because every year...

- an apple tree grows more shoots...
- that can become branches.
  - Just like I told you about the suckers...
    - that come from the roots...
  - they also do this from the trunk.
- And so, if those branches are not managed,
- the tree will literally grow in on itself.
  - The branches begin to grow in on themselves.
  - And they literally choke on themselves.

## APPLICATION: SUFFERING

So, Jesus says,

- *“If you want to bear more fruit...*
- *I’m gonna have to do some pruning.”*

Hey church, this is where SUFFERING comes into the equation.

SUFFERING is one of the ways God PRUNES his people.

**And the problem with pruning is that PRUNING IS PAINFUL.**

- If you ever see a tree after a tree-trimmer is done pruning it...
- it looks like a disaster.
  - You’ve got all these leaves...
  - and branches...
  - and even fruit lying all over the ground...
- and they sometimes even look good...
- like they should be still connected to the tree...
- and you don’t even know why those things were cut off.

**But pruning is the process...**

**by which the pruner brings out the best life...**

**that tree can have.**

- **The trimmer has not removed anything...**
  - **that was not a loss to keep...**
  - **or a gain to lose.**

But here’s the truth from the scriptures:

- **You will either be cut-back...**
- **or you will be CUT DOWN.**

My apple tree wasn’t cut-back...and so, I had to cut it down.



## POINT 4: CONTAGIOUS

And that leads me to my last point,

- and it goes all the way back to the original question I had:
- Why did Jesus curse the tree?
  - Why kill it?
  - Why CUT IT DOWN?

Because fruitlessness is **SLIDE CONTAGIOUS**...

Listen: a life filled with hypocrisy, is contagious.

- Hypocrisy is contagious.
  - And I'm a firm believer that there is hypocrisy...
  - in every heart in this room, including mine.

There are ways I am not lining up completely with all I say I believe,

- just like you,
- and just like anyone else who claims the name of Jesus Christ.

But when it comes to it,

- if your life is FILLED with people...
- who are not serious about the things of God...
  - and have no real desire to pursue him...
  - love him...
  - and worship him...
- it will not take long for you to join them.

Fruitlessness is CONTAGIOUS.

But I think the opposite is true.

- If you get around bold people,
- ferocious people,
- people who are sold out to the Lord,
- it has this effect of drawing that out of you.

## ILLUSTRATION: PEAR TREES

Now, I did some online reading...

- on my neighbor's Flowering Ornamental Pear trees,
- and I found something fascinating.

In 2023, it became illegal to sell flowering pear trees in Ohio.

And I'm gonna butcher the science here.

- But apparently non-fruit-bearing pear trees...
- have a genetically controlled self-incompatibility system...
- that prevents Flowering Pear trees from reproducing.
  - They have been genetically modified NOT to reproduce...
  - and that's why they cannot bear fruit.

BUT something unforeseen happened.

- They actually started to be pollinated by wild pear trees.
  - They can't pollinate each other...
  - but a wild pear tree CAN cause them to reproduce.

And as these ornamental pear trees have been planted...

- in yards and gardens...
- they have started reproducing...
- and have become an invasive species of trees...
- taking over large portions of woods with their flowering groves.
  - And they're actually choking out and destroying...
  - the real, fruit bearing pear trees.

It is literally so bad that they made them illegal trees.

- They spread.
- They're taking over.
- They're CONTAGIOUS.

So, I'm watching Phil closely...to see if I need to report him.

## CONCLUSION

Church, this whole passage is a warning!

And I'll put it like this:

### **SLIDE W/PADS BEAR FRUIT...OR BE CUT DOWN**

It's a warning about bearing fruit!

- And I'm not talking fake,
- outside-in,
- stapled to a tree fruit!

I'm talking about the fruit of the Spirit...

that can only be PRODUCED from the inside out.

Christian, have you been ABIDING in Christ?

Staying connected to him?

- Or have you become a slave to the 'try harder' method?
- Aren't you exhausted from holding that thing under the water?
  - Or maybe it's already, violently, shot out of the water,
  - bashing you in the face.

Hey, maybe you feel like you're in a season of being PRUNED?

- Does it feel like you're being cut...and trimmed...
  - and sometimes even butchered?
- Do you look around you, and notice what's been pruned,
  - and sometimes it even seems like...
  - there was good stuff being cut off?
- And you don't even know why it needed to be pruned?
  - He prunes those he loves...
  - so that they will bear more fruit.

And finally, I'll just end with this:

- Is there any objective evidence in your life...
  - that you have an actual love for Jesus Christ?
- Are you obeying any of God's commands...
  - because you desire to be closer to him?
- If not...
- if you aren't bearing fruit...
  - it could be evidence...
  - that you've never really trusted in Christ as Lord.

If you see NO FRUIT in your life...

- you need to lay your YES down today.
- You NEED to put your trust in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Cause there's only two options:

BEAR FRUIT...or be CUT DOWN.

**There are no non-fruit-bearing Christians.**

**There are no ornamental Christians.**

BEAR FRUIT...or be CUT DOWN.

Let's pray.

## RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – [fathomchurch.org/give](http://fathomchurch.org/give)
- PRAYER - [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer)
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

## RESOURCES CONSULTED:

- Carson, D.A. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Matthew.
- Osborne, Grant. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Matthew.
- <https://bygl.osu.edu/index.php/node/2117>