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Substance of Two Sermons preached by our Pastor

on Sunday, August 4. 1974.

Morning Lesson. Matthew 5. vv. 1-16 & 38-48.

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it.

Luke 13. vv. 6-8.

I wish to make it plain to the friends that according to the grace and strength the Lord may be pleased to bestow on me for this holy Day, I trust to go through the solemn subject matter of the parable, ending probably in the evening Service. I feel it would be right to say to you immediately, the reason for this subject flowing, as I believe by the Spirit to my soul is, it has been occasioned by a personal survey of my own soul and case first. You should and must begin in your own heart before you look outside. Taking a survey of one's personal case and of the Churches of God, one might use the term 'Christendom', only a limited number of Churches we are conversant with, - there is a general lamentation of spiritual ministers and people, concerning the solemn condition obtaining this day of considerable barrenness. We have to solemnly face the fact, although there are a few salutary exceptions and occasions, there is a large measure of this sterile, barren state in the Churches of God to day. Is that a fair analysis according to holy discernment? or is it a fallacy? It is a fact.

What follows in the solemn findings? A word will supply me; "Is there not a cause?" I do not for one moment think you can pin down the cause to one thing. Many influences, agencies, idols have contributed to the stalemate; the solemn, near moribund state to day in the Churches. It

is not just this denomination: all spiritual ministers complain. It is not for me to pull anything over your eyes so you remain blind to it. It is for me to seek to expose this, and hope we may be led to the remedy. How necessary therefore, is the eye of discernment to be able to tell the causes why this barren condition obtains. This caused a free flow of my spirit to the language of this parable of our Lord's. A solemn parable it is.

Let us state this: if we are fig trees planted in the vineyard, we have the advantage of the soil of the vineyard which is unique. It is completely removed from other soil: it is the richest available. It is symbolic of the holy ordinance in the gospel. If we are planted in the vineyard, and have all the advantages of the holy ordinance and the means of grace and are found barren and fruitless: if this prevails and is never changed; if we are never fructified and bear precious fruit, I must state solemnly the issue will be; "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" I do not hesitate to say it to myself and you, and any other congregation the Lord calls me to minister to. If the heavenly Father sees that we live and continue in the vineyard planted in a barren state, and even the use of digging and manuring, which is useful to bring a tree to fruitfulness; if all is of no avail we shall be cut down in the Chapel or Church and cast into the fire of hell. I am not deceiving you. If all you have is leaves it will be of no avail. The one thing that proves vital union with Christ is fruit.

I will say two things concerning fruit. That is why I read the Lesson in Matthew 5. because all the Beatitudes contain fruits and the blessings conveyed to those who have fruits. They are all fruits: it will therefore be a wonderful thing if your fig tree is rich with the fruit of mourning. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." The Beatitudes -an exposition is given; the wonderful words of our blessed Lord convey to you the complete Christian character: they are not to be viewed separately. These are the fruits.

The second thing concerning fruit is, it is the edible product of a tree; that part which is eaten with pleasure. Why is the term 'fruit' of such enormous importance here? For one specific reason: that is, the Lord Himself eats the fruit. "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his

pleasant fruits." So if there is nothing for Christ to eat on your tree you know what the issue will be. Christ eats the fruit that is acceptable, edible to Him: it is sweet to His taste. He partakes of it and gives His people to share in it. Fruit is edible to Christ.

I am sure you will see, therefore, the vital importance of the parable; a lesson drawn from Nature to teach spiritual facts and heavenly truths. The fig tree is one of the earliest mentioned in the Bible. It was grown for great pleasure and delight and fruitfulness in the garden of Eden. It was renowned for its large and green leaves, misused by our fallen first parents. They thought by sewing a few together to hide their nakedness it would be well. So the leaves became a symbol for indecorum. You cannot take a few and sew them together and hide your nakedness. It is a solemn symbol. So you see the use of the tree in the parable.

I want to state a few basic facts in the first part. It would appear although there is tremendous solemnity, there is a little element of hope and there is certainly for the barren people of God. I would like to give you time to examine yourselves in the light of the parable, and I wonder what your reply would be consequent on your searching? What do you think your spiritual state is? fruitful? or are you afraid you are barren? If you spent all day sequestered, I wonder if you would come forth with an answer that God would attest as to your spiritual state now? Would you be able to say; "I am fruitful"? or would you say; "My soul is barren, and I am in a solemn state, a sad state. I was once fruitful but I have deteriorated to a barren state."? There is always a danger. You can think of a garden. I remember when we moved to "The Grove" and had all types of fruit trees on the walls and the fruit was beautiful, we soon proved it was no good saying there has been a wonderful crop of peaches, etc, so we can sit back and think it will go on. No: what confronted my mind, though I had not the skill or time, was that every year there are so many pests, and peculiar pests and fungus, and all were things that would attack a tree and no fruit was brought to perfection. It is the same with the soul. You might say; "Twenty years ago my bough was heavy with fruit!" How are you to day? It may be that fungus, mildew, red ant, and various forms of disease have attacked, and you have not been alert; there has been no remedy, no great anxiety, a settling on your lees, and so all

these enemies have advanced till there is no fruit brought to perfection; it has dropped off. You look on yourself and say; "I cannot see anything that brings glory to God." Are we aware of these things? It is the same in the garden. Your crops, fruit trees, all require constant attention, very careful inspection. If there is anything attacking the root, stem, or bud, it must be diagnosed and a specific found so the trouble is arrested and the sad condition corrected and reversed. Am I speaking the truth?

I speak to you concerning your souls. It is not a matter of taking the ^{secateurs} ~~secateurs~~ or a saw, and cutting down a branch of the tree: it is a matter of God cutting us off eternally, consigning us to the fire of hell. See how solemn the matter is! So is it not obvious to you if you know fruitfulness, it is so easy to slide into a barren state, a careless state lukewarm, to 'a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep,' and so the rot increases and barrenness develops. I want to say it is right to make a careful and balanced presentation of all parts of Holy Scripture. The parable surely contains an element of hope for God's poor people; those who have been planted by the Father in His garden. The element of hope is, there is an Intercessor. I do not believe this just points to ministers. There is a degree of it in a minister, but the Intercessor here is Christ, who said in reply to His Father; "Lord, let it alone this year also...give the barren fig tree a respite. Let us proceed to do something, dig about it and dung it. See if in this year there is a change." There is no doubt you will find, - this is a thing I find, and we shall ^{increasingly} the nearer we get to eternity, it will be necessary for some deep digging, and the Lord will do it. We might use the term, a solemn work. If you said; "Why?" I ask you, do you find it difficult to give up your idols? If you become aware that things are ruining your fruitfulness and the profit and peace of your soul, are you willing to give them up? You may say to me; "Yes; I will do it to day. I will go back and begin to day." How will you do it? You say; "Surely I can." If this is your response you are doing it, or trying to do it in your own strength: to do it in a legalistic way, and it is doomed. Do you know why? Because you will try, and in a week's time you will pick it up again. One never realises until years are past and there is a depth of divine

teaching, how strong sin and the flesh is, and how strong the devil is. You would say; "Yes, I am doing it." with good intention. In a subtle way the flesh is surreptitious, and there is an attractive presentation to your mind and you pick it up. So how will you do it? Only the Lord can. I have mentioned this to you as a good example of the point. A number of years ago when I was at Tamworth Road, one of the deacons, now in glory, said after the evening service; "Something has been ^{done} to night." I had tried to dilate on; "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," He said; "Something has been ^{done} to night," and I was spiritually interested. There was an idol. He said; "I have tried over the years to lay aside an idol several times. I see now I did it in a legal way; in my own strength, and what happened was, I picked it up again. To night I have laid it aside in a gracious way, and it is done." and it was. He had laid aside the thing that had contributed to the state in the Text. He was a gracious, honest man, transparently honest, and it was done.

I will just put a word to you. Don't you feel this type of spiritual work is very needful in your soul? I feel it. You look on your life and feel before you get to heaven there are things that need to be done. You feel; "I should not like to close my eyes in death with these things round me. Something needs to be done, and only God can do it." If I could get this over to you; -you see the devil and the wicked heart of man, and the complete replica of the world that lieth in wickedness is in all men and continually unite to present to us every form of seductive influence to make us barren. They are so plausible, specious. Think of what has taken place in the professing Church of God over one decade. Take the power of Communism, which is Anti-Christ. Communists say; "Yes, we can send an army to break the people by force. There is no need to waste strength. We will infiltrate; gradually get a fifth column, and break them down from within." This is what the devil tries to do. He is not battling against you in fury: he is infiltrating, and one of his ways is the whole spirit of the world and the practices of the world gradually penetrate the defences of the people of God, and they; "It is all right. there is no need to worry: we must be modern." I do not expect you to dress as if you were living in the Victorian era. The devil says; "I will

not have a confrontation. I will just get in and work." and people say; "Look at those pleasant people." They are spies. They are pleasant people, pleasant things the flesh likes: they are Anti-Christ. They weaken the defences and produce sterility. There is a bud, the early stages of the formation of fruit, and it drops off. Amen.