

ARE YOU HUNGRY? (Matthew 21:18-22)

Matthew 21:18-22 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away. ²⁰ And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?" ²¹ So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, 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 also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. ²² And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

On the very first Sunday of 1999, when our church was still located in the old Slaughter lumber company office building, I stood before you and declared that, as a church family, we were at a crossroads. I told you that one road would lead us in the direction that **God** would want us to go — toward life and vitality and God Himself. The other road, I said, would lead us toward stagnation and God's displeasure.

Of course, many of you know the rest of the story. You know that God did what seemed impossible to us—**first, He helped us to raise** the money we needed to move over here on Ferguson Road, and **second, He touched the hearts** of the people of Gateway Baptist Church to lower their asking price so we could actually buy it. **We trusted in God and sought Him in prayer and He heard our prayers!**

Fast forward twenty years. We have been here now on Ferguson for twenty years. And today, on this first Sunday of the new year I want us to see that God has us, once again, at a crossroads. **One road** will lead to God's glory and the other to God's displeasure. One road will lead to fruitfulness and the other to futility. One road will lead to the status quo and the other to a supernatural work of the Spirit of God.

· God's glory	· God's displeasure
· Fruitfulness	· Futility
· Status Quo	· A Supernatural work of the Spirit of God

I would like to ask you some important questions this morning:

- Is anybody here hungry to see God do a supernatural work this year---in 2020?
- Is anybody here hungry to see God do some things that are unmistakably of God and **HIS** doing?
- Is anybody here hungry to hear newly saved people stand up and share that God has saved them and changed their life?

Are you hungry today for God to do something supernatural through you and through your church in the next 12 months?

Now, I didn't say, "*Through your church,*" I said "through **you** and your church." Today, I am asking the question: "**Are you hungry?**" (That is the title of my message to you, and that is what I would like to speak to you about for a few minutes this morning.)

(Prayer)

Author Margaret Feinberg, in her book "Hungry for God," wrote the following words:

Hunger for God compels us to seek the Lord. At times our desire for God overcomes our physical desires, and the ache for God is [obvious].¹ Throughout the Scriptures, God is faithful to reward those who search for him. Written during one of King David's low points, while living on the run in the wilderness, he cries, "**Oh God, you are my** God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." Though David hides in the wilderness, he doesn't stay there physically or spiritually. When we seek God with our whole hearts and souls, he promises to reveal himself to us.

The story we read earlier from the life of Jesus occurred just a few days before He would die on the cross. Jesus performed a miracle because He wanted to teach His disciples some very important truths. That miracle, of course, was the withering of the fig tree. When Jesus saw that there was no fruit on the tree (but only leaves), He said, "**Let no fruit grow on you ever again.**" And the Bible tells us that "immediately the fig tree withered away."

Jesus was hungry that day. He wanted something to eat to quiet the pain in His stomach. But far greater than **that** hunger was the hunger He had for the nation of Israel. The people of God were like that fig tree — they had leaves but no fruit.

They had promised great things to God. When all the other nations around them were like trees without leaves (unsaved and living like it), **Israel was covered with the leaves of verbal allegiance to God.**

- **The leaders** were all sticklers for the letter of the law.
- **They boasted of** being worshippers of the one God, and strict observers of all His laws.
- **Their constant** cry was, "The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord..."
- "**We have Abraham** for our Father" was frequently on their lips.

¹ palpable

- They were a fig tree full of leaves, but there was no fruit.
- They drew near to God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him.
- They were alive and well on the outside and dead on the inside.

Jesus miraculously withered the fig tree to teach His disciples that because Israel was rejecting Him, He would judge it and turn it into a lifeless bush. Yes, the temple remained open for a few more decades but its supporters had no nourishment for hungry souls—it was of no help to anyone.

Vance Havner, that witty and powerful preacher of the 20th century, once said, “A church can be straight as a gun barrel doctrinally and just as empty spiritually.”

The people of God in Jesus’ day had no impact upon those around them. Does that thought convict you today? When Jesus came to the fig tree, he was hungry — He was looking for fruit — but He didn’t find any.

I believe that Jesus comes to **each one of us** and is just as hungry to find fruit in our lives as He was the day He passed that fig tree in Jerusalem. When the Lord looks at your life, does He find any kind of fruit that satisfies His hunger, or does He only see the leaves of verbal confession (today we call that lip-service)?

And when He looks at **our church**, does He find fruit that delights His heart, or does He only hear our excuses.

I don’t know about you, but this morning, I am hungry. I’m hungry for fruit. I’m hungry for fruit in my life and in your life. I’m hungry to see God so work in all of our lives that at the end of the 2020, we will all look back and **marvel** at what **God** has done in our midst.

So the first lesson here is about Jesus’s hunger and desire for fruit (and what happens if He expects to find some in us and doesn’t).

The second lesson here to His disciples is some **essential** qualities they need if they are to see this kind of God-satisfying fruitfulness happen. In v. 21, Jesus tells His followers:

*“Assuredly, 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 also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. ²² And whatever things you ask in **prayer**, believing, you will receive.”*

The first step quality we need is **faith** that God can do such a work. If we don’t believe that God can transform us as individuals and as a church family in the coming 12 months, forget about it! It will never happen if

that is our attitude and belief. Jesus says we are to “have faith” and not to “doubt.” Let me remind you on Hebrews 11:6 where it says:

Hebrews 11:6-----⁶ But without **faith** it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God **must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**

So if we are to bear the kind of fruit that Jesus desires, we need unwavering faith. But there is another quality that Jesus speaks of. Notice v. 22. Jesus said: **AND....**

*“And whatever things you ask in **prayer**, believing, you will receive.”*

So first, we need to **trust in God** to do the impossible through us, and second, we need to **pray for God** to do the impossible through us!

Many years ago, I read a new year’s message by the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon. I didn’t memorize exactly what he said, but he told the people of his London congregation something like this:

*“Many of you would like to see God do great things this year. You would love for Him to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing on our church so great that there would not be room enough to receive it. But why should he do that when we are not personally prepared to help those He would send our way? Why should God send us people to teach when you are unwilling or unable to teach them? Why should He send people to us for nurture when you are unwilling or unable to nurture them? **God would like to bless us to an even greater degree, but in many cases, He cannot simply because we are not prepared to minister.**”*

Folks, the Lord Jesus is looking for fruit in your life in this new year. He wants to see you invest your life in others and to make an impact. A lot of God’s people have the mistaken notion that all God requires is for them to show up for church each Sunday morning. **But God is not looking just for faithfulness, He is looking for fruitfulness as well.** In the parable of the minas that Jesus told, when the master gave the gold to his servants to invest, he was looking for a return on his investment from them. He was looking for a tangible increase in funds. And when his servants failed to bring him a return, the master was not pleased.

The first Sunday of a new year is a great day to say, *“This year, with God’s help, things are gonna be different in my life.”* My dedication to God, His church, His work, His people, is going to increase. I want my priorities to be different. I’m going to quit making excuses about how I’m too tired to get up for Bible Fellowship. I’m going to get my family to bed early on Saturday night and up early on Sunday. I’m going to be an example to my family as well as to others around me in my church.

God give us a group of people:

- who will prioritize faith in God...
- who will prioritize heartfelt prayer...
- who will prioritize learning God's Word...
- who will prioritize edifying those around them...
- who will prioritize winning others to Christ and inviting others to church...

God give us people who will leave any and all excuses behind and will say, “God I’m hungry to bear fruit that glorifies Your Name!”

The Lord Jesus is looking for fruit from **you**. He is hungry for it. There can be no denying this.

This morning, God's question to you is this — are you a leafy tree of verbal profession and lip-service or are you bearing fruit unto God?

Are you hungry to be transformed this year by God's Spirit? Has God spoken to your heart about the fruit that you are bearing in your life?

Young people, are you going to return to school like a sailboat and allow your classmates to push you in the direction **they** desire, or will let **God's Spirit** take control of the wheel and direct your course in life?

Every single one of us is at a crossroads today. The decisions you make today will be a key factor in whether, at the end of this year, you will look back and be glad or be sad. The decisions you make today will be a key factor in whether our church will be fruitful or not. **Folks, if a church is full of people who are happy to let everyone else do the work, pay the bills, invite new members, pray, how fruitful and pleasing to God do you think that church is going to be?** But if a church is full of people who say, *“Hey wait a minute. I am an integral part of this body. This body needs me. It needs my faith in God and my heartfelt prayers. If I lay down on the job, the others will have to work harder to make up for me. I refuse to live such a life! This year, is going to be different!”*

Church family, show me a church of people who have that kind of spirit and I will show you a church that, before long, **God will begin to use in a mighty way. Supernatural power** will be brought to bear in that place.

(Invitation)