

I. SERVICE EXPECTED:

There is a temptation for religion to become

A lady came to church one day and asked the janitor, "Was the service over?" He replied, "Lady, the service is over, but the worship has just begun." It is very true that unless our worship leads us to service we stop short of the expectation of Jesus.

As Jesus and some of his disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration, there was a feeling among the disciples that they should stay up there. But Jesus led them back to the valley where there was a boy who needed help. So worship and service were linked together here. The tree was supposed to have fruit, but the tree had nothing but leaves. A disciple is supposed to bear fruit. As Madam said, "Confusionism worships ancestors, but never built an old folks home." There is a type of worship apart from service.

As a soap manufacturer was arguing with a minister about the value of religion, he named a number of instances of wickedness and corruption in the world, and concluded that religion had not done any good. About that time,

THE MIRACLE OF THE FIG TREE

Most of the miracles were helpful and of a merciful character. This comes at the last stage of our Lord's ministry. It is early in the morning. He has left Bethany and is completing three years of his ministry. And as he comes over the highway, there are many fig trees lined on the slopes. It was an April morning and ordinarily it was time for these trees to have fruit. One of these trees stood out from the group as a flourishing tree covered with glossy leaves; but, it bore nothing but leaves. There was no fruit. In this wayside situation he stopped to inspect the tree, for they needed some food.

He said, "No man will eat fruit from this tree, henceforth, forevermore." It was as if there had been a shock by an electric current. A group passed this same way the next day and the tree had withered at the request of the son of man. It was pointed out that this was in connection with faith; that whatsoever you

ask, you shall receive in believing.

This was symbolic or prophetic in its application relative to the Jewish nation and the church. Literary shows that our law, given by it, is easily read between the lines, as if being meaningless.

Several days before, Jesus has talked about a parable left to prophesy in Luke 13: 1-9. He continues to unfold, in a prophetic way, the truth of divine judgment. For three years I have been seeking fruit from the tree of Israel and it has not produced. Therefore, let it be cut down.

This was judgment on a spiritually fruitless priesthood, and people by the judgment, has not yet become ripe. Therefore, he had given them more time to bear fruit. But standing around this morning, he spotted it, out in the doom of the fruitless fig tree. It needed no words to carry home the sad conclusion. The year of grace had passed. This was a symbol of the nation's doom. They knew how to read his mind through symbolic actions. Luke 19: 41 Moreover, this incident was followed

by the parable of the wicked men who were in charge of a vineyard. Those who had the privilege of keeping God's vineyard had abused and mistreated the messenger sent to them. Therefore, judgment was plain and most awful. Three years he had sought fruit on this fair tree of the church of the Jewish people. He not only sought, but expected it. It was a reasonable expectation. This constituted the mercy in the law of the prophets, the sacrifices, and the ceremonies of his coming.

Nevertheless, it failed. When he came to the temple, he was rejected. The tree, full of leaves, proved itself to the searching eye

So stands Israel, age after age, as a dead and fruitless religion, and wherever men look for peace, consolation, and faith, it is nevermore here.

Jesus had spent the night out in the country, and being hungry, he went down to gather figs to eat. But he found nothing but leaves. So he said, "Let no fruit grow on these trees, forevermore."

tree soon lost its leaves even though it looked promising. A false profession soon comes to nought. This was the great disappointment to Jesus for he expected it to be fruitful, but a worse thing happened when he passed judgment upon it.

We also must expect the suddenness of judgment. The unhappiest people in the world are the ones living within themselves.

THE SIN OF USELESSNESS

Here was a barren Israel, which had followed the letter of the law, had the memory of the prophets ancient sacrifice. But it is a profession which resembles the stony ground. One of the other parables was not to question that Jesus had the power to curse the fig tree; he used his power to heal, and he used his power to forgive sinners. More than this, he used his power to warn against uselessness.

a little boy, who had been playing in the mud, came walking by. The minister observed that neither had soap done any good. The manufacturer replied that soap does no good unless it is applied. The minister ended by saying that the same is true of religion.

The same may be said of education. I read of a boy who was to receive \$2000 each year as long as he was to remain in college. The boy continued through college for 46 years, and he died with 11 degrees; but, his education was no good because he never used it.

II. THE SIN OF USELESSNESS:

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He points out the worthless religious promises that are never fulfilled. There is no sin in promises. A cherry tree must issue white, fragrant blossoms in May if delicious fruit is to be produced at the end of 60 days. There is no sin in a church covenant honestly made. The sin is in breaking it. For a time, the glossy leaves of profession made a fair show, but when the novelty of the profession has worn off, religion becomes an unwholesome drugery. The cross loses its very charm, prayer loses its power, the word of God ceases to attract. The very name of Jesus no longer applies. Church membership has become a hateful task and the owner is ashamed to wear it. Before the world the fig tree wears leaves, but underneath, it is utterly barren.

Jesus told about Dives, who went to hell. As far as the record goes, he did not steal or cheat, but he failed to help the poor man at his gate.

He told about the rich farmer who lost his soul. He worked hard, but failed to use the fruits of labor for any worthwhile service.

The priest and the Levite did not rob or beat the man who was wounded; they just passed him by.

The man who was cast out to the outer darkness. He did not use his talent wastefully, but he simply buried it in the ground. The five Virgins who faced the closed door were just unprepared. One of the clear aims of life is that we shall be useful. You put your arm in a sling and keep it inactive, and after a while, it will wither away. There are fish in Manouth Cave that are totally blind because they have lived so long in total darkness. You have been created for a purpose and that purpose is to bear fruit.

### III. THE DOOM OF THE FRUITLESS:

Would you not say that this was justice? He expected fruit and he sentenced it to perpetual barrenness. Some people seem to be shocked that Christ would use his power for destructiveness; but, this is a very basic law of life. When we cease to bear fruit, we die. If we could carefully fix in our minds the picture of the tree; it had promised, and had not been true to its promise. Another thing is that a fig tree is only good for figs and whether it be a nation, a church, or an individual, the sin of barrenness was justly punished.

False professions soon wither in this world. The