

## **BARREN FIG TREE – DEFILED TEMPLE**

– *AUGUST 9.* – *MARK 11:12-25.* –

**"By their fruits ye shall know them." – MATTHEW 7:20.**

THE triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was a past incident. After spending a portion of the day in the Holy City, Jesus returned to Bethany, which is merely a suburb. The next morning, going again to the city, Jesus noted a fig tree by the wayside, bearing plenty of leaves. He approached it, seeking figs, but found none. The good show of leaves was deceptive. Then Jesus put a ban, a curse, a blight, upon the tree, declaring that it should not bear fruit forever, or to a completion. What did this mean? Surely it was not an intimation that the followers of Jesus should place a curse upon every unfruitful tree or unfruitful field! There must have been some deeper lesson in it, not apparent on the surface.

Bible students believe that they now see the deeper significance of this carefully noted incident. They believe that that fig tree was used as a type, or picture, of the Jewish nation; and that that blight upon the tree because of its unfruitfulness corresponded exactly to the blight pronounced the day before upon the Jewish nation because of its unfruitfulness.

On the day previous Jesus had said to the Jewish nation, "Ye shall see Me no more until that Day." So He declared of this tree that it should be blighted to the end of the *aion*, or Age. Again, when speaking to His disciples respecting the end of this Age, Jesus declared, "When ye shall see the fig tree putting forth leaves, then know that summer is nigh"\* – that the winter time, the blight time of the nation of Israel and of the world, is at an end. In other words, one of the signs of a New Dispensation would be the sprouting, or indications of life, hope, promise, amongst the Jews.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF ZIONISM

These same Bible students are now pointing to the revival of hope amongst the Jewish people, as especially manifested by Zionism. It is being pointed out that this return of hope and faith to the Jews respecting their land and the Divine promises of the past is opportune – exactly in line with prophecy. They point to Isaiah 40th chapter as now in process of fulfilment: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

These Bible students are telling that Ezekiel's prophecy of the valley of dry bones which came together, were clothed with flesh and finally received the breath of life, is an allegory respecting the Jews. They hold that it does not refer to a literal resurrection, but to the revival of Israel's hopes in the Divine promises. This is in harmony with the Prophet's declaration, "These bones are the whole House of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off from our parts." – Ezekiel 37:11.

The same Bible students declare that St. Paul teaches that the Jewish nation was typically represented by Ishmael, the son of Hagar. (Galatians 4:22-31.) As Hagar and her son were outcast for a time only, so the Law Covenant and the Jews have been cut off from Divine favor only for a time. Ishmael had almost fainted for thirst in the wilderness, and then was revived by the angel of the Lord, who pointed out a spring of water. This also is typical. Jewish hopes of God's favor had almost died. Zionism is the well-spring which is reviving them – rescuing them from death as a people. Under Messiah's Kingdom, soon to be established on the spirit plane, the Jews will receive a great blessing – on the earthly plane.

We know of no other interpretation which seems to fit the facts of this lesson or to show a reason why Jesus should manifest displeasure against an inanimate object, which had no personal responsibility or accountability.

## **CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE**

After the fig tree incident, Jesus and His disciples proceeded to Jerusalem and went directly to the Temple. There, contrary to anything that He had previously done, Jesus assumed authority, and began to cast out the traders without ceremony, overturning the tables of the money-changers and the stalls where doves were sold to people who desired to offer them in sacrifice at the Temple. Another account of the same incident tells us that in this cleansing of the Temple Jesus used a scourge of small cords, and drove forth the traders. Today's lesson tells us that He would not permit even the carrying of vessels through the Temple. All this is of double significance:

(1) Primarily, it had to do with that time;

(2) Secondarily, it was typical of a cleansing of the antitypical Temple due, we believe, in this our day.

According to the legal usages of our day, it would be quite improper for any one to enter any church edifice or temple in order to interfere with any of the rights of conscience or the procedure sanctioned by the congregation owning the edifice. If wrong were being done and he wished to rectify it, it would be his duty either to go and swear out a warrant before a magistrate or to call a policeman and have him take note of the infraction of the law and correct matters. But under the Jewish Law **[R5503 : page 220]** it was different. Every Jew was privileged to enforce the Divine Law in respect to blasphemy or any sacrilege. Parents were even required by the Law to stone their own children to death for blasphemy.

Jesus therefore did only what any Jew would have a right to do, in upsetting the trading apparatus of those who were defiling the Temple of the Lord, doing violence to its sanctity. It will be noticed that as much as their Scribes and Pharisees desired to find some occasion against Jesus, they made no objection to the high-handed procedure here described. Jesus was within His rights, He was championing the cause, the honor, of God and His Temple, as He had a perfect right to do.

### **"MADE IT A DEN OF THIEVES"**

In the declaration, "Ye have made it a den of thieves," Jesus intimated that responsibility for the prevailing condition of things rested upon those in authority – the Scribes and the Pharisees. For graft and other considerations they had permitted the especially consecrated House of God to become a place of merchandise. Moreover, it is claimed by some that the Temple was frequently used as a place for barter on a larger scale. Here money-sharks found opportunity for meeting people in distress, who came to the Temple for prayer. Such were referred to by Jesus as those who robbed widows, while for pretense they made long prayers. In other words, Jesus judged that some in His day made a cloak, or pretense, of their religion in order to take advantage and to reap pecuniary benefit. Hence the Temple had become "a den of thieves."

In olden times, as with many at present, there was a literalness attached to the word theft which only partly covered its meaning. The loan-sharks infested the Temple, pretended sympathy for those in trouble, and loaned money on exacting terms which finally devoured the property of the widow and the orphan in a legal manner. We fear that the same is true today – that religion is still used as a cloak to cover selfishness. People who do not think of literally committing theft, robbery, often succumb to the arguments of warped consciences. The Master, who was especially indignant

at such misuse of the House of God of old, holds the same sentiments today. It is in vain that any claim to be His followers, His disciples, His friends, members of the true Church of Christ, who at the same time use religion hypocritically.

### **"THE HOUSE OF PRAYER"**

While Jesus often went into the mountain to pray, or prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, while Pharisees sometimes prayed on the street corners, and while St. Peter went to the housetop to pray, nevertheless the Temple was recognized by all the Jews as especially a House of prayer. Thus we read that St. Peter and St. John went up to the Temple to pray. (Acts 3:1.) It was the one place of all others in the world where the soul might feel that it could draw especially near to God. In the [R5504 : page 220] Most Holy was the Mercy Seat, upon which rested the Shekinah light, representing Divine Presence.

The nearer to that Most Holy any one was able to draw, the more was he understood to be in communion with God. Thus the priests alone might enter the Holy and the Most Holy. The others of the nation of Israel were not permitted to come nearer than the Court. Of these courts there were three – first, the one for the Jews; second, the one for Jewish women; and third, an outer Court, where believing Gentiles might worship the true God, but separated by "a middle wall of partition," as St. Paul declares. (Ephesians 2:14.) These Courts represented differing degrees of approach to God's favor. In the antitype, which is not yet complete, Christ and His Church will be the Temple proper; and all mankind desiring to approach God will approach through The Christ, the Temple of God. And the nearer they come, the greater will be their blessing.

St. Peter and St. Paul both tell us of this antitypical Temple: "Know ye not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Corinthians 6:19.) "The Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are." (1 Corinthians 3:17.) The Church, making increase for years

in the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit, "groweth unto a holy Temple of the Lord." (Ephesians 2:21.) "Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual House." (1 Peter 2:5.) "Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Holy Spirit" – "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Corner Stone." – Ephesians 2:20-22.

This antitypical Temple may be viewed from four different standpoints. In harmony with the last text quoted, it is still under construction. The living stones are being quarried out of the world, and being shaped and polished for places in the glorious Temple of which Christ is the Head. That Temple will be spiritual, unseen of men, each member like unto the glorified Jesus, far above angels.

In that Temple God by His Holy Spirit will dwell in fullest measure. Through it all mankind, during the Millennium, will be privileged to draw near to God and to receive Divine favors and uplift out of sin and death, back to the original image and likeness of God lost in Eden, redeemed for all at Calvary, and to be offered to all during Messiah's Kingdom Reign of a thousand years. Then in the largest sense of the word it will be God's Holy Place. Nothing defiling shall be brought into it. All merchandising and money-sharking will be far from it. It will be the House of Prayer, the Channel of Prayer, the way of approach of mankind to draw near to God for forgiveness of sins and for the reception of all the blessings and mercies which God has provided in Christ for whosoever will.

It was because the Temple at Jerusalem was a type of that glorious Temple of perfection that all business of every kind done in it was profanation – was spoiling the beautiful perfection of the type – was misrepresenting the future, the reality – God's intention in giving it.

## "YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE"

But now let us take a still different view of the subject – not contradictory to the foregoing, but confirmatory. As in the future the Church will be the Temple of God, perfect on the Heavenly plane, so each individual member of the Church of Christ, who has been begotten of the Holy Spirit as a New Creature, has to that extent God dwelling in his mortal body. The world in general are not temples of the Holy Spirit, however good or moral or kind or generous.

No one becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit until begotten of the Holy Spirit. That spirit-begetting constitutes him a New Creature, a son of God, even though only the will, the mind, is begotten again – even though the body is still an imperfect body of flesh. The new mind, dwelling in the old body and using it, constitutes that old body thenceforth a temple of God, and gives to that body a holiness or sanctity which it did not have before.

Now, as the New Creature dwells in this mortal body, it is styled a tabernacle rather than a temple, because through sin and degradation it is impaired, and not glorious. Besides, the word tabernacle signifies that which is temporary, not permanent, not eternal. Our Heavenly house, our spiritual body, will be the Temple, but none can enter that perfect Temple condition except **[R5504 : page 221]** by a share in the First Resurrection, as Jesus said: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the First Resurrection; on such the Second Death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." – Revelation 20:6.

None can know the character of the heart, whether it be a new heart or merely that of the natural man or woman who has learned politeness, morality, etc. The only way in which we are permitted to judge each other is by the outward fruitage. If the Spirit of the Lord dwell within, the fruitage must be good, helpful to others.

That human being must be a blessing in his home, in his community, even as Jesus was, whether his character, his goodness, be acknowledged by others in general or not. The fruits of these people of God are the fruits of holiness, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, brotherly-kindness, self-sacrifice in the interest of others and especially in the service of God and His Truth.

