

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship
August 30, 2020
“Blessing or Curse?”

Sunday school at 8:30, in-person indoor Service at 9:15, and at 10:45, with King’s Kids outdoors.

NEWS

Be respectful of others by allowing them to deal with COVID 19 in their own way.
 Wednesday Night Activities Start September 16th (Orientation September 9th) at 6:30 PM

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In legalism there is always relative righteousness. And so, for anyone who is able to perform better than average, there is self-righteousness. The self-righteous cannot see the error of self-righteousness in themselves. Fiery Judgment awaits... (Matthew 7:22).

Those that rely on their own performance, are not humble enough to trust in the sufficiency of Christ, and so, not grateful enough to rest in His Grace.

MATTHEW 21:18-22 ~

In the vicinity of Bethphage (which means?), Jesus spotted a fig tree in leaf. Fig trees grow figs as they grow leaves. When leaves are easily seen, the figs are edible, although not fully ripe. A fig tree with leaves, but without any figs, is falsely advertising.

Matthew 3:10, 7:19, 21:43, Micah 7:1, Jeremiah 8:13, Hosea 9:10-16, etc.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Self-righteous people produce leaves and folks mistake that for meaning that they are producing fruit, but only the Holy Spirit can produce fruit, and only in humble vessels.

The sad reality for such people is in their self-righteous, self-assurance, they cannot see that they are actually barren and will eventually be cursed.

It is never your ministry. No human can wither a tree (as a sign of judgment), nor move a mountain (as a sign of deliverance - Zechariah 14). Only God can.

By definition, the prayer of "Believing," is the prayer that Jesus Himself would pray. Trust God's plan, and He will do what He wills, through you.

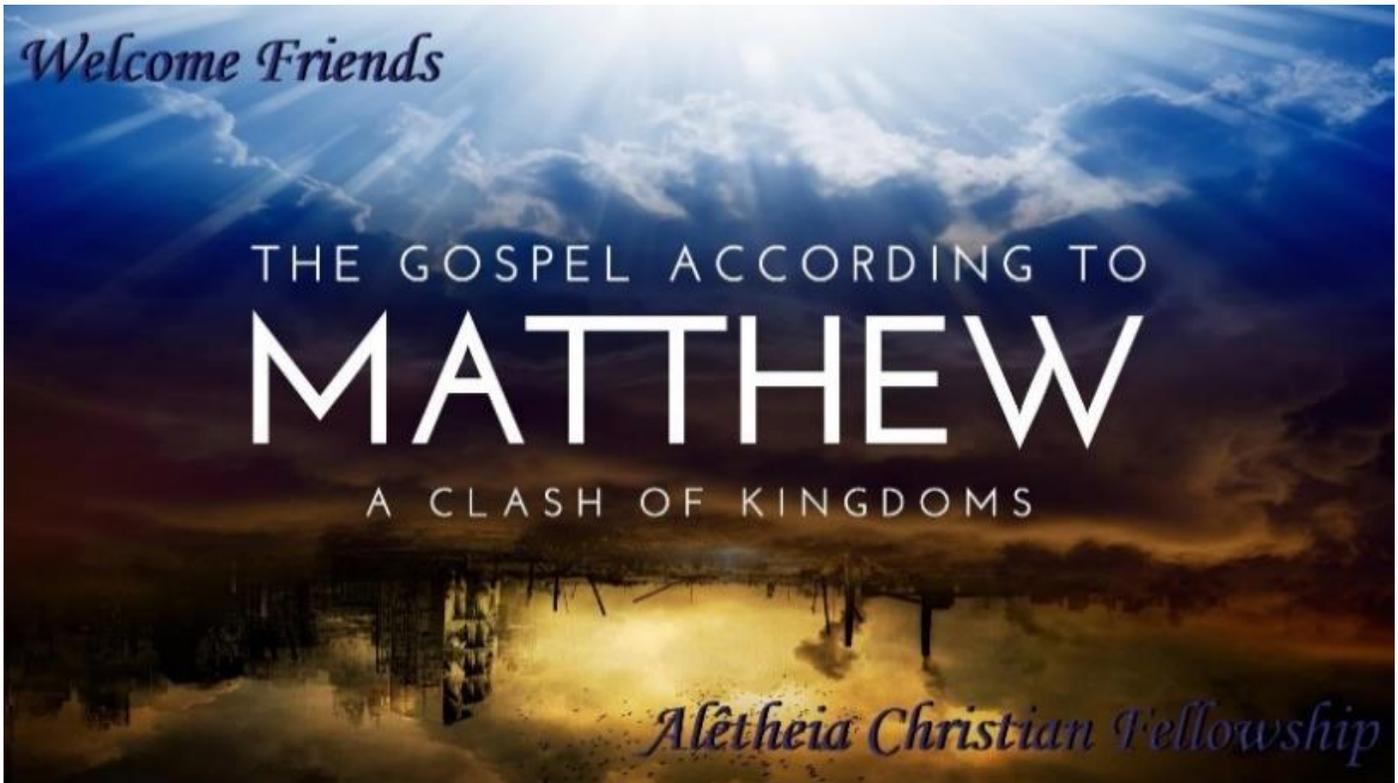
True individual liberty can never be anything other than anarchy unless every person involved is self-controlled.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 21c ~ 083020
“Blessing or Curse?”



Let me remind you that as Jesus approached the Holy City and the final week of His earthly life, He began a series of what are best described as fulfillments of Biblical prophecy. From the donkey, to the Resurrection, everything He did declared the same thing. First, that He was the Messiah and second, that the people either needed to repent, or they would be judged. That would have seemed incongruous, or absurd to proudly self-righteous Jews.



If the Messiah is coming, it is to reward the Jews, not condemn their religious practice.

In legalism there is always relative righteousness and so for anyone who is able to perform better than average there is self-righteousness. The Self-righteous cannot see their error, particularly, when the biggest part of the error, is the self-righteousness itself. They don't see self-righteousness in themselves - it is a deception. Fiery Judgment is what awaits... To the shock and confusion of such people. "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" (Matthew 7:22).

To which the Lord will say three things. "I never knew you." Meaning that you did all sorts of religious things, but never bothered to get to know Me... We didn't have a real relationship then and we won't now. "Depart from Me." That is eternally speaking... We have nothing to do with each other - it is too late. Finally, Jesus says to them that they were actually "Practicing lawlessness." My dear friends, please recognize, that the super religious stalwarts - the people who were the very best at living by the rules and regulations - the people everyone pointed to saying, those folks have it figured out. They have it all together... Those are the people so good at religion, whether Judaism then, or Christianity today... Those that rely on their own performance, are not humble enough to trust in the sufficiency of Christ, and so, not grateful enough to rest in His Grace.

People must reject their own goodness and their own performance and just cry out to God for His Salvation - for Him to apply His goodness and Christ's performance to their account. "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near," is really now, repent, for the Kingdom is here. The Kingdom is everywhere that

people yield to God in trust. It dissolves and disappears wherever humans take control.



Matthew 21:18-22 ~ 18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, “No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered. 20 Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, “How did the fig tree wither all at once?” 21 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly 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 even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast

into the sea,' it will happen. 22“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

When we left Jesus last week, He had just shocked the most elite leaders of the Jewish nation to their core, and then, walked away before they could react.

What was so shocking? When the Chief Priests came to Him after He had completely disrupted the entire sacrificial system of the Temple and specifically complained about Him not putting a stop to the Messianic shouts of the children, Jesus said to them, “Have you never read,” and then quoted a Psalm every Jewish leader could have recited from memory.

To say that it was an insult, would be an understatement. Are you guys, who have the Psalm memorized and are the most elite leaders of Judaism so dull that you don't understand the passage you can rote regurgitate... Have you never actually read it?



Then He quoted the Psalm, which is not about the Messiah, but about Almighty God. The meaning is that even babies who cannot yet speak, gurgle the praises of God... Jesus clarified the Psalm by specifically saying, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself.” “Infants and nursing babies” aren’t two separate categories, it’s just a poetic way of describing newborns. The “Praise” is for God, and Jesus applied it to Himself.

Evidently, the Jewish elite were still trying to pick their jaws off the floor as Jesus walked away. That doesn’t mean they didn’t quickly come to their senses after He made His exit. Mark’s account tells us that, “The chief

priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching” (Mark 11:8). Luke 19:47-48, tells us the same thing with a little more clarity, “The chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on to every word He said.” The masses were still quite mesmerized by Jesus and the Messianic potential - so the Jewish leaders had to act with care, or the people might turn on them.

Well the next day, He was journeying from Bethany back to the Temple for more. We travelled through the backside of the Mount of Olives between Bethany and Bethphage. It is a steady grind uphill.



Remember what Bethphage means? The House of the unripe figs. Jesus was passing through that area and spotted a fig tree in leaf.

Naysayers from two different camps, with two separate agendas, have ridiculed this incident as a ridiculous fabrication. One group, because they just want to discredit the Bible, and the other, because the Jesus of their manufacture, would never curse a poor defenseless tree.

Their objection is that the Passover season was too early in the spring for ripe figs to be present, so they dismiss the entire account. First, Passover occurs based upon a lunar calendar and therefore can be

anytime between late March and late April. Second, the Bible clearly talks about Jesus seeking unripe figs, in an area known for unripe figs... What does that mean?

The way fig trees work on the backside of the Mount of Olives to this day, is they grow figs as they grow leaves. By the time, the leaves are easily seen, the figs are edible - still not fully ripe, but edible, and many people like early, or unripe figs. Any fig tree showing good foliage, should have edible, if not fully ripe figs. The leaves are the sign that such is the case. A fig tree with leaves, but without any figs at all, is a deceptive tree... It is falsely advertising. It is showing by being in full leaf that it is one thing, but upon closer examination it isn't that thing at all. It is barren of any fruit. In a few more verses Jesus will explain by saying, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it" (Matthew 21:43). All along, going way back to the very beginning, John the Baptist, proclaimed, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Both John and Jesus said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10, 7:19).

Self-righteous people produce leaves and people, themselves included, mistake that for meaning that

they produce fruit as well. But only the Holy Spirit can produce fruit in a person's life as that person humbly gratefully embraces such a life. As they humbly yield to the Spirit's work. Religious legalism only ever produces death. Another way of saying self-deceiving self-righteousness.

To carry this back to what the Jews should have known... God speaking through the ancient prophet said, "When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved" (Hosea 9:10). So much potential, but no fruit. So prophetically and metaphorically the barren fig tree that falsely advertised early figs was cursed by God made man.



Never again, would He permit false religion to pass for true relationship with Him. As a symbol it stood for Israel, but it continues to stand as a precautionary tale for all people, especially for self-righteous Christians.

The sad reality for such people is in their self-righteous, self-assurance, they cannot see that they are actually barren and will eventually be cursed forever, if they don't repent and fully trust 100% in the merits of Jesus, and zero percent in their own goodness.

The fig tree withered at Jesus' Word and the disciples were amazed. It was another incredible supernatural display... They had seen plenty of them by now, but it

was still spectacular and strange enough that they marveled.

How was it possible seems to have been their question? Jesus' answer really throws a lot of people, so much so, in fact, that some think that there's a mix-up. That Jesus said what follows the Disciples question, not in association with the tree, but at some completely different time, place, and circumstance. Again, it just has to do with not appreciating the situation.

Deuteronomy 11:29... "Place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.



The guys want to know how the tree withered all at once - that's their question. Why? These guys have

seen Jesus walk on water, calm the sea, stop the wind, command legions of demons, heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind and raise the dead and now they want to know how a tree withered?

We cannot be certain about their line of thinking, but what we know for sure is that no matter how well they understood the symbolism, that's what Jesus' response is about. He was not saying that His disciples could, given enough faith, go around withering actual trees and moving actual mountains. This is purely theological.

The tree stands for unrepentant and self-righteous Israel and beyond. The "Mountain" stands for what is humanly impossible... and a bit more.

Let's start with faith. Having faith and not doubting is not two separate things, nor does it indicate a super-special faith. It is simply a way of saying that if you allow Jesus to use you, to do the thing that He asks you to do, it will be done. To accomplish that all you need is a mustard seed's worth of faith... Why?

Because it is not you doing it, and it is not your decision to do it, because it is not your ministry. With a

tiny amount of the correct faith you realize that you are merely a conduit, a go between, a vessel through whom God works... It is He and only He that wills and works through His children as He chooses.

I said it is not your ministry. I constantly hear from Christians who say singing is my ministry, serving others is my ministry, playing an instrument is my ministry, teaching kids is my ministry, whatever is my ministry. It is a completely backwards way of looking at it and it is the reason our ministry is so stressful.

It is never your ministry, if it is God's ministry. If it is God's ministry, then it is His ministry and you're just doing what He tells you to do and for our point today, what He enables you to do.

This is the biggest travesty of Pentecostalism... This idea that I as a human being have these supernatural gifts that I can then operate in, as I choose, as I see the need... Can you see the problem? No human being can wither a tree or move a mountain with a word. God can. If I'm simply doing what He wants me to do trusting Him as I put one foot in front of the other and He decides that it's time to do something supernatural through me, He will do it. I never need to worry about

moving mountains, or cursing trees... They're God's problem - I just follow His lead.

These men Jesus spoke to that day all went on to be used in amazing ways, but the overarching message through it all was that there was a blessing from God that simultaneously functioned as a curse to all who failed to accept Him.

The tree, the one's rejecting "God's purposes for their lives," as the Bible says it (Luke 7:30), were cursed for all eternity because of the blessing proclaimed.

The "Mountain," was a common enough saying, that just indicated a humanly impossible thing. It was a salient metaphor for where Jesus and the Disciples were that day. Not too far from the area of Bethphage, about 7 ½ miles to the south was the great palace known as the Herodium. Herod the Great had it built on the higher of a double peaked mountain and named it after himself.





He wanted an unobstructed view from the palace of Jerusalem and the Temple. His architects told him that the mountain simply wasn't tall enough to make that possible. Herod had them remove the top of the shorter peak to make the taller one tall enough to see the city.

He moved a mountain to make an existing mountain bigger. As I say, not the same thing, but an apt comparison. Jesus was probably pointing to Herod's palace when He essentially indicated that a king with tremendous resources spent years moving some dirt... God simply says the word and an entire mountain will disappear.



moving mountains

Beyond the common saying and the example before them, there is this... Zechariah 14 starts out “The Day of the Lord is coming.” It goes on to talk about all the nations gathering together to war against Jerusalem, but then the Lord comes to defend His people. We pick up the action in verse 4, “On that day he (the Lord) will stand on the Mount of Olives. It’s east of Jerusalem. It will be split in two from east to west. Half of the mountain will move north. The other half will move south. A large valley will be formed.” The people will escape through the valley formed from God moving the mountain.

Jesus, well aware of both the prophecy in Zechariah and the past activity at the Herodium nearby, uses what was a common saying, to indicate that the Disciples would be used by God to dramatically declare repentance as Jesus had so frequently done.

The tree stood for judgment and the mountain stood for deliverance... The point? When God gives deliverance it always functions as judgment for those who refuse to be delivered by Him.



If I offer all of you ice cream and cake... I offer you a choice to participate, or not... Every offer entails the possibility of refusal.

Jesus then finished it off by putting a wonderful bow on it. His next words confirm what I was saying, even though it might not seem so at first.

If the Apostles trust in God, trust in the Father through Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, then “All things,” (and just so you know, in the Greek, “All things,” means, “All things,” so, quite literally “All things,”) will be received. Pray with faith that God will give you a pony and voilà, a pony.

By definition, the prayer of “Believing,” is the prayer that Jesus Himself would pray. He taught us how to do that. Heavenly Father... Be glorified, Your Kingdom where your reign is completely unopposed come now, Your perfect Will done here, just as there... Give us each and every day the Word we need to get through the day honoring and obeying and working to advance Your agenda, Your way... Right? Where in the prayer of a true child of God is the request for a magic show, or for an early Christmas?

If the Apostles would trust God’s plan, God would use them to advance His program and it would function as a call to repentance... Salvation for those who accept

and judgment for those who reject... It is the same today. At this very moment, God is using little ole me, to declare the exact same Message.



Repent, get real, spend time with the Lord, let His Spirit guide you, get to know Him better, LOVE well through His power... Trust with a hope that produces unshakable JOY, because it is a hope grounded in Who God is... Be at PEACE, take it easy, have a cream soda, and wait upon the Lord for His perfect timing in PATIENCE... Be KIND and be GOOD... Stand firm in the FAITH, and let your yes be yes, and your no be no... Realize that you have the ear of the Living God. That you are the child of the heavenly

Father, the friend and joint heir of the Lord Jesus, possessed and animated by God's own Holy Spirit... So, my friends be GENTLE with others - be gentle. Therefore, always strive to be SELF-CONTROLLED.

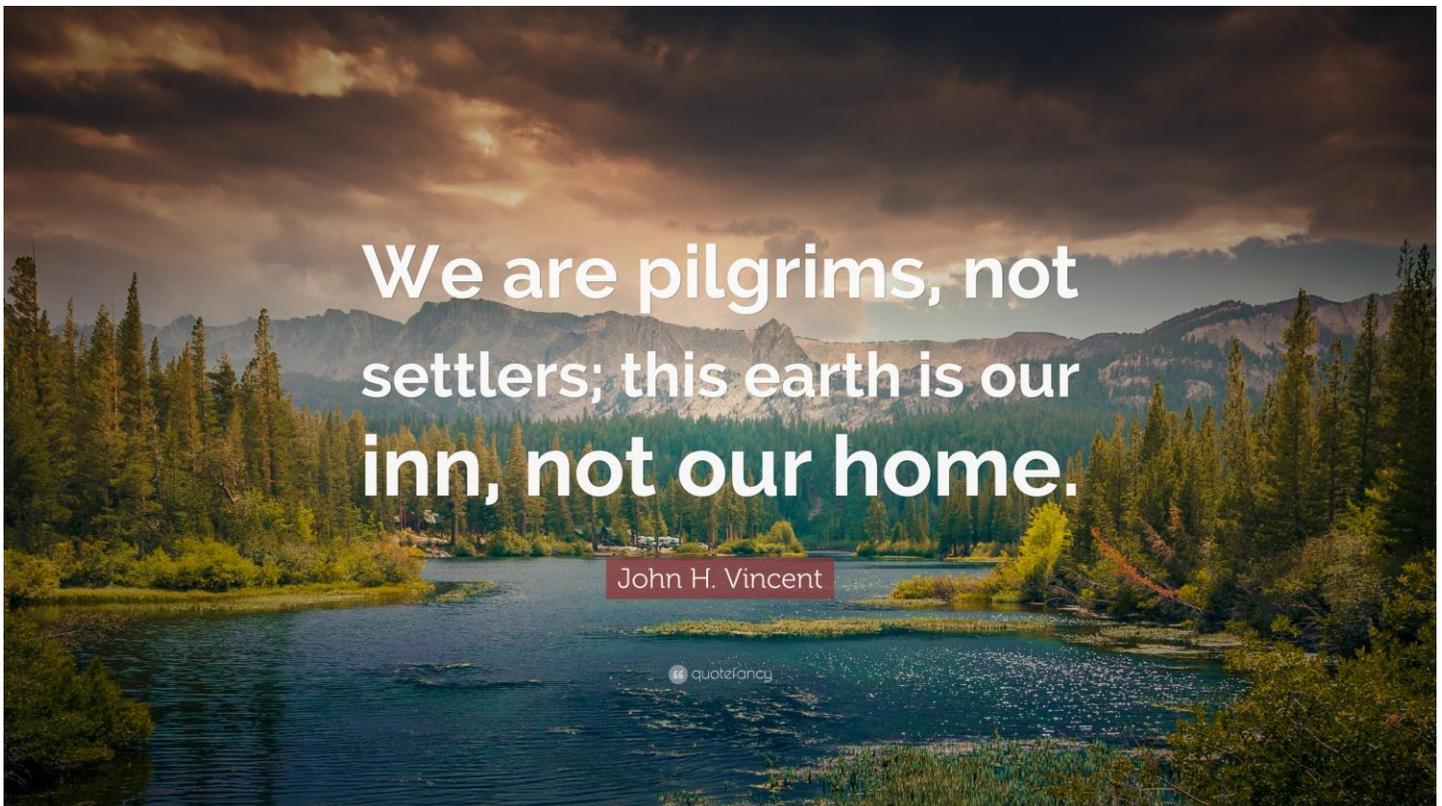


Do you know why the American experiment with individual liberty and freedom to independently conduct your life as you see fit does not work?

Freedom, liberty, individual rights can never be anything other than a chaos unless every person involved is self-controlled.

The only way a free society can function is for everyone to do the right thing voluntarily and faithfully. As soon as an individual puts their interests ahead of the group and acts upon that to the detriment of others a law must be made, and evenly enforced, and freedom is simultaneously restricted.

Enough laws and no one is free. Americans are now so utterly self-absorbed we cannot make enough laws to keep order. Chaos ensues and the way chaos is brought under control is through authoritarian militaristic force. Welcome to the future.



As for you and me... This is not our home. We are

here, not to enjoy the good life, not to fret about what has been lost, not to react to evil in the same way others do, not to be full of fear, but to be Light and Salt in this present darkness.

Let God use you to proclaim His Message to the lost, while there's still time.