

“Don’t Just Be On Display”

Matthew 21:18-22

5/4/10

Introduction: When we come to church we typically wear the best clothes, matching hats, purses, ties, and shoes. We do this because our physical appearance speaks volumes and also because we want to look our best for the Lord. But, we need to remind ourselves that we are on display, not just physically, but also spiritually. Just as our clothes and accessories can enhance our physical appearance, the Godly characteristics we exhibit display our inner spiritual beauty (**Galatians 5:22**). Tonight, we are going to look at a situation where we find the necessity of displaying our spiritual characteristics. Reading this passage should help us realize that we are connected to an awesome God. He has a plan and purpose for each one of us, but He wants us to be productive and not just be on display.

Verse 18

The Incarnation

Here we see Christ’s incarnation when he took on a **human** body and nature. How do we see this? The text tells us that “he hungered”. Only a fleshly being could experience this (**Hebrews 4:14-15**). As we read through the four Gospels, we see many instances where Christ displayed His humanity. He became tired, went to sleep, was thirsty, etc (**John 4:6**). Yet, we know He was completely God (**Philippians 2:6-8**) (**John 1:1, 14**). Christ willingly left His lofty **position** to lift us up. If we call ourselves Christians, then we need to imitate His pattern (**3 John 1:11**) (**1 John 4:20**). We have to remember what He did for us. His purpose on earth was to save the spiritually lost (**Luke 19:10**). So, Christ “walked in our shoes” in order to reach us. If we desire to reach (minister to) others, we need to be separated, but not **isolated** from the world. Just as Christ took on a body, we are new creatures in Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). Christ exhibited humanity. Are we exhibiting our spirituality in our walk and talk? We are told that Christ “returned” to the city. Looking at the previous verses (vs. 15 – “displeased”), we can see that He was experiencing animosity in the city (Jerusalem). Yet, He returns to the city. He did not let the attitude of others affect His behavior or mission. In the same manner, our behavior should **mirror** our belief. Christ had a cross to bear. Likewise, if we can’t bear our cross, we can’t wear our crown (**James 1:12**) (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

Verses 19-20

The Permutation

Here we see the permutation (change) that took place based on Christ's command. On His way from Bethany to Jerusalem, He saw a fig tree. Being hungry, He approached it. This tree was apparently in good soil because it had leaves. But, it had no fruit. From Christ's teachings we can understand that soil represents our heart (**Matthew 13:19**) (**Luke 8:15**). Fig trees were a common source of food. Despite the good soil, this tree was not serving its purpose (bearing fruit). As a result, Christ curses it. Even though we may have a good heart with good intentions, are we serving our purpose? Remember, we are saved not to sit, but to serve. Because of its many leaves, the tree appeared to be fruitful from a distance. Do we appear to be fruitful only from a distance? Jesus' cursing the tree was a purposeful divine lesson and not a rash act of frustration. The fig tree is often used as a symbol of Israel (**Hosea 9:10**). The barren tree often symbolizes divine judgment on Israel because of her spiritual fruitlessness despite an abundance of spiritual advantages. Unlike the Israelites, we (Christians) will escape eternal condemnation. But, we are commanded to be obedient to God's commands (**Romans 8:1**) (**James 1:22**). This tree was planted "in the way" (along side) of the road. This implies that it was on public property (not privately owned). Anyone who passed by could enjoy its fruit. Likewise, we are to bloom and produce not only for our benefit, but for anyone who comes in contact with us (**Hebrews 10:24**) (**Hebrews 6:10**). The tree was to meet the physical need (hunger) while the Word of God has given us is to satisfy the spiritual hunger in others. His Word will always be present (**Matthew 24:35**). The disciples' reaction ("marveled") indicates that they would not have expected Christ's condemnation to materialize. Have we found ourselves in the same mind set, not believing in Christ's words?

Verses 21-22

The Stipulation

Christ gives a stipulation (condition) that the disciples (and us) should be aware of. In order to see the mighty works of God in our (and others') lives, we need to first be obedient to His Word, sincerely believe (trust) in Him and pray to Him (**Hebrews 11:6**) (**James 1:6**). We need to realize that faith is the greatest force available (to us). It can move the many mountains we face in our lives. But, remember, true faith must always involve surrendering to the will of God (**1 John 5:14-15**). We have to learn to put our faith into actions. Remember, no participation from us, no activation from God. Don't just be on display, but be an instrument that brings glory to God!