

Appearance and Reality

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Text: Mark 11¹

Date: November 21, 2010, 5pm

Series: Song of Solomon (Passion, Purity, & Fidelity)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Mark 11**. We continue in a series of messages through the book of Mark. The title of the message is “Appearance and Reality”.

In 1946, when Joe Kennedy gathered his family together to announce that his sickly son John F. Kennedy would run for Congress, the family didn't think it would float. JFK was too small and sickly for people to have any confidence in him. To which Joe Kennedy replied, “Just remember, it's not who you are that matters, but who people think you are that counts. We're going to sell Jack like soap flakes”. In other words, a soap flake is a soap flake, but were going to paint him as special. Of course JFK surprised a lot of people and he far more substance than most conservatives of today. But the point is, any one can be packaged. I think politicians and many modern day Christians have a lot in common. “it's not who you are that matters, but who people think you are that counts.” This is something that has moved into the mainstream of our culture.

We as a culture put far more value on the external than the internal. We have so many reality shows that preach that changing your outward appearance is one of the most important things that can change your life. So we get fascinated about image making.

Politicians and products have their own marketing scripts. And then you have reality TV, and the only thing certain about reality TV is that nothing there is actually reality and it is all staged, scripted and edited to project a certain image.

Churches have gotten into this. They have their own imaging companies. They want to project a certain image. “We're the cool church”. Etc.

As the old TV ad said, “image is everything.” But I've seen marriages and families that seemed to have everything together, and you'd think—nothing could ever happen to them. And then there is an explosion. And you scratch your head. And you realize that “image ISN'T everything.”

There are churches and ministries full of programs and activities, and you'd think they've got it together, and they know what they are doing. But you find out they are more concerned about image than about substance. We've all seen the number nickels noses and nonsense.

But before I point the finger, I have to confess that in my own life, I am at times more concerned about what people think of me or about appearances than about reality.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

Queen Mary Ship: I'm told that when the Queen Mary was retired it had been the largest ocean liner to go across the ocean. During WWII it was used to carry troops and then after the war it became a passenger liner. Then in 1967 it was retired to become a floating restaurant. When they brought it back to refurbish it, I'm told that they removed the three smoke stacks and they were to repair them. The problem was, when they set them upon the deck, they disintegrated. You see, they had been covered with 30 coats of paint, and when they looked at it all of the steel had rusted away and all that was left was paint. THE SUBSTANCE WAS GONE!

Actually it's the opposite. God said about David in **1 Samuel 16:7**, "The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart".

Not everything that looks good is the way it is. And tonight, this is what Jesus points out in two very powerful acts. Turn with me to Mark 11 to one of the most curious stories that comes from the life of Jesus.

The most fearful diagnosis that God can give a person is found in **Matthew 15:8**, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

What we come to is an acted parable. Jesus curses the fig tree to illustrate something greater that is happening in the Temple, and in the nation of Israel, and ultimately in the hearts of the people. It was a poisonous attitude of hypocrisy. Jesus acts out this parable. Let's look at the event itself in verses 12-14.

After the triumphal entry, you'll remember that Jesus entered the temple and in **verse 11**, we read, "And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve". So he inspected the Temple and it seems from what follows, He was greatly angered by what had been going on in the Temple. So he goes back to Bethany, likely with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He spends the night. It's a two mile walk. The pathway is covered with Olive trees and fig trees. It's morning, He's hungry. This is late March or early April.

He comes to a tree that has all leaves and no figs.

I. All **leaves**, no figs: The cursing of the fig tree (vs. 12-14).

Verses 12-14, "On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it."

His disciples must have looked at this with curiosity. Why would Christ curse the fig tree when they don't come till July or August? Why would you get upset with an apple tree in the dead of winter?

A. This is not about fig trees—the people weren't ready when Jesus came.

Jesus does curse the fig tree for being out of season on purpose. This is not about fig trees. This is about people. The point is the people were “out of season”. They weren't ready for Christ.

Application: Are you ready for Christ? Do you know if a believing person is preaching a message, you can always get something out of it. It is the Word of God, and you can be changed whether you drink out of plastic or out of a golden chalice. ***Are you ready for Christ to work in your heart?***

Knowing and walking with Christ is a gift of God. The gift is extended today. The Christian life is NEVER in season in this world. It comes by fellowship with God each minute of the day.

In **verse 14**, Jesus says, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.” What's that all about? It was about turning from Israel as the mode for the Gospel message. From this time forth Israel would be withered, and judgment would come in 70AD.

B. The message for us, is appearance is **not** everything. God came looking for substance and fruit and found none.

God wants your heart!

Now we come to verses 15-19.

II. All **religion**, no godliness: The cleansing of the Temple (vs. 15-19).

Verses 15-19, “And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, ‘Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’ [Isaiah 56:7] But you have made it a den of robbers.’ [Jeremiah 7:11] 18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. 19 And when evening came they went out of the city”.

A. The Temple was externally impressive and religiously.

In this passage, the Temple is cleansed and the fig tree is cursed. The fig tree had lots of leaves, but no real fruit.

The Temple said by its appearance that it was a center of worship. It was busy. There were prayers and sacrifices and teaching going on. It looked on the good on the outside, like a hub of godly and pious religious activity. But on the inside, it was a den of thieves. They were in it for the money.

B. Jesus responds to religious externalism with holy **anger**. What is Jesus' response to religious hypocrisy?

When the church becomes a playground, and becomes nothing more than a market for books and wares, we've got problems. We've got to be careful. Religious activity doesn't make us closer to God unless our heart is engaged. God hates it when our hearts are far away from him.

Mark 7:6, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me' (Isaiah 29:13).

Going back to an agricultural illustration, let's look at **John 15:1-6**, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."

III. True **faith**, real fruit: The antidote to failure (vs. 20-25).

Verses 20-25, "As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.' 22 And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have [hold] anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.'"

A. So what is the solution to false appearances? True FAITH. Verse 22, "Have faith in God". That's pretty clear.

B. What does real faith look like?

1. It looks like regularly seeing the **fruit** of miraculous answered prayer. **Verse 23-24**, “Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”.
2. It looks like harmony and **forgiveness** toward others. **Verse 25**, “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have [hold] anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Conclusion: Illustration of TODAY show where they wore no make up. One day Christ is going to take off all our make up!

There are two main statements that you and I and all people are going to hear when we see Jesus. It will be one of two statements.

Matthew 25:23, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

or

Matthew 25:41, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Christians don't need make up. We are slowly being conformed to the image of Christ. It's not always pretty, but it is real. It there is nothing more beautiful than a sinner being transformed into Christ's image!

On the last day, all the make-up comes off, and He will reveal all.