



[Matthew 21:19](#)

(19) Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

[Mark 11:13](#)

(13) Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

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The fig tree was deceptive due to its leaves. Normally, a leafy fig tree would be pleasing, since a fig tree in leaf indicates that it has ripe fruit. However, this tree had no fruit. The first figs normally begin to appear before the leaves, but as the foliage increases, the fruit ripens. Since the leaves could be seen from "afar off," it was misleading because it had not borne any fruit.

It is true, as Mark says, that "the time of the figs was not yet," but that only meant that the normal time for figs had not yet come. The fig tree appeared to be producing ahead of schedule, giving the appearance of doing something it was not. The tree represents a *hypocrite*, who gives the appearance of being something he is not. This hypocrisy was the condition of the religious leaders of Jesus' day, and it is also the condition of many today.

The Jewish leaders professed to have what no other people had, a relationship with [God](#), but were in reality shallow, simple, and phony; there was plenty of outward show but no real conviction. They lacked truth, righteousness, and goodwill. And though they professed a great desire for the Messiah, they rejected Christ when He came to them. Hypocrisy was their dominant characteristic when it came to spiritual matters.

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The arrogant priests, scribes, and elders, along with their elaborate rituals of the Temple, were all just leaves on a fruitless tree. Their heart was still malicious within, and true devotion for God and His truth was absent. Shortly before His crucifixion, Christ repeatedly called the religious leaders “hypocrites” ([Matthew 23:13-15](#), 23, 25, 27, 29), saying, “All their works they do to be seen by men” ([Matthew 23:5](#)). Like the fig tree, they liked to stand in conspicuous places, and also like the fig tree, they had leaves but no fruit.

On another occasion Christ quotes Isaiah in condemnation of the Israelite religious leaders: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me’” ([Matthew 15:7-8](#); [Isaiah 29:13](#)). Speaking to Ezekiel, God describes the hypocrisy of the Israelites then:

So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. . . . [T]hey hear your words, but they do not do them.” ([Ezekiel 33:31-32](#))

Mainstream Christianity is in the same hypocritical condition today. Like the fig tree, many of its members are nothing but leaves waving in the breeze. Many church services are strong on show and weak on substance. The emptier a church is spiritually, the phonier their outward appearance will be.

Jesus' actions here have symbolic importance, signifying the hypocrisy of those who appear to be bearing fruit but in fact are not. The person who lives a hypocritical life will someday discover that he has deceived himself worse than he has deceived others. If we cheat others, our judgment from God may be to have others cheat us. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” ([Hebrews 10:31](#)).

— Martin G. Collins

To learn more, see:

[The Miracles of Jesus Christ: The Withering of a Fig Tree](#)

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