

**“Authenticate”** Sermon for September 2, 2018  
Song of Songs 2:8-13, James 1:17-27, Mark 7:5-8  
Sermon Text: Psalm 40:6-8

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, I have come—with the scroll written for me. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

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Mark tells us that one day as Jesus and his disciples were leaving the town of Bethany, he was hungry.

In the distance he saw a fig tree with leaves growing everywhere. When he went to take a piece of fruit, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again (Mark 11:12-14a, NIV).”

You might ask, “Why was Jesus so severe in condemning the fig tree?” He had the expectation that the tree should have had plenty of figs. Like the fig tree, we who have received the grace of life in Christ are expected to bear fruit. It sat there in full

leaf, leaves everywhere, advertising figs, figs, figs, but there was nothing but leaves. There is no special time for us to produce the fruit of Christ in our lives.

We are made righteous in Christ. Psalm 92 says,

***12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;***

***<sup>13</sup> planted in the house of the Lord  
they will flourish in the courts of our God***

***<sup>14</sup> They will still bear fruit in old age  
they will stay fresh and green,***

We have been given the new birth, new life, a second chance, a new opportunity. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us, in order that we be fruit-bearing agents of the kingdom, God's new reality. This is why James reminds the church that we are-

***Doers of the word, and not merely hearers  
who deceive themselves.***

Be careful. It does not say BE DOERS. The admonition, "Be doers OF THE WORD."

1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The value system of the world stains us. It can be summed up very simply, “ME FIRST” or “ME. MYSELF and I.” We cannot be authentic for Christ if we are stained by self-interests over God’s interests. We cannot bow to the law of profits before people if we would keep ourselves unstained by the world. Those who depend on others for their existence are not a priority in the world. The old, sick, infirm, children, differently abled, the oppressed are the poor that we always have among us. Jesus said they are there for us to do good to them whenever we are able. That’s keeping yourself unstained, that’s being an authentic disciple of our Savior and Lord. That’s pure religion of pure devotion for God,

to care for the orphans, the widows, those in distress.

Only then is our faith authenticated. Leaves are not enough. Clean hands, clean containers, proper worship, consistent liturgy, appropriate handling of the elements. Sacrifice and offering God has not desired, but a body, the church, the ecclesia, the gathering of God's people committed to the reality, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Then we are authentic. This is our status quo—figs on our tree. Amen.