

DO WE HEAR?

by Carl McMurray

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 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. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. (Mark 11:12-14 ESV)

During the last week of Jesus' life on earth the above occasion records that he became hungry, approached a fig tree, and finding no fruit proceeded to curse the tree. We could learn lessons from a fruitless tree or a tree that pretended to have fruit by showing leaves, but the disciple's response catches our attention. Mark records that they "heard" Jesus. The New American Standard says that they were "listening."

How odd. When Jesus talked about going to Jerusalem and dying they didn't seem to understand or listen. Some even argued with him. When he spoke of the influence of the Pharisees and how it was to be avoided, again, they didn't seem to get it. When he performed miracle after miracle in their presence, and even gave them the power to perform supernatural feats it did not seem to make a lasting impression. But, when he declared that fig tree was done, then they listened. They heard. The next day they remembered and took note of the withered tree.

Is this not human nature at its finest- To hear the Lord's instructions about a tree that they had not invested anything into, which gave them nothing, and which had no effect on their lives one way or another, while missing out on what the Lord said and repeated that was really important? It's like people who want to wade around in the book of Revelation, most of which is already fulfilled and outside of effecting one's life for good or bad, while ignoring the message of Acts which describes the kingdom of God on earth and how one can be saved and become a part of God's great plan.

When will we learn to be discerning in our listening skills- to hear closely what Jesus says about serving him, being committed to one another, and loving God with all our heart? Taking to heart the Scripture's teaching on patience, forgiveness, kindness and setting the proper example, letting our light shine before men. Understanding the vitality as well as the responsibility of fellowship with other Christians in worship and association. Let us not be "selective" hearers, concerned only with fig trees that don't really concern us. Let's hear about the kingdom as well.