

Scripture: Matthew 21:18-22

(also, see Mk. 11:11-14, 20-24.

LUKE 13:6-9)

Topic: Trees without Fruit

Text: Matthew 21:19a --"..and seeing a tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only."

Proposition: The parable of the withered fig tree, which is reported as a happening in our Scripture in Matthew, is a teaching by Jesus to suggest that those who do not make fruitful **usage** of their individual talents for good shall wither into persons without meaning or joy (without fruit and ~~withered like~~ like dead); while those who with faith and reverence try constantly and vigorously to perform good acts to the best of their ability shall surprise others and themselves at the results.

Dates written: Sept. 28-Oct. 3, 1970.

Dates and places used:

OCT-41 1970-OAKLAND PARK, FLA.

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Introduction:

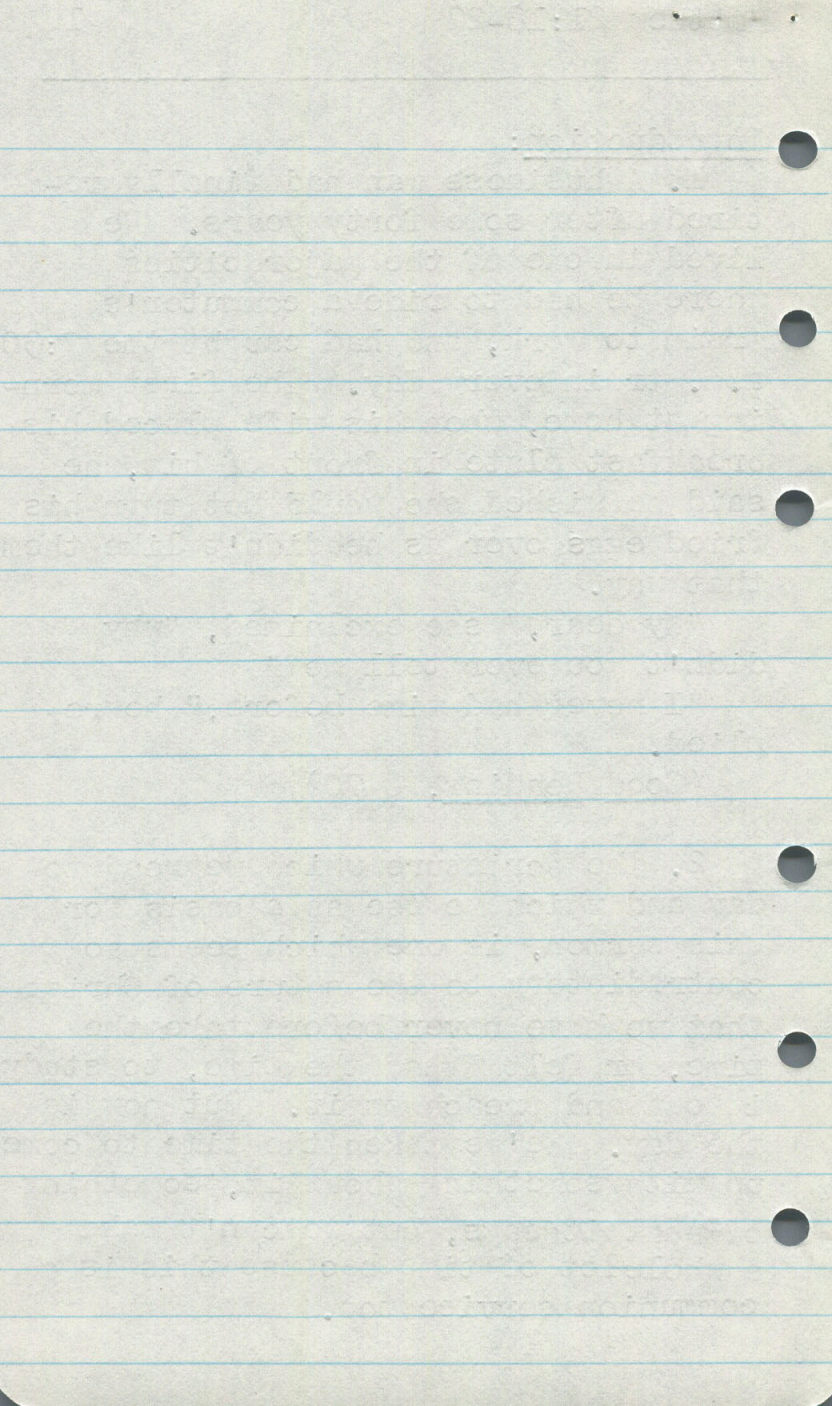
1. A business man had finally retired after some forty years. He lived in one of the major cities where he had to ride a commuter's train to work, and had caught the 7:30 a.m. train every day. The first morning at home, when his wife placed his breakfast plate in front of him, he said he wished she would not turn his fried eggs over as he didn't like them that way.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I never had time before," he replied.

(Good Reading, 8-70)

2. The Scripture which we read today and which we use as a basis for this sermon, is one which seems so contradictory to the nature of Christ that we have never before taken the time, or felt I had the time, to study it out and preach on it. But now is the day. We've taken the time to come up with something about it, something of what it says, but we can't take a whole lot of time because this is a communion service too.

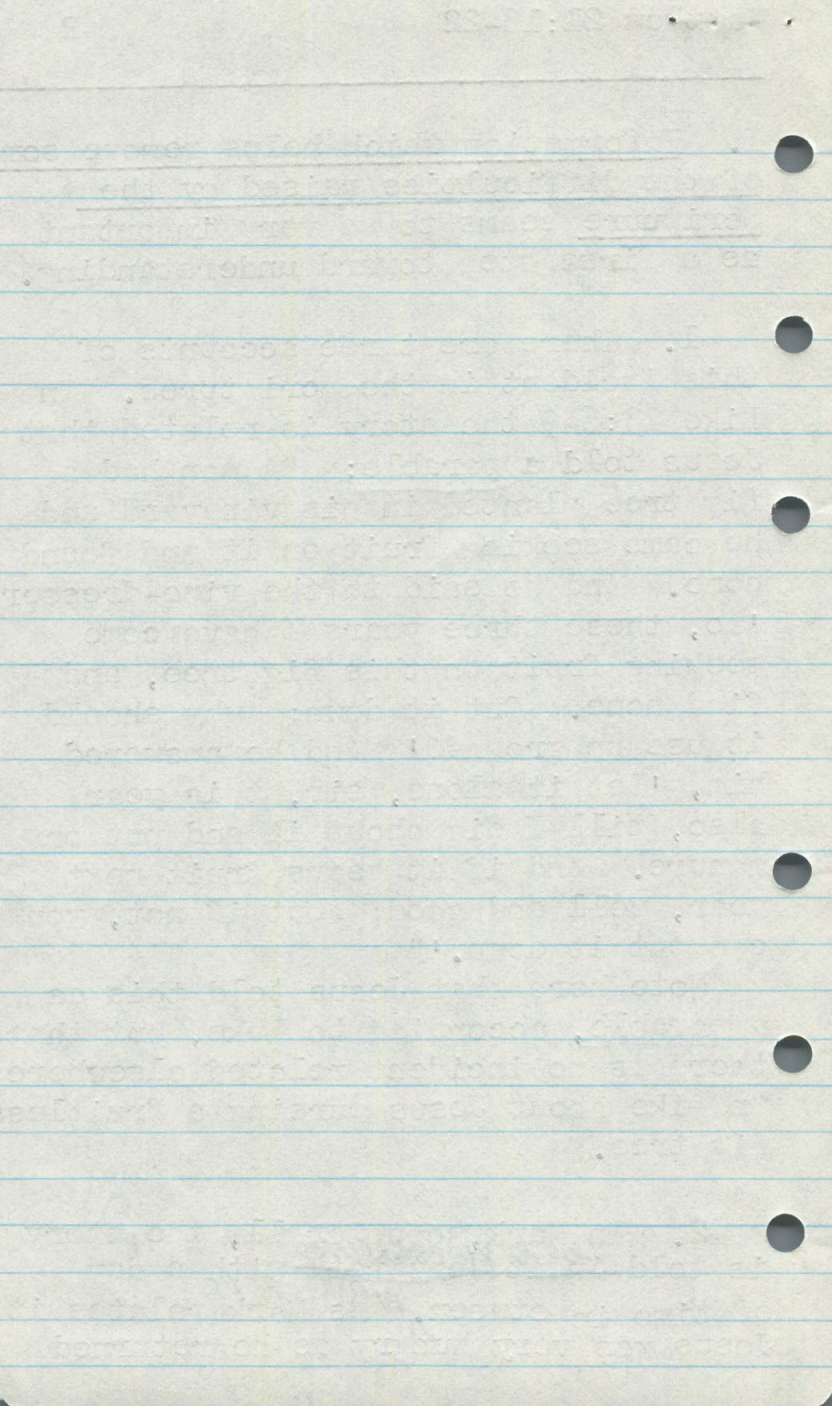


I. Information which helps remove some of the difficulties raised by the Scripture seems to be very important as a first step toward understanding.

1. There are three accounts of this incident in the Scriptures. In Luke 13:6-9 the story is related that Jesus told a parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vine-dresser 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Note here that Jesus told this as a parable, according to Luke, but that there is no incident related elsewhere in Luke about Jesus cursing a fruitless fig tree.

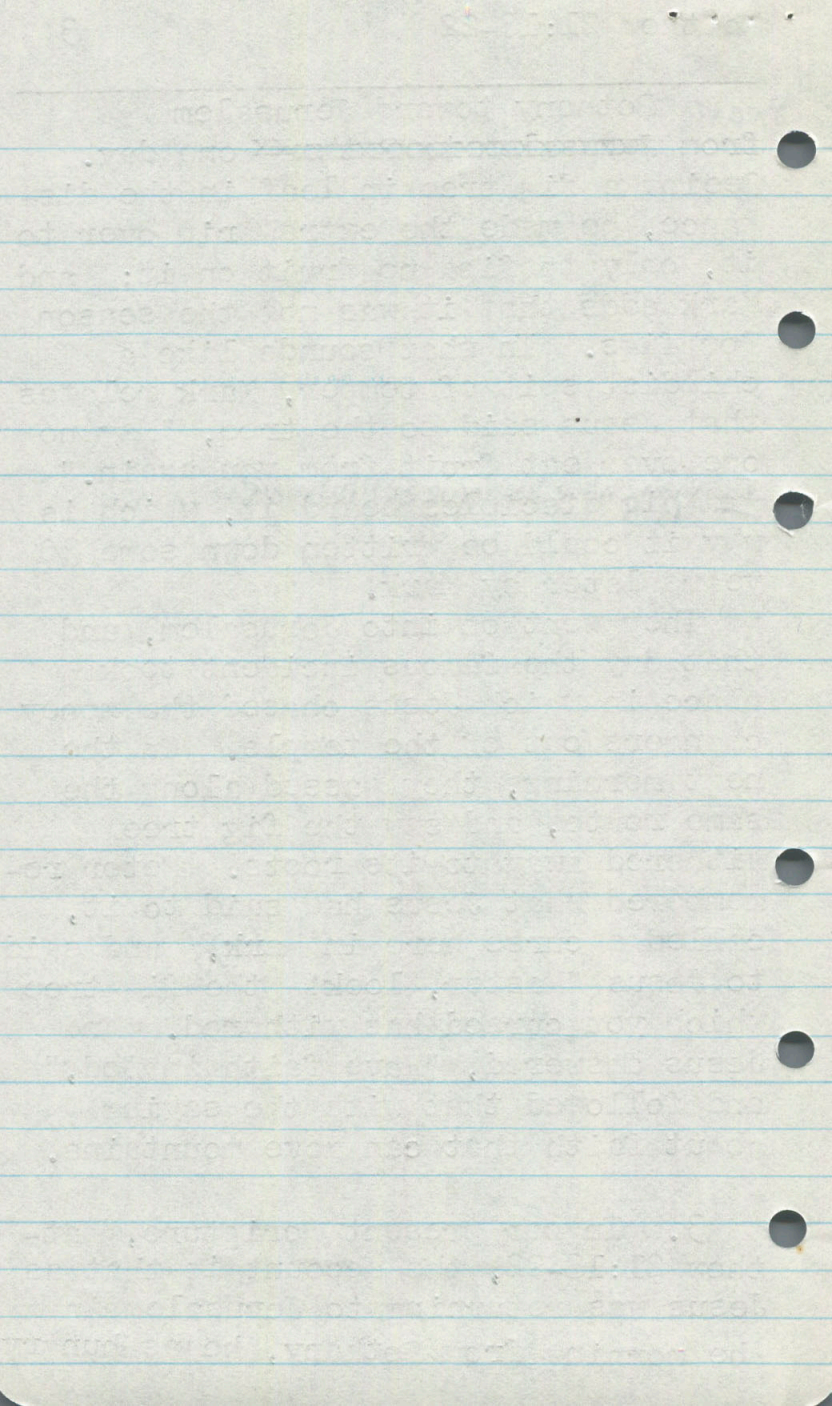
2. In Mark, chapter 11, the story is told ~~in its entirety~~ ^{as a happening} with a day of time in between. ^{parts of it.} As Mark relates it, Jesus was very hungry as he returned



From Bethany toward Jerusalem
 from ~~Jerusalem to Bethany~~ one day.
 Seeing a fig tree in leaf in the distance, he made the extra trip over to it, only to find no fruit on it; and Mark adds that it was not the season for figs. In what sounds like a childist spit of temper, Mark relates that Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." ~~And his disciples heard it,~~ ^{It may have been Jesus' home.} which is why it could be written down some 30 years later by Mark.

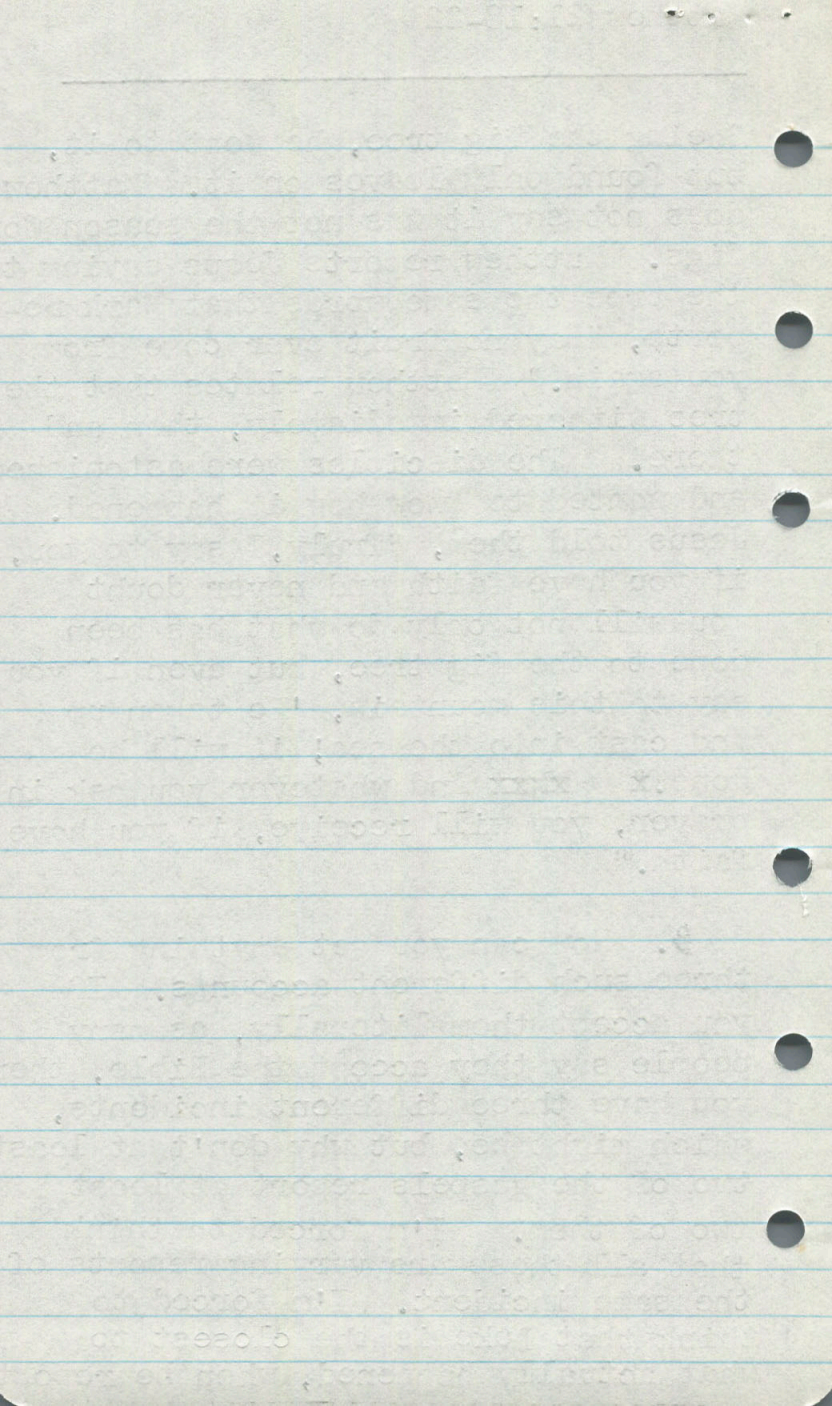
They went on into Jerusalem, and that day the famous incident took place in which Jesus chased the money changers out of the temple. On the next morning, they passed along the same route, and saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. Peter remembered what Jesus had said to it, (called a curse here in Mark), and said to Jesus "Master, look! the fig tree which you cursed has withered. And Jesus answered, "Have faith in God," and followed that with the saying about faith that can move mountains.

3. In our present Scripture, Matthew 21:18-22, the account is that as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem in the morning from Bethany, he was hungry



Seeing the fig tree, he went to it, but found only leaves on it. Matthew does not say it was not the season for figs. Matthew reports Jesus saying to the tree the same words that Mark reports, "May no fruit ever come from you again." Matthew relates that the tree withered immediately, then and there! The disciples were astonished and wanted to know how it happened. Jesus told them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea; it will be done.' ~~xxxx~~ And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

4. How can you get anything from three such different accounts. If you accept them literally, as many people say they accept the Bible, then you have three different incidents, which might be, but why don't at least two of the gospels report at least two of them? I'm forced to think that all these are varying reports of the same incident. I'm forced to think that Luke is the closest to what actually happened, when he reports



the fig tree incident as a parable. I find myself forced to this view by the general nature of Jesus' teachings throughout the gospels. This may be only one man's opinion, but it surely solves some big questions.

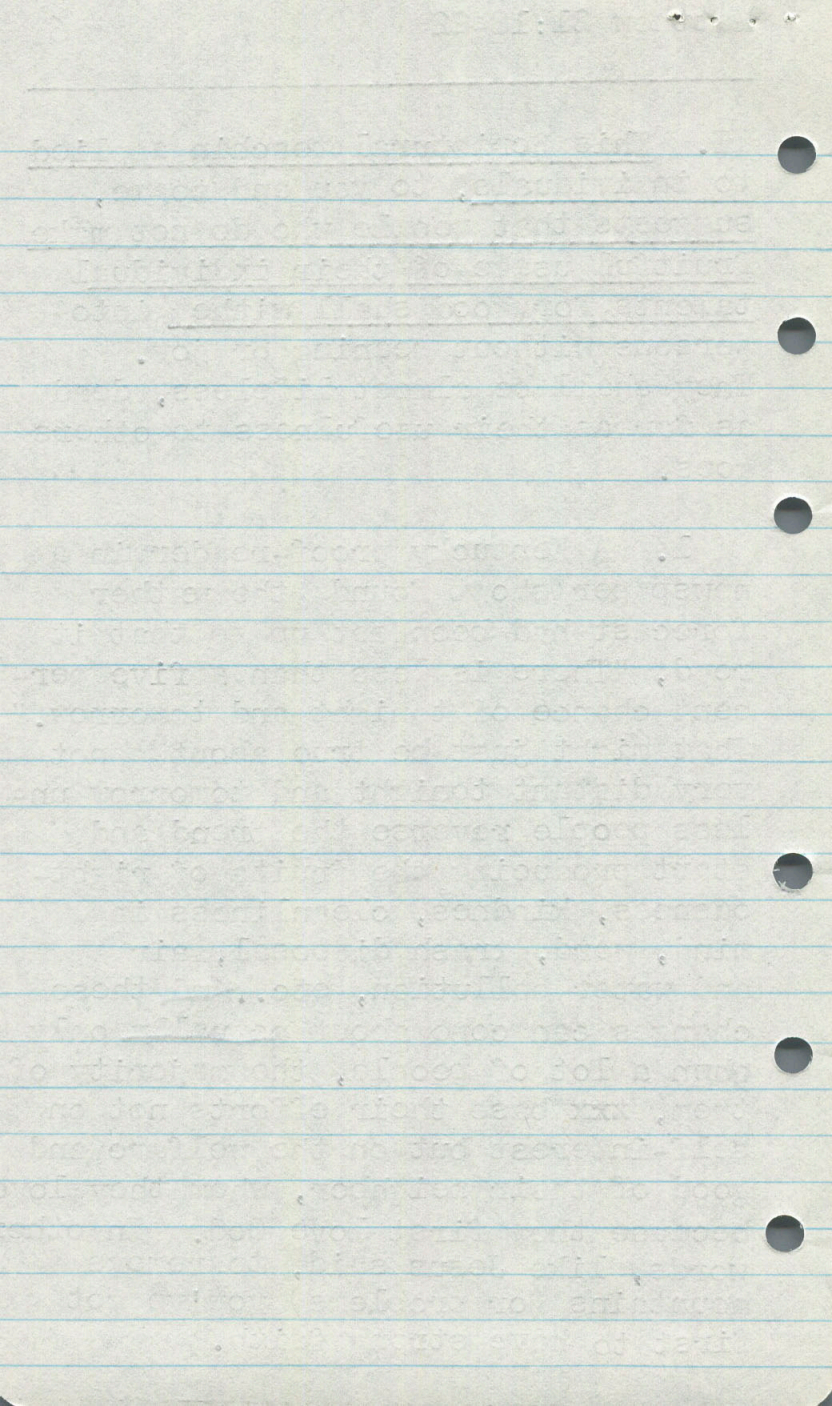
5. In Muke's ^{parable} account, at the request of the gardener it is implied that the landowner let the tree grow for another year, being cared for carefully all the while, giving it another chance and helping it along. This is much more characteristic of all I've been taught and know about Jesus.

6. Matthew and Mark report the incident in a way that is hard to understand. One commentator says that the fig tree was, symbolically, the nation of Israel, and that Jesus was warning that unless Israel grew strong spiritual fruits soon, it would be cursed of God and wither away. That's about what happened ~~for~~ not long after that when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and scattered many of its people.

The first part of the paper discusses the
 importance of the study and the objectives
 of the research. It also outlines the
 methodology used in the study and the
 results obtained. The second part of the
 paper discusses the implications of the
 findings and the conclusions drawn from
 the study. The paper concludes with a
 summary of the main findings and a
 list of references.

II. This Scriptural teaching applied to individuals, to you and to me, suggests that people who do not make fruitful usage of their individual talents for good shall wither into persons without meaning or joy. They shall be almost lifeless, dead as far as their usefulness to others goes.

1. A Kentucky proof-reader in a newspaper shop found the weather forecast had been set up so that it read, "There is less than a five percent chance of tonight and tomorrow." That might just be true about a not very distant tonight and tomorrow unless people reverse the trend and start producing ~~the~~ fruits of righteousness, kindness, cleanliness in mind, word, trash disposal, air and water pollution, etc. ~~And~~ these changes can come about actually only ~~when~~ a lot of people, the majority of them, ~~try~~ base their efforts not on self-interest but on the welfare and good of their neighbor, whom they love because they first love God. In other words, like Jesus said, to remove mountains (or problems) you've got first to have strong faith.



III. Those who constantly and vigorously because of their faith try to perform good acts shall surprise others and themselves at the results.

1. A young father was leaving the church service, and said to the minister at the door, "you spoke of a baby being a new wave on the ocean of life."

The pastor nodded and asked, "Do you have any comments?"

"Instead of a new wave," observed the sleepy-eyed father, "shouldn't you have said a fresh squall?"

(from Progressive Farmer, in Quote 9-27070)

It takes some fresh squalls to purify the air sometimes, to make things new. Young people properly trained can and do serve that purpose in our society. Each person who is converted to the faith of Jesus Christ can also serve as a newborn person, in outlook at least, who is improving things around him. Long enough effort can bring surprises, big surprises.

Conclusion:

1. The Scripture that started us

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1. The first part of the report is devoted to a description of the work done during the year. This is followed by a summary of the results obtained and a discussion of the problems encountered.

2. The second part of the report is devoted to a description of the work done during the year. This is followed by a summary of the results obtained and a discussion of the problems encountered.

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10. The tenth part of the report is devoted to a description of the work done during the year. This is followed by a summary of the results obtained and a discussion of the problems encountered.

is a difficult passage, but we think we've made ~~a bit of~~ sense of it here. I hope so, anyway.

2. This Scripture both warns and encourages us:

a. It warns against sins of omission (not producing fruit),

b. and it encourages and promises rewards to a person who tries hard to be the best Christian person he can.

3. Instead of being a tree without fruit, you can bear attractive, tasty, healthy fruit in all seasons if in faith you work to use all of your abilities to that end.

