

A WORD ON WORSHIP

JANUARY 20, 2013

BY PASTOR ANDREW KICKERT, SUNRISE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Mark 11:12-14

“On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples were listening.”



The last miracle of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is the most unusual. For the first time, a miracle of Jesus brings about death, not life. Needless to say, this raises many questions. How is it that Jesus can tell the disciples where to find a colt tied up from outside the city and yet He can't see from a distance whether a tree has edible fruit? How is Jesus able to feed five thousand people with five fish and two loaves but one fig tree frustrates Him to the point of cursing it?

Sadly, most readers and many commentary writers are shocked to read that Jesus could be so spiteful as to curse a poor fruit tree. Instead of seeing the guilt of an unproductive tree in full leaf, many people think Jesus is being irrational and petulant as He curses the tree. Yet would they wring their hands in disbelief when a chicken farmer assigns a chicken that no longer produces eggs to the stew? What we fail to see is that both the fig tree and the activities of the temple failed to produce the very thing they were created to produce. The tree was created to produce figs and the temple was created to be a house of prayer for all nations. What should the Master do when the proverbial chicken does not produce what it was created to produce?

Jesus has taken the place of the temple during His ministry. Jesus announced in John 2 that He is the Temple. From there, Jesus proclaims throughout the gospels the forgiveness of sin, healing for the sick, and the restoration of people to society. He has replaced the tables of the money changers, where worshippers had to pay for atonement, with the Lord's Table, where He presents the free offering of His life on the cross as payment for the forgiveness of sins to all who come to the Father through Him.

And that leaves one last question for you and me. What were we created for? Were we merely created to make sure we make arrangements with God to get our fire insurance in order? Or should we have learned from the parable of the soils in Mark 4 that the desired end for our lives is to be people of the fourth soil producing fruit? The Lord is very serious about His people growing in maturity so that we produce good fruit. Do not miss the lesson of the fig tree. Realize how God deals with things that do not produce – especially when they outwardly profess to be fruit bearing.

Sunrise Community Church
Come acknowledge the Lord in our midst
EVERY SUNDAY BEGINNING AT 8:45 A.M.

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What's Happening at Sunrise

January 2013

Jan. 20	8:45 a.m.	Mark 11:12-26 <i>Jesus and the Original Occupy Jerusalem Movement</i>
	10:30 a.m.	Sunday School
Jan. 22	7 p.m.	Bible Study at Pastor Andy's
Jan. 25	6:30 p.m.	Friday Night Fellowship
Jan. 27	8:45 a.m.	Mark 11:27-12:12 <i>Who Does Jesus Think He Is?</i>
	10:30 a.m.	Sunday School
Jan. 29	7 p.m.	Bible Study at Pastor Andy's
Feb. 1	7 p.m.	Game Night



US Christian faces death in Iran trial

WASHINGTON — A Tehran court will next week put on trial an Iranian American Christian on charges that could carry the death penalty, his wife said Thursday, in a case that has raised concern among US officials.

Saeed Abedini, a naturalized US citizen who converted to Christianity, was arrested in September on a return visit to Iran and in a recent letter said he suffered beatings in prison, his wife and his US-based lawyer said.

His wife said her 32-year-old husband will face charges of harming national security at a trial starting Monday under Abbas Pir-Abassi, a revolutionary court judge who has been criticized overseas for harsh verdicts.

Naghmeh Abedini voiced hope that international pressure would benefit her husband but said it was “highly possible that put under pressure (by Iran’s leadership) they would give a very long sentence and possibly the death penalty.”

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland recently said the United States had “serious concerns” over the case and urged Iran to grant Abedini access to an attorney. His wife said he has not seen a lawyer since his arrest.

Iran’s constitution following the 1979 Islamic revolution recognizes the rights of several religious minorities including Christians, but the regime has targeted former Muslims for leaving the faith.

Naghmeh Abedini said her husband, with whom she has two children, was detained in 2009 and released after an agreement not to engage in religious activities in Iran, such as working with underground churches.

She said that Saeed Abedini had returned nine times to Iran since 2009 and did not violate the agreement. She said he was building an orphanage near the northern city of Rasht out of a conviction that the Bible teaches helping widows and orphans.

“He had no worries that he would be arrested, believing that he kept his end of the promise and that the government would keep their end,” she told AFP from the western state of Idaho.

Abedini said that the arrest showed an increasingly hard line in Iran. She quoted an interrogator as telling her husband that the regime was worried that “if the country is not following Islam, then we have less control over them.

“So in a way they connect people becoming Christian to politics,” she said.

Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative legal advocacy group that is representing Abedini, said the case illustrated an internal shift in Iran.

The case has moved from the jurisdiction of police and intelligence services under the control of Iran’s president to a revolutionary court that reports to the nation’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

“That’s going to be harsher and it’s going to be more tense and it’s going to be less restricted,” Sekulow said of the revolutionary court. “They kind of can do as they want.”

The American Center for Law and Justice said that 49 members of Congress have urged the State Department to press for Abedini’s release.

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