

# The fig sandwich

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[0:00] Thank you, Daniel, for leading, Phil on the keys, and Roger and Angel for serving tonight.! I did have a bag of figs tonight for you to share, to ruminate while listening to my talk, but unfortunately I forgot them as I did, as I normally do on the kitchen sink or somewhere.

So that would have been a good realia, as you say in EFL, English as a foreign language. If you eat a fig to really get into it, but sorry, no figs tonight. But this is the fig sandwich, my talk, as you'll see. And just a quick recap from last week. So we looked at the main themes. Actually, Daniel, did you choose that last song because of Messiah and Son of God? You did, I thought so. Yeah.

Yeah, it did, didn't it? Yeah. So we looked at how Mark, a lot of Mark is, a lot of theme is based on Christ's messiahship, and he has this title, the Son of God, that goes back to Daniel.

And we looked at how the disciples bragged they wanted a better position in glory with the Lord.

Correct me if I'm wrong, by the way, I'm just going from my recollections.

[1:18] And true discipleship is being a servant, not wanting the best position, but actually being a servant. And Jesus shows that, doesn't he? Because he's going to take the cup, God's wrath for us.

And the way to glory is through suffering. We looked at how baptism was a metaphor of his forthcoming death. So, first of all, imagine going away on holiday, leaving your older children to look after the home.

You expect them to clean it, look after it, do the washing up, etc. However, on returning back, Julie's laughing here because this has happened to her.

It's a tip. Coming back home, rubbish is strewn everywhere. No one has cleaned the dishes. There is a stench of mouldy food.

The TV is on. Not only this, but your children have invited their friends over for a sleepover, and they're living in the home, treating it disrespectfully.

[2:32] How shocking. Well, was this how Jesus felt? Has he entered the temple all those years back? So, this is the fig sandwich.

And, yeah, Matthew, sorry, Mark, not Matthew, Mark 11, verses 11 to 25, we're going to look at this evening. We're not going to look at the triumphal entry, and we're not going to look at the authority of Jesus' question, by the way.

Oh, by the way, I do have Q&As; at the end, so we can discuss that, happy to discuss that. But I just want to focus on verses 12 to 25 tonight. Okay?

So, here's the fig sandwich. And, of course, if you have a fig sandwich, the first part is the? Thank you, Corinne. Yeah. So, we're looking at verses 12 to 14. Let's read, though, shall we?

The next day, as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 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.

[3:41] Then he said to the tree, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard him say it. So, the day after Christ, he's been hailed as the Jewish Messiah.

Hosanna, Hosanna. We read, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, Hosanna.

Hosanna. Presumably, there were lots of fig trees and date trees around Bethany.

And like the vine illustration, we've been looking at the vine in John's Gospel recently, the fig tree was an emblem of Israel's faithfulness, or should I say fruitfulness, or fruitlessness in the Old Testament.

In Jeremiah 8.13, it says, What does Jesus notice on his journey to the cross?

[5:57] Verse 13, barren fruit. He found nothing but leaves. The tree is a metaphor for the spiritual state of Israel.

Ordinarily, a fig tree grows leaves at the same time it grows fruit. Is he seeing good fruit as he comes into Jerusalem?

Will he see lives devoted to God, worshipping him wholeheartedly, keeping his laws and requirements, recognising him as the Messiah King who comes to suffer for his people?

Do they identify him as the suffering servant from Isaiah, come to free them from the tyranny of sin?

Will he find good fruit in his chosen people?

Well, he sees a barren tree with no figs, not even one, just green leaves. We see that Jesus was hungry in verse 12.

[7:07] This reveals his human nature. He wants to eat some good, tasty, satisfying fruit. He finds none. Will he find fruitful worship as he enters Jerusalem a second time?

The bread. Well, let's move on to the figs, or perhaps no figs.

Let's read verses 15 and 16. On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

Verse 17. And as he taught them, he said, is it not written, my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers?

Apparently, Jesus would have entered the outer courts of the temple. Interestingly, he was in the temple, actually, a day before, wasn't he? Checking it out. It was late at night and he goes out.

[8:18] What did he see there? That's a good question. Did he see what he's about to see? And he hopes to see good fruit. Imagine this scene as you are in the temple courts.

You're a bystander there that day. All the hubbub of noise, the sound and smell of animals, people bartering over how much money they are willing to pay for some pigeons to sacrifice, exchanging money to and fro, Roman currency into the temple currency.

Then suddenly someone comes in and starts overturning the tables, telling people to get out, stopping people from coming through. Everyone freezes in shock.

Who is this? The judge has come to judge his people first, not the nasty Romans. And how do they fare?

Well, in Jeremiah's day, similarly, the people were living duplicitous lives. They were in the world committing adultery, lying, stealing, murder, you name it, worshipping false gods.

[9:36] And yet on the Sabbath, they were coming into the temple and offering worship through the rituals, the sacrifices, as if the Lord would accept them, even though they were not honouring him with their lives.

At that time, the Lord judged them. He rebuked them. They were treating the temple like a safe den. A place to go after you had committed your sin, to protect yourself from punishment. What did the Lord see?

He saw a dead fig tree. There were no tasty figs. Is what Jesus doing here, more than a cleansing of the temple, is he not showing us that he has come to replace it himself?

Is he saying, well, it serves no purpose anymore. The old wineskins need replacing with new ones.

[10:48] A better sacrifice is needed. No more money needs to be paid for sacrifice. I will pay it all myself. The people in Jesus' day, like Jeremiah's, were hiding from judgment and excusing their sinful behaviour.

People were probably making money out of the sacrificial system. God's house was a marketplace rather than a place of prayer. Verse 17.

Is it not written, my house we call a house of prayer for all nations? The nations should be coming here for worship, adoring the Lord, honouring him, devoting themselves to him.

It is worth pointing out, I read, that apparently trade for animals to be sacrificed was permitted. But the issue is how this was done.

It seems as though people were making far too much money out of it. And perhaps this should be done elsewhere. And in particular, we see the reaction of the chief priests in verse 18, and the teachers of the law, because they fear him.

[12:08] And they began looking for a way to kill him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. The reaction here, it seems that they are angry.

Perhaps they were making money out of this system as well. So figs, or perhaps no figs. And what happens after the figs you get? Thank you.

Verses 20 and 21. Shall we read it again? In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, look, the fig tree you cursed has withered.

Mark then goes back to the fig tree the next day. Presumably, Jesus is with his disciples once more, as Peter, Peter, sorry, is mentioned in verse 21.

They walk past the same fig tree as they take the same journey out of Bethany. Picture the scene. One day, you see a perfectly healthy tree.

[13:20] The next day, it's shriveled up, withered, and dead. What a contrast. Judgment has come. Not on the nasty Romans, but in the house of God.

The Savior comes to look for fruit in the temple and sees none. True worship is not found.

Judgment starts in the house of God.

And for us, it's easy, isn't it, to go through the rituals of church, and it's not going to help us unless we have heart transformation.

Coming to church, singing praise, taking communion, going through the waters of baptism, leading a meeting, giving money to the church, preaching, reading your Bible.

This won't count nothing, as nothing, if we are hiding sin in our hearts. The Lord sees our hearts. He wants us to have wholehearted devotion.

[14:24] He wants to see fruit in our lives. True religion is lives, or our lives, transformed in Christ, in the Messiah. Then all the things I listed will be done in the right way.

Well, lastly, let's see the good fig tree. The good fig tree in verses 22 and 25. It's probably worth reading that as well.

Have faith in God, Jesus answered. Truly, I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, go, throw yourself into the sea, and it does not, and does not doubt in their hearts, but believes what they say will happen, it will be done for them.

Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Well, here is a picture of the good fig tree bearing good fruits. This last section focuses on faith and prayer. The contrary to no fruit, empty religion, is true worship, a life of faith and prayer.

[15:43] And here, Jesus gives us a snapshot of what he's looking for. He's looking for good figs. What is he saying here? Well, firstly, faith in prayer.

Where is Jesus? Well, he's on Olivet, just outside Jerusalem. He can see the temple mounts, and the Dead Sea. Verse 23, truly, I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, over there, go throw yourself into the sea, the Dead Sea, and does not doubt.

This mountain, not a mountain, this is going to be destroyed. Thank you, Daniel.

Yes, the temple mount, he can see in the distance, is going to be destroyed. Yes, it's going to be replaced with a better one through the Lord Jesus Christ, a living one. Jesus' journey to the cross speaks about the destruction of the old order of things.

There is a new order coming in place. Ultimately, there will be no need for people to go to this mountain anymore, as access to God is coming through a much better sacrifice, the Messiah.

[17:21] Have faith faith in God, Jesus says, in verse 22. What type of faith? It's the kind that trusts that God's power, his word, is so great that if you ask him for anything, within reason, he will do it.

J.C. Ryle explains, although there is one faith in God, yeah, sola faith, trusting and believing in God, however, there are varying objects of faith.

There is justification of faith in that we receive through Christ's atonement on the cross for our sins, but here, this faith is talking here about believing in God's supreme power to answer prayer, his promises, his word.

we can grasp and hold on to that. If we have faith in Christ's power, his word, then God will be able to answer our prayers.

do we have this kind of faith, this kind of belief? It says that, doesn't it?

[18:36] Do not doubt in their hearts but believes what will happen, it will be done for them. It reminds me of James. I think I've got the right quote, but we can just skip to James. You can correct me if I'm wrong.

This is kind of a parallel verse. It's difficult to find James, isn't it? It's near Hebrews. Before Peter, after Hebrews.

I think it's in James 1.6. It says, but when you ask, you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind.

I think that's the verse I was alluding to that sort of mirrors this. We should not doubt. So the good fig tree. And for us as a church, perhaps our mountain would be pastoral accommodation.

We've been thinking about, praying about. It seems huge, isn't it? But let's have faith that the Lord will provide without doubt and he will give it to us.

[19:50] It says it in his word. We should believe it. It will be yours. We're not asking for pie in the sky. It's not an unreasonable request. So let's pray, brothers and sisters, that the Lord will provide this for our pastor and his wife and future pastors and wives.

this is an encouraging word for us as a church. And lastly, the fruit of forgiveness in verse 25.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins. Here we see the importance of forgiveness.

How can we have our prayers answered and expect God to forgive us when we are holding on to bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness ourselves?

Doesn't make sense. If we have not truly understood the great grace of God's mercy in forgiving our debts, then we will not forgive others.

[21:01] when we realise how horrible our sin is and Christ's rich pardon on the cross, then we will be able to forgive others.

Brothers and sisters, forgiving others is key. Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This is tough. It's easy saying it, but really tough doing it, especially when we have been wronged.

Our natural instinct is vengeance. C.S. Lewis said, everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.

Jason Mayer says, unforgiveness reveals a tragic double standard in us. When others fail us, we tend to put the spotlight on their evil actions.

[22:04] When we fail others, we tend to put the spotlight on our good intentions. I'll say that again. Unforgiveness reveals a tragic double standard in us.

When others fail us, we tend to put the spotlight on their evil actions. But when we fail others, we tend to put the spotlight on our good intentions. God will fruit.

To conclude this talk, if the king came back today, what would he see in our heart? Would he see fruitfulness? Sincere devotion to him?

No double standards? A life of faith? Praying forgiving others? How would he find Calvary Church? His church? Well, hopefully, he would see fruit.

Tonight's illustration is quite a sad picture, isn't it, brothers and sisters, of our saviour not seeing fruitfulness in his people, and how they didn't really identify the suffering servant as he journeys to the cross.

[23:12] Nonetheless, it is a great relief that through this journey to the cross, he did it for us. He shows us that there is a better way for reconciliation between man and humankind and God, and that is through him, through the Messiah.

He is the living temple, and one day the Messiah will return back, and true justice will be finally seen. I'd like to read Malachi 4 to finish.

Last book of the Old Testament. Malachi 4, 1 to 3. 1 to 3. Surely the day is coming.

It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. And in that day, what that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty.

Not a root or a branch will be left to them, but for you who revere my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays, and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

[24:26] Then you will trample on the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet. On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. Here he's speaking to the remnants, those that were faithful.

faithful. And we can be encouraged tonight, brothers and sisters, that if we are faithful, if we are fruitful, then we will see the son of righteousness rise, see those rays of righteousness, and we'll be like those well-fed calves.

And that's the reward for those who stay fruitful. Because in the end, the ungodly will be destroyed, but the righteous will live. Amen. Amen. So I've got a few questions from the passage.

And do we have a song as well at the end or not? We do. Okay. So we'll have an open discussion, and then we'll sing to close. Okay? So.

My questions, I would have to answer them in any order. If you have a better question, please say, what struck you from this passage? What encouraged you? Do you agree with my interpretation of the passage?

[25:38] If not, why not? Are there any more areas of application? You can see from this text that we can apply to our lives. And is there any other thread that I did not look at, which would perhaps be helpful for us to look at from this passage?

And if you want to speak about the other passages that we didn't look at in Mark 11, we can. So, should you say 10 minutes?

Discussion? Is that okay? As a whole? Whole body? Please. Yeah. We have the roving mic. I think the mic's at the back. Is that right? Yeah?

So, if you want to speak, put your hand up and please speak. But if there's no discussion, that's fine. One thing I'd never noticed before, which I think you're quite right to bring to our attention, is that when Jesus talked about throwing the mountain into the sea, he was talking about the temple mound.

I'd never really clocked that before, and I think that's important. It kind of refers back to Zerubbabel, who had to clear the top of the temple mound to build the temple in the first place.

[26:56] He was told, not by might, not by power, but by my spirit. So, he cleared the top of the mountain to build the temple, but they were going to throw down the temple, in a sense.

Yeah. I got that from someone else, so that was not me. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'd say something that struck me was in verse 13, where it says, seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit.

When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves. And then the reason that's given is because it was not the season for figs. Yeah. And I found that really curious because when I remember that specific passage, I've remembered it as it was meant to be sprouting figs.

So, like, it was in season, but it wasn't, and that's why Jesus was upset. And so, reading it now, and it's like, okay, it wasn't meant to be sprouting figs in that season anyway.

And I suppose, I don't, I mean, I don't want to read too much into the text, but I suppose it echoes something of, you know, the count of the five virgins, the ten virgins, when it's like some of them were ready, some of them weren't, like, this idea of always being prepared.

[28:11] But I thought it was quite curious that he expected there to be figs even though they weren't in bloom, in season. Yeah. Yeah, that's a bit bizarre. I guess thinking about it just now, that's actually, perhaps it's a metaphor for actually, they should be in season.

The Israelites, the Jewish nation should be in season, ready for the Messiah, but they're not.

They're out of season. Yeah. Sorry. really quickly in line with that. I think what struck me was after, in verse 14, when he says, then he said to the tree, may no one ever eat fruit from you again.

Yeah, I just thought that was a, I don't know, a reaction that I wouldn't have expected. Firstly, the tree is not meant to be in season, but then after he says, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. Yeah. It's almost like the tree can actually listen. It's like a human, isn't it? It's anthropomorphic. It's almost like it's alive. Oh, I have my hand up as well.

Okay. I was simply just going to remark on how wonderful it is that the Lord is speaking to us again about fruitfulness after the vine the other week and here again.

[29:27] Yeah. That's all I had to say. Thank you. I was going to pick up on a couple of things. That idea of Jesus looking for fruit, even though there wasn't going to be any, but he still looked, didn't he?

And I wonder whether you could say that he gave Israel every chance and even though there wasn't going to be any fruit, but he still gave them a chance.

He would still come and have a good look. And as it goes on in the narrative, he looks for fruit in various different interviews and situations and debates.

And the only fruit he finds is the woman who gives the little coin into the treasury. Now that's fruit, but the rest of it. So I wonder whether that's perhaps something behind the fact he's looking, even though every indication is there won't be any, he still gives it a chance.

The other thing I was going to say, and thank you for saying this, that idea of, oh, I forgot what it was going to be. Yeah. When he, you mentioned when he went into the temple and turned over the tables of the money changers.

[30:38] I remember talking about this to one particular group and they said, oh, well, the problem is that they were trading on the Lord's Day. And in which, which to say, if Jesus had made sure that they traded respectfully and honestly, would that have been okay?

Would Jesus have said, yep, that's fine. Because I think what you brought out was that the whole system had reached its sell-by date. That the whole temple system, it just fails again and again. I mean, in a sense there's nothing wrong with it, but it just keeps on failing. And the, I think it's in John's gospel where Jesus, in the same context, I think it's worth having a look.

Is it in John 2? talks about the destruction of the temple. Yeah, in John 2, verse 19, Jesus says, in the same context, but he doesn't say this in Mark, he says it in John, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.

This is verse 19. And they say, just take 46 years to build this temple and you're going to raise it in three days. But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

[32:12] And that idea that, the destroyed this temple is ambiguous. Does he mean that they will destroy it or it will be destroyed or some, something like that? And what is he actually referring to?

And then it becomes clear, perhaps only with hindsight, but in verse 21, the temple he had spoken of was his body. And of course, the Jewish leaders were going to actively consign Jesus to death. But the idea that the old temple has had its day and the new temple is the body of Jesus. Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days is his resurrection, isn't it?

So there's a whole set of things sort of combining together. The sell-by date of the old temple system and the new thing of everything being focused on Jesus and his resurrection.

So I think that is a marvelous thing, which leads me on to one other comment if I may. Sometimes Christians who take the same interpretation as you've done are accused of replacement theology, which I don't think is a very helpful way of describing things.

[33:38] But I think it is worth addressing the fact that in John's gospel and in Mark's gospel, there is an ending of God using ethnic Israel and the temple structures to fulfill his plans.

He is going to fulfill his plans, but they're going to be fulfilled in Jesus. And that idea that the exclusive right of ethnic Israel to be the place where God works things out is forfeited.

Perhaps it's worth adding, I think Chikundi said that no one will ever eat fruit from you again. I think we read that in the context of the whole of the New Testament, which doesn't say no Jews will ever be converted, but they will be converted to Christ in the same way that Gentiles are.

And so there will be Jewish people who belong to the kingdom, but not just because they're born Jews, but because they're born again. There, I'll stop now.

Yeah, yeah. And perhaps we can stretch the temple metaphor to us being bricks in the temple, growing. Isn't that in the New Testament? We are the temple as well. Yeah, because he is, yeah. [35:01] Anybody else? Yeah, Jerome. Yeah, thank you for that. It was really, really helpful. I was thinking of the whole, when Chikundi was talking about may no one ever eat fruit from you again, I think that whole idea of that whole religious system, the sacrificial system, the Jewish theocracy, that dispensation was coming to an end with Christ coming.

And we see that in AD 70 when that was so symbolic in terms of what that meant in the destruction of the temple. And we're now in those, in the last days, the days of Christ.

And I think, yeah, just to emphasize what Phil said, it doesn't, I don't think it means there's not a plan or purpose for any ethnic Jews again. That's not what it's saying, but it's that dispensation, that religious system.

And it's a glory, isn't it? That Jew and Gentile are both brought in to the church and it's all in Christ and Christ is the true temple. Just something else I wanted to pick up on, which I thought was really helpful, Mark.

And something I think in that I've somewhat shied away from, and I think it can be an overreaction in our type of churches, we're very nervous about name it and claim it theology, prosperity theology.

[36:23] So when you get these sections which talk about, you know, whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea and do not doubt in your heart but believe that what he says will come to pass.

These kinds of texts have been so kind of perverted and twisted by prosperity teachers. But I think it's important that we do come at this with faith and big prayers.

And we don't go too far the other way. Does that make sense? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So thank you for that. It is important. And because some of the language we hear, like, you know, have faith and, you know, pray with faith, we can sometimes associate it with televangelists, which, you know, say some rather unhelpful things.

And that's not actually what the text means. No. No. Yeah. Thank you. Well, shall we end in a song then and then I'll close in prayer?

Well, shall we end in a song then?