

Lying Leaves and Temple Thieves

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[0 : 00] As I began to study this week, I realized that this text has actually historically been much more controversial than what I even thought that it was. There's a man named Bertrand Russell, who was a British philosopher and agnostic around the turn of the 20th century, late 1800s, early 1900s.

And he actually pointed to the events of this passage in Mark chapter 11 in his famous essay, Why I'm Not a Christian. When he read of particularly Jesus cursing the fig tree, he found it utterly offensive to the point that he decided this is one of the very reasons that I am not a Christian, why I don't believe Christ and why I don't think other people should believe Christ either.

That he would take whatever power that he was given, if it's even true that he had it, and he would exercise it in a destructive way. And Bertrand Russell just couldn't get past that.

And he says, this is one of the reasons I'm not a Christian. And then I was surprised to discover that even some beloved New Testament scholars who are much more friendly to Christianity on the whole have written that Jesus' actions were unnecessary here.

That they tarnished his character. One of them, William Barclay, even wrote, quote, that Jesus was acting petulantly. Insinuating that the actions of Jesus, particularly as it related to the fig tree here, was like a spoiled child who didn't get his way.

[1 : 42] That's what he means by petulance here. And they believe that this actually tarnishes the person of Jesus. But the foolishness of these critics, and it is foolishness, it is wrought with inconsistency.

Think about it a moment. People who would have no problem at all cutting down a tree for firewood, or to furnish their home, or to have parchment on which they can write their critics of Jesus and his ways, are suddenly shocked when the creator of the tree actually exercises authority over it in order that he can teach a vital spiritual lesson to his disciples.

And it's the same kind of inconsistency that accompanies some people's thoughts of when Jesus cast out the legion of demons in chapter 5.

Do you remember that? Remember the people of the nation, the country, that area, they actually asked him to leave. They were so bothered by what he did. The fact that he would cast out these demons into pigs, and that the pigs were then destroyed.

Those people would have no problem slaughtering a pig for their breakfast bacon. But then all of a sudden they're offended when Jesus uses them to cleanse a man and heal him from demonic torture.

[3 : 11] There's amazing inconsistency in that type of criticism. And really, that type of criticism really only comes from the heart of unbelievers. And you may not agree with them.

Certainly, you would affirm the fact that the potter has right over the clay. Jesus, as creator and Lord of all creation, has the right to do whatever he wants with whatever he wants.

And whatever he does is perfectly righteous as the holy God. We would affirm all of that. But that doesn't mean that we don't also have some questions about what Jesus did here. With the cursing of the fig tree, and then also the clearing of the temple.

And if you have some questions about that, I just want you to know you're not alone. That's why I'm dealing with it so much right now. It's okay to have questions. But I think that the employing of good, correct, interpretive principles will help us come to the right answers in this.

One such principle is this. Whenever we study our Bibles, we always interpret the obscure by what is clear. Always interpret the obscure by what is clear.

[4 : 23] What is it that we know is absolutely true of Jesus, and absolutely true about what the Bible says of him, despite this peculiar narrative that we find ourselves here in Mark chapter 11.

Well, has there ever been a time in the Bible that it has insinuated in any way that Jesus acted vindictively, or that he was not in control?

No. Never. Every time we see Jesus in the Bible, he is always in control. He's never acting vindictively.

That's never true. So why would we immediately bring a thought like that to this particular passage? You see what I mean? We take the obscure, we interpret it first by what is clear. And the Bible clearly teaches that that is not characteristic of Jesus, right?

So we don't automatically go there. But then there's also the matter of context. What is this purpose?

[5 : 27] Why would Mark include this here? And how does he actually present it in his gospel? And he actually does something very beneficial for us in chapter 11, something that Matthew doesn't do.

We see another literary sandwich. This is one of Mark's favorite techniques. In fact, commentators call them Markin sandwiches. And we've seen him do this a number of times already in our study, where Mark will begin a story, and then he'll suddenly change to a different story.

And then after he finishes that one, he'll conclude the original story. You remember? He's done that a number of times already. Now notice what the pattern was here in this chapter.

He deals with the fig tree, and then he just kind of leaves it alone. And he goes to the clearing of the temple, and he finishes that narrative, and then he returns back to the fig tree.

Fig tree, temple, fig tree. He's linking these stories together in order that we might rightly interpret them. In other words, Mark is saying this issue with the fig tree is the same issue as the issue with the temple.

[6 : 33] And we're to understand the fig tree by the temple and understand the temple by the fig tree. And what we discover in this context is that Jesus was teaching his disciples a crucial lesson about true faith and the fruitfulness that issues from it.

And the driving point of this particular passage is that God will not tolerate hypocritical, corrupt worship.

And it's an important lesson that we need to give our attention to this morning. Well, let's work through the narrative here. The first thing I have here is cursing the tree. Cursing the tree.

Look with me at verse 12. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

Now, it's not typical for Mark to give us these timing notes in his gospel.

So we want to pay attention to him when he does. And I think that it's here for a really specific reason. Do you remember the previous day's events that we talked about last Sunday? This whole issue of Jesus riding to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives on the colt of a donkey.

[7 : 45] Do you remember what Jesus did once he got into the city of Jerusalem? He went to the temple. And what did he do there? Verse 11. Look at it again. And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. So Jesus had just spent the previous evening examining everything that was taking place in the temple.

This was no surprise to him what he awoke to the next day. This is not a surprise. He had just examined all of this the night before. And he goes to the temple. Suddenly, the crowds are not there anymore.

And he's going around and he's witnessing what is actually happening there. What are the processes that they're following? He's looking at all the stuff. And then it just says that he leaves. And he quietly leaves the city. He resorts to Bethany.

And undoubtedly, as would have been his pattern, probably spent the evening in prayer. And this is an important contextual note. Because it eliminates the notion that Jesus was acting spontaneously here.

[8 : 52] Jesus didn't just happen across the fig tree the next morning. He didn't just happen to be surprised by what was happening at the temple and so angered by it in this, that moment that he spontaneously began to drive people out and turn over tables.

No, this was premeditated action. Jesus witnessed it all. And then he went back to Bethany. And he spent the night praying, probably. And he planned a course of action for the next day.

He was not acting vindictively. This was not petulant anger. But he was carrying out the perfectly righteous plan to teach a powerful lesson.

Okay, you with me? Right? Jesus was not surprised by any of this. He planned this. Okay? Verse 13. So as they journeyed back to Jerusalem from Bethany, Jesus led his disciples to a fig tree that was in full bloom.

Now, Jesus was fully aware that this tree was fruitless. Just like Jesus was fully aware of all the other things that he had done.

[10:23] Okay? He saw the tree in the distance. And his knowledge of its fruitlessness is precisely why he went to it. He's teaching his disciples something.

He's going there on purpose. As far as his disciples are concerned, Jesus was simply checking the tree for fruit because he was hungry. And once it was examined and found to be barren, Jesus pronounced this curse.

And he did it in such a way that the 12 could hear. Notice what Mark is saying. Notice the details. Jesus plans it. He goes to the tree.

He examines it thoroughly in the sight of the disciples. And then where they can hear him clearly, he pronounces this curse. But what is it that stirred his anger here?

It wasn't merely the fact that the tree had no fruit. The typical season in Palestine, at least, from what I understand, the typical season for fruit bearing and fig trees is late summer, early fall.

[11:32] There were some exceptions to that, but very rare exceptions. Mostly, the figs were going to come in late summer, early fall. So there's no reason at all that anyone would ever expect that this tree was supposed to have figs at this moment.

Mark even gives us that note. It's not the season for figs. He wasn't saying that to castigate Jesus in some way. He's saying that to let us know Jesus would never have expected this tree to have figs because it wasn't the season for figs.

There's only one reason, one sign that showed or indicated that this tree might have some figs on it. And it was its leaves. Because the early figs always followed the leaf.

And Jesus sees that this tree is in the distance and he sees it's in full bloom. It's a leafy tree.

Indicating that what it offers to anyone who would come to it is fruitfulness.

It will have figs that can satisfy hunger and can be what Jesus needed for it to be in that moment physically. It's the leafiness of the tree that has Jesus' attention.

[12:41] So why then does he curse it? Because when he gets there, it actually has no fruit. The leaves were lying. It was the hypocritical boast of fruitfulness that the tree had.

When in reality, it was barren. It had all the trappings of a tree full of fruit. But it left its hungry admirers unsatisfied and starving.

And because of its hypocrisy, Jesus cursed him. And it would never bear fruit again. Do you see? It wasn't that it was just fruitless.

It wasn't that time for figs anyways. It's that it was telling everybody, I have fruit. Come and eat. And when you get there, you're left starving and unsatisfied.

That's what stirs Jesus' anger with the tree. But then the narrative changes, right? And he goes straight to the temple. Because it's an enacted parable. This is not a parable that Jesus is speaking.

[13:48] It's a parable that Jesus is acting out. He is demonstrating it by his behavior. And his curse was a prophetic illustration.

It was an illustration of Israel's hypocrisy and God's judgment against it. Fig tree was a common symbol for Israel in the Old Testament.

And the fact that this tree had elaborate foliage but bore no fruit portrayed how Jesus saw the nation of Israel and their worship.

And it was all typified, as we'll see in just a moment, in the corruption of the temple worship and the nation's leaders. That was the tip of the iceberg.

And Jesus is going to go and deal with it. Sinclair Ferguson wrote, Israel, like the fig tree, showed the outward signs of bearing fruit. But those who approached it spiritually hungry found none.

[14:52] Although planted by God, nurtured by his servants, the people of God were spiritually barren. Like vine branches which bore no fruit, they would be cast aside.

So no, Jesus' curse wasn't about spiteful anger. It was about righteous judgment. And it was a picture displaying God's wrath against those who dress in the trappings of faithfulness.

But are inwardly barren and corrupt. And churches are filled with these fig trees. They have all the trappings of a faithful Christian.

They dress the part. They go to the services. They give in the offering box. They do the things. They say the words.

They go through the lingo. But inwardly, they're barren. There's no fruitfulness at all in their life. It's just a hypocritical boast. They're playing games with God.

[15 : 58] And this is a warning. That God doesn't play those games. He's not interested in hypocritical worship. He doesn't care what you look like.

He's not concerned with whether or not you're following all the steps that your religion tells you to follow. He's concerned about your heart. This was always God's problem with Israel.

In Isaiah chapter 1, God specifically speaks through Isaiah and he tells the nation of Israel, I am so full of the blood of goats and of bulls. Stop it with the sacrifices.

I don't care about your feast. I don't care about all these things you are doing because I do not have your heart. God doesn't care if you're going through the motions. He's not concerned about that.

He's in one hypocritical worship. And this is a warning to all of us who may fit that description. So we see cursing the tree.

[16 : 54] Then we see clearing the temple. Look at verse 15. And they came to Jerusalem and he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?

But you have made it a den of robbers. And the chief priest and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him. For they feared him because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

And when evening came, they went out of the city. Well, if you're like me, you probably spent more time trying to wrap your mind around the clearing of the temple than you have the cursing of the fig tree.

And I think there's some reasons for that. Where, like I said before, we're taken aback by Jesus' action because it's so different from what we're accustomed. Or maybe it's very different from what we desire to see from Jesus, isn't it?

[18 : 07] It's not just that we don't see him acting this way very often in the gospels. It's that we don't want to see a Jesus that responds this way, right? We find this offensive.

We all want a God of love and compassion. But we resist a God of judgment. We resist a God who acts in righteous anger against sin and corruption.

And we of all people understand what this is like. We live in the midst of the capital of cultural Christianity. Which has emphasized God's love in such a way that people are shocked by notions of God's wrath.

Notions of God's judgment. And by focusing on God's mercy while neglecting the reality of God's justice, many people have just, under the banner of Christianity, have made a God of their own making.

They worship not the true God, but they worship the God that they want. And then when we pair that with our obsession with individuality and relativity, people think that any correction from God is an assault against our autonomy.

[19 : 22] We don't believe God's sovereignty should overrule our individuality. We make ourselves God. And we're fine with God ruling other people's lives.

And we're fine with Him ruling the nations. And we're fine with Him controlling the weather. We're fine with doing all of that. Just don't rule over me because that would be an encroachment on my personal autonomy.

And like the Pharisees and the religious leaders, perhaps you read this story, and your first question that comes to your mind cynically is, what gives Jesus the right to go into the temple and start flipping over people's tables?

What gives Him the right to do that? That comes from the same heart that says, what gives Jesus the right to tell me how I'm supposed to live?

What gives Jesus the right to come into my life and tell me who I'm supposed to marry? Or how I'm supposed to be activated in sexual intimacy? And who gives Jesus the right to come in and tell me the way that I'm supposed to worship?

[20 : 28] And the things that I'm supposed to do? No, that's encroaching on who I am. That's not what God's supposed to do. He's just supposed to provide the stuff that I want. He's not supposed to tell me what to do.

Yes, Jesus is a compassionate Savior, and He wants to save us, but He's also the holy God, and He will not tolerate sinful lives and corrupt worship.

He won't do it. And the righteous indignation of Jesus in this text, it does not contradict His divinity. It glorifies His divinity.

Jesus' reaction here doesn't, it shouldn't lead you to think, well, maybe He's not God. No, it should actually lead you to the fact that He actually is God. He cares explicitly about our worship and our lives, and our proper understanding of this event should lead us to humbly bow to Him, not arrogantly accuse Him.

Okay? Let's look at it. First, let's see the clearing examined. What actually happened here? Let's talk about it. So the temple in Jerusalem is the most sacred place in Judaism.

[21 : 40] The Passover is among the holiest of celebrations to the Jews. There's a lot happening in Jerusalem in this moment. And I want you to imagine with me, if you would, the incredible scale of what is actually happening here in chapter 11.

It's hard to see it when you're just reading it, but think about it for just a moment. Josephus was a Jewish historian, Hellenistic Jewish historian from around the first century.

Am I doing something? If I do something with that, I'll switch if it happens again. Sorry about that. I don't want to annoy you. Anyways, Josephus wrote that in AD 65, about 30 years after this, there were 255,600 lambs that were offered during Passover in Jerusalem.

That's a lot of lambs, okay? Now, as the people of Israel gathered together for the Passover celebration, there wouldn't have been any less than 10 people per lamb, okay?

This was a community thing. It's a family thing that they did. You didn't do this on your own. If you didn't have family of your own, you would attach to somebody else's. That's how they would go through the Passover. So a conservative estimate in AD 65 is 2.5 million people at Passover in Jerusalem.

[22 : 56] Now, to put that in perspective, in Mecklenburg County, not Charlotte, but Mecklenburg County, that includes us here, Cornelius, 1.1 million people, okay?

In Wake County, which is Raleigh and the area surrounding Raleigh, 1.1 million people. In Guilford County, Greensboro, 500,000 people.

So imagine all the residents in Mecklenburg County, all the residents in Wake County, all the residents in Guilford County, come together for a celebration in uptown Charlotte, okay?

All at one time. That begins to set the scene for what's happening with Jesus here. Now, imagine when all those people from all those counties come to Charlotte, they all have to go to the arena downtown to get the stuff that they need for their celebration.

And they only have a couple of days to do it. So 2.5 million people all going to Time Warner Cable Arena or Spectrum Center, whatever it's called now, all in a matter of two to three days to buy animals and wine and salt and all the things that they would need for the sacrifices.

[24 : 06] This is a huge scale happening here, right? Now, the text tells us that there were four groups of people that Jesus drove out. And again, it's not the number of people that are there that angers him.

It's what they're doing. First, it says he drove out those who sold. Then those who bought, the money changers, and then the people carrying things through.

So those who were selling were selling livestock, wine, oil, salt, all the things necessary for the sacrifice, which this was a necessary service. They needed to do this for people traveling to Jerusalem.

The problem was these merchants brought their business into the temple. They had set up shop and constructed these stalls inside the temple courtyard. And this is where they were going about their business.

So people had to come inside of the courtyard of the temple. And not only are there lots of people there, but there's lots of animals there. Can you just imagine the circus this is? Where you go to church one day for a really massive church, like a three football fields wide church.

[25 : 14] You go there one day. And all of a sudden, there's all these merchants, and it's loaded with animals. And they're making all kinds of noise, and they're doing all kinds of animalistic things,

and it stinks. And then there's all these people that are also coming in there, and they're all trying to buy what they need to buy.

And maybe they're bartering, or maybe they're doing whatever they need to do to get. You're there to pray. You're there to worship. But you can't even process a thought because it's a circus around you.

So what does Jesus do? He goes in, and he drives out the people that are selling all the stuff. He gets them out of the temple. But then he drives out the people who are buying too. This is important, I think.

Those purchasing those items were also driven out. Now think, you're a person. You're going to Jerusalem. You've got to get your stuff. And you really hate the way that the merchants are doing this.

Like you don't like it, and you wish it was different. But you go and you do it anyways. Because you don't want to trouble yourself to have to do it any other way. And you become complicit in what's happening in this corruption of worship.

[26 : 15] You may not like it, but you still go along with it. That's what's happening. Jesus drives them out too. The money changers. They were the third group. So the Old Testament law commanded every male 20 years and older would have to pay a temple tax.

It was half shekel weight. The problem was they couldn't just bring any type of money. Any coin that had an inscription of a false god or of a pagan ruler like of Rome was not allowed to be used in the temple tax.

It had to be something sacred. So they would have money changers. The money changers would exchange for the right rate. And they would give the right coinage that these people could then actually pay their temple tax.

The problem is these money changers have set up shop in the temple and they're charging exorbitant fees in order for people to go about this.

So much so that Jesus flips over their tables and calls them thieves. This is supposed to be an act of worship. They've made it a marketplace and they're robbing people.

[27 : 24] And then we stop and we say, this overturning tables thing is a little much, isn't it? I mean, if you're ever watching TV or a movie and you see somebody get angry and turn over a table, that's a violent act, right?

Nobody goes up to someone else and says, excuse me, kind sir, I'm not really pleased with the way you're doing this. I think I'm just going to flip your table over. You just scoot back a little bit and we'll flip it over. That's not how that happens.

And this is what takes us back here, right? What's Jesus doing? This is not anger in the sense of, this is not explosive violent anger.

He's preventing them. He sees what these people are doing as thieving. They're robbing from true worship and from the people that have come to worship.

When he flips over that table, it's not that he's trying to hurt them. He's stopping them. He's preventing them from being able to carry on. He's putting an end to the thievery.

[28 : 25] If somebody comes and breaks into your house tomorrow and they start carrying your stuff out, you're not going to say, you know, I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't do that. No. You can do whatever you can to stop that from happening any further, right?

You're going to prevent them from robbing you, prevent them from thieving you. Here comes Jesus into the temple. There's a bunch of thieves, criminals that are pretending as if they're going about the Lord's work, but they're actually robbing the people.

Jesus flips their tables over so they can't do it anymore. They have to stop. They have to stop what they're doing. The final group was the people that were walking through with things in their hands.

Now, Jewish custom forbade this. And the point of it was people would use the courtyard of the temple as a shortcut. Google when you get home today, the courtyard, the size of it is very big.

And if you're trying to get from one side of Jerusalem to the other, it's a little bit laborious to go around the temple to get where you need to go. So people would cut through. Well, they're not supposed to do that.

[29 : 30] Why? It's a sacred place. It's a sacred place. Carelessly, they're carrying things through. That's actually what Jewish law said not to do. You couldn't carry anything through, and it helped to prevent this type of careless treatment of the house of God.

So Jesus stops all of those people, and he prevents them from carrying anything through, makes them go around the temple. Now, look at verse 19. When evening came, they went out of the city. Okay? They were there all day. Think about this. Jesus and his disciples, they're there all day in the temple. Thousands upon thousands of people coming in and out of an area that spans three football fields wide, two and a half football fields long.

Jesus was most likely clearing these people throughout the day, pausing periodically to teach. He's not yelling these statements as he flips tables.

No, he's stopping, and it says he's teaching them, saying to them, is it not written? And so he goes through, and he'd clear a section over here, and then he'd stop, and he'd explain to those people.

[30 : 42] He'd teach them. He's preached to them what's happening. Then he'd go to another section. This is going on all day as people come in and out of the temple to go about the things that they had come to do. And naturally, this catches the attention of the scribes and the chief priests who had sold franchises to the merchants so that they could have their own cut of the profits that were being robbed from the people that came to do their worship.

Naturally, they didn't like that. Not only is Jesus threatening their authority, but he's hindering their business, which means they just want to kill him all the more.

That's what's happening here, okay? Let's look at the clearing explained. Why did it happen? Well, like the fig tree outside of Bethany, the temple had the appearance of worship, but in reality, it was barren of the fruit of genuine worship.

And Jesus saw this as a monstrous desecration of holy ground and a total corruption of true worship. And so he quotes Isaiah 56, 7.

And he preaches to the people that the temple was the place God had sanctified for prayer and worship, not just of the Jews, but of all people, of all nations.

[32 : 06] But they had turned it into a den of thieves. Even the matter of carelessly trotting through the temple court was a sign that they did not have much of a heart for God.

They looked like they did. They were busy in the religious stuff, but they did not have a heart for God. And what's more is that the section of the temple where all this is happening is the court of the Gentiles.

This is the only place where outsiders could come to the temple to learn about the true God and have their hearts turn to him in faith.

It was a place where the spiritually hungry could find true satisfaction. But as it was, the temple was a leafy tree. And it had nothing real to offer the starving people who approached it.

Nothing. There's no fruit. James Edwards says the Messiah was popularly expected to purge Jerusalem and the temple of Gentiles, aliens and foreigners.

[33 : 12] Jesus' action, however, is exactly the reverse. He does not clear the temple of Gentiles, but for them. But for them.

He's clearing out the corruption so that people can hear truth and truly worship. Now, third thing. Clearing applied. Why does this matter? Why does it matter?

Let's consider first an application for the church. Both universally and its local expressions like Lakeside. We're fooling ourselves.

If we don't admit that in many places. The church has become a circus. That offers anything and everything except the gospel.

There are some places where masses of people follow thieves who have corrupted worship into a scheme to pad their pockets.

[34 : 20] And they lie to people. And they have their television programs. And they tell people, if you will just, if you'll give a little money, I'm going to pray for you personally. And God's going to give you success.

And he's going to provide healing for you. But you're going to have to give something to him first. They're thieves. They look like they're a part of this Christian worship thing.

They're not. Church buildings, every Sunday, are flooded with people who don't have the slightest interest in truth.

So long as their favorite song is played and their hearts are motivated by the message. They don't care if the Bible's even opened.

As long as the band is hot and the pastor is hip and the message makes them feel better about their lives. They got lots of leaves.

[35 : 22] Things look nice. They say, yeah, I'm a Christian. I love Jesus. But they don't know Jesus. Churches continue to trade worship for entertainment.

They trade the preaching of the Bible for standards of inclusion that defy the God they say that they serve. That's what Jesus is dealing with in Jerusalem.

That's what I believe Jesus intends to deal with in the church today. Leafy trees. Temple thieves. Jesus is going to clear it out.

But the local church isn't the only place to apply this text. In fact, I think it may even be most appropriate to see the application for each individual here.

Because the temple doesn't matter. What does the New Testament say is the temple of God? Believers are. Each one of us.

[36 : 28] The Holy Spirit indwells us. And Jesus desires to clear out and cleanse each one of us. The same way he did the temple in Jerusalem.

Does he not? He will not tolerate the desecration of our bodies with immoral behavior. He won't tolerate that. No matter how tolerant of sin the church becomes, Jesus will not tolerate it in those who are supposed to be his temple.

He will not excuse those who pretend to know him when they're fruitlessly barren in reality. The truth is we all have some tables that probably need to be overturned in our lives.

We all have some desecration that Jesus probably needs to drive out to purify his people. Our lives are the temple in which we worship and proclaim the gospel of Jesus to the unbelieving world.

And God demands holiness and faithfulness and fruitfulness from his people and their worship. And if this text doesn't do anything else for you, it should remind you that this matter of spiritual fruitfulness and faithfulness is of immense seriousness to God.

[37 : 48] And we ignore it at our own peril. Because as we look at the tree in the temple, we see those who are nothing but leafy trees are warned and judged and killed.

Only those who are fruitful, faithful. That is the temple of God. That's true worship.

Finally, we see completing the parable. Look at verse 20. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

And Peter remembered and said to them, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered. So Mark brings us back here.

He tells us Jesus cleanses the temple. He clears it out. And then he goes home. And that's all he tells us. But then he is sure to finish his sandwich.

[38 : 52] And he brings us back to the tree. And that's when it clicks for us, doesn't it? Ah. Ah. That's what the whole temple thing was about. It's, it's, we see it in the tree, don't we?

The way back to Jerusalem on day three. The disciples notice it's completely withered. And this is important for them to see because now they see that this is not just an empty threat from Jesus. It was proclaiming judgment against Israel and its false worship. And that judgment wasn't going to tarry very long. That's, that's the illustration.

And the fact that the tree had withered to its roots symbolizes the totality of certain destruction. And it would be less than 40 years later when Rome would march into Jerusalem and would dismantle the entire temple complex stone by stone by stone.

Not one part of it would remain. But this isn't just about the physical dissolving of the temple.

There's something more at work here. When Jesus goes into the temple to clear it on this day, he's laying his axe to the root of this corrupt worship.

[40 : 11] And throughout this week, it's going to wither away. And it's going to finally reach its final dissolving point and destruction point at the cross. And I'm going to read to you a quote from James Edwards.

I think, Missy, I actually have this on the screen. Because I want you to see. I'm going to read it slow. And I want you to read it with me. This is so good. What Jesus does in the temple goes beyond purging or corrective act.

Together with the subsequent events of Holy Week, Mark portrays the clearing of the temple not as its restoration, but as its dissolution.

That's why it's probably not the most appropriate for us to say this was the cleansing of the temple because Jesus wasn't interested in restoring the temple right now. This is the beginning of its destruction.

It's the dissolution of the temple. Like the fig tree, its function is withered from the roots. Not one stone of the temple would be left on another, says Jesus in his final temple discourse in Mark. [41 : 17] Everyone will be thrown down. In his own body, the temple is broken down. And in himself, as a ransom for many, it's being raised anew in three days.

A temple not made with human hands. Not the blood of animals slaughtered by the high priest on the day of atonement. But his own blood, the blood of the covenant, will make Israel right with God. Indeed, at the moment of his death, the great curtain that divides the Holy of Holies from the court of Israel is torn in two. Dramatizing the dissolution of the temple as the means of approach to God. Now, focus on this. In his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus alone is the access to God. The fig tree thus symbolizes the temple. As a means of approach to God, the temple is fundamentally from the roots, replaced by Jesus as the center of Israel.

[42 : 27] Do you see this? Isn't that awesome? What's Jesus doing here in the temple? He's not trying to make the Jewish worship better. No, he's getting rid of all of it.

And what's he going to replace it with? Himself. Himself. And picture for a moment, as Edwards alludes to, as Jesus hangs on the cross and as he breathes his last breath, breath and suddenly and supernaturally the curtain, this thick, thick curtain in the temple is rent from top to bottom. Why? Because now we all have access to God, not through a priest, not through the temple, but through Jesus alone. What is this whole fig tree thing about?

This was a necessary illustration. Jesus is showing the disciples all of this is coming to an end. All of it. It's all going to wither away. It's fruitless. It's barren.

It's worthless. It's been wasted. It's not wasted. People will find their hope. They will find their satisfaction. Their spiritual hunger will be filled with me and with me alone.

[43 : 34] And he's doing away with all the rubbish. All the rubbish. And what's he going to do in the church? And what's he going to do with these leafy tree Christians? They're rubbish. They're not real.

They're not real. And Jesus, time and time again, through history, comes to his people and those who claim to be his people. And he gets rid of the rubbish in order that he may be glorified.

That his gospel alone may be proclaimed. And that the people who are proclaiming it are genuine believers whose lives are pure and holy and righteous.

Not perfect, but controlled by his spirit and living for his glory and for his glory alone. That's what the fig tree in the temple clearing is about. This isn't a Snickers moment.

He's not just hungry. No. This isn't vindictive, petulant anger. No. This is a warning. This is a warning that God doesn't play games.

[44 : 35] And if you're going to play games with religion and play games with Christianity, you're going to be cast to the side and withered to the root just like the tree, just like the temple, just like Israel.

So stop playing games. It doesn't matter if you know the part. Who cares about the leaves? What God cares about is the fruitfulness of your life.

And the fruitfulness of your life is not something you provide. It's something he does. It's something he does in you. Because there's all kinds of ways, there's all kinds of ways that we can feign it and fake it.

And Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7, we know the heart of people by the fruitfulness of their lives. And the problem is that we measure that in artificial ways. And we look at somebody's life and we say, well, they go to church.

And they're generous people. And they keep their lives together. They sit clean. And we measure gospel fruit based on things that anybody can do.

[45 : 43] Now, those things are important. But that's not gospel fruit. Paul gives us a glimpse of it in Galatians 5. Not a comprehensive list, but a helpful one.

Galatians 5, what does he say? The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering or patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance.

Paul says, these are the things that are real fruitfulness. Things that don't always show in the way that you dress. And the attendance that you keep at the functions.

And by the way, Paul says those things are not the fruit of your best efforts. Paul says, no. These are the fruits of the Spirit. These are not the things that you provide to yourself.

Though there may be some measure of it that you can do for a little while. But it won't be transformative in your life. No. This comes about in the lives of those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.

[46 : 57] In other words, a fruitful life is inevitable for one who belongs to God. You couldn't stop it if you wanted to.

You belong to Christ. There will be fruit in your life. If your life looks more like a leafy tree, it's probably because you've subscribed to a set of religious principles without truly turning to Christ. And the good news is, he died on the cross for sin and rose from the dead to give you life. This is the best part of all of this. Yeah, it's hard to see the judgment part. It's not comfortable at all. But that's not the only part. There's good news that follows the bad. And the truth is, he's calling you. Today. Now. He's calling you. And he says, if you just come to me, I will never cast you out.

[48 : 12] Take my yoke upon me. All you who are weary and heavy laden, I will give you rest. Real rest. Your life may still be a mess, but I'm going to give you rest in the midst of it.

Because my yoke is easy. My burden is light. I'm gentle and meek and lowly in spirit and in heart. And if you come to me, I will welcome you with open arms. I'll forgive you. Don't wait any longer. You don't have to face the judgment of the tree. Believe him. Follow him. Let him change your life. Let him change your life. Let him change your life.