

# Leaves but no Fruit

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 07 July 2024

Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning, brothers, sisters and friends, a joy to worship. A special welcome if you're visiting with us. Today we pray the Lord would bless your time with us.

There's intimation sheets at the back door. There's quite a lot going on in the next few weeks. Just to highlight some of the info for us today. First of all, God willing, a week today, a week just now, a week this coming Sunday morning, we hope to baptise Finn Bekever.

And as I say here, we thank God for the gift of new life and also the gift of his covenant promises to us. So again, that's a week today and we're very grateful to God for his goodness to us.

We always remember Finn and remember Lionel and Fiona this week. And the families has no doubt nerves and no doubt excitement of the baptism looms.

So please do remember that in prayer. It's also a good chance to invite people to come to church. Especially people in the community who know, are connected to the family.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] Neighbours, friends. It's a good chance to do some simple evangelism. Everyone likes to see a baptism. And then, God willing, in addition to the sheet here, at the end of this month, something perhaps, it's not new, but it's different for us perhaps.

We hope to have a short in-house communion. A short in-house communion weekend. Just Saturday, Sunday, as it stands. I'll be myself doing the services.

It's a good chance for us to take communion together as a congregation. We're not saying visitors aren't welcome, but it won't be advertised. It's just ourselves as a church gathering together.

And, of course, it provides opportunity for anyone in our congregation. If you are desiring to profess the Lord publicly as your saviour, this is a good chance for you to do it.

In many ways, there will be less eyes watching you. If there's nerves behind that, please prayerfully consider this is a good chance for you. Also, I give thanks to everyone who came out yesterday to the manse, to a men's breakfast.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] We managed to get through quite a good amount of bacon and sausages, and a good amount of conversation, too. There will be more men's breakfasts going forward after yesterday's success.

So, please, don't worry if you didn't make it yesterday. And just know, if you're a man and you're connected to the congregation, even if you come to church occasionally, you're more than welcome, more than welcome to come to the next men's breakfast.

It will be advertised on the sheet. Today, we're remembering Dumbarton Free Church. As they progress over work in that area, we heard from Geoff Murray recently, and the Dumbarton area is much the same.

There is so much gospel work, so much gospel potential, so many souls on that mission field who are just desperate to hear the gospel.

So, we pray for the ongoing work in that massive catchment area of Dumbarton Free Church. We also pray for Asamu and Mari, the missionaries connected to the Free Church, who are serving in Japan.

[ 3 : 26 ] We pray for them, too. Just to remind us that our evangelism opportunity this month in July, our challenge, brothers and sisters, is to pray for the opportunity and pray for the words to share the gospel with just one person in the village that you regularly interact with.

So, we're praying this month, each one of us, for the opportunity and for the words to share the gospel with just one single person in the village we regularly interact with.

We're here to worship God. We can sing to his praise. All are singing today. We're singing through Psalm 96 in the Scottish Psalter. We'll be singing through this psalm in our time of worship today.

Psalm 96 in the Scottish Psalter. That's page 358. Page 358. Sing, first of all, verses 1 down to verse 5.

Psalm 96, verses 1 down to verse 5. Oh, sing a new song to the Lord. Sing all the earth to God. To God sing. Bless his name.

[ 4 : 40 ] Show still his saving health abroad. Among the heathen nations, his glory do declare. And unto all the people show his works that wondrous are. Psalm 96, verses 1 to 5.

To God's praise. New song to the Lord.

Sing all the earth to God. Sing all the earth to God.

Amen. Come of the King of Pre■■■■■, And the Savior of the King, Go from His Son, The Jesus En■■id divine in love am in love in chirp

Let's join together in a word of prayer.

[ 7 : 28 ] Let's now pray. Lord God, we thank you for the glorious opportunity we have just now to gather before you, our sovereign God.

We come just now humbling ourselves before you, understanding that as we have just sung, you alone are the one, true, living God. You alone have all power.

You alone are holy. You alone deserve all our praise. And you alone receive the endless praise of the heavenly creatures. Help us then, Lord, this short time together, this short hour together, to have our minds and our hearts in the right place for worship.

We come to this place, we admit. We come to this place with so many things distracting us. We come to this time of worship with our own personal worries and stresses and strains.

Perhaps family worries, job worries, wider community worries. Lord, you know the full extent of the distractions and worries and stresses and anxieties in our mind today.

[ 8 : 41 ] We bring all these things to you. We confess at times we are shown just how small we are. When we come face to face with the reality of living in a fallen world, we take these things.

All these things which weigh us down, which worry us. All these things which cause us such pain at times. And we bring them to you. To you who know the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end.

You who has endless power and endless ability to take our worry and to give us peace. Help us, Lord, then to understand what we are doing today. That we come today to worship you.

We come today on holy ground. Not because of this building. Not because of ourselves. But because your word tells us that when your people worship you. When your people praise you.

That you are there in your presence. You are there in your glory. And we know that you are here with us today. You are here with us because your people are here. And you have made your home in us.

[ 9 : 44 ] You have made your dwelling within us. So we know for certain today as we sing to you. As we read your word. As we study your word. As we pray both publicly and privately just now.

We come before a God who is with us. A God who is present. A God who sees us. And a God who receives our worship. Thank you, Lord, for this gathering today.

Thank you. We have the privilege of gathering each week like this. We pray just now especially for our children on their time of holiday. We pray for the children of our congregation.

Some of whom are going to church camp this year. We pray for them. We look after them. We pray they enjoy themselves. They come back having grown in their knowledge and in their love of their saviour.

We pray just now for all our children. We thank you, Lord, once more for the increase of young people we have seen this past year. As we have seen the pew and indeed the pews steadily fill up.

[ 10 : 44 ] We give you all the glory. We give you all the praise for that. That we ourselves know we have done nothing to make this take place. But you are bringing your people in one by one.

Lord, we ask for the boys and girls would enjoy their summer break. We pray, Lord, for their teachers in school. We pray, Lord, for the school in back where many or indeed most of our young people attend.

We pray for that school. We thank you, Lord, for we have a gospel opportunity month by month to go on to share the good news here. We pray, Lord, for our children who are going into the Nicholson and who are in the Nicholson.

Lord, as they experience a widening of their school experience. We pray safety for them. We pray you keep them, look after them. That they would stick with you as they go through the many years and many challenges ahead of them.

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of having young people in our congregation. We pray, Lord, for our own Sunday school teachers. We thank you for them. Those who work so diligently throughout the term to prepare and to teach lessons.

[ 11 : 51 ] That we ask that they would be encouraged by all the good work they are seeing done. Pray, Lord, for us today. Pray especially just now for your people here today. Help us to grow.

Help us to grow in love for you. As we hear more from your word. As we study more of your word. We pray, Lord, as we learn more about who you are. That knowledge would turn to praise.

It would turn to love. We pray for more than a head knowledge. We pray also for that heart knowledge. That all that we learn, we would enact in our daily lives. Help us not just to come here out of routine.

But help us to come here with that desire to grow in our knowledge. To grow in our love. To grow in the appreciation of who you are. We come just now, we're aware.

As those who are needing that constant supply from the water of life. We find ourselves fainting and failing daily. We find ourselves falling away.

[ 12 : 49 ] We find ourselves feeling dry spiritually. We find ourselves at times weak spiritually. And we come again to the source of living water. We come back to you again and again.

Who promises to supply us with that living water. Without money and without cost. Pray just now, Lord, for our friends here today. Those who have gathered here as of recent weeks and recent months.

And also those who have been gathering here for weeks and years and decades. Those who have been gathering here since the early days of this congregation's formation.

But as of yet. As of yet. As of yet have not shown or have not proclaimed their public love for our Saviour. Who as of yet perhaps cannot say that they are yours.

And that our Saviour. That he is theirs. We pray for them. We thank you for them. We thank you for their diligence in coming out. We thank you for their support of the gospel cause in North Tulsa.

[ 13 : 53 ] We pray first and foremost. That you would work in their lives. And they would come to understand. That there is hope for them. There is salvation for them. That you have made a way for them to come.

And to know Jesus for themselves. To come and be saved. Pray Lord for North Tulsa. We thank you for placing us here. Pray just now for every home.

In the Glen. All the way. As I were to Gary. Every family. Every individual. Represented in North Tulsa. Pray Lord for the gospel. That goes out.

Week by week. Pray just now. For us. As witnesses. As ambassadors. As salt and light to this place. Help all that we say. And think.

And do. To be to your glory. Forgive us Lord. For times of embarrassment. Forgive us for times of pulling back. Forgive us for times. Where we have wasted good chances.

[ 14 : 49 ] To share the gospel. Or good chances to invite others. To come and to hear. Give us the words we ask. Give us the sense. And give us the sense of urgency we ask.

That we speak. As those who have been saved. To those who need to be saved. We speak as those who have been loved. With the love of a saviour. To those who are desperate.

For the love of a saviour. We speak as those who have been snatched away. From death. To those who are still dying. And heading towards a lost eternity. Help us Lord.

Give us that sense of urgency. Thank you Lord for all the blessings. You have bestowed on us. We give you praise for all of it. It's for your glory. And not to our glory.

Not the glory of this ministry. Not the glory of this congregation. Not the glory even of our denomination. It is your glory. And your glory alone. With that in mind. We give you praise.

[ 15 : 44 ] For the plans. And the hope we have. Of the upcoming baptism. Of Finn. Thank you Lord for him. We know that he is. An answer to many prayers.

And we thank you for his. Ongoing health. We thank you Lord for all that he is. And all that he means. Not just to his parents. But all that he means to grandparents. And to close members of the family.

And to friends. And the wider community. Pray for him. As he grows. And grows in this community. He would know. Not just the love of his family.

Not just the love of a community. But also we know. We ask he would know the love. Of a saviour. Pray Lord for Lila and Fiona. We thank you Lord for them.

Pray for them. As they look forward. We are sure some level of anxiety. Perhaps. Perhaps not. To the upcoming baptism. Still any fears.

[ 16 : 37 ] And worries. That they have. Thank you Lord. For the gift of children. And the gift of young people. As part of this congregation. We thank you Lord.

For the gift of baptism. As we show. With physical means. The spiritual reality. That thin. Is entering in.

To the covenant family. Of this congregation. The covenant family. Of your people. Not because of the word said. And not because of the. Of the water sprinkled.

But because of what that tells us. And what it shows us. We have a God. Who is gracious. And a God. Who expands out. His promises. Week. After week.

Year. After year. Decade. After decade. To individuals. To families. To your people. Thank you Lord. For that gift. And we ask. It would be an encouragement.

[ 17 : 31 ] For us. As a congregation. We also look forward. We pray. To the upcoming. In house. Small gathering. Of a communion. For us. As a congregation. We ask. It would be a means. Of blessing.

For us. As we partake. Of the simple. Elements. Of bread and wine. The elements. We know. That help us. And that show us. And that point us. To a greater reality.

Beyond the physical. We ask. As we eat. And drink together. As brothers. And sisters. We be encouraged together. And grow together. And enjoy. What it is. To speak.

Love. And to see. Shown to us. The love of our saviour. Together. Pray just now. For those missing. From our number. Just now. Pray for those missing.

From our number. Because of. Ongoing. Health. Situations. Lord. You know the. Details there. Pray for them. We ask. They would know. Not just our love.

[ 18 : 26 ] And our encouragement. But more than that. They would be reminded. Of your ongoing love. For them. Brothers. And indeed sisters. Who we care for. And who we. Long to see restored to us. To a measure of health.

Pray just now. For those. Who are away on holiday. Lord. We ask you keep them safe. Pray again. Just now. For those. Who. For other reasons. Family reasons. And other complications.

Lord. That are not with us. As often as they wish to be. Lord. We ask you comfort them. And be with them too. Pray just now. As we pray for ourselves. We pray for our brothers and sisters. Next door. We remember them as always.

As they are part also. Of the gospel witness. In North Tulsa. Pray for them. In their time of vacancy. We know that prolonged vacancy. Is often a. A good tool.

Used by the evil one. To sow discontent. And disunity. Pray Lord. That would not be their. Their reality. Pray for them. Pray Lord. You would bring a pastor to them.

[ 19 : 22 ] Who would lead them. Who would guide them. Pray raise up one. Who would encourage them. And one who would. If not in practical terms. At least spiritually.

Who would partner with us. In sharing the gospel. In North Tulsa. Or help us. We ask. To serve you well. And serve you faithfully. Help us. We come around your word.

Open up our ears. And our eyes. And our understanding. Help us to understand. What it is. You're teaching us. Through. Your holy word. Today. We pray for ourselves. Locally.

We are mindful. Of recent days. We pray for our nation. Pray especially Lord. For our new government. In Westminster. We pray Lord.

For how that will look. For us locally. Also in Scotland. And in the island. We pray Lord. For a peaceful. A few weeks.

[ 20 : 16 ] Of transition. And change. We pray Lord. For the prosperity. Of our island. And our nation. Pray Lord. For peace. For our nation. We pray once more.

As we prayed. And as generations before us. Have prayed. We pray Lord. Once more. For the. The salvation. Of those. Who lead us. We pray for salvation.

Of those in. Holyrood. Those in Westminster. We pray for salvation. Of our new prime minister. And the salvation. Of our king. We pray Lord.

That these men. Would learn. What it is. To have a king over them. One who is just. And who is good. And one who leads. His people perfectly. We leave.

That prayer with you. We cannot change. These circumstances. We know that you can. Pray just now Lord. For those. Involved in politics. Who are your people. Those.

[ 21 : 12 ] Who are over us. And civil matters. And who worship you. And who love you. And who seek to. Fulfill. And who seek to carry out. What it is.

To be good servants. Pray Lord. For them. You be with them. And comfort them. And support them. In a world. And in a. In a job. In a career. That is so at times.

Against who. And what you are. Encourage us Lord. As your people today. We come just now. Confessing sin. We come just now. Confessing waywardness. We come just now. Confessing that.

In our thoughts. Our words. Our actions. We go. And have indeed. Gone against. Your holiness. We come just now. Clinging only. To the finished work. Of our saviour.

In him. And through him alone. We have forgiveness. Indeed. Full forgiveness. Of our sins. If only we would come. To him. We ask these things.

[ 22 : 06 ] Clinging on to him. As he holds. Eternally. On. To us. Amen. Let's read. In God's word. We're carrying on. Our series.

In Mark. If you remember. Last week. We got to Mark. Chapter 11. And we studied. Verses 1. Down.

To verse 11. Today. We can turn. To Mark. Chapter 11. And we can read. Verse 12. Onwards. Mark. Chapter 11.

Verse 12. That's page. 796. In the church. Bibles. Page. 796. Mark.

11. And verse 12. Let's hear together. The word of God. On the following day. When they came. From Bethany. He was hungry.

[ 23 : 03 ] And seeing in the distance. A fig tree and 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. And they came to Jerusalem. And they 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. This shall be called. A house of prayer.

For all the nations. But you have made it. A den of robbers. And the chief priests. And the scribes. Heard it. And were seeking a way. To destroy him. For they feared him.

[ 23 : 57 ] Because all the crowd. Was astonished. At his teaching. When evening came. They went out of the city. As they passed by. In the morning. They saw the fig tree. Withered away.

To its roots. And Peter remembered. And said to him. Rabbi look. The fig tree. That you cursed. Has withered. And Jesus answered them. Have faith in God.

Truly I say to you. Whoever says. To this mountain. Be taken up. And thrown into the sea. And does not doubt. In his heart. But believes. That what he says. Will come to pass.

It will be done for him. Therefore I tell you. Whatever you ask. In prayer. Believe that you have received it. And it will be yours. Whenever you stand. Praying forgive.

If you have anything. Against anyone. So that your father. Also who is in heaven. May forgive you. Your trespasses. And they came again. To Jerusalem. And as he was walking.

[ 24 : 52 ] In the temple. The chief priests. And the scribes. And the elders. Came to him. And they said to him. By what authority. Are you doing these things. Or who gave you. This authority.

To do them. Jesus said to them. I will ask you. One question. Answer me. And I will tell you. By what authority. I do these things. Was the baptism of John.

From heaven. Or from man. Answer me. And we discussed it. With one another. Saying. If we say. From heaven. He will say. Why then. Did you not believe him.

But shall we say. From man. They were afraid. Of the people. For they all held. That John really was. A prophet. So they answered. Jesus.

We do not know. And Jesus said to them. Neither will I tell you. By what authority. I do. These things. I may give praise to God. For his holy.

[ 25 : 46 ] And his perfect. Word. Let's again. Go back to Psalm 96. Sing again. In Psalm 96. 96. We can sing.

Verses 6. Down to verse 9. Scottish Psalter. Psalm 96. Verses 6. Down to verse 9. Great honour.

Is before his face. And majesty divine. Strength is within. His holy place. And there doth beauty shine. To ye ascribe. And to the Lord.

Of people. Every tribe. Glory do ye unto the Lord. And mighty power. Ascribe. Sing his verses. Verses 6. Down to verse 9. To God's praise.

May the honour. Is before his face.

[ 26 : 45 ] And after sea. God bless.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 29 : 07 ] Thank you. Let's, for a short time, turn back to the chapter we had, the verse we had, Mark chapter 11. Mark chapter 11. Today we can look together at verse 12 down to verse 25.

This prolonged account of the fig tree, Mark chapter 11, verse 12 down to verse 25.

If you remember last week, of course, we left Jesus having entered the city and we saw the beautiful but also the humbling scene of our Savior riding on this young donkey.

And we saw all that showed us and all the prophecies that fulfilled from the Old Testament. And it told us about our servant king. Our servant king came to live, but also we saw it showed us our servant king was also, of course, coming to die.

We said that for the next seven or eight days from that entry into Jerusalem on the donkey, Jesus and the disciples, they spend all their time either in the city or just outside the city.

[ 30 : 27 ] We, again, think back, think to our own cities. Think that the city centre isn't just the city. As you go further out, you might think of the same way.

Think of Stornoway. It's not a city, but think of Stornoway. Technically, Marybank isn't Stornoway. But for a lochi, like myself, everything past Balallon is basically Stornoway.

Marybank is pretty much Stornoway. So we spend all our time in the area around Jerusalem. We come after all the glory and all the beauty and all the praising of the triumphal entry.

What could be seen is quite a strange interaction in verse 12. Verse 12 down to verse 25. This interaction around a wee fig tree.

On the following day, verse 12, when they came from Bethany. They're staying there and are coming back into the city. Came from Bethany. He was hungry and seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf.

[ 31 : 29 ] 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. Now to begin just our short study in these verses.

For us, perhaps, a fig tree is a fig tree. If you've ever seen one, I've never seen one. But figs are figs. You might buy them occasionally. You might have them in your cupboard for cooking or for baking.

For us, there's something we might eat. We might use at times. We have to remember that for the people of Jesus' day and for the Jews of this day, figs are not just figs.

And fig trees are not just fig trees. We're not just another tree. There is real importance and real significance to the fig tree. Historically, of course, we can look through at Scripture and we see several examples of the Lord using the image of a fig tree to describe Israel.

A healthy fig tree to describe them when they worshipped them well. But also times where God uses the image of an unhealthy or dead or dying fig tree, that tree without fruit, to describe Israel when they were not serving the Lord well.

[ 32 : 47 ] Where the Lord describes them as once being healthy. Once having both green leaves and also having fruit.

But now an infection of sorts. The infection of sin and of backsliding has taken over the tree. And the fruit is gone. It might still look healthy, but there's no life in it.

There's no fruit coming from it. Now technically, this is far too early for figs to be on the tree. At this time of year, we know what it is.

We can work out exactly around exactly when this takes place. We know the feasts. We know the times. We know the seasons. And we know that this is too early for figs to be on the tree.

And when Jesus sees this green healthy tree, it's showing signs that it's got fruit. It's got leaves on it. It looks alive. It looks healthy.

[ 33 : 46 ] It looks ready for fruit to be picked. So again, a fig tree, when it's got fruit on it, will show healthy green leaves. But of course, when Jesus gets to it, despite this fig tree showing all the healthy signs of a tree ready to be used, well, he finds, of course, there's nothing on it.

There's no fruit here. And he curses the tree. All the signs of life, but there's nothing of substance to be found. Now, there are some, indeed many, who will question this strange interaction from Jesus.

If we are saying, if we believe that he is the creator of time and space, the creator and sustainer of the universe, then why on earth does Jesus not know that this is not the right time for figs?

If he knows everything else, if he sustains the whole world and the whole universe with the word of his mouth and the word of his power, if all the galaxies and atoms, as it were, literally belong to him, then why is he looking for figs at a time that there is no figs to be found seasonally?



Our atheist friends, ones who are well-versed in scripture, will often point to this interaction as an example for us of how Jesus was just a man and how he made pretty bad mistakes at times.

[ 35 : 08 ] And this is one of them. He doesn't even know the right time of season to get fruit from a fig tree. The most basic knowledge that every other single person that day would have known, every other good land-working Jewish person would have known.

And yet the saviour doesn't even know that himself. Just a note. Two things for us, looking at that objection, perhaps.

Firstly, to note that every single time we see our saviour interacting with someone or something, indeed, every place he goes and everything he does, it always has significance for us, doesn't it?

Nothing that Jesus says or does is just there to fill in the space. There's always a reason. There's always something else going on.

A more practical reason. If the disciples, if those, we say, who compiled scripture, thinking from an atheist point of view, if they're saying, they're trying to prove to us that Jesus was really God, even though he wasn't, he was really God, they wouldn't include this bit.

[ 36 : 27 ] This bit which perhaps makes him look less than God. You wouldn't include it. You would just miss this bit out. But it's included. Why? Because there's something more going on. And like almost all the issues so far I've heard people having with scripture, when you look at the context, when you look at the wider few verses, the wider chapter, the wider book, things make sense pretty quickly.

Pretty quickly. Scripture adds one fact for us here in this interaction that tells us something more going on. At the end of verse 14, where Jesus curses the fig tree for having all the signs of life but having no fruit, we hear and we see, and his disciples heard it.

And his disciples heard it. This is scripture giving us the reason for this interaction. That tells us Jesus wanted his disciples to see this, and to hear this, to witness this, because shortly he's going to use this to teach them something.

And we'll see that in a second. What then does the empty, what does a barren fig tree show us?

In one sense it is showing Israel, the people of God, the ancient people of God, who are called to proclaim the goodness and the perfection and the power of God to the nations, who are called to be his people from the very start, and who had failed him and failed him and failed him and gone astray and had absolutely decimated every chance they had to be the people of God in their actions, in their words, in their interactions and worshipping of our idols.

[ 38 : 18 ] We saw that in our book of Judges. We saw a nation that was just given over to every single sin and every single avenue and route apart from worshipping God.

It was a show that all the people before him, all of Israel before Jesus, they had all gone astray. They still had all the show. The temple was there.

They had all the scribes and Pharisees, all the laws. They had all the smells and bells. All the signs of a healthy, vibrant, spiritual life.

But there's no fruit. There are green trees, yes, which looks like it's good fruit there somewhere. When you look for fruit, there's nothing to be found.

Nothing to be found. And the question that applies straight to us, can we apply this to ourselves before we go on any further? Like Israel, are we guilty of the same situation?

[ 39 : 21 ] That outwardly looking in, perhaps, someone looking at your life, they're seeing all the signs of flourishing. They're seeing a green tree, like the fig tree here.

There's all the signs of spiritual life. Church attendance, perhaps. Bible reading, perhaps. Bible understanding, perhaps.

Catechism understanding. Church history of this island understanding. You can answer and quote scripture far better than I ever will. All the signs of flourishing are where you look good, you sound good.

But the question is, behind the scenes, is there life? Is there life? Whatever you might think, no minister, no elder, can perceive that we have no spiritual gifting in that way.

At times, we might say things on God's word that you think is directly for you. If that happens, it's from the Lord. But only you know the answer. Only you know your heart. You and the Lord know your heart.

[ 40 : 25 ] Are you like this fig tree? Like Israel of old. All the signs of life. But there's no fruit. There's no real substance. There's a pause in this narrative.

There's a pause in the account here. And Mark then carries it on to the temple. Verse 15 down to verse 19. If in the fig tree we saw an empty tree, now in verses 15 down to verse 19 we see an empty faith.

An empty tree. Now we see the example here of an empty faith. And this account of Jesus cleansing the temple, you think, is Mark just putting this here to fill in the gap for us?

Is he just trying to fill in the story? Why does he place it here? Well, we said before, Mark places and Mark works out his narrative very carefully.

He's always getting somewhere. He's always journeying to a point in all his writing. And here Mark makes clear. Now, there's no problem and we will do it in the future, I'm sure.

[ 41 : 39 ] We will happily preach verses 15 down to verse 19 in isolation. There's plenty to learn from these verses. But this interaction in the temple, it takes place within the context of verse 12 to verse 25.

The fig tree is cursed by Jesus for being barren but showing all the signs of life. And the next day we find them where? The next moment we find them in the temple.

So walking from Bethany to the city, they pass the fig tree, he curses the fig tree, they carry on then into the city, into the temple. And what do they find in the temple?

They leave the empty tree and now they find empty faith. There's twice recorded in scripture, two separate interactions. We perhaps may get them confused where Jesus clears, Jesus cleanses the temple.

The first one is earlier in his ministry and this of course is near the end of his earthly ministry. But to remind us of what's taking place, we see and we know that the temple, as we all know it, it's the home, the place of worship for God on earth, at least historically.

[ 42 : 59 ] We know that the Shekinah glory that the presence of God had long, as it were, since left, at least in its physical appearance and physical presence in the temple at this point.

But nonetheless, this is where God was to be worshipped. But what gradually happened was that commerce, that trade, that money had become the central reason for the existence of a temple in Jerusalem.

It was no longer worship. They had a very smart scheme on the going. We know this, not just from Scripture, we know this historically. The Romans record this at this exact time, just before Jesus ran about.

The Romans record it in their records because they're impressed with how smart the people have been in extorting the money. the Romans loved any way they could get money out of people.

And the Romans record for us what took place. This is in the history books. That at this time, the temple had, as it were, a special temple currency.

[ 44 : 12 ] So a coin you could only really use within the temple. And of course, you had to go to the temple if you're travelling from miles away to sacrifice your animals. so you couldn't really bring the animals with you for miles.

So you go to the temple and the temple has fields worth. Fields worth of animals. So you go to the temple, you can buy the animal of them, and you can kill it and sacrifice it there.

But there's no problem there in theory. It's simple trade. You're allowed to do that. What they were doing was though, they were increasing all the time the exchange rate.

So you'd come with your own money from your own town, your own city, your own area, and buy this special temple coin without which you couldn't buy the animals. And this temple coin was at an extortionate rate.

An extortionate rate. One recording says it was five to one. So it would be five times more to buy a sheep in the temple than it would be to buy it outside the temple.

[ 45 : 12 ] Complete fraud. Complete extortion. And there's one account we have. Again, secular sources. One account from about ten years after this time that the same scheme was taking place.

There was one seller, one merchant, and this shows us the scale of the fraud. It's not just a few sheep here. One single seller, one single merchant, in around two or three days sold three thousand sheep.

one person managed to sell three thousand sheep. The scale here is immense. This is a marketplace. It's why Jesus says so clearly, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it into a den of robbers?

The temple is spiritually empty. The temple is spiritually empty. And Jesus reacts to this.

Jesus reacts to this in a righteous anger. What does he do? Well, it's one who is there to be praised and glorified. Those in the temple are there, the faithful believers, offering up prayers at least to God.

[ 46 : 39 ] What does God now do? Our saviour, God in human form, God as man, what does he do? He destroys the tables.

He destroys the symbol of the disruption of his temple. He overturns the tables, the mind changers and the seats. And we have to hear overturned.

You think, that's a gentle. No, he overturned them. Which we read elsewhere in the other account, he formed a whip. He fashioned a whip at this time.

This is no gentle, would you mind shifting your tables? Jesus, as he righteously is allowed to do as God, as seeing that the desecration of his place of worship, the desecration of what it means to worship and serve God, replacing God with greed, seeing the emptiness, spiritual emptiness of his place, he turns over the tables, turns over the seats, he drives them away.

There is a place and a time we see from our Saviour for holy anger. And this interaction is here to show us Kaizen from the fig tree.

[ 47 : 58 ] This is a practical example that Mark shows us of how spiritual emptiness looks like. To walk into the temple you'd be amazed.

The incense is burning. Also the sacrifice, the smell of blood and death is in the air. There's thousands of animals. All the chanting is going on, the singing is going on, the playing of kinds of instruments is going on.

You're getting the full temple experience. All the smells and sounds and sights and full sensation of being closer to God and his presence.

But in reality what's going on? Thraud and deceit and greed and sin and complete desecration of what it means to be God's holy people.

The leaves are green. It looks good, it sounds good but there's no fruit. It's dead, completely dead inside. completely dead inside.

- [ 49 : 02 ] The question is again, like the fig tree, are we all show? Are we all just about how it looks and how it sounds? But in reality, in reality, like the fig tree, there's nothing else going on inside.

They leave, it's evening time and they go back out of the city, back away to Bethany area. Next morning now in verse 20, next morning we're now going back into the city, they're spending their evenings, presumably because the city is so busy, they're spending their evenings staying just outside the city and going back into the city during the day, which most of the Jewish believers would have done at this time.

Next morning they wake up and they head back into the city. 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 him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

And Jesus answered them, have faith in God. The tree is dead. Just as Jesus had said, just as Jesus had cursed it, the fig tree is no more.

This fig tree which had such green leaves, which had such promise, it is now gone. There's no more green leaves, no more promise. It is now just a husk, now just dried twigs.

- [ 50 : 31 ] There's nothing left of it. Overnight, it has been killed off. And Jesus, and Peter, of course, points this out to Jesus, as Peter always does. He's always mouth first.

He can almost hear the excitement of his voice. Rabbi, it's happened. You said it happened. It's happened. Look, look, look. I've seen it first. And Jesus perhaps gives, we might think first of all as a strange answer, a strange response.

As far as we can see here, the response Jesus gives has no bearing on what Peter has just said to him. Peter says, look, the tree you've cursed has gone, it's withered, it's happened, as you said it would happen.

And Jesus says back to him, not an answer, but it's a statement back to him. Have faith in God. And so on, truly I say to you, down to the end of verse 25.

Is this a strange change of topic or again, is there something else going on there? Have faith in God, the answer of Jesus to Peter.

- [ 51 : 37 ] What has this got to do with the fig tree? Why does Jesus not take on? Why does Jesus not respond to Peter? and what Peter has said?

Well, of course, he does and he is answering Peter back. What is a fig tree reminding us of? What have we seen in the temple?

The sin of Israel, the sin of all of us, the sin of all of us, is turning away from God and trusting in ourselves. Self-righteousness, it is what will bring in ourselves locally here, turning away from God, turning to ourselves, self-righteousness, trusting in ourselves, in our own works.

It is, at least for our culture, our island, indeed our village, it is what will bring many of our loved ones and those around us who do not repent and return, it's what will bring many of them to the very gates of hell, is their own self-righteousness.

They would rather trust themselves to the end and believe in themselves to the end and their power to help themselves, their power to save themselves, than just for a second turn to God.

- [ 52 : 50 ] They would rather trust in their own green leaves of goodness, all the time not realising there is no fruit there, there is no substance there, that internally, spiritually, they're dead.

And, have faith in God. The one thing that Israel had lost sight of, the one thing that every one of us loses sight of, it's all about him and not about us.

All about him and not about us. This was a sin of the scribes and Pharisees of the day. This was a sin of everyone in the temple, all the money sellers of the day.

They had lost sight, trusting in themselves, trusting in their own faith, their own faith to save themselves, trusting in their own good works, trusting in their money and whatever else they had.

But we did not have faith, quite simply, in God. Friends, this is the sin that we ourselves, not just the disciples, not just the religious leaders, that we ourselves here in North Tolstair are so easily taken in by.

[ 54 : 06 ] We trust in ourselves. How good we are. How easy it must be for us to save ourselves.

We think, well, I'm looking good, I'm sounding good. We don't say that, but we think, well, I'm going to church, I know my Bible well, I perhaps even do family worship. My grandparents came before me in this place, and my parents and I have everything sorted out.

I know exactly what it is to believe. I know all about him and I even believe in him. Do you love him? Do you actually know him?

If you don't, then come back to this verse where Jesus says, have faith in God. Have faith in God.

Do we believe? Do you believe that he is able to take you, take your life, and change it, and transform it, and change all that you are?

[ 55 : 17 ] Do you believe that what you have to give him, it can't save you, but what he has to give you is able to transform you, and to change you, and to make you his.

And when a commentator writes concerning this interaction, he says that this is a reminder to us that prayer is not just simply asking God for the pleasant things we may desire, but an earnest yearning for and entering into the will of God for ourselves and others.

whether it is sweet or bitter, this was a prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, and such prayers will always be answered by God. Faith and trust, friends, faith and trust, don't be like the fig tree, all green, all beautiful, full of promise, full of evidence, love, like the fig tree itself, like the temple, like all who believe in themselves, when you look into it, there's actually nothing else going on.

There's no life, there's no substance to it, it's self-reliance, it's trust in yourself, it's faith in yourself, and you ignore what Jesus says to have faith in God.

Jesus expands it out by saying, have faith in God, truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain be taken up and thrown into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes what he says will come to pass, that we have done for him.

[ 56 : 57 ] Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, it will be yours. And whoever says, stands praying, forgive, if anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

the mountain they've thrown into the sea, it's a common phrase, we have it elsewhere, it's a common phrase the rabbis would say to describe how your faith must be, it must be so big that you can even move a mountain with it.

Many will read this and think, well, surely this is not what Jesus means, surely it's just saying we can move mountains of our word, that's not what Jesus is saying clearly, he's talking to disciples here, he's teaching something to them, what's he saying?

what's he saying? It's all about God. Look to him, have full trust and full faith in him, have faith in him and have nothing to ourselves, nothing to ourselves, don't be like the fig tree, all look, all show, looks good, it sounds good, but inside there is nothing.

A life that looks and sounds like a Christian life, a life which has no faith in God, which does not trust that God can do any and everything, that is a life without substance, that's a life without real meaning.

[ 58 : 25 ] And the danger here is, if a life is lived that looks good, that sounds good, but has no real trust, or no real love in Jesus, that one day, we will be spoken to like Jesus spoke to the fig tree, and we ourselves will face the same fate, withered away forever.

Friends, the hope today is, and the promise today is, that we need not to be worried about withering away. But Jesus says to us, have faith in God, have faith in God.

The question is, are you today, like the green fig tree, looks good, it sounds good, but you have no faith in God, you only have faith in yourself, or are you like a tree, which perhaps doesn't look good, perhaps it's not the best tree looking world, perhaps it's a tree that leaves our green, but behind the scenes you have faith in God, you love him, and you trust in him.

Let's all make sure and ask ourselves the hard question today, are we truly trusting in him, or are we still trusting in ourselves?

Are we all looks and all show but no substance, or do we trust in him and know that he loves us, that he keeps us, that he has saved us?

[ 60 : 00 ] If we don't have our faith and trust trust in Jesus and him alone and find our strength in him alone and find our representation in him alone and find in him all our hope and all our joy and all our salvation, then we'll be like the fig tree in the account here.

These are hard words perhaps for us to hear, but they're the words that Jesus gives to us and Jesus says, have faith in God. Brothers and sisters and friends, there is hope for all of us today.

As we come to Jesus once more, we need not be withering away forever. Come to him and come back to him and trust that he is able and eternally able to save us, to keep us and help us to bloom not just in looks but in substance too.

Let's put our heads now, a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you Lord for the gift of your word. We thank you for the challenge we often find in your word. But there's so much there at times which confronts us and so much at times which leads us to asking the hard questions.

We page never any here today who are asking the hard questions, who are looking to their own hearts and seeing perhaps less substance and they're looking to themselves and seeing only show, only outward representation of health, inwardly there is death and inwardly there is no life.

[ 61 : 27 ] Lord, thank you for that work and we ask that they would come to see that there is only life to be found for them in Jesus. If they come to him they will know what it is to be green, not just green leaves but also to a full substance, to a full fruit.

Help each one of us not to be hypocrites in anything we say and do but to understand that it is in Jesus and his finished work alone we have all our hope and all our substance. Pray Lord for the gathering today.

Help your word to lodge in our minds and to lodge in our hearts. We ask all these things in and through his name for his sake only. Amen. We can conclude the last four verses of Psalm 96 10 down to verse 13.

Psalm 96 verses 10 down to verse 13. Among the heathen say God reigns, the world shall steadfastly be fixed from moving, he shall judge the people righteously, let heavens be glad before the Lord and let the earth rejoice, let seas and all that is therein cry out and make a noise.

Psalm 96 verses 10 to 13 to God's praise. Amen. évly Platze, Christ first highs and night how G and I Child's Stone and man Haw and Beth tocar service, rey Ph etwas Least Jesús Bugha and Galilei Savior.

[ 63 : 49 ] Savior. God bless you.

When was coming He shall sing?

When Thou medicines doth listen. Before the Lord be upon thee, come to judge me here, come to thee.

You judge the world in righteousness, the people can believe.

The grace of God, the love of Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, for you now and forevermore. Amen.