

# Mark 11:1-33

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[ 0 : 00 ] So our passage is Mark 11 and there's some wonderful lessons in this passage. I'm not going to deal with them all. I want to zoom in on one particular theme.

It's the implicit warning in this passage. It's the warning against putting on a good religious show when our hearts are actually indifferent or corrupt or fickle.

It's a bit like when I watch American sports with my wife's family. Because it's Super Bowl Sunday, right? I can say all the right things.

I don't know quite what to say, to be honest. What would I say? Go team, go. Come on, ref.

Open your eyes. You know, just generic kind of stuff that you'd say. I can say all the right things, but I'm not really into it, to be honest. I don't really care. So that's what we're talking about.

[ 1 : 06 ] How's that sound? A little bit serious, doesn't it? But that's all right. We're going to crack on. So what we'll do is we're going to walk through the story. We'll allow God to speak to us. We'll pray that the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to do that.

So let's be expectant that the Lord will speak to us. Mark chapter 11. Probably good to have your Bibles open. So Jesus was almost at Jerusalem.

He's about to enter. This is the big city. This is the religious headquarters of Israel. And it's Passover. So there would have been a real festival-type atmosphere there.

Thousands and thousands of pilgrims turning up for Passover. Just like a bonkers amount of people already there. Lots of excitement. Lots of noise. And Jesus decides to make a big entry, which is something he hasn't done before.

And he enters Jerusalem riding a donkey, which, as Will said to us, is odd to our ears. Because if this is the creator of the universe, why not a stallion or why not one of those, you know, like the chairs with the poles you see in the movies and people carrying them?

[ 2 : 15 ] Why a little horse? And the thing is, we know it wasn't just like a last-minute kind of thing. Jesus organized it beforehand. He said to his people, I've got a guy. Go there.

Pick it up. It's going to be great. It wasn't his only option. He chose to ride in on a donkey. And remember, Jesus is a pretty big deal at this point.

People are excited about him. He knows when he enters Jerusalem, it's going to cause a drama. They're going to be watching what he's doing. So why a donkey?

Well, he's communicating something about himself, isn't he? But what is that? Most likely, it's a reference to Zechariah 9, chapter 9. Let me read it to you.

This is 500 years before this. Zechariah wrote, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you.

[ 3 : 07 ] Triumphant and victorious is he. Humble and riding on a colt. So this is a prophetic picture of a king riding on a little horse who's just come from this great victory.

It's a picture of strength and it's a picture of humility. And Jesus knew this text and knew others would eventually make the connection. So what he's communicating is, yes, I'm the king.

I'm the rescuer. I will lead. But I'll rescue you through weakness. Now, there is a lot more to say about that, but I want to get to the crowd. So you have all of these people, a great throng around Jesus.

And they're all shouting, Hosanna in the highest, as Jesus rides in. Here's the thing about it. These are standard Passover shouty things to say.

Now, we can look at these words and we see the deeper meaning, but the crowd are saying just the things you say at Passover. Now, they're saying them in Jesus' direction because they've heard he's done really cool stuff.

[ 4 : 26 ] But it's kind of just the things you say. I want you to hold that thought. Did you notice the deliberate anticlimax moving from verse 10 to 11?

Let me read them to you, those two verses. Blessed, this is the crowd, blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David, Hosanna in the highest. And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

It's like at this point, he's by himself. The crowds have all disappeared. He enters alone. They were all very shouty about Jesus, saying great things, but, you know, it's getting late.

Got to go get some dinner, walk the dog. Finale of dancing with the stars. Don't want to miss that. I mean, they said the right things, but they obviously didn't really think Jesus was the Messiah.

They kind of yelled the stuff you're supposed to say, and then they just went home. It seems to me Mark here warns us against mistaking enthusiasm for faith.

[ 5 : 43 ] They put on a great show of faith, but there was no substance to it. It was a fickle faith. So let me just say this plainly.

Folks, we can say the right things, and we can say them with gusto at times, but we can still have a shallow faith. It can be a faith built on a few sort of positive religious experiences, some nice brushes with Jesus, but then life mostly just redirects us back to kind of the stuff we need to get on with.

Now, what we need is a faith built on a deep conviction of who Jesus is.

We need a faith built on a deep conviction of who Jesus is. And if you are not sure about that, if you are here and you're feeling a bit wobbly about that, can I commend to you catechism?

Can I commend to you that you spend some serious time building a foundation in your faith? Okay, we're going to keep going.

[ 6 : 55 ] Before moving on to the fig tree, just have another look at verse 11 there. Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and he looked around at everything. Isn't that interesting?

What's that about? We know it's not a touristy visit. It's Jesus sizing up the temple. He's seeing if it's fulfilling God's purpose for it. So the next day, when he goes flipping tables, we know that wasn't like a spontaneous act.

This was a premeditated judgment. Okay, now, fig tree, fig tree, which is very interesting and often misunderstood. Before that, let's just stop and look at the big narrative flow here of our reading.

We have Jesus cursing a fig tree. Then he trashes the temple. And then it's the fig tree again.

Fig tree story. Trashing temple. Fig tree story. Now, a reminder, this was written 2,000 years ago, but they're not stupid people that wrote this. This is sophisticated literature.

[ 8 : 09 ] And what we have here is a sandwich, kind of literary technique of bringing emphasis to something. Fig tree, temple, fig tree. This is not random.

It's trying to tell us something. So let's have a look at it. So the fig tree incident. Jesus is walking along. He sees a fig tree in leaf. He goes over. It doesn't have any figs.

It wasn't fig season. But at that time of the year, it should have had these little pre-fig nodules on.

And so travelers, they'd look at fig trees at this particular time we did, and they'd eat these little nodules. They were great to eat, apparently.

They were edible. This one didn't have those. So he curses it. He says, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. It's like a, well, it is. It's a reverse miracle. It's a miracle of destruction.

And this is a story that has really troubled people a lot over the centuries. Because it does seem like Jesus is being petty. Like he loses his cool.

[ 9 : 05 ] He loses his temper over a silly little thing. He uses his powers carelessly. It's what it seems like is going on. Sometimes I yell at my kids over really dumb things.

And I make the wildest of threats. Like I will say the most ridiculous things like, son, if you don't pick up your socks like I've asked you 20 times, I will throw that PlayStation out the window.

No. Or, son, I keep saying son. Son, we've got five minutes to school.

If you didn't put your clothes in, I will walk you to school in your underpants. I'm serious. I will walk you to school in your underpants. It's like I just lose my mind for like 10 seconds.

Am I alone in this? No. Thank you, Sawatsky, back there. Thank you. Probably shouldn't have said your name out loud.

[ 10 : 22 ] But anyway. And then afterwards I feel ridiculous and I have to apologize. It feels sort of like this is happening in this story.

Like, do you know the phrase hangry? Like Jesus was really hangry. Like he was angry and he was hungry and he just did something really mean and petty. I think that's what's troubled people about this incident. But remember the sandwich.

Fig tree. Temple. Fig tree. It's a literary technique and the thing in the middle is normally what it's about. Jesus doesn't lose his temper here. It never says he loses his temper. What happens is he uses this situation to teach us something.

The fig tree becomes this parable. This living parable that Jesus has just created. And he's trying to tell us something about the temple. The fig tree represents the temple.

This leafy fig tree for all its promise of providing food was actually barren. It was bankrupt. It's a bit like these crowds yelling Hosanna in the highest.

[11:33] Looks pretty good. There's nothing there. The fig tree was all show. It was as deceptive as the temple.

And that will make more sense in a moment. So let's go there. Let's talk about the temple. So we're in verses 15 to 19 now. Jesus goes into the temple. He starts driving out the vendors.

He's turning over tables. And then he says, this is supposed to be a place of prayer. You've made it a den of robbers. So what's going on here? So the temple, this one was built by Herod, probably as a favor to the Jewish people.

But Herod was a builder. He was a city builder. He liked big, impressive buildings. And this was a remarkable building. Apparently, it took three people, arms held, if they wanted to stand around the columns at the front.

Massive column. 35 acres it took up. And there were different places in the temple. So you had the Holy of Holies, you know, right in the middle, which the priests would go to once a year.

[12:36] You had lots of places that only Jews were allowed. You had places that only women were allowed. And when you first walked in, where Jesus entered, there was this enormous area called the Court of Gentiles.

This was the place, the area of the temple, where Gentiles were allowed, where non-Jews were allowed. And it was there that they were supposed to meet God. This was the place.

Here, meet God here. But it had become just this market filled with vendors, and corruption was rife. The temple refused to accept foreign currency if you wanted to give to the temple.

So you had to exchange your money for these coins that had no image on them. At an awful exchange rate. And there were just animals everywhere. People, you know, buying and selling animals.

It was supposed to be a place that the Gentiles could engage in prayer and have access to God and learn to forgive and be in fellowship with their Creator. And it had become a gong show.

[13:37] In Isaiah 6, back in the Old Testament, Isaiah has this vision when he visits the temple. Let me read it to you. And in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up.

And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face. With two he covered his feet. With two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke.

And he said, Woe is me, for I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And then one seraphim flew to me.

Having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt has taken away.

[14:42] Your sin atoned for. Awesome. Isn't that awe-inspiring stuff? This happened in the temple. For a thousand years it had been this holy place.

And now it was a circus. It was like the fig tree. It looked impressive. It was leafy. It was this huge, busy, beautiful building that was fruitless.

Didn't seem like lives were changing. It had become just a vehicle for greed. Now remember the sandwich.

Fig tree. Temple. Fig tree. Let's go to the bottom piece of that sandwich. Verse 20 to 24. And as they passed by in the morning, that's the disciples, they saw that the fig tree withered away to its

roots.

And Peter remembered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, look, the fig tree you cursed has withered. It's an interesting detail. Withered to its roots. It tells us something really important. It tells us about Jesus' intentions.

[15:48] In your Bible you have those headings. You know those headings you have in the Bible? Those are not in the original manuscripts. They're there to help us. And they're very helpful. But in this case, it's wrong-headed.

The heading for this story is called the cleansing of the temple. But it's not what Jesus was trying to do here. He was not trying to cleanse the temple.

He was not trying to reform the temple. I mean, when he curses the fig tree, it says, this fig tree is not recovering from this. It's rotten. The tree is not coming back.

It's rotten to the core of the temple. It's going the way of the fig tree. It's rotten. Of course, you probably know the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Jesus just preempted it a little bit.

Folks, that's the fig tree sandwich right there explained. I hope that makes sense. Now let me try and sort of pull some threads together here and finish up. Jesus entered Jerusalem.

[16:52] People were shouting all the right things. Conventional things. But then the crowds disappeared to live their lives.

They didn't carry on with Jesus. He entered the temple alone. They had a fickle faith. A faith that was easily distracted. Jesus was an interesting guy, but he wasn't at the center of their life, his rightful place.

They had bursts of enthusiasm, but nothing changed. Just like the temple industry. It was all show and chaos and business. It was leafy, but there was no fruit.

It didn't seem like lives were being changed there. And I think this is one of the great challenges of this passage. Friends, Jesus wants more than our fickle excitement.

He wants more than our religious busyness. He is not impressed by, you know, perfunctory religious language.

[17:56] By just saying the right things. These things, they can look good from the outside. They can be leafy, but folks, are we changing in character?

Is the life of Christ being reproduced in us? Are you becoming more humble? Are you trusting God with your future? Are you becoming less attached to money?

Friends, when was the last time the words of Jesus caused change in you? You know, these are questions I ask myself. And I grieve about them.

And that's a good thing. I ask myself, where are the areas in my life where Jesus is not the center? Areas of my life where I know all the Christian-y things to say.

And I've read the books, and I know the doctrines. And I can look leafy, but I know Jesus is not the center of some of these areas. It is a good thing to take into account every now and then of our life.

[19:04] And we have this whole season that Jordan mentioned at the start coming up called Lent, which is committed to this idea. Folks, it is a good thing to have these spiritual reckonings.

So, action point. Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus. Pray for forgiveness.

Ask for Holy Spirit change, that Jesus would rule in your life, and that your whole hearts would be submitted to him. Amen. Amen.

Amen.