

Garden and Home

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[0 : 0 0] Well now if you would turn back to Mark 11, page 847. We pick up again in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 11. And we finally arrived at Jerusalem at the beginning of chapter 11, which is the final third of the Gospel.

The first third of the Gospel was in Galilee, then on the way up to Jerusalem, and now we finally arrived in Jerusalem. And in Galilee, Jesus did lots of miracles and taught publicly mostly.

In the middle section, he only did three miracles and taught mostly privately. And now in this last third, there's only one miracle in all these last chapters.

And Jesus mostly teaches and confronts those who oppose him. And the only miracle that Jesus performs is this cursing of the fig tree, a kind of a negative miracle.

Now, I know it's St. Patrick's Day, and when I first came to Canada, I discovered that people crack jokes at the expense of Newfoundlanders.

[1 : 0 9] Newfie jokes, which was a great surprise to me, because in Australia, we crack Irish jokes. I don't know if this is familiar to you, but they were the same jokes, exactly the same jokes.

But they were always funnier when they were told about the Irish for some reason. And I'm doing all that I can to resist telling you an Irish joke. We have bigger fish to fry.

And we can fry them, because it's Sunday. So let's go back to Mark. I don't know what came over me. I apologize for that. In these last chapters, though, the focus is not really the city of Jerusalem.

It's the temple. In verse 11, at the end of the triumphal entry that Dan and we looked at last week, he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

That's the first reference to the temple. And then the references to the temple come thick and fast. Temple, temple, temple, temple. Everything happens around and around the temple and about the temple.

[2 : 1 3] And then there is a final reference to the temple. It dominates this whole last section. And the question is why? What is the big deal about the temple? I mean, it's a great big building, 35 acres, massive columns.

But so what? I mean, it wouldn't have been more sensible for Jesus to avoid this whole issue altogether. He would have lived a long and safe life. And so what I want to do with you this morning together is to talk about the temple for a few minutes and then go back to Mark 11.

Will you allow me to do that? All in favor? No, let's not do it that way. To talk about the temple, we have to go back to paradise, to the Garden of Eden, to the beginning.

Because when God made the world, at the center of the world, he created a garden, a place of protection and pleasure and purity, which was qualitatively better than anywhere else in creation.

It's there in the garden God invited humanity to enjoy the harmony of creation with one another in perfect bliss with God himself.

[3 : 25] And God was uniquely present in the garden, walking with Adam and Eve in love. There was no suffering. There was no evil. There was no pain. It was a picture of peace and life and enjoyment, which is what we long for.

We've been created for this. The essence of our humanity is that we were made to dwell with God. And we live outside the garden now.

We can't force our way back in. Because like Adam and Eve, we've replaced God with other things. We've made other things more important in our lives than God.

And so we vandalize and sabotage what God has made us for. And the whole story of the Bible in one sense is the story of God, a God of love, a God of holiness and a God of sovereign power, pursuing vandals to restore us to himself in paradise.

And one of the key ways that God does that is by transferring this paradise presence, his own unique presence, to different things and different places, from the garden to the tabernacle to the temple to his son to his people.

[4 : 45] That's the story of the scriptures. So take the Exodus, for example. Remember the Exodus, prince of Egypt? It's not really about the prince of Egypt. God rescued his people.

And the reason he rescued them is that his determination is to come and live with those people. So he takes Moses up on the mountain. Remember we did Exodus a couple of years ago. He takes Moses up on the mountain for 40 days and he gives Moses very specific instructions on how to create a tabernacle where God will come and dwell on the pattern of God's dwelling in heaven.

And we come to the end of Exodus and what happens is the tabernacle is built and the glory of God comes down on the tabernacle. And all throughout the tabernacle is the carvings of Eden and the perfect tree of life and fruit and living water.

And when we come into the land and God has Solomon build a temple for himself so that in Jerusalem there's a palace for the king but there's a larger building which is the temple.

It is the house of God. And God comes and takes up personal residence in the temple again. Now of course God is everywhere.

[6 : 02] God is present to the ends of the universe. But the temple is God's special place. His care is over this place. It is his face to humanity.

It's this place through which he wants to bring us back to himself. And he wants Israel to live in the light of his presence. To be a light to the Gentiles.

So that the nations would come in and come to know this God and the glory of his saving power. But you know Israel continued to subvert God's house.

And over the years they began to care more about the building of the temple than God himself. They felt secure with the building of the temple. And so they violated God's word without even thinking about it.

And again and again and again God warns his people. And again and again and again God cleans out the temple. And they start again. For 500 years God perseveres until he finally draws a line and he withdraws his presence from the temple.

[7 : 06] In 586 BC in a catastrophic moment that's described in the prophet Ezekiel. God's glory abandons the temple.

And the Babylonians overrun Jerusalem. The temple is razed to the ground. The leaders of Israel are carried off into exile. And it ought to be the end of the Bible. The story ought to be over.

But God remains passionately committed to his own purpose and to his people. And in that same prophet Ezekiel. God promises that one day he's going to create a new home in a different form.

It's not going to be a physical building. It's going to be a new people. And these new people are described in terms of a new Eden and a new temple. And the water of life is going to flow out from these people.

And he will be uniquely present with them. That's why we read Ezekiel 47. I know sometimes when we drop into the middle of a context in the Old Testament it's hard to catch up. But that picture of the river which gets deeper and deeper and deeper and creates fruits and trees comes from this new temple.

[8 : 17] It's the river of life and the tree of life. And in Ezekiel this new people are created by resurrection. They're given new hearts and a new spirit.

And God will dwell amongst them forever. And this is what we see in the last chapters of the Bible. This is the new Jerusalem. However, and we're coming to Mark in a moment.

When God's people, when Israel started dribbling back from the exile around 530 BC, they built a second temple out of the ruins.

It wasn't very good. They used recycled rocks and shabby material. And when Herod became king sometime later in the first century BC, he was the sort of first century Donald Trump, he began a massive renovation on the temple.

A massive renovation. Huge structure. But there was only one thing missing. God. And this was the temple that Jesus came to.

[9 : 29] The temple that had been abandoned by God. Still it was Herod's massive building project. But despite all the religious activity and the ritual, it was a shell.

So all of that is background. And when we come to Mark 11, I wanted to say all that because here is Jesus, the son of God, the Messiah King, who comes to now announce God's judgment, final judgment of the temple and its replacement.

That's what Mark 11 is about. The son of God has come to the house of God. And in this, chapter 11 happens over three days. And each day starts in Bethany, which is about two kilometers on the other side of the valley from Jerusalem.

We go down the Mount of Olives, up to Jerusalem, into the temple. And then we go down back to Bethany at night. Three days, Bethany, temple, Bethany, three days doing the same thing.

And I just want to look quickly at those three days with you. So on the first day, which we looked at last week, Mark 11, verses 1 to 11, this is the Palm Sunday passage, sometimes called the triumphal entry.

[10 : 51] I feel like saying, is everyone with me? I know we've flown at 50,000 feet over the entire Bible. We'll do it again at the end of the sermon, just in case I've lost anyone. So day one, the house inspected.

When you look closely at the triumphal entry, I know it's exciting, but the crowd has no real understanding or commitment to Jesus. And it's very interesting.

Although there's excitement on the road, when we come to verse 11, when we come to the city, the crowd just melts away. In other words, the crowd doesn't get past the walls of Jerusalem.

Verse 11, Jesus goes in on his own. It's singular. Verse 11, and he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was late, he went out to Bethany with the 12.

Now I think by now we're expecting fireworks, aren't we? You know, we know that Jesus has come to Jerusalem to do the big thing. The Lord will suddenly come to his temple, but nothing happens.

[12 : 00] Jesus comes into this house, which is meant to be the symbol of his father's presence and Eden, and he takes a very careful look around. He does nothing but look around, look around, look around.

And what he finds is that the temple is a zoo. It's a massive stock market. It's where people are changing money. And when they change money, there's a massive tax extorted by the clergy.

But nothing happens. And the reason it's placed here, I think, is because what happens on the next day when he comes back to the temple is no angry impulse.

Jesus is sizing up the temple and the whole empty temple system. He goes back to Bethany with the 12th of the night. He has inspected the house of God.

Day two, I've called it the house condemned, verses 12 to 19. Day two and day three each have two events, fig tree temple, fig tree temple.

[13 : 01] So, fig tree, verses 12 to 14. They come from Bethany. And, you know, if you say, Bethany is on this side. It's kind of a hill.

They come down the Mount of Olives into the valley and up, they walk up again to Jerusalem. It's only about two kilometers or so. But as they come down the Mount of Olives, Jesus does something very unusual, deliberately unusual.

He sees a fig tree that's got lots of leaves on it and he says, I'm going to go and get something to eat from it. He finds nothing on it and he judges it.

Verse 14, he says, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. Sound a bit harsh? And, what makes it worse?

Mark tells us that it's not the season for figs. It's cruelty to fig trees. Some people think Jesus just lost it. You know, it's a moment of vindictive selfishness, overwhelmed with hunger.

[14 : 06] I have seen people overwhelmed with hunger do silly things. Others point out that when, this time of year, when fig trees leaf, when they have leaves, they don't have figs on them.

They have little prefigs. Pagim, which is sweet and nourishing. Any leaf will demonstrate proof that there are prefigs there. All commentators go off on these things.

Something else I think is happening. Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is about to happen in the temple. What he's doing with the fig tree is a symbolic action, an acted parable.

It's not a spontaneous outburst. It's a planned demonstration. Jesus judges the tree, not because it has no figs, but because it has no fruit.

And his judgment on the tree seems way out of proportion. It's eternal. The day before, what happened? He came to the temple and he looked for fruit.

[15 : 07] And he found that the temple was just leaves, just outward show, but completely barren. Jesus announcing judgment on the fig tree is utterly devastating for the fig tree.

It's never going to recover. And he's going to do exactly the same thing in the temple in just a moment. The future of God's purpose, the future of God's people have shifted from that building.

God's presence and blessing will never again have anything to do with the temple structure. And so that the Christians who get excited about rebuilding the new temple in Jerusalem nowadays, I think, are misguided.

So still on day two, verse 15 to 19, they come to the temple. People love this passage. You know, this is Jesus, not so meek and mild.

Very familiar to us. As soon as he arrives, he bounces everyone out, the buyers and the sellers alike. He overturns the money tables. But worse, for the temple authorities, verse 16, he does not allow any traffic through the temple.

[16 : 15] In other words, all these money changers and all these sellers, what they were doing is they were keeping the sacrifices going. You can't keep the function of the temple going without these guys.

And Jesus specifically stops the functioning of the temple. How can one man do this? I mean, it's a huge space. The answer, I think, is in verse 17.

And he was teaching them and saying to them, is it not written, my house shall be called the house of prayer for all the nations, but you've made it into a den of robbers.

And the way it's written in the original is that throwing out the market happened quickly. It didn't take long. He does it once. But the ongoing activity where Jesus stops everything is the ongoing teaching, teaching, teaching.

Driving out was just the start, but he held the ground for the rest of the day through hours of teaching. See? Like the fig tree, it's not just an uncontrolled burst of anger.

[17 : 23] Jesus is deliberately closing down the temple operation. He's not just targeting the temple because of its commercialization or profit to the clergy. He drives out both those who sell and those who buy.

No, no, the emphasis in this text is that he will not allow anything to continue by his teaching. Did you know that the headings in the Bibles are not part of the original text?

And you can see the heading in our Bible says, Jesus cleanses the temple. This is often referred to as the cleansing of the temple. And I want to suggest to you this morning that is exactly not what is happening.

He is not correcting. He's not improving the function of the temple to restore it to its greatness. He's cancelling it. He's bringing it to an end. He's not trying to reform or fix the temple.

He's laying the axe to the root. He's announcing God's judgment. An end to sacrifices. An end to priesthood. An end to all temple operations.

[18 : 31] And it was this in the end that got him killed. And what is it that Jesus teaches on that day with great authority? Well, we have a little summary of it from Mark.

He teaches from the Old Testament what God's purpose for his temple was. And what was God's purpose? Did he want the biggest building in the world to live in? Did he want thousands, hundreds of thousands of sacrifices and rivers of blood?

Did he want an incredibly profit marketplace for his clergy? No. He quotes God saying, my house will be a house of prayer for all nations.

The essential purpose of the temple was to have access to God, to have fellowship with God. It was a place where people should come to know him for their faith to grow, for prayer, to learn how to forgive.

It was the place of God's presence to re-enter into that paradise relationship, for people to have access to him, to hear his word and pray and to speak with him, not limited to Israel but to all people.

[19 : 38] God didn't want the money to pour in, God wanted people to pour in. But they'd made it a hideout for bandits, a safe covering for themselves as wolves while they fleeced the people.

So, what do you do with something when it no longer works? I have a friend that has an old television set, he really likes it as a piece of furniture, television stopped working and so he took out the inside and made an aquarium out of it.

You can do that with things that stop working. You know, when your computer goes kaput, you can make a mailbox out of it if you like, I've seen that. This is a little closer to what happened in the 30s where Stalin took the Orthodox churches in Russia and made them museums of atheism.

The house of God was given by God as a place of connection and fellowship with him. It was meant to be a place of praise where the praise and glory of God would resound to the nations. But they had converted it into a vehicle of exploitation and greed.

Not as a place for people to have access to God but a place for them to have access to wallets. And Jesus came looking for fruit, for faith and for forgiveness and prayer.

[20 : 53] And while there were plenty of outward impressive buildings and show, they were just leaves, there was no real fruit. Of course there was genuine faith in Israel. And it's very interesting, in the very next chapter as we'll see, Mark gives us two illustrations of genuine faith and godliness, one by a scribe and one by a widow.

It's not black and white. The point is that the temple is over. The institution at the heart of the Jewish life is now a relic and the clergy are flogging a dead horse.

And even in the way that Jesus deals with his opponents, as we'll see next week and the following weeks, demonstrates his grace that he wishes them to enter the kingdom of God. Well, we need to finish with day two, but verse 18, what is the response of the temple authorities?

They want to kill him with every fibre of their being. The upholders of the Ten Commandments plan to murder this man who dares to say anything against this building.

And in one sense, I think you can understand, I mean, we live outside Eden, don't we? We don't live naturally and easily in face-to-face fellowship with God.

[22 : 14] And as we long for that true connection and we long for life and authenticity and peace, you know, we long for harmony and to know and be known, that longing is good and it's God planted in our hearts, but we attach it to all sorts of other things.

I mean, the temple was a very good thing. It was God's idea in the first place. But the chief priests and the scribes have elevated the temple into the place of God.

They've replaced God with the temple. And you can tell when we replace God with something else, we will want to kill people who challenge it in our lives.

We take God's good gifts like the temple and gradually make them into something that's ultimately important to us and the only thing missing is God himself. And what's restraining the clergy is their fear of the crowd, but their chance will come three chapters later.

And so at the end of day two, verse 19, as darkness falls, Jesus separates himself from the temple and returns to Bethany. And then we move on to day three.

[23 : 23] We saw the house inspected, the house condemned, and now the purpose of this passage is the house replaced. Verses 20, and I'm only going to be able to do the first half of this, 20 to 25.

On their way down the mountain again, they come to the fig tree and it's completely withered away to its roots. Peter points it out as though he's surprised. And I want you to picture it.

Here they are coming down, they're on the Mount of Olives. There's the fig tree. It's in the shadow of the massive temple. And Jesus begins to teach his disciples about faith and prayer and forgiveness.

Why? I mean, a few good thoughts before they begin the day in Jerusalem. You know, sort of an early everyday with Jesus inspirational pick-me-up.

No, because faith and prayer and forgiveness is exactly the fruit that God is looking for. Verse 22, have faith in God, Jesus says to the 12.

[24 : 32] Don't put your faith or trust in the temple. Don't put anything else in the place of God in your life. Put your faith in God. You were made for fellowship with him, to dwell with him.

There's nothing else, there's nobody else who can replace him. And if there is someone else or something else other than God in that place of ultimate importance, put it away, turn back to him and trust him.

Prayer, well, true faith will show itself in prayer, that's how we have fellowship with God. And I want to just read these prayer verses because there's so much silly teaching on this, if you would pardon the French.

Verse 23, 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, and 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. There are some people who teach this passage as though, I think I would like Whistler Mountain closer, and Mount Seymour a little more to the right, as though Jesus is giving us one ring to rule them all, you know, sort of a free ticket for our greed, genie God.

[25 : 55] The Bible never promises God will give us what we want, he'll give us what we need. Prayer is not magic, and if you want any proof of that, just go three chapters further into the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus himself prays to God, that God would relieve him of the cross, and God says no.

No, Jesus is talking about true prayer, and true prayer is always based on what God says in the scriptures. Jesus is teaching his disciples to pray out of the words of scripture.

Jesus says, whoever says, to this mountain, not any old mountain, this mountain, the Mount of Olives, that's the mountain thereon. And those who read their Old Testament will know that in the prophet Zechariah, God promises that on the day of the kingdom, on the day of salvation, the Mount of Olives will be split in half, and both halves will flee away.

That's how he'll establish his kingdom. In other words, Jesus is calling on his disciples to pray that the kingdom would come, that God would so work through his death and resurrection that the nations would come to see his glory.

I actually find that when our prayers are not formed by the scriptures, they just become selfish shopping lists, mine do, or sort of a doing the deal, you know, I really want you to do this Lord, I'll do this if you do that, or a kind of a spiritual entitlement therapy.

[27 : 30] But you know, praying that God will bless mummy, daddy, and me is great when you're six, but not when you're 26 or 56. The Lord's prayer teaches us to pray, yes, for our daily bread, after we have prayed for God's concerns, that his name would be treated as magnificent and holy, that his kingdom would come and that his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus wants to create a true house of prayer, and in our prayers, he wants us to be taken up with God's concerns, based on God's promises in the scripture for God's glory.

Of course, there's nothing too trivial to bring before our heavenly father, he loves us, but true prayer in the true house of God is transforming, we pray out of God's word. And this is the fruit that God is looking for, faith, forgiveness, and finally, sorry, faith and prayer, and finally forgiveness.

In verse 25, forgive one another, he says. It's not a throwaway line. This is what binds us into being a house of God.

It's through forgiveness that we became disciples of Jesus. Jesus, I have authority on earth to forgive sins, and our forgiveness, brothers and sisters, you know, cost Jesus his life.

[28 : 55] I mean, he died to create this new temple made up of followers. And as we go through the next chapters, you'll see it again and again and again, his enemies, as they want to kill him, say, you said you destroy this temple.

And in the very last reference to the temple in Mark's gospel, Jesus is on the cross, cross, and as he dies on the cross, the curtain in the temple is torn from top to bottom.

God tears the temple to indicate that his presence and his blessing is no longer in the building. From now on, the temple is never going to be the place of access to him. And Jesus' death opens the door of paradise.

And that's why forgiveness ought to be a crucial mark of Christians. If we're trying to form a community, we're sunk without forgiveness, aren't we? I mean, what makes a Christian church is not how good we are.

This is such, we lose this so easily, don't we? But it's how sinful we know we are. And if we have access to God based on the costly forgiveness of Christ, I think we give access to ourselves and to each other by extending that forgiveness to others.

[30 : 07] I know it goes against the grain. We're very practiced at holding on to grievances and grudges. But we can have buildings and money and we can have programs and sumptuous liturgies, but without forgiveness for one another, we have nothing.

If we have faith to move mountains but have not love, we are nothing. And although one of our members is deeply distressed, I'm going to conclude right now.

Why is it you think Jesus goes to forgiveness? forgiveness? I think it's because here he is with the twelve and they are the nucleus of the new temple founded by Jesus.

These are the ones who are taking up their cross and following him. Before he goes and confronts the temple again, he tells them how they should be, what they should be, and who they should be together.

I know this is hard to believe, but in God's plan, the way in which the world will see the glory of God is through our faith and through our prayers and through our forgiving one another.

[31 : 28] Jesus is God with them now, but when he's raised from the dead, the promise of the Old Testament is that God will build a new temple, not out of bricks and stones and concrete, but with living stones.

And that's where the Holy Spirit is present amongst us. That's where God dwells now. You are living stones. We are built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ to be a new creation.

The same purpose of God in paradise, in the tabernacle, in the temple, is fulfilled in us as the Holy Spirit builds us together to be a dwelling place for him.

And you can tell the presence of the Holy Spirit in a community by his fruit, by the fruit of faith and prayer and forgiveness. God will be with us.

And as we continue to build our lives on Jesus Christ, all of this will be consummated on that last day when God judges evil, the old heaven and earth will pass away and heaven and earth will come together and we'll hear that great voice saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with us.

[32 : 44] He will dwell with us and we shall be his people. God himself will be with them as their God. He'll wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.

For the former things have passed away. And he who is seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things new. So let's kneel and pray that God's kingdom would come.

thou.