

The Temple

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

So Mark chapter 11, we are going to continue, pick up where we left off last week and continue studying this book.

So Mark chapter 11, verse 12, where I'm going to begin reading. So look there with me. Mark chapter 11, verse 12, and on the following day, when they came from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in 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.

[1 : 12] Verse 15, and they came to Jerusalem, and he entered the temple, and he 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 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, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came, they went out of the city. Verse 20, and 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.

[2 : 26] 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. And whenever you stand praying, forgive. Do you have anything against anyone so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses?

May God bless the preaching and the hearing of his word. You know, in the slapstick and ridiculous comedy Talladega Nights, Will Ferrell plays a race car driver named Ricky Bobby.

Reportedly, I haven't watched the movie, I did read the script in this part. During one part of the movie, Ricky Bobby prays to, I quote, Dear Lord Baby Jesus, whom he later addresses as dear 8-pound-6-ounce newborn infant Jesus.

As he's praying, his wife says, Hey, honey, Jesus did grow up. You don't always have to call him baby. It's a bit odd and off-putting to pray to a baby.

[3 : 46] And Ricky Bobby responds, Look, I like the Christmas Jesus best when I'm saying grace. When you say grace, you can say it to the grown-up Jesus, or teenage Jesus, or bearded Jesus, or whoever you want.

In a lot of ways, I think Ricky Bobby captures our heart. We like the Christmas Jesus best, right? As you say, you can pray to whatever Jesus you want.

Though we may roll our eyes at Ricky Bobby, we often live with a picture of Jesus in our mind that may not be the real one. He may be the feel-good Jesus. He always smiles, always agrees, always welcome.

He's never upset with you. He's just glad to see you whenever you can come around. Kind of like a desperate grandmother in a nursing home or something like that. No matter what you do, or no matter what you do, you can count on this Jesus to assure you that everything's going to be okay.

He understands, because as long as you're basically good, you're good enough for him. But a lot of folks think this is the real Jesus, but we know that's just bogus. That's no king. He agrees with whatever we want.

[4 : 58] So the alternative that we fall into is often the feel-bad Jesus. That's the only alternative to the feel-good Jesus, the feel-bad one. And that's the one who doesn't feel good about you.

It must be, because he feels bad about something you've done, and he does. Nothing you'll ever do will satisfy this Jesus, because he feels bad.

You don't read enough, pray enough, give enough, serve enough, do more, and it makes him feel bad, and you should feel bad about it too. But that's not Jesus.

A petty miser is no king. But this passage introduces us to what could be called the feel-mad Jesus. You know, he's a bit like the feel-bad Jesus, only turned up a few hundred decimals. He's angry and annoyed. He's heated up, and he's boiling over.

[5 : 59] He's getting violent. This Jesus is not okay. He's crossing the line. He curses a tree, flips over tables, empties out the offerings of people trying to obey the Lord. And many say, if this is the real Jesus, I don't want anything to do with him.

One scholar says, it is a tale of miraculous power wasted in service of an ill temper. That's what he says is going on in this passage. It's a miraculous power wasted in the service of an ill temper.

For the supernatural energy employed to blast that unfortunate tree might have been more usefully expressed, enforcing a crop of figs out of season. And as it stands, it's simply incredible.

So is this feel-mad Jesus the real one? Does Jesus have a temper problem? Is this the real Jesus Christ?

In order to understand this passage, all that's going on, we've got to unpack it in context. As we've seen before, Mark does something. He does something here that he does in other parts of his gospel.

[7 : 05] He sandwiches a story into another one. So he tells this story about a fig tree and sandwiches in the middle of it Jesus cleansing, angrily cleansing the temple.

So we're going to work this passage through before we land on a main point to see what God would have us see, what Mark would have us see here. So point one, the blooming fig tree.

The blooming fig tree. Our passage begins very simply with, and on the following day. Now last week we studied Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.

You remember it was quite the procession, but it was so late, Jesus went back to Bethany. After he went in the temple, we went back to Bethany, and our passage picks up on the next morning.

So all that wonderful stuff happened the last day or yesterday, and our passage picks up on the next morning. Jesus and his disciples are making the two-mile walk from Bethany to Jerusalem again.

[8 : 07] And along the way, Jesus becomes hungry. Now I love that because I think it's just a wonderful brief reminder of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is hungry.

Does God ever sleep or slumber? Does God ever grow tired or hungry? In Psalm 50 he says, if I were thirsty, I wouldn't call you. He has no needs, and yet Jesus is hungry.

St. Augustine put it like this wonderfully. Man's maker was made man that he, ruler of the stars, might nurse at a mother's breast, that the bread might hunger, the fountain thirst, the light sleep, the way be tired on its journey.

A wonderful little window into the humanity of Jesus Christ. But no need to worry. Jesus sees a blooming fig tree in the distance. Look at verse 13. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf.

He went to see if he could find anything on it. And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And then he cursed it. Now, if we're honest, this is quite disturbing of a scene.

[9 : 23] Jesus sees a blooming fig tree, or a fig tree in leaf, but when he comes closer, he finds that it was not, there was no fruit on it, because it was not the season for figs. And so Jesus just curses this tree for not bringing forth figs at a season.

You think, what's going on? You know, it's Jesus. I mean, does his elevator not go all the way up? You know, something like that. Did he lose it? You know, is he angry? Does he have a sinful tendency to overreact? I remember watching that movie, Father of the Bride, years ago. And believe it or not, I don't just watch movies all the time with two movie references today.

But watching the movie, *Father of the Bride*, George Banks warns his daughter, Annie's fiancée, about her tendency to overreact. He says, Annie is a very passionate person. And passionate people tend to overreact at times.

Annie comes from a long line of major overreactors. Me, I could definitely lose it. My mother, a nut. My grandfather's stories about him are legendary.

[10:30] The good news, however, is that the overreacting tendency tends to get proportionally less by generation, so your kids should be normal. Is that what we're introduced to here?

Jesus' tendency to overreact, to get angry. Now, no in a word.

And this is where we must not miss the forest for the trees or the buds for the leaves, if you will.

First, fig trees were very common in the Middle East and known to produce two kinds of fruit.

Before the fig harvest in early fall, the branches produced little buds. When the leaves came out in March or April, March and April, travelers would often pluck those buds to eat as they walked.

So after winter, when you saw a fig tree in leaf, you knew these little buds were on there. So Mark alerts us that Jesus was expecting these little buds when he says, in the distance he saw a fig tree in leaf.

[11:39] Okay? So the leaves come out March or April, and these buds come out with them, and so Mark is saying, that's what Jesus came to expect. Not fig tree, or not figs, but these little buds.

And then Mark adds, it was not the season for figs, not to confuse us and think that Jesus was expecting to find something he didn't find, but to make clear that Jesus did not go for the figs.

He went for these little buds. Does that make sense? So Jesus was not angry at the fig tree for not producing figs out of season. Jesus was angry at the fig tree for not producing buds in season.

Does that make sense? So that's what's going on, and everybody in the Middle East would have known that. So that's a part of what's going on. That's why it doesn't completely explain all of its anger, but fig trees are very common.

I've said that in the Middle East, but they're often, in the Bible, they're common metaphors. If you search fig tree through your scriptures, you'll just find dozens of metaphors, and one of the metaphors is for the people of God.

[12:46] Hosea 9 says, like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. So Israel's like grapes. Like the first fruit of the fig tree in its season, I saw your fathers.

Okay? It's kind of a simple analogy, what he's saying. Israel, it's like a fig tree, and it's used all throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps this scene is not really about fig trees.

but about the people of God. So Jesus then makes sure everyone's present. Look at verse 14. And he said to it, may you never eat, no one ever eat fruit from you again, and his disciples heard it.

Point two. the cleansing of the temple. So before finishing this story about the fig tree, Mark interrupts it with this scene from the temple. Point two, the cleansing of the temple.

Now, this scene begins very simply, and they came to Jerusalem. Look at verse 15. And they came to Jerusalem. He entered the temple, began to drive out those who sold and bought in the temple. He overturned the tables and the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

[14:08] Did you see the way that's worded? And they came to Jerusalem. So, you know, Mark's helping us again and describing this eyewitness testimony this gospel is based on because he tells us that they came to Jerusalem and then everyone is watching Jesus.

So the subject turns from them to he. Immediately, all eyes are on him and Jesus immediately enters the temple. Now, Jesus is not, this is what we're seeing in this scene, Jesus is not so much making his approach to Jerusalem as he's making his approach to the temple.

Now, this temple is Herod's temple which was being built and are still being built in Jesus' day. It's a temple after Solomon, after Zerubbabel and it is incredible.

This temple is incredible. It's the one destroyed in AD 70. Jesus first enters this court of the Gentiles, this massive outside courtyard, five football fields, 500 yards long by three and percentage football fields, 500 yards long by 325 yards long.

So you capture the scale of this courtyard that Jesus is walking into. He immediately notices the portico lining the perimeter with Corinthian columns, gold caps in the center of this courtyard.

[15:30] Now, I did have a map for y'all. I had a little picture of it. I forgot to get it off my computer and send it to the guys. But inside this courtyard and rising above everything else was the place reserved for the Jews, the court for the women, the court for circumcised men and the Holy of Holies.

Jesus is struck by the brilliance of this temple, the marble walls and the gold. Jesus immediately sees people all around and the text captures that.

People would have been buying birds and livestock and wine and salt for sacrifices, tossing coins as Moses commanded them to the money changers, tossing coins in here, the half shekel that was required.

Jesus was no doubt struck by a large number of people. The historian Josephus, the Jewish historian in AD 65 said 255,000 lambs were sacrificed for Passover that year.

You know what that means? That means 2.7 million people came to worship in Jerusalem. Now this is AD 30. There's no reason to believe there's any less people gathered.

[16:43] So it's just burgeoning with people. And then Jesus begins to cleanse the temple. Jesus begins to finish what he started the night before when he looked around that temple so pregnant with meaning and he gets right to the heart of what everyone expected him to do which was to cleanse the temple.

That's what the Messiah is going to do to set up right worship in the temple of God, the place where God dwells. Now it's very hard for us to understand the impact of the expectations about this coming king on the average Jewish person.

They believed they were part of something bigger than themselves and they were waiting on it expectantly. Nearly every moment of their daily lives was consumed with this longing. Perhaps it's like Tennessee fans who had a little taste of the glory back in the day who had the national title, the top ranked recruiting classes, the SEC titles, though it's been a doozy of a decade and though it's hard to convince our children we were ever good, we believe there's more in store for us.

There's a bigger plan out there. We're not meant to be mentioned in the same sentence with Kentucky. And so we hope against hope. We labor on.

That's just a little tiny glimpse. And if you don't believe me, just follow fall Twitter, which everything good happens, something, you know, we start predicting 11 wins every season in August.

[18:17] That's how the people of God were. they live with this expectancy and this anticipation that though they were small and though they'd been kicked around by the surrounding nations for hundreds of years, they were holding fast to the promise and one of those promises that the coming king would come and set right worship in the temple of God.

And it seems that that day's arrived in Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus begins to do. He drives out the folks buying and selling things in the temple. He throws over the tables of the money changers and those who sold pigeons.

It seemed like he was about to get this thing started right. But Jesus stops short of anything very significant.

Jesus doesn't run everyone out. He doesn't close it down. Jesus drives out some folks, throws over some tables but the money changers, they quickly gather their coins and would soon prop up their tables.

Those who sell pigeons would soon open back up for business. If this was all Jesus came to do, it hardly could have been called a success. But then he begins to teach.

[19:31] Look at verse 17. He says, he was teaching them, saying to them, is it not written? It's just another way of saying it is written. But in a way that underlines their neglect.

Is it not written, my house shall not, shall be called a house of prayer for all nations but you have made it a den of robbers. So he rebukes them. He rebukes them in two ways. He says, it's not right, the temple has become a place where unrighteous people are not welcome.

It's not right, the temple has become a place where unrighteous people are not welcome. It's meant to be a house of prayer for all nations. Now, he's quoting Isaiah 56. In order to really understand what's going on here, you've got to see that verse in context.

Look with me, 56, 6 and 7. He said, and the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants. So the foreigners will join themselves to him, be his servants, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

So he's underlining what the temple was meant to be throughout his ministry. Jesus has been gathering the outcasts. We've said that again and again and again all throughout the book of Mark. That's what Mark has been talking about.

[20:40] He's been gathering the demoniac, the demon-possessed man, the deaf, the weather-beaten fisherman, the blind, the hemorrhaging woman. Jesus has been going after those very ones not welcome in the temple and he's saying it's not right.

Wonderfully, he's saying it was never meant to be this way. The temple has become a shrine for the people of Israel, not a house of prayer for all peoples. Now, the late Stevie Ray Vaughan had a 1959 Fender Stratocaster that he dearly loved.

Now, Stevie Ray Vaughan was no George Harrison but he was quite a player. Stevie Ray acquired this guitar in 1973, quickly named it his first wife.

No comments about his marital issues but this guitar, his 1959 Strat was his first wife and his words, his baby and Stevie Ray wore it out.

There's a fascinating video of him changing a guitar string while he's taking a guitar solo. If you want to see how amazing Stevie Ray is, you could find that video.

[21 : 49] Stevie Ray wore it out. The finish completely, or got continuously worse down to the bare wood at the end. The body bore deep gashes from his aggressive picking.

The neck had to be refretted numerous times. I played guitar for 20 years and refretted one guitar. He did six times on this one neck. That means they took all the frets off, cut a new groove in there, and then put the frets back on.

He had it done six times, so many times that they could not do it again on that neck. They put a 1961 neck on his 1959 Strat and you're thinking, what in the world are you telling me all this? Hopefully we'll get there soon enough. Stevie Ray made a lot of good music with that guitar. Now it's in a museum. But imagine if he bought the guitar and put it in a showcase on day one.

Wouldn't that be a shame? Wouldn't we miss out on all that great music? Well that's what Jesus says the people of God have done with the temple. It's good that they go to the temple.

[22 : 58] It's good that they go offer sacrifice, but it's not good that they don't make room for the outcast. God's had a purpose for foreigners the whole way out from the beginning. For strangers, for visitors, they're misunderstanding the purpose of God.

Stratocasters were made to sing the blues and the people of God were blessed to be a blessing to all peoples. The people of God were meant to be a light to the nation. The people of God are meant to be like that fig tree in leaf only with the buds.

Does that make sense? That's one of the parallels going on here. The people of God are meant to be this fruitful vine that blesses, just like Isaiah 5, that blesses the world. We're vulnerable to misstep in the same way when we assume church is mainly about what we can get out of it. Isn't that what we think sometimes? Church is about me getting fed, me getting time to worship, getting my worship on or something like that, getting a break from the kids, finding a safe place for relationships.

Yes, but it's so much more. It's meant to propel us into the darkness with the light. If it's not, if what's happened here doesn't overflow, one person says, what Taylor said last week, church is a place where people are just telling hungry people where to go and get fed.

[24 : 23] There's an old Methodist benediction that said, we take the Lord's Supper on Sunday and we're satisfied. You know, that's why we're so thankful on Sunday, wish tomorrow was Sunday and then throughout the week the benediction goes, we just leave crumbs throughout town pointing to where the bread is.

That's, it's, the purpose of God was always to overflow the banks into new people, into more people, into the law. So he says, it's not right that the temple has become a place where unrighteous people are not welcome.

Jesus continues, it's not right the temple has become a place where righteous people go to hide. It's not right the temple's become a place where righteous people go to hide where they put on a mask. Not an N95, a different type of mask and so Jesus says, you've made it a den of robbers.

Now what, what else do you mean by that? I mean surely by the context you think a den of robbers, that must mean he's saying you shouldn't be selling and buying in here. You shouldn't, the livestock shouldn't be in here. The money changers shouldn't be in here but that's not what Jesus means.

Jesus is not confronting them for buying and selling in the temple. The den of robbers is a reference to Jeremiah 7. Again, the context helps us understand what's going on there. Look, look, look here, Jeremiah 7, 9 through 11.

[25 : 43] It says, will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely? I mean that sounds like Mark 7. Make offerings to Baal, go after other gods that you have not known and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say we are delivered.

Will you do that? Only to go on doing all these abominations. Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes?

Behold, I myself have seen and declares the Lord. Now a den, now we call that where we have some family room stuff or something like that but a den is just where robbers go to hide after committing their crimes.

It's where they hide out. It's a safe place. One of my neighbors got robbed one time and they finally found him.

Or they finally found the robbers and they had all sorts of stuff. They had a little robber's den in Ten Mile right on the lake. Bulldozers and guns and my friend was able to go over there and get his guns back and a few other things and they had a robber's den where they unloaded their haul, looked at it and hid out.

[27 : 07] And Jesus says that's what the temple has become. Jesus is confronting them again for something he's confronted them with before.

They think they're okay because they clean up the outside of the cup, right? They think they're okay because they wash their hands, they say their prayers and offer their sacrifices but their godliness is just a veneer like a fig tree in leaf without buds.

True godliness has the appearance of fruit but is utterly empty. There may be leaves on the tree but the inside is dead man's bones.

Very sobering. You've probably seen that with trees that continue to bloom in parts and yet completely hollow. A friend of mine had one fall a couple weeks ago completely hollow on the inside.

And Jesus says that's the way they are. They are dead. Temples become a place where they hide. The church is always in danger of becoming a place where people become professional Christians who say the right things while their hearts are far from it.

[28 : 30] Not surprisingly the religious leaders are angry. You know, it begins with Jesus' anger and then it leads to their anger at what he said. I mean this is not you know coffee table discussion and so they're not excited about it they were seeking away verse 18 to destroy him.

So they sought to destroy him when he healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath and now they seek to destroy him here because Jesus confronts them in the temple.

So he's confronted them there two most holy places but the crowd is amazed. They're astonished. Who would confront these big guys?

But Jesus comes in and confronts them. They all they feared him because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And so even though they didn't believe he was the son of God they were struck in such a way that they're astonished.

And then Jesus leaves the city to go back to Bethany and returns to the story of the fig tree. So we end with this conspiring and this awe and then he goes back to the story of the fig tree.

[29 : 38] The final scene as we see in verse 20 as they pass by in the morning. Now we're in the third day of the final week of the Lord's life.

First day the grand entry. Second day this fig tree cursing and then the cleansing of the temple.

Now we're in this third day that's beginning. And they come upon the fig tree.

Verse 20 as they pass by in the morning they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said Rabbi look the fig tree you cursed has withered.

Fig tree is not withered gradually. When a tree withers gradually its decay begins in the leaves and branches but this tree has miraculously withered. The last miracle in the gospel of Mark is not of life but of death.

it's becoming clear the story of the fig tree is not about the fig tree. It's a symbolic act.

[30 : 48] It's a visual parable much like the prophets of old. The curse of the fig tree is pointing to a very profound spiritual reality.

In conclusion what's this passage mean? Why does Jesus curse the fig tree? Why did Mark sandwich the cleansing of the temple in the midst of the fig tree?

What's the main takeaway? In a word anyone who is far off can come to God through faith in Christ Jesus but this faith their faith must be sincere.

Anyone who is far off can come to God through faith in Jesus but their faith must be sincere. let's unpack this just briefly the two halves of this.

Anyone who is far off can come to God through faith in Jesus. When the disciples say the fig tree you have cursed is withered Jesus answers look at verse 22 have faith in God.

[31 : 49] 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 it will be done for him.

He's saying there's nothing else you need to come to God except faith. It's faith that brings withered fig trees to life. And so have faith and God the religious leaders thought they were accepted by God by going to the temple and offering sacrifices the religious leaders thought they were acceptable to God because they were set apart and they boasted who they were and what they were and Jesus says their faith is just as dead as that fig tree.

But he says to us and to them have faith in God. Have faith in God's abilities Ezekiel 37 to raise the dead in the valley of dry bones.

Now true faith is hard for religious people which we fall in that category you know I mean because you have to admit you are the withered fig tree without Jesus Christ.

You are fruitless. You are hollow on the inside. You are dead and the only way you're going to come to life is to come out of the den to Jesus.

[33 : 13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book said you are a sinner a great desperate sinner now come as a sinner that you are to God who loves you.

He wants you as you are. He does not want anything from you not a sacrifice or work he wants you alone you can hide nothing from him. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before him.

he wants to see you as you are he wants to be gracious to you you do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers as if you were without sin you can dare to be a sinner.

Martin Luther famously said sin boldly and then repent boldly. What he meant was man you just stay on the outsides of things and worry about sin in that sort of way like in a performative external cleansing sort of way you are going to miss the heart of the gospel.

The heart of the gospel says you are a dead man and you need to be raised to life. The old hymn by James Proctor says till to Jesus work you cling by a simple faith till you do that doing is a deadly thing doing ends in death.

[34 : 42] Cast your deadly doing down down at Jesus' feet stand in him alone gloriously complete. That's one of the things this passage is saying you can stand in Jesus Christ gloriously complete by casting it down and running to him by faith.

How can this be? What about the law? What about the sacrifices? What about the temple? Jesus Christ is the new temple. That's what's being whispered through this passage. Jesus is coming to establish a new temple.

He's the way, the truth, and the life. That's why Jesus says in John 4 one day you won't worship on this mountain or that mountain. So the Jewish people and Sadducees don't get it right.

You won't worship on either one of those mountains but those who worship me will worship in spirit and truth. Another way of saying they'll worship me in Jesus Christ for I am the way, the truth, and life. Anyone who is far off can come to God through faith in Jesus.

But that faith must be sincere. Their faith must be sincere. Now Jesus is not, that's what I'm trying to get at.

[35 : 45] Jesus is not looking after people who say the right things. Jesus is not after people who do the right things. Jesus does want the right things done. But he's not after people who just say or do the right things.

Jesus is after people who want the right things. Jesus is after sincere faith. Jesus is looking for the faith of the heart.

In a lot of ways Jesus, he acts and he preaches like a prophet. He is the great prophet. In these last days he's spoken to us through Jesus Christ.

Joel 2 could have been written about Jesus Christ. Yet even now, return to me with all your heart, with your fasting, with your weeping, with your mourning, and rend your hearts, not your garments. I love that. Return to the Lord your God for he's gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster. Rend your hearts, not your garments.

[36 : 42] That's what Jesus wants us to do. Rend our hearts sincerely before him. Jesus is looking for those who have truly encountered God. That's what he's underlining here.

He's after those who have been born again, who have a sincere faith. This is so important. It's so easy to boil down Christianity to saying the right things and doing the right things, but that misses the heart.

All that's external. All that's management. Anybody can do that. True Christianity is miracle. It's dead things coming back to life.

It's the blind receiving their sight. It's the demoniac saying being set free. It's a woman being healed.

It's about a new heart that loves the right things. And so he says this is the prayer that will be blessed, be taken up and thrown to the sea. It does not down his heart, but it will come to pass.

[37 : 40] Wherever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it. It will be yours. This is the way to be made right with God. Through faith in Jesus Christ. So I do offer that to you. I offer you the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel brings with it no commands to work. The gospel is not advice, but news. News from a far, far country about a God who's come to rescue you. And you can be made right with him by faith.

That's the only way. Yes, Jesus is angry in this passage, but he's angry because he's beaten down every other way to God. And saying there is a road left. It's the road of faith.

this is important. This is important for us as parents. You know, parenting is a daunting task.

You know, I was a doctor that said, you know, I had four theories about parenting, then I had four kids, and now I have four kids and no theories.

[38 : 40] You know, I got no advice. We're not looking for children to say the right thing. We're not looking for them to do the right thing.

Any child can be led in the sinner's prayer, but it may mean nothing. Now, lead them in the prayer. We're looking for sincere faith. You know, we're looking for them to love the right things, not perfectly, but truly.

We're looking for fruit. When Jesus came to the fig tree, he didn't ask, are you a fig tree? He looked for fruit. And he's going to come again to every one of us and look for fruit.

And a confession will not be enough. Faith without works is dead and unable to save on the final day. God will be. So it's important with kids, but it's important for all of us.

[39 : 51] J.C. Ryle helps us. He says, let us take care that we each individually learn this lesson that this big tree conveys.

let us always remember that baptism and church membership and reception of the Lord's Supper and a diligent use of the outward forms of Christianity are not sufficient to save our souls.

They are leaves, nothing but leaves. And without fruit will add to our condemnation. we must bear fruit or be lost forever.

We must bear fruit. I don't know what your plan is for 2020, 2022. We've been stuck in that year for a long time. You know, I don't even know what year it is. But I don't know what your plan is for 2022.

Let's bear fruit. That's what Paul prays for in Colossians 1, that they will bear fruit because the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing all throughout the world. That's what we want. We want this real heart change and transformation that's bearing fruit that leads others to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

[41 : 01] That's what we want. What do you want out of your life? I want to bear fruit. Are you growing? Are you bearing fruit?

Are you more patient than last year? God's word?

Are you more in love with God's word? Jonathan Edwards said, I resolved every day to learn something of God's word before the end of the day. Is there anything you know more than God's word?

Does that mean we have to all go to seminary or something like that? Jesus says, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. Are you more generous than last year?

Are you more amazed at God's love for you in Jesus than last year? How are your affections? I mean, that's what it's, the righteous man is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields fruit in its season.

[42 : 17] And all he does, he prospered. He's always bearing fruit, that's what we want, more than anything else because our faith must be sincere when he returns. Anyone who is far off can come to God through faith in Christ, but that faith must be sincere.

Father in heaven, we cast ourselves onto you. We have no hope in ourselves. We humbly confess our own fealty and sin, our own wickedness within us.

We confess all the ways that we've strayed, that we've strayed like lost sheep from you. God, we feel the battle within our hearts, desires of the flesh waging war against desires of the spirit.

We want to please you. We want to serve you. We want to love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And so, Lord, we pray that you'd come by your spirit and help us produce in us that sincere faith that you will require of us in the end.

We need you. We cast ourselves onto you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[43 : 35] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

Thank you. Thank you.