

Faithfulness leads to Fruitfulness

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[0 : 00] Chapter 11, beginning at verse 1. Now hear God's word. Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, and Jesus said to them, Go into the village in the front of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it and bring it to me. If anyone says to you, Why are you doing this? So the Lord has need of it, and will send it back here immediately. And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it.

And some of those standing there said to them, What are you doing untying the colt? And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.

And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before, and those who followed, were shouting, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, and blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest. And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

[1 : 16] And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he 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.

He said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it. And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple.

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

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and they 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 to the city.

[2 : 30] 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 him, 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, whoever, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive.

And if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. Well, may God bless his word to us this morning.

Well, by now, we should be fairly familiar where Jesus is going and who Jesus is. Remember, the Gospel of Mark is split into two halves.

[3 : 36] The first half is asking the question or answering the question, who is Jesus? And the second half of Mark, from 9 verse 1, verse 2 onwards, is asking the question, or rather answering it, why Jesus must die.

So, we know who Jesus is and we know where he's going. This part here follows on from everything that Jesus has been saying all the way through chapter 10 of the importance of trusting God.

But trusting God sounds far easier than it is in practice. because trusting God involves, according to Jesus, not trusting anything else.

So, if you've got a trusting God this morning, as you're trusting in something else, you'll begin to, you'll realize from Jesus this morning that's not actually trusting God. It's, it's, you're verging carefully on idolatry.

This is how Jesus puts it. That the way we get into the kingdom of God is by trusting God, is by coming to him like a child, completely dependent on God and God alone.

[4 : 51] But what Jesus does here, as you've read in the passage, is that he takes trust in God even further. He finishes by saying, have faith in God and do not doubt in your heart.

That's where everything ends up, these verses that we have read. What Jesus is about to show us then is that when we don't trust in God, we're robbing God.

That's Jesus' point of when he's in the temple, he shows up, he shows that we're to trust in God and we're not to rob God. And we've got to ask the question, well, how does a person rob God?

Okay, if God, if something belongs to God and it's taken from him, then we're robbing it. And if something belongs to God and we're not giving it to him, but we're holding on to it, that's another form of robbing God.

That's the issue that Jesus has with those in the temple. And then we come back here to the fig tree. The fig tree is simply an illustration. It's Jesus' way of drawing a picture about everything that he's saying to be true to those in the temple.

[5 : 56] So back to trust. Why is trusting God so hard? Well, because it's easy for us to turn back.

Trusting God's difficult, not because trusting God is difficult, but because it's easy to turn back to other things. It's easy to take your hand off the plow and look back.

It's easy to put your trust in something else. So this is how I want you to consider trust from God here on in. Consider it like a parachute jump. Now, I've never done a parachute jump, and I'm not likely ever to do a parachute jump.

And I don't know if you've ever done a parachute jump, but at least I know what happens. You go up in a plane with a parachute on, and for some odd reason, they open the door, move out to the edge, and jump.

Now, if that sounds reasonable to you, then go ahead and do a parachute jump. But the moment you leave that plane, gravity dictates you can't go back.

[7 : 08] Gravity dictates. There's no way you're going to be able to flap your little arms and get back to them. You're just not going to be able to get there. Gravity is going to say, come home. And it's going to pull you all the way down.

And at that point, you're going to realize you've got nothing else to trust in than the parachute that you're wearing. And so the reason, the real reason why I think many of us don't and will not do a parachute jump is not necessarily because we're afraid of heights.

It's actually because we only have one thing to trust in. And when our trust goes wrong with God is because trusting God, real trusting God, is just trusting God alone for everything.

And the reason why it's so difficult on this earth is because we start trusting in the other things just in case trusting God doesn't work. But God is always faithful.

God is always there. God will never let us down. The reason we don't trust one thing is because we're afraid to trust just one thing.

[8 : 26] So we need lots of things around us. We need these protective hedges, whatever it may be, the house that you live in or the money that you have in your bank or whatever it may be, you find what it is.

It could be your strength. It could be your mental ability. It could be your health. And you trust in these things. And these are the things that keep, as long as I've got that, as long as I've got that, I'm fine with God.

But when those things go, all of a sudden you're no longer fine with God. Well, why should they make any difference? They do.

And so Jesus' point here, which we'll get to as we get closer to the temple, is go back to the illustration of the parachute jump. The reason why we wouldn't do it is because we fear trusting in only one thing.

And what Jesus is saying here about trusting in God is that real trust in God is trusting in God alone. That very trust belongs to God.

[9 : 30] But we often want a life where we have many things to fall back on, just in case, just in case. So we live a Christian life that falls into the category of just in case, just in case.

And this is why it's so hard to follow Jesus. This is why so many people do turn back from following Jesus. This is why so many people do start and then stop.

Because over the course of time, Jesus will not allow us to get away with following him the way we want to follow him. He will have to strip us of all those things that we put our trust in that are not God.

Because that's idolatry. That's a way of robbing God. Now, the reason why this is so important is because Jesus does not want you to come up with your own way of following him.

He doesn't want you to come up with your own way of trusting God. He doesn't want you to come up with your own way of believing in God. But we do because we have these other things that we hold on to.

[10 : 36] And like I said this morning, that the world says that if the world changes, you don't have to hold on to your convictions. If the world changes, you don't have to hold on to your commitments, okay?

Just be progressive. Be, right? Just, but God says, the reason you're given commitments, the reason you're given convictions is because the world changes.

You're not to change along with it. It's to keep you sound and secure in following Jesus. And the reason why this is such a shock to us is because everyone's expecting Jesus to ride into Jerusalem and turn left, as I said last week, and turn into the Roman garrison.

But Jesus, rising to Jerusalem, turns right, and goes into the temple. The equivalent of this would be like Jesus riding into Edinburgh and going into the church and not the Scottish Parliament.

Okay, Jesus is not interested in the powers that think they have. He's interested in what his people are doing or not doing.

[11 : 39] That's the point. So the shock here is, is that everyone's excited about Jesus coming in to throw out the Romans and he comes in and he throws at his own people.

And you, I didn't see that coming. Of course you didn't see it coming because you've been blinded by the fact that you think you're following God when actually you've come up with your own way of following God and it's God in the way.

It's, it's, it's, you see the problem. This is why trusting God is so difficult because we surround it with a lot of other things that we then begin to trust in more.

And when those things go, our relationship with God, I've lost my health, I've lost my, right, I've lost whatever, right? And now my faith in God is, where's my faith in God?

So Jesus enters the temple, not the Roman garrison. It says here that Jesus rides on a colt and this is significant. It's also significant that they throw out their coats and they throw out these leaves on the ground because the pictures of a king becoming king in the Old Testament is this.

[12 : 47] It looks pretty insignificant, but this is the coming king. And this is what people understood it to mean. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem this way, it looks meek, it looks humble, it looks like nothing, but this is the coming king.

Go read two kings and read about David and you just see it for yourself. This is the coming king. So Jesus is king, the king that is come.

And of course, kings like all kings, where do they sit when they get off their horse? Well, they go into a room and sit on a throne.

And kings make other people suffer. Okay? Kings get rid of their enemies. Kings deal with other people.

This king doesn't. He rides into Jerusalem to a cross. And the way he deals with his enemies is not by sitting on a throne first.

[13 : 46] Psalm 110, he's doing that now. But right at this point, this is the king who is the redeemer king. The king who will die. Who's not come to first sit on a throne and dictate, but has come to serve by dying on the cross to sort out the mess.

And what a mess it is. The world's in a mess, but Jesus goes into the church first. Jesus comes into the temple first. His own people.

What a mess he's saying. And why is it such a mess? Because for such a long time, they have devised their own ways of following Jesus. They have devised their own ways of believing and practicing the Christian faith.

And listen, we can all do it. We can, you know, sometimes we're brilliant. Some of us actually believe that if we read two chapters a day, we're more likely to get our prayers answered at the end of the week.

Some of us have a Christianity like that. Some of us also have a Christianity that says if we pray more, then God will bless us more.

[14 : 49] But God's been known to bless people who never pray. That's the type of God we have. It's frustrating. It's frustrating to people who pray a lot thinking they're going to get a lot.

Because there's Joe Bloggs over there who's a Christian, who's not following Jesus at all. And then God just, for some reason, blesses me. Why? We're to learn what God is like.

We don't give to get. Okay? We give because God is worthy. God is honorable. This is why we give everything that we do.

So Jesus comes into the temple. He has a look around. It's late. So he doesn't really do anything. But the one thing that Jesus is concerned about is not that God's people are just faithful, but he expects God's people to be fruitful.

And it is the case that faithfulness will lead to fruitfulness, but it's not always the case that it leads to it immediately. And it's also very hard to dictate what that fruit looks like.

[15 : 55] Okay? I've had conversations with ministers. What does fruit actually look like? And he says, well, it depends, one minister in particular, a very faithful guy, very, you know, sort of, no longer in the pastorate, but clearly a faithful minister.

He says, well, it all depends on what God has got for that minister to do. And so other ministers say, well, what do you mean? He says, well, for one minister, it could be to build up. For another minister, it could be to tear down.

He says, the trouble is that in a congregation, the minister who's given the ministry to take things apart looks like he's failed. And the minister who's been given the blessing to build things up looks like he's done a great job.

But in true faithfulness, it is God's word that does the work. And his word will not return to him void. That doesn't mean that all of a sudden the world's saved.

What it means, it can mean, is that the very people who are rejecting the gospel are hardened in their rejection. And that's fruitfulness. How can that be? So we can't come up with our own way of defining what Jesus does or how he does it.

[17 : 04] When Jesus comes to the fig tree, then on the following day, there's no figs, but there are lees. And lees on a fig tree, I don't know if you know this, I'll let you know, dictate that there should be fruit.

Now Mark, it seems, sarcastically says, it doesn't seem to be the season for fruit, but this seems to contradict what Jesus is doing because Jesus goes to the tree expecting fruit.

And there's only one reason you'd expect fruit on a tree is because it's the time of year to expect fruit. I mean, this is Jesus. I mean, it's not as if he doesn't know. You know, the creator of the world doesn't know when figs are produced on trees.

You know, I mean, let's give him some credit. And so he gets to the tree and he curses the tree because there's no fruit. It's fruitless. There's no fruitfulness there.

It's giving the impression of fruitfulness by being covered in lees, but actually there's no fruit. So let me just put this into real terms for men and women.

[18 : 09] When a person says one thing and does another, we call that hypocrisy. What Jesus is saying here is that this is an illustration of hypocrisy.

And where we're going to see that hypocrisy is when we get into the temple. Jesus is illustrating with the fig tree what we're about to see as we enter into the temple.

It's hypocrisy. You're seeing one thing, but something else is actually happening. And so Jesus curses the fig tree so that it never produces fruit again, which is the ministry that he has on this tree because it has the appearance of godliness, but no power.

Okay, the temple is going to have the appearance of godliness, the appearance of faithfulness, but there's not going to be any there. This tree has the appearance of fruitfulness, but there's nothing to be found.

So, Jesus now enters the temple and what does he find? No faithfulness. And of course, no fruitfulness.

[19 : 13] And so the very people who are supposed to be giving to God what God deserves, what is due to God out of their lives and out of everything, are actually now robbing God. Now, most people assume that when this passage talks about Jesus being in the temple and he turns over the tables, that it's all got to do with money, that these people are robbing other people, but that's not what Jesus says.

Jesus says that they're robbing God. And if they're robbing God, that means they're taking something from God. They're not taking something from people. They are, however, taking something from people, but effectively, most importantly, they're taking it from God first. And therefore, but what are they taking from God? Okay, how are these people robbing God? Well, Jesus says that all prayer is a place, prayer is for God.

My house should be called a house of prayer. It's for God. It's a place where God is to be obeyed. It is a place where God is to be trusted. It is a place where God is to be worshipped. And it's not happening. Why isn't it happening?

Because they've turned the place and used it for something else. It's the robbing the purpose of the temple of these things. And so they're robbing God of those things. Right? That they've turned church into something else other than what it should be.

[20 : 33] And so when you turn church into something else other than what it should be, not only are the people robbed of knowing what it is to trust in God and obey God and believe God and pray to God, but God is being robbed more importantly.

So church becomes what can I get out of it? Church becomes this and that. Church becomes something where you know, Paul doesn't he say you know, that even ministers have to watch their watch carefully lest the church becomes a place where ministers can just get a quick buck, a bit of employment.

You know, they don't have to work too hard. We only work on Sundays as it is, as you know. And you know, I'm glad you laughed at that because it's just not true. But you know, and ministers have to have to be careful.

So I'm all in favor for ministers being paid a million pound a year. And I'll tell you why I'm in favor for that is because ministers should set the example of being able to give.

Okay, you just give it all away. I'm kind of glad that we don't earn anything. My temptation is not holding to what, holding on to what I have. because I don't have anything. My temptation is wanting it.

[21 : 46] Okay, I have a different temptation than perhaps other people. But the same, the same wrongness is still the same. Okay, we've got to get rid of it. We can't come up with our own way of following Jesus.

So I'm not allowed to use the church for a quick buck. I'm not, right, I'm not allowed to, everything has to go. And what Jesus is saying here is that these people are robbing God.

They're robbing God because prayer is due to God and God is not receiving the prayers of his people. In fact, the very people who should be setting the example have turned this place into a den of robbers.

So not only are they not doing it, with everybody else selling in the temple and doing stuff like this now, they're not praying either. That's where the real robbery is happening.

The issue here is not in trade or merchandise, though that is an issue. The real issue is no prayer is happening. Prayer is not being offered to God.

[22 : 51] So Jesus has to judge it. Jesus has to judge this man-made religion because he cannot afford people to trust in it. He cannot afford people to trust in the wrong thing.

So he judges it. He demolishes it. He throws it out of the temple. He makes it a public spectacle to say, this is wrong. This is not to happen.

This is not the way you trust in God. This is not the way you have faith in God. This is nothing like the life that God has actually come to give you. And so Jesus publicly destroys it because of the danger of people trusting in the wrong thing, of coming up, dare I say, with their own way of following God.

And we can all do it, but it's wrong. It's real, but it's wrong. Now here's the point. The moment you understand that prayer is a gift to be given back to God, you will understand that when you don't pray, you're holding something from God that's due to him.

Right? The moment you understand that prayer is something that God has given you to give back to him immediately, if you don't give it back to him and you hold on to it, you're robbing him from what is due to him.

[24 : 09] And so if we go and pray to something else like that picture on the wall or that carved image, that's idolatry because we're now giving what belongs to God to somebody else. So that's idolatry.

And if we don't give it to God, we're robbing him. And if we don't pray ever, we continue to rob God perpetually. Trust, having faith in God, trusting in God alone for the forgiveness of sins, not in the temple.

Right? The reason why this is happening in the temple with the trade and the merchandise is because they're relying on these things to get their sins forgiven. Right? Let's buy a pigeon here. Let's buy a lamb here. Let's buy these things here. I need to have my sins forgiven. What is the best price you can do on a lamb? Right? It is, your sacrifice, your atonement is as good as money can buy.

And Jesus says, you don't, that's wrong. Trust in God alone for forgiveness. Not the temple, not the sacrifices. Trust in God alone.

[25 : 13] But here's the problem. We think trust is something that we have that we can freely use wherever we want. That trust is something that I have.

It's mine. And if I want to spend my trust here, I can do that. If I want to spend my trust there, I can do that. But trust is the same as prayer. It's been given to God, given by God to you to give straight back to Him.

Okay? Remember that. Prayer, trust is like prayer. It's been given to you by God to give straight back to Him. It's not allowed to be spent anywhere else. It's to be spent completely on God.

And so when we spend it elsewhere, we understand why we spend it elsewhere because we want the safeguards. What if God doesn't come through? What if the creator of the universe who has power over everything can't sort out this little issue that I have?

God does sort out the issue, and if He doesn't, then He's got a really good reason for not doing it. That's the kind of faith that we are to walk in.

[26 : 20] So trust is something that God gives to us in order for us to give it back to Him. And when we don't trust God, we're robbing Him.

And when we're trusting in something else other than Him, then we're not only robbing Him, but committing idolatry. The reason why this is so important here, as I said, is because people were trusting in the temple.

And Jesus here comes along, and He's basically illustrated with the fig tree what's going to happen to the temple. I'm going to destroy it. It's never going to, it's going to be, it's going to go down to its roots, and it's never going to recover.

And people are worried about that. Why? What's the one question that you will have if the temple is destroyed if you're a Jew? Well, the question is, how am I going to be forgiven?

I can't do any sacrifice. I can't, how am I going to, how's it going to happen? Well, this is where we've got to see Jesus.

[27 : 26] Jesus is the servant king. Jesus is the redeemer. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb. He is the one who has come to seek and to save the lost and to die on the cross.

The redeemer king. the king who will be the savior. The king who will be the sacrifice. The savior. Now, when the disciples realize what's happened with the fig tree, realize what Jesus has done with the temple, they come back the following day to the fig tree and Jesus says to them here to have faith in God.

They pass by, verse 20, in the morning and saw that the fig tree had withered away to its roots. And Peter had remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed had withered. As if to, as if to, that's the point, Peter. You know, it's an odd question. Rabbi, look, as if, have you seen what's happened, Jesus?

That was, that was meant to happen. I did it for that to happen. And so Jesus answered them saying, have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, I want to put the emphasis on the this, okay, I'll explain why in a moment, be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes what he says will come to pass.

[28 : 54] It'll be done for him. The reason why I want to put the emphasis on the word this is because I want to put the emphasis on the fig tree and the temple and everything.

Okay, the fig tree is about fruitfulness. Okay, the fig, cursing the fig tree, Jesus does it because there's no fruit and yet he expects fruit. That's an illustration of the temple.

He comes to the temple expecting fruitfulness and there's no fruitfulness. So he curses the temple. The temple is destroyed eventually. Okay, he comes into the temple expecting faithfulness and there's no faithfulness there at all.

The temple is the place where you get your sins forgiven and so it's a place where forgiveness is going to happen but that's not going to happen through the temple. It's just not even going to get close.

And then Jesus up with his disciples this next morning see the fig tree and the first thing he has to say is have faith in God and then he changes the subject it seems and goes on to a mountain. Now most of us will read this and go, do you know what, I'm going to really try this this afternoon.

[30 : 01] Now, when I was a teenager I really did. There's not many hills in Cornwall. There's definitely no mountains but I found the biggest one that I could find and being where we lived it wasn't too difficult and so I thought I'm going to give it a go.

So I just stood there and I said just move over that way a bit and nothing happened. So I thought I must be doing it wrong so I went home and I read my Bible and I thought well no it just says if you say to this mountain you know be lifted up and be thrown into the sea or to move and you believe in your heart and you don't doubt and when you're a young boy you do believe without doubt you just believe anything can happen and so on and I try it again.

I once I did the same thing with when the sea was rough then at Charlestown Harbour I thought I'll give it a go nobody's looking and I just said be still just nothing happened and it was a wonderful picture of you know I'm not Jesus but just the power that Jesus must have had just be still and then I realised that the whole point here that Jesus is getting to is that the emphasis is not on the mountain but the emphasis is on this mountain.

You remember John 4? You remember the conversation that Jesus had with the woman at Samaria and she says we worship on this mountain but you Jews worship on that mountain and what does Jesus say?

No, there's coming a day when you will not worship on that mountain or this mountain but you'll worship God in spirit and in truth. So Jesus is getting rid of the temple and the place of worship because the real temple and the real place of worship is Jesus.

[31 : 50] Jesus is getting rid getting rid of everything else that people are trusting in simply to draw people to himself. He is destroying everything to simply bring people back to trusting in Jesus and Jesus alone.

To trust in God and God alone through Jesus. To remember that our sins are only forgiven through the one who will die to take them away.

That's the point. That's the point. It's all about Jesus. And so as we conclude knowing then that Jesus wants us to trust in God and God alone have faith in God.

Knowing that. Knowing that we're not to doubt in our heart. Knowing that we're to make sure that we always forgive. Remember that if you have I'll say this as a passing comment you can read it here for yourself.

But if you have iniquity in your heart don't think for a moment your prayer is going to work. They're not. Our prayers are ineffectual in God's sight if we hold iniquity in our heart.

[32 : 57] This is why we spend every Sunday morning confessing our sin before we go any further. Because you want your prayers to be honoured by God. You want your prayers to be blessed by God. We have to get the sin out of the way.

If we hold on to it even that prayer doesn't do anything. All of it has to go. And so when Jesus says here have faith in God he means have faith in God.

The one thing that matters to God more than anything else is your faith. It's your faithfulness to God. That's the one thing that matters more than anything else. And trust is to trust in God and God alone.

And as I said the reason why it's so difficult is because we ought to realise that the Christian life is more like the parachute jump than it is the swimming pool where you can touch the bottom.

You know I love going out swimming with you know sort of like my relatives that are slightly older. I'm not going to say they're older but back in the day when they didn't have swimming lessons. [34 : 03] And they go out to a certain depth in the sea and they do this. You know they're walking along the bottom and they're just you know you do this and then they turn as if to say everyone just aren't I wonderful?

Have you ever seen that? They're giving the appearance that they're swimming but they're standing. And the Christian life can't look like that.

It has to look more like the parachute jump where you've got one thing God alone to trust in. And so Jesus gets rid of everything else. He's judging everything else because it doesn't do you any good. there is one way to follow Jesus. It's called a narrow way and few find it but it is the only way to follow Jesus. And so don't overlook the fact that trust is something that God has given to you to give straight back to him.

Faith is something that God has given to you to give straight back to him. Obedience is something that God has given to you to give straight back to him. Love is something that God has given to you to give straight back to him.

[35 : 10] In other words, even though you have it, it's not yours. And if we hold on to it or we don't give it to God, we are robbing God. And that is the very thing that Jesus came in the temple to deal with.

So have faith in God. Have faith in God. Believe and do not doubt in your heart that Jesus is the one who makes you right with God. Amen.

Amen.