

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 11:12-26

Life Lesson

The withered fig tree and the cleansed Temple reveal that God desires true worship rooted in purity, prayer, and faith—not empty rituals or religious show. Jesus demonstrates both His humanity and His divinity: He identifies with our weakness yet holds authority to judge spiritual hypocrisy. The destruction of the Temple was not the end of worship but the beginning of a deeper, personal relationship with God through Christ. True faith bears fruit, prays with confidence, forgives freely, and worships sincerely.

Examine Scripture

12 *The next day when they went out from Bethany, he was hungry. 13* *Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he went to find out if there was anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. 14* *He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And his disciples heard it. 15* *They came to Jerusalem, and he went into the temple and began to throw out those buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, 16* *and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. 17* *He was teaching them: "Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of*

Cleaning House

This passage is perhaps one of the most challenging in Mark's Gospel to interpret. Not only does it include the only "destructive" miracle of Jesus, but it also features one of the interrupted accounts in Mark. The miracle of the withering fig tree is split into two sections, with the cleansing of the Temple in between. This pause is likely a key clue for understanding the passage. Mark intentionally interrupts this miracle with the Temple cleansing, indicating that the two moments are connected; one must be understood to interpret the other. When properly understood, this passage offers a powerful prophecy of the temple's destruction and a serious warning to those who may seem to bear fruit but do not truly do so.

Vs. 12-14

There are two miracles described in these verses; one is obvious, while the other is more subtle and hidden within three small words: "he was hungry" (v. 12). First, let's examine the more subtle miracle in those three words. Imagine the God of the universe, the Creator of everything, becoming hungry. It would be easy for us to overlook these words without considering their theological and Christological significance. If we unpack the phrase "he was hungry," we find evidence of the Incarnation of Christ. Jesus did not come into existence at His birth; He has always existed. He is "the Alpha and the Omega... the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). His incarnation was taking on flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). He is fully God and fully man. His incarnation means Jesus didn't merely have the form of a man; He was fully man. He experienced everything that any human would, including hunger. These three words remind us of the sympathetic nature of Jesus, understanding everything about us (Phil. 2:6-11). What great comfort to know that Jesus identifies with us, even in the smallest moments of hunger.

The second miracle is more straightforward: the cursing of the fig tree. Although this miracle is direct, its meaning is not. There are many different opinions on how to interpret this miracle, but two views

of thieves!" 18 The chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to kill him. For they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was astonished by his teaching. 19 Whenever evening came, they would go out of the city. 20 Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. 21 Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 Jesus replied to them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received[c] it and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."

• Underline "He was hungry" in (v. 12). Write "Incarnation" above it.

• Bracket "fig tree" in (vs. 13 and 20). Write (Isa. 28:4; Hos. 2:12; 9:10; Joel 1:7, and Micah 7:1; Jer. 5:17; 8:13; 24:1-10; 29:17, and Hab. 3:17) in the margin. Write "Fig Tree = Judgment."

• Circle "house of prayer" (v. 17). Write "worship" above it.

• Underline "for all nations" in (v. 17).

• In (vs. 22-25), circle "faith," "does not doubt," "believes," "believe," and "forgive."

Personal Notes

are consistent. The first, and perhaps the most obvious, is that the cursing of the fig tree predicts the coming judgment on the Temple. As Jesus and the Disciples were leaving Bethany, Jesus saw a fig tree in full bloom, with leaves but no fruit. It was the season for the tree to bear figs, but Jesus said, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" (v. 14). The significance of these words would not be understood until (v. 20).

Throughout Scripture, Israel is compared to a fig tree, or rather, fig trees are frequently used in prophetic judgments concerning Israel (Isa. 28:4; Hos. 2:12; 9:10; Joel 1:7, and Micah 7:1) and Judah (Jer. 5:17; 8:13; 24:1-10; 29:17, and Hab. 3:17). With Jesus' cursing of the fig tree, there is no sign of anger or frustration. He simply states, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" (v. 14). As one commentator notes, His calm demeanor indicates that this is an "acted-out parable." It aims to declare the coming judgment on the Temple, which would lead to its destruction. Many such prophetic judgments appear in the Gospels (e.g., Luke 21). This also explains why Mark chose to sandwich the cleansing of the Temple between the cursing of the fig tree. The Disciples heard Jesus' words, watched Him cleanse the Temple, and saw the curse come true. As the fig tree showed no fruit, the Temple and Jerusalem were no longer places of worship. They were no longer bearing fruit for God's glory; therefore, they would be cut down and burned, just like the fig tree.

What is true for the Temple and Jerusalem is true for us! This text not only serves as a warning of the coming destruction of the Temple but also as a judgment on anyone who professes with their mouths, having the appearance of leaves but bearing no fruit (John 15). Paul warns us about such people in (2 Tim. 3:2-5): "For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, demeaning, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid these people." If there is a greater sin than bearing no fruit, it is surely bearing false fruit. If Jesus judged a fig tree and the Temple for such a sin, He will also judge us. We must be cautious about being fruitless but also about bearing false fruit.

Vs. 15-19

Now, we have the reality of the "acted-out" parable; Jesus begins to cleanse the Temple. His cleansing of the Temple is found in all four Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) place it within the same timeline. John, as he typically does, diverts from the Synoptics and places the cleansing of the Temple earlier in his Gospel. All four Gospels describe this intense moment, with John adding that Jesus even fashioned a whip to help drive out those who were buying

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and selling in the Temple. Though the cursing of the fig tree was emotionless, this moment was not. Jesus' righteous indignation burned against those who violated the purpose and holiness of the Temple.

It is important to understand that Jesus did not necessarily forbid the action of selling sacrificial animals. This was a necessary practice, especially during Passover. Jesus did not oppose the sacrificial system, the Temple tax, or even the selling of sacrificial animals; instead, he opposed the selling, buying, moneychangers, and profiteers within the Temple. The Temple was meant to be a holy place. It was as sacred as the Tabernacle; it represented God's presence. Yet, people were desecrating this holy site, mainly by profiting off the poorest worshippers. It was a place to come and worship God, to offer sacrifices, not to be gouged. In fact, the ones most targeted were the poor, those who didn't have animals to offer as sacrifices, who would now be forced to pay higher prices for blemished, second-rate animals.

It's interesting to note that the religious leaders imposed unbearable burdens on the people, demanding they follow strict and legalistic rules that had no Scriptural support, and they now permitted buying, selling, and moneychangers within the Temple. As Jesus walked through the Temple, there is no doubt that He saw all forms of unrighteousness, such as political power exchanges, the oppression of the poor, and the neglect of the disabled and suffering. Jesus observed all of this, but in that moment, He focused on the heart of everything. He chose to emphasize the one thing we were truly created for: worship. Worship is the connection between man and God. Jesus saw worship in the Temple being corrupted.

Where did this corruption in the Temple come from? From the religious leaders! If the leaders are corrupt, the people will follow suit. If the religious leaders are careless about worship, the people will be careless too. If the religious leaders see worship as something they can exploit, then the people will see it the same way. Jesus didn't see the Temple building itself being corrupted; He saw the worship within the Temple being corrupted. That's why we see the religious leaders so angry that they actively seek a way to kill Jesus in (v. 18).

Notice that Jesus' actions were not without revealing the truth. Jesus was teaching them: "Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!" (v. 17). Jesus is quoting (Jer. 7:11). Once again, Jesus addresses the core issue. Temple worship was meant to be about connecting with God; it was about communing with Him. How do we do this? Prayer. Prayer is our active communion with God. Prayer is the heart of worship. Without prayer, there is no worship. The Puritan Thomas Brooks writes, "Prayer crowns God with the honor and glory due to His name, and God crowns prayer with assurance and comfort. The most praying souls are the most assured souls." This is what the people and religious

Personal Reflection

1. How does Jesus' humanity—His ability to experience human needs and emotions—bring you comfort or encouragement in your daily walk?
2. In what areas of your life might you be showing “leaves” without actual spiritual fruit, and what steps can help you grow genuine fruit for God's glory?
3. How can you ensure that your own worship remains focused on God's presence rather than routine, emotion, or personal gain?
4. How does your current prayer life reflect your trust in God's power and your willingness to forgive others?
5. With the Temple destroyed, Jesus became the center of worship and communion with God. How does this truth shape the way you approach prayer, worship, and your relationship with Christ today?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

Mt. Zion's Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.*

leaders were missing. They were engaging in empty rituals and routines, not true prayer. Jesus was calling them back to the essence of worship: prayer. And this connection with God is open to “all nations” (v. 17). What a wonderful demonstration of grace and mercy that everyone can come to God through Jesus!

As mentioned, Jesus' actions were seen as a direct challenge to the religious leaders. The chief priests and scribes were enraged that Jesus would challenge them and their authority. However, something seems different in this text. The religious leaders were not angry, but fearful. They feared His popularity and influence over the people. They feared Jesus and wanted to kill Him. Thus begins the path to the cross.

Vs. 20-21

Now, we return to the cursed fig tree. The “acted-out” parable is now finished with the Disciples seeing that the fig tree had withered from the roots up. Peter, always the outspoken Disciple, states the obvious: “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered” (v. 21). So, here is the interpretation: just as the fig tree has withered from the roots up, so will the Temple be destroyed from the foundations up. This moment in history will seem to be the end of worship on earth—no Temple, no sacrifice. No sacrifice, no atonement. No atonement, no salvation. No salvation, no relationship with God. It may seem like a hopeless situation. However, the Temple may have been destroyed, but worship was not! The altars may have been removed, but a greater sacrifice was offered. The destruction of the Temple was not the end of worship and communion with God; it was the restoration of true worship—no longer through the Temple, but through Christ!

Vs. 22-26

Again, Jesus takes a moment to teach the Disciples privately. This is not a new lesson, but a continuation of what He was teaching in the Temple: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (v. 17). Jesus turns to His Disciples and shares the keys to powerful prayer: have faith without doubt, believe as if it has already happened, and forgive others. Authentic, powerful prayer comes from our hearts, not formulas. Thomas Watson says, “That prayer is most likely to pierce heaven which first pierces one's own heart.” John Bunyan writes, “In prayer, it is better to have heart without words, than to have words without heart.” In other words, as Jesus teaches us, prayer must be rooted in genuine faith, from the heart. If we pray this way, not only will we see mountains moved, but we will also grasp God.