

Series: **Gospel of Mark**  
Today's Title: **"Appearance vs. Substance"**  
January 24, 2021 – Mark 11:12-25 (Also: Matthew 21:12-22; Luke 19:45-48)

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**Objective:** To help people know that faith should produce spiritual fruit, not just spiritual activity.

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Today we're going to talk about figs - because our passage talks about figs.

For some of us, the most we know about figs is a package of 'Fig Newtons'.

In America, figs are not that popular - but in Israel, they are everywhere - including our passage today.

Also, in our passage, Jesus disrupts the business operations in the Temple - often referred to His '*cleansing of the Temple.*'

**Turn to Mark 11:12-25**

**Prayer**

This is the final week of Jesus' life before He is crucified on Friday morning.

This is the most transformative week in world history - and the most transformative week in salvation history.

**- Read passage**

**The healthy-looking but fruitless fig tree.** vs. 12-14

Fig trees are all over Israel.

vs. 12 - It's the morning - and Jesus is hungry (His humanity).

vs. 13 - He sees "a fig tree in leaf".

The one mentioned in this verse seems to be growing by the side of the road - not part of someone's fig tree farm. Fig trees are a bit unusual.

*I'm not a farmer - or a fruit tree expert - so I needed to do some fig research to understand the issue at hand.*

I have had limited experience with orange trees.

Orange trees bud in the early spring - and the oranges are usually ready to harvest and eat in December and January.

Fig trees are slightly different.

In the spring (March-April) fig trees have a small, green figs. They aren't fully ripe - but they're edible - and some people actually prefer the green figs of early spring. These 'green figs' begin appearing before the leaves as you can see in these pics - so when Jesus sees "a fig tree in leaf" - it should have plenty of figs on it, but Jesus finds no fruit.

***The tree looked normal - healthy - but it was fruitless.***

Note: The "season for figs" is actually June - September (depending on climate) when figs are fully ripe.

Jesus is using the fig tree as a parable - or what's called a parabolic statement - an active parable.

This parable is not a made-up story - but Jesus is using a real-life situation to illustrate a spiritual problem with Israel - or a spiritual problem in our life.

Fig trees and grape vines are often used in the O.T. as metaphors for Israel's spiritual status, and this incident is no different.

Jesus is pronouncing judgment on this fig tree - but the bigger reality behind the fig tree is the nation of Israel and its lack of spiritual fruit.

Israel looked spiritual - but it was a show - empty ritual. God will judge those who put on a spiritual show but have no spiritual truth or fruit.

Impressive appearance but nothing on the inside.

All leaves - no fruit.

**John 15:2**

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...”

Jesus is using this living parable as a prophecy of what will happen to Israel in judgment of their spiritual emptiness even though they have the appearance of spiritual piety and spiritual activity.

They had the special revelation from God - something no other nation had. They were supposed to demonstrate those spiritual truths about the true God and share God with the nations.

But they were like the fig tree full of leaves - but no fruit.

They looked spiritual - but had no spiritual fruit.

**Jesus purifies the busy but spiritually empty Temple. vs. 15-19**

The *cleansing* vs. 15-16

The 'Court of the Gentiles'

(pic of Temple) where the 'market' was in the Temple

- was where you could buy an animal for your sacrifice - and where you could exchange your money for the annual Temple tax (males 20 yrs. +), which could only be paid with the silver drachma of Tyre. (Mark, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Robert H. Stein, p. 515)

The problem was the market was a huge profit center for the religious establishment - and they were inflating prices and charging high rates for the money exchange.

***Think of the kind of inflated prices you find at sporting events - \$6.00 hot dogs - \$5.00 sodas, etc.***

Those selling pigeons refers to the sacrifice of the poor. They were even stealing / taking advantage of the poor!

vs. 16 - some were even using the Temple area as a shortcut - carrying their good through the Temple grounds - instead of walking around the Temple grounds.

*Like people walking through our sanctuary - as a shortcut to where they are going!!!*

Jesus disrupts the entire business - during the busiest week of their business year - Passover week - like

the Christmas shopping season for modern-day stores.

The *teaching* vs. 17

Jesus is not a raging, out of control extremist. He knows exactly what He's doing - and why. It's likely that His *looking around at everything* in vs. 11 was the final confirmation He needed to take dramatic action in the morning - and now He was teaching them what the Temple was supposed to be. Jesus quotes **Isaiah 56:7** "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.". ("Robbers" - Jeremiah 7:11)

Israel had neglected their calling - their duty - to be an example to the nations - to help the nations - invite the nations to join them in their worship of the true God.

Instead, they rejected and belittled the nations - and considered them inferior - refused to include them in their worship of the true God.

They were spiritually prideful - but their own spiritual life was empty - non-existent - only a show - an appearance of spiritual life - but no fruit!

Activity in the Temple but no prayer and making it difficult / impossible to pray and have a spiritual encounter with God.

*'Yeah...but we have a coffee shop in the lobby!'*

1. *Not forced to buy anything*
2. *Bargain prices - helps students work to earn money for camp and mission trips.*
3. *Helps you stay awake during the sermon!!!*

The plotting vs. 18-19

As you can imagine, Jesus messing up their profit center didn't make the religious establishment happy.

They started plotting a long time ago how to get rid of Jesus - to "destroy Him" (see 3:6), so the verb translated "were seeking" is better '*continued to seek*'.

The reason Mark gives is "they feared Him".

His teaching "astonished" the crowd - and His popularity with the people was a threat to the religious establishment's hold on power and their political position with the Romans.

**Jesus teaches about prayer and the power of God.** vs. 20-25

The next day - in the morning - they were on their way from Bethany - back to the Temple - and they pass that same fig tree.

The disciples notice that it's dead - "withered away to its roots."

Peter points it out - and Jesus' reply is odd - seems misplaced...but it's not.

vs. 22-25 - “Have faith in God” ...prayer...power to do amazing things...move mountains...forgiveness...etc.

Some atheists have used this passage as ‘proof’ that God doesn’t exist, and the Bible has no authority.

They say that since no mountain has ever been ‘thrown’ into the sea - that it proves there is no God - and the Bible can’t be trusted.

What the atheists fail to understand is this is not meant to be taken as a literal statement, but it’s a hyperbolic statement.

*An exaggeration which emphasizes the larger point or principle.*

Figures of speech - like hyperbole - do not take away from the literal meanings and truths contained in the Bible. They are used to ‘point out’ or to ‘highlight’ certain truths that are especially important.

***Hyperbolic statements in our modern-day culture:***

- “He is older than the hills!”
- “You’ve stolen my heart.”
- “The rain is coming down in buckets!”
- “You’ve got a smile that could light up the whole town.” - Taylor Swift, “You Belong With Me”
- From “Elf” - “The world’s greatest cup of coffee!”

Comics:

- ‘Hyperbole is going to kill us all’

- ‘My feet are killing me.’

**Hyperbole** is a figure of speech - rhetorical ‘tool’.

vs. 23 - “whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart, but believes that what they say will come to pass, it will be done for them.”

***Jesus is making a hyperbolic statement here to make a point - to emphasize what He’s saying about the importance and power of prayer.***

vs. 24 - “...whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Really? “whatever I ask for?”

Is this really an unqualified - no limits - promise that whatever you pray for will be granted by God?

No.

Remember...Jesus is speaking in hyperbolic language here - and the point is the power of God that we can access in prayer.

When interpreting a passage in the bible, one of the things you must do is look at other passages in the Bible and what they say about the topic being addressed.

What does Jesus and others say - in other passages - about prayer - and our requests being answered?

**John 14:12-14**

12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

13 Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.



14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

**John 15:7**

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

**15:16**

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you.”

The guarantee Jesus is giving is when we pray for the same things the Lord wants - we can be confident our prayers will be answered.

When we pray according to God’s will, the power of God will be present.

**Mark 14:36**

“Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.”

Great example of praying not for our will - not for our self-indulgences - but for God’s will.

**James 4:3**

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

The power available to the Christian is not our faith - or our obedience - or knowledge.

Our power resides in God - in the Holy Spirit.

It’s God who is our power - and when we pray according to His will - and believe in Him - amazing things can happen.

vs. 25 - The discussion ends with Jesus teaching on the importance of forgiving others. This is such an important lesson for us to learn.

It's tricky...because it can seem like we *'earn'* our forgiveness by forgiving others...but that's not quite right.

It's an issue of hypocrisy.

Jesus taught on it often - as you treat others...you will be treated.

We can't expect to refuse forgiveness to others - and think that God will forgive us.

That's inconsistent - it's hypocritical.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught that forgiving others - reconciling with others - is more important than your worship of God!

**Matthew 5:23-24**

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

**Romans 12:18**

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Forgiveness is often a process - the greater the offense the more layers to your forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a choice - a decision - which can involve time - process of forgiving.

Forgiveness doesn't mean you forget - we must learn from our experiences - this is where we gain wisdom - but holding a grudge - a memory with an edge - is not forgiveness.

***Apply it...***

Pray

Sign-up to get the prayer chain emails.

Believe that God can / will do amazing things - and we will be part of the process when we are aligned with His will.

Live your faith

Don't be a Christian with only leaves and no fruit!

Forgive others

If you want to be forgiven, forgive others when they sin against you.

Forgiveness brings joy, freedom and life!

Closing prayer