

Few things are harder to take than the vandalism of the sacred. Vandalism is the destruction or the defacing of something that doesn't belong to me. To vandalize the sacred is to deface or damage something of great importance to someone else. We saw it this past week - a statue of George Washington dressed like a Palestinian by a bunch of protestors. It was a painful image and it made me mad. But vandalizing the sacred is not limited to antisemites and antifa activists. It is right here in Mark 11 and it made Jesus mad too. In this chapter Jesus confronts a kind of clueless sacrilege that we are all susceptible to. The chapter opens with Jesus entering the city for the final time. (I'll summarize since Garrett preached on this passage for Palm Sunday.) Jesus requisitioned a donkey and rode into the city with an entourage thus fulfilling OT prophecy.

Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zech 9:9

In spite of the significance of His triumphal entry, most people didn't even notice. It was business as usual in Jerusalem. What happened when Jesus entered the temple area? Verse 11 tells us. Nothing happened! The promised Messiah arrives, and no one notices. They are too busy with other things. The rejection Jesus warned His disciples about has begun. Rather than being received as King of Kings, He is completely ignored. How is it possible to ignore the long-awaited Messiah? Simple: **Israel valued their customs over their Christ.** Gradually, over time, the primary purpose of temple worship was crowded out by human ambitions like power and politics and profit.

Jesus signaled His displeasure with this kind of vandalism in a couple of ways....vv. 12-14. Jesus walked past a fig tree and saw that it was unfruitful so he cursed the tree. It looked okay from a distance but it wasn't doing what it was supposed to do. By cursing the tree, Jesus simply stated the obvious. It's a dead tree, no matter how full the leaves are. You have heard the expression, "all hat and no cattle?" Well, in this case Israel was all leaves and no fruit. What appeared full of life was actually lifeless. Jesus wants his disciples to see that it is possible to be outwardly religious and inwardly dead.

Next, Jesus goes up to the temple and finds that sacred space being vandalized by vendors. It had been turned into a flea market...vv. 15-18. What is happening here? **Israel not only valued their customs over their Christ, but they valued their commerce over their calling.**

Worship was big business for insider Jews. Merchants and moneychangers set up shop as close to the temple as possible. As a result, the temple was not a welcoming environment for the Gentiles. It's no mystery how Jesus felt about all of this vandalism of the sacred. This is one of the few places where we see Jesus expressing anger and it wasn't the first time He has made His feelings known about this desecration of the temple...Jn. 2:13-22.

Bertrand Russell, the philosopher who wrote an essay called "Why I Am Not A Christian," used this narrative as one reason he didn't believe. He said it shows Jesus as a furious man unable to control his anger, not worthy of the supposed "Son of God." But he missed the point of Jesus' anger. The money changers had set up in the area known as "the court of the Gentiles" prohibiting access for non-Jews. That's why Jesus called the temple a "house of prayer for all the nations."

What is the common denominator of these two stories? The fig tree and the temple are both functioning improperly. In the OT the fig tree was symbolic of God's people and their service to Him (Jer. 8:13, 24:1-10; Hos. 9:10-17; Micah 7:1). The tree was planted by God to bear fruit. Fruit was promised but it was a promise not kept. The temple was the place where all people could gain access to God. But those who were not "insiders" were being squeezed out.

We should take care when we read these stories not to excuse ourselves from a similar behavior. The truth is we all preach better than we live. We desperately need God's help to be what He called us to be. Fruitfulness begins with humility and confession. Andy Gullahorn's convicting song, "I Haven't Either."

Have you ever been so selfish
that you let your baby cry
While you finished up a video game?
I haven't either
That's pretty bad

Have you ever stretched the truth
telling stories to your friends
So they'd be a little bit more amazed?
I haven't either
I'd never do that

But there are some people out there
Who aren't completely sincere

What they show in the daylight
Is not exactly what's inside
It's a form of protection
From being rejected
But you and I can be so glad
We are not like that

So, what should we do? How can we avoid the vandalism of the sacred? Jesus tells us in vv. 20-25. "Have faith in God." What? This is not the kind of response I expect. It doesn't even seem to make sense, does it? Why is he talking about faith and prayer and moving mountains and forgiving? How does it have any relation to the fig tree and to the temple? Here's the point. Only by prayerfully trusting God, can we be transformed into the kind of person who looks like Jesus. Our church can be the kind of place that welcomes all people who long to connect with Jesus.

There's a great example of this from the 1960s. Chuck Smith was a pastor of a little church in Costa Mesa, California. God did something powerful. He started to call a lot of young people to himself. They started coming to church. But they came straight from the beach, without shoes and without shirts. They didn't know any better. The church had just installed new carpet and new pews. On the beach, there were oil deposits. When they were stepped on, they stuck to the bottom of their feet. These new God-seekers walked into the church building with oil on their feet and it got all over the carpet. One day, Chuck Smith showed up to find a sign hanging on the door. "Shirts and shoes please." He took it down, and after church met with the church leaders. They realized they had valued carpet over these kids. So, they decided that they would rip up the carpet so they would not hinder these young beach kids from worshiping God. That's the heart of Jesus. **Never value carpet over kids!** And if you saw the movie, *Jesus Revolution*, you know what happened to that little church? God brought revival. "How did this happen Chuck?" "Oh, we just prayed and trusted God."

"Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." This isn't a promise to grant our every wish. Jesus isn't a genie in a bottle. offer to come into your dead religious heart and drive out what doesn't belong and make us fruitful.

Jesus instituted what we call communion so that we would remember these things. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Let's confess that. Then let's recommit ourselves to Jesus who came and formed a new community, a diverse community, a prayerful community, a forgiven and forgiving community.

FOLLOW

JESUS THROUGH THE BOOK OF MARK

PART 3: FOLLOW THE FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS



Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

ZECHARIAH 9:9

NEVER VALUE YOUR CUSTOMS OVER YOUR CHRIST.

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 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. 14 And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

MARK 11:12-14

15 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. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

18 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.

MARK 11:15-18

NEVER VALUE COMMERCE OVER CALLING.

20 As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

MARK 11:20-25

NEVER VALUE CARPET OVER KIDS!