

**The Fruit of True Discipleship**  
*Mark 11:12-25; August 29, 2021*

**Introduction:**

As we've studied through Mark, we've continually wrestled with:

- Who is Jesus?
- What does it mean for me to follow Jesus?

We've wrestled through Jesus' teachings but we've also watched his life and wrestled through why he does what he does. His actions are a window into his heart and the more we see and understand his heart, the better we are at following him with our life. I pray this is true of us today.

**Review Last Week: Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem initiate the last week of his earthly life.**

- Jesus ends the messianic secret and enters Jerusalem as the promised king who has come to save his people.
- He enters the temple after his triumphal entry as the sovereign Lord and I imagine that he's looking around to see if it's fulfilling its purpose of leading people to the true worship of God.
- His observations lead to action in our passage today.

**Read Mark 11:12-25**

- Bethany: he was probably there staying with his friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha (cf. John 12:2-3).
- Acknowledge fn on v. 26
  - Parallels Matt. 6:14-15
  - "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

**Context:**

Before we jump into the details, let's step back and look at **the larger picture** of this narrative.

- First, Jesus curses a fig tree.
- Second, Jesus enters the temple, cleaning it and in effect pronouncing judgment on it.
- Then another encounter with the fig tree with additional teaching from Jesus.

This is an **A-B-A structure**. It's a "fig tree sandwich" (side note: my grandparents' Fig preserves) with the cleaning of the temple in the middle. Why is it important to see this?

- All of these events need to be interpreted together.
- There is a connection between the cleaning of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree.

**Why does Jesus curse a fig tree (12-14)?**

- "Jesus was hungry": we see in this Jesus' full humanity.

- Was it season for figs or no?
  - Initially, it seems as if Jesus expects that this tree should have fruit on it.
  - But, then, how do you explain, “for it was not the season for figs?”
    - If it wasn’t the time for figs, then Jesus’ cursing of the tree comes across as irrational.
  - At this point (March-April), fig trees would’ve had leaves and small buds called *paggim*. These *paggim* would’ve been at various stages of maturity. They weren’t mature figs yet but they could’ve been eaten and often were by natives (cf. Hosea 9:10; so Edwards, Akin).
  - One commenter paraphrases the end of verse 13 this way: “It was, of course, not the seasons for figs, but it was for *paggim* (James Edwards).
- So what happens?
  - Jesus inspects the tree and finds no *paggim*.
  - As a result, he curses the fig tree. And the disciples overheard him do it.

### **How does the cursing of the fig tree relate to what Jesus does in the temple?**

- The prophets often used the fig tree as a symbol of judgment (cf. Isa. 34:4; Jer. 29:17; Hos. 2:12; 9:10; Joel 1:7; Mic. 7:1). Here is an example from Jer. 8:13 (allude to later Jer. 7:11 reference):

“When I would gather them, declares the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.”  
(Jeremiah 8:13, ESV)

- Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree is a *visual parable* that signifies the judgment of God on the unfruitful temple.
- The temple is just like the fig tree. Even through the temple’s commerce and activity suggests fruitfulness (like the fig tree’s leaves), in reality, it is a den of robbers.
- So, just as the fig tree was cursed and withered, so will the temple.
- Jesus’ triumphal entry combined with this cleansing of the temple, meant his death would be near. As you can see, Jesus’ protest has caught the attention of the chief priests and the scribes and they would find a way to destroy him.

### **What does this teach me about Jesus and what it means to be a follower of Jesus?**

- I don’t want to be under the curse of God, but rather want to live under the blessing of God.
- What is the fruit that Jesus desires?
- What is the fruit of true discipleship?

I want to give us 5 encouragements for the fruit of true discipleship that Jesus desires from us.

### **I. Watch out for Hypocrisy (15-19):**

### **The temple consisted of four divisions/areas:**

- The Court of the Gentiles
- The Court of the Women
- The Court of Israel (only for circumcised Jewish males)
- The Holy of Holies

### **This “cleansing of the temple” took place in the Court of the Gentiles:**

- Just to paint a picture: Jerusalem probably grew by 10x its normal size during the Passover. I’m talking hundreds of thousands of people. The Jewish Historian, Josephus, says that in AD 66, over 255,000 lambs were sacrificed for Passover.
- This is where the buying and selling took place, a “virtual stock market of animal dealers and money changers” (James Edwards).
  - Money changers:
    - Foreign currency was exchanged into a shekel following the command of Exod. 30:13-16.
  - Merchants sold what was necessary for the various sacrifices (pigeons, lambs, oil, salt, etc.). See also Lev. 1:14, 5:7, 11; 12:8; 14:22, 30.
    - Your sacrifice had to be acceptable (perfect) and it has to pass rigorous inspection.
    - Pigeons is specifically mentioned probably because it was the sacrifice of the poor.
  - This practice was created for convenience.

### **What was the problem with the money changers and merchants?**

- It must have something to do with Jesus’ statement: “den of robbers.”
  - These merchants and moneychangers would markup the cost and this markup was shameful and immoral.
  - One commentator noted that the markup was up to 16x the normal price (so Akin).
  - Here are some things that come to mind: extortion, bribery, greed and dishonesty.

### **What does Jesus do?**

- He drove them out.
- He overturned tables and chairs.
- He would not allow anything to carry anything through the temple.
- Jesus acts with righteous rage and indignation.
- “[Jesus] restored, at least for a moment, the temple of God to its rightful purpose. Here is God’s greatest High Priest exercising His rightful authority over his temple” (Daniel Akin).

### **Why does Jesus respond this way?**

- Jesus is attacking the commercialization of temple worship.
- The temple had turned into a place of corruption.

- The money changers and merchants had made worship efficient but that worship was not flowing from a prepared heart.
- In addition to robbing people, they were robbing God of true worship.
- The temple worship had an outward appearance of devotion to God but that worship proved to be hypocritical.
- Like the fig tree, the temple promised one thing but delivered another.
- Additionally, we see hypocrisy in the spiritual leaders.
  - Instead of inspecting themselves to let Jesus purify and cleanse them, they look to find a way to destroy Jesus.
  - This is a warning to all leaders, including myself.
  - What would've been the most God-honoring response? Listen to Jesus, See my Sin, Confess and Repent of my Sin.

**We need Jesus to make us fruitful.**

- Does love shape my life and interactions with God and others (1 Cor. 13).
- Office hours: "Lead me in your love to those around me."

**II. Worship Jesus, the New Temple, with your entire Being (15-19).**

There's something so much larger than the "cleaning of the temple" going on.

**From the very beginning of the Scriptures, there is a continual and consistent "temple" theology.**

- The people of God in the place of God enjoying the presence and blessing of God.
- There were many promises made in the OT, especially in the Prophets, about worship being restored in the temple.
- But Jesus doesn't come to restore the temple. He comes to fulfill it and replace it.
- So, rather than being a "cleansing of the temple," it's actually its condemnation and pronouncement of its coming end.
- Just like the fig tree, the temple will soon be destroyed (AD 70). Why? Because Jesus has come.

**How does Jesus fulfill and replace the temple?**

- Jesus is the true Passover Lamb. His death is the death that once and for all pays for sin. His blood is the blood of the covenant. Animal sacrifices are no longer needed.
- Jesus is the High Priest. He is now in the heavenly temple at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. He is the way for us to get to God.
- Jesus is the Temple. He is the center of all true worship (cf. John 2:18-22).

**We see this clearly later on in Mark:**

- Mark says that when Jesus dies on the cross, the curtain in the temple that divides the Holy of Holies from the Court of Israel is torn in two (15:38).
- This symbolizes the centrality of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the means of access to God.

- Here's what's cool: immediately after the veil is torn in two, do you know what happens? Mark recounts the story of the Gentile Centurion confessing, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (15:39).
- Mark's point is clear:
  - Jesus' death is a new and definite means of forgiveness hence standing for the removal of the temple. And, ironically, the first person to embrace this newness is a Gentile who represents those who were denied a place in the part of the temple assigned for their use.

### **Through our union with Jesus through his Spirit, we are temples:**

- The church is a spiritual temple (1 Cor. 3:16).
- Believers are personal temples scattered all around the world (1 Cor. 6:19-2). This is you and me.

### **How do we worship?**

- Worship is a response of our whole being to all that God is.
- Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength (contra Mark 7:6-7).
- We dishonor God when we minimize worship to bunch a checkboxes (an hour on Sunday, I served on a team, I've setup giving through the app).
- Jesus is just as much concerned with how you love him at home, at work, with your time, with your relationships, with how you spend your money, with what you do with the least of these.

### **III. Make a Way for Everyone to Meet to Jesus (17).**

Verse 17 is at the heart of why Jesus gets so angry.

- Mark is the only author who includes the words, "for all the nations." Why?
- Some believed that when the messiah came he would purge Jerusalem and the temple of Gentiles (*Psalms of Solomon* 17). But the exact opposite is what happens. As a number of commentators note, "He does not clear the temple of Gentiles, but *for* Gentiles" (Akin, Edwards)
  - The Court of Gentiles was the only place available for non-Jews to worship.
  - Because of all of the commerce taking place, they were in effect driven out.
- He quotes Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11.
- Go read Jer. 7 this week. It's one of the most scathing sermons to Israel in the OT.
- Let's look at Isa. 56

*"Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree....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...these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.""* (Isaiah 56:3, 6-8,

ESV)

- This passage is about the extension of God's salvation to those who have been excluded: foreigners, eunuchs, exiles and Gentiles.
- The point: the temple is not reserved exclusively for the Jewish people. Israel was to be a light and a blessing to the nations.
- This is why our heart should beat for the nations.
- This is why we should leverage our lives to make a way for everyone to meet Jesus.
- One of the highlights of my week was a conversation with Monica Tawfik. I had been praying with them about some things and CG possibilities this fall and in one of our conversations she said (I'm paraphrasing), "Our vision is to see people in Medford and surrounding cities come to know Jesus and we want groups in all of these places...so I want a group in Arlington and we'd love host. I'm praying that God would use us with our neighbors."
  - Your CG's should be mini temples, missional houses of prayer for the nations.

#### **A few encouragements:**

- We should live in such a way that we bring people into God's presence.
- Our lives should not obscure people from seeing God but should be glimpses of who this God is like.
- Where will you plant your personal temple that it might be a place where people experience the true life that Jesus offers?
- Will we pay any price necessary that all the nations might hear of King Jesus?

#### **Pause and Pray for Teachers and Students!!!**

#### **IV. Live with a faith that pleads for the impossible (22-24).**

Two possible interpretations: General vs. Specific

- What does "this mountain" refer to?
- Specific:
  - What's in view is the replacement of the temple by the believing community (so James Hamilton; Blomberg; William Lane; NDBT).
  - Contrast to the prediction of the prophets that the Lord's house will be elevated (see Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1), it will in actuality be cast down.
  - "...it is far more likely that Jesus is calling his disciples to trust in his promises that a new world order replacing the temple is imminent" (Craig Blomberg).
- General:
  - This is a call to trust God and go to him in prayer despite everything to the contrary.
  - The mountain is hyperbole for what appears to be impossible.
  - It would make sense that this is where faith begins.
  - These verses resemble some from John (cf. 14:13-17; 15:7, 16; 16:23).

- True prayer is praying in faith trusting that God wants his will done on earth. You can be certain of a future act because of the trustworthiness of God. Faith and prayer both rest on God's character.
- These verses can also be taken out of context and lead to error
  - Cf. Matthew 6:9-10; Mark 14:36; John 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-24; 1 John 5:14-15

**Paul Miller, in his book, *A Praying Life*, says there are two errors to avoid in prayer:**

- Not asking at all (on this end of the spectrum, God does nothing).
  - Miller's experience is that most people lean towards this error.
  - He says most fail to put God to the test.
- Asking selfishly (on this end of the spectrum, God does my will).
  - We shouldn't be trying to get God to change his will to conform it to ours. Rather, we want his will done.
- What's the solution? Ask boldly, surrender completely.

*"And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"* (Mark 14:36, ESV)

- Ponder this thought: You can't ask too much of God. God is never frustrated by your asking.

What is have you been hesitant to ask boldly?

Where is God calling you to surrender completely, trusting he is good, sovereign and wise?

#### **V. Forgive as you have been forgiven (25).**

- There is an unmistakable echo of the Lord's Prayer here.
- What is Jesus saying?
  - If we can't forgive others it shows that we ourselves are not conscious of the grace that have received and need.
  - If we can't forgive others, are we approaching God on our own merit?
  - None of us deserve the right to be heard by God.
  - We have access only because of Jesus.
  - Do you see how our identity is at play?
  - God is our Father. We are his children...because of Jesus.
- God can accomplish great things through those who pay attention to how they relate to others.
- Can you forgive those you once hated and who have wronged you?
- Can you remove any and all barriers that would keep them from a genuine face-to-face encounter with the savior for all nations?

**The Point: Trust the one who judges justly but extends grace to everyone who genuinely**

**seek him in faith.**

**Conclusion**

- What is the fruit of true discipleship? Our lives should be categorized by...
  - True worship from the heart, not just external.
  - A life leverage so that all people have access to Jesus
  - A life of faith that pleads with God for the impossible.
  - A life that forgives because you are keenly aware of the forgiveness you have received