

Follow the King

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Sermon Questions

Date: *February 12, 2023* | Scripture: *Mark 11:1-25*

1. Read the passage from the sermon together. What do you find convicting? What do you find challenging? What do you find confusing?
2. Imagine you were a man or woman on the street in Jerusalem as Jesus was welcomed with shouts of “Hosannah!” And “Blessed is he who comes in the name of David!” What might you be feeling? What would you expect to happen next? Where would you anticipate Jesus going?
3. How does Jesus’ next course of action surprise you?
4. What do you make of Jesus cleansing the temple? Why is Jesus doing this?
5. Mark frequently uses parallel miracle stories to interpret a key event sandwiched between them. What might the fig tree have to do with the cleansing of the temple? (See the back for further discussion)
6. How does Jesus’ reply to his disciples in 11:20-25 challenge you?

Inward Grace in Action

In Romans 9-11, Paul reflects on the amazing providence of God in bringing Gentiles into the fold of his people, even through many Jews’ rejection of Jesus as their messiah. At the end of his reflection, he writes “Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you” (Rom 11:22).

- Where in this passage from Mark do you see the kindness of God? When does he show mercy? Where does he restrain his judgement?
- Where in this passage from Mark do you see the severity of God? When does he reveal his wrath? Where does he release his judgement?

ACTION: Take some time individually or as a group to reflect on the kindness and severity of God in your own life. How has God shown you mercy? Where has he “cleansed” you like the temple? Think of a few people want to pray for this week who need the kindness of God.

WORSHIP THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Here are some other ways you can meet with God throughout the week:

Reflect on these Scriptures:

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- Zechariah 9:9-17
- Matthew 23:13-39
- Romans 11:1-24
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Serve: there are lots of opportunities to serve in our church family. [Click Here](#) to serve as a volunteer.

Pray for those affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, that they might know the mercy of God through the mobilization of his church and the comfort of his Spirit.

Reach out if you need assistance:

- Call our church office at 703.821.0800
- Request aid from our Deacons’ Fund at deaconsfund@mcleanpres.org

[The following is a collection of quotes from [this article by Grace Communion International](#)]

Jesus' cursing of the unfruitful fig tree presents Christians with a dilemma unique in the Gospels. A cursory reading of the text portrays Jesus as acting quite out of character, using his divine power in selfish anger to curse a mere tree because it did not act contrary to nature by providing him fruit out of season to satisfy his hunger. Many ideas have been brought forward in an effort to explain the apparent anomaly of Jesus' behavior in the fig tree incident. These range from flatly rejecting the authenticity of the account to blaming the confusion on a problem of "misplaced clauses habitual with Mark" (Cotter 66).

I believe the account is best understood, however, when it is taken just as it is written, and when it is interpreted in light of: 1) Mark's overall goal of declaring the identity and authority of Jesus and 2) the significance of the fig tree in Jewish and Roman culture. In this paper, I will suggest that Mark intentionally designed the account as it stands for the purpose of intensifying the meaning of Jesus' identity and authority, as well as declaring the fate that awaited Jerusalem.

The account of the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-26) is interrupted by the description of Jesus' cleansing of the temple (15-19). This a-b-a structure makes evident the connection between the fig tree and the temple (Lane 400)...Jesus' pronouncement on the tree was a teaching situation. Jesus' words were intended to instruct his disciples, and the incident, therefore, was intended to provide the opportunity to teach them and the reader.

...The fact that Jesus was hungry provides not only the immediate reason to approach the tree (a fact essential to the narrative — approaching a fruitless tree only to be disappointed would be meaningless unless someone was hungry), it is also vital to the prophetic declaration Jesus was to make. Many scholars agree that Jesus would have had in mind such passages as Jeremiah 8:13 "When I wanted to gather them, says 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." The fact that Jesus was hungry and approached the fig tree looking for fruit illustrates his identity and authority as the Judge of Israel who finds that the nation, despite its "leafy" appearance, has not produced the fruit God desired.

...Jesus is not interested in judging fig trees. The focus is, rather, on the nation, the temple, the Jewish leadership. Therefore, Mark makes plain that it was not the season for figs...The fact that it was not the season for figs, then, should not make Jesus appear unreasonable, as some have assumed; rather, it underscores the point of the passage: the nation has not borne fruit — its spiritual leaders are incapable of recognizing the Messiah, the temple is a den of robbers and not a house of prayer for the nations — and the Judge has arrived to pass sentence.

The cursing of the fig tree, then, is not a strange and unexplainable aberration in Jesus' character, nor in Mark's Gospel, but a powerful and culturally meaningful pronouncement of judgment against the people who should have borne fruit by accepting their Messiah, but instead had rejected him.

The account of the cleansing of the temple (15-19) illustrates the extent to which the Jewish leadership had gone in losing contact with God's purpose for the temple and for his people Israel. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7, pointing out that the temple is to be a house of prayer for all peoples (17). Yet, the High Priest had instituted the practice of selling sacrificial animals and ritually pure items in the Court of the Gentiles, a practice which made it impossible for the gentiles to worship there (Lane 404-407). Furthermore, the general corruption of the High Priesthood and the religious leadership is evidenced by the fact that they responded to Jesus' zeal for the sanctity of the temple by deciding to kill him (18)—the supreme declaration of their refusal to accept his identity and authority.