

Mark 11:11-21

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] I always appreciate when you're asked to be seated. The chairs in the back half, the folding chairs with the pads on them, when you guys all sit down at the exact same time, they go... Have you ever heard that or not? Just to give you a little insight into my mind, if you've ever seen a guy do squats and he exhales before he pushes up, that's what I imagine all the chairs going... when you guys all sit down on them at the same time. Like that. Mark chapter 11. I'm going to begin reading to you in verse 11. And he, being Jesus, entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree and 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. And he said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it. 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.

[1 : 08] And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 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.

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. And when evening came, they went out of the city.

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And people remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

This is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Let's pray together. Father God, we do thank you this morning for your word. And this is the expression, the physical thing that we gather around today, because it speaks of Jesus, the word of God.

[2 : 24] It points us to him. And every single word, every verse, every passage points us to the one, Jesus Christ. And we thank you for the gospel of Mark that we have been able to behold the life, the practice, the words of Jesus here.

And I pray, Father, this morning, that you will have your way with us as we sit under the instruction of your word. That you will shape our hearts. That you will make us look more like Christ for your glory and for our good.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, interestingly, here we find, in Mark's gospel, kind of a bookend literary technique.

We see a story framed within a story. And it would seem that this is meant to help us interpret both events properly. There can be some confusion about the chronology of these events.

In Matthew chapter 21, they're not recorded in this way, in this bookended fashion. But rather, the temple cleansing happens, and then the fig tree event happens.

[3 : 32] And Matthew records that it withers at once. Jesus curses it, and it withers right away. Some people get very troubled by this, that the chronology is different in Matthew's gospel and in Mark's gospel.

And let me just say to you, pastorally, please don't let your hearts be troubled by such things. I believe that the chronology probably happened in reality the way Matthew records it, but that Mark, under inspiration, records it for us in this way to highlight the meanings for us, to help us better

understand.

It doesn't mean that the meaning has changed by any stretch of the imagination, but simply that he's trying to better help us understand the greater purposes of these two stories in the Gospels. The fact that it happened is recorded by both Matthew and Mark. Both of these events did indeed happen. And so here we find ourselves in Mark's gospel account.

Verse 11, at the end of Jesus' triumphal entry, he goes into Jerusalem and into the temple, and he has a look around. It's kind of a scouting trip for him.

[4 : 46] He goes in to see what has been happening in the temple, but it's late at this hour and people have gone home at this time, and so they return back to Bethany, to the house of Mary and Martha is where they're staying at this time.

And they had back out. And the following morning in verse 12, we see that they had now back in. And we see this wonderful expression of Jesus' humanity that he is hungry.

He's hungry to the degree that he's rather frustrated when he doesn't find the food that he needs for his hunger. And we may ask, does Jesus not eat breakfast before he heads off for an important day?

He had a big day ahead of him. Certainly, we should all eat breakfast before big important days. And it's likely that Mary and Martha and their production of food, their providing for all that the disciples needed, that Jesus missed this because it was his habit to go out early in the morning and to pray.

This is conjecture on my part. Please hear me. The text doesn't state this to us. But I would assume that Jesus, knowing what was confronting him that week, we're in the Passion Week, the very week that he'll be crucified, was extra fervent in prayer, that he was out on his knees before the Lord, making sure that he was walking properly before him.

[6 : 06] He also knew what he was about to go do at the temple. You remember the evening before, he had gone in and scouted it out. He had seen the tables of the money changers and those who were selling the pigeons and the doves.

And he knew what he was coming back in to do. And so, likely, again conjecture, he missed breakfast. And so he's hungry. He was a man, fully human, and experienced all of the same pains that we do in life.

So he sees, from far off, a fig tree in leaf, in verse 13. Now, it's interesting as we read this because he arrives at this tree that has no figs on it, and Mark records for us that it's not the season for figs. And so it seems interesting when you first look at the text because you say, how is it that Jesus got upset at a thing, created thing, following its proper order, that had not created food for him to eat? How was it that he was so upset at it that he curses it so that it'll never produce fruit again, knowing full well the case that it should be in? And the point is, you've got to look a little bit, you've got to dig a little deeper, and you've got to understand figs.

[7 : 14] I had to do this. I don't know anything about figs until this past two weeks. A fig tree puts on fruit before it puts on leaves. So the fruit is first produced.

The fig puts its energy into producing the fruit first, and then the leaves, and then the fruit begins to mature. Now remember, this is Passover week.

On our calendar, March or April, sometime in this span, which is when the fruits would have come on to the fig tree, followed by the leaf.

But those fruits wouldn't have come to full maturity until somewhere between August and October. So in the fall is when the ripened fruit was actually harvested. However, people in this day would eat the green fruit from the fig tree, particularly if they were very hungry.

So what Mark is telling us is it's not the full time. It's not the fall. It's not the fall. It's the full ripe fruit shouldn't be on this thing yet, but the green ones should have been because the tree is in leaf.

[8 : 22] That's why that is recorded for us that the fig tree is in leaf. So Jesus would have expected that there would have been small, hard, green fruit that would have satisfied his hunger.

So the fruit comes first and second comes the leaf. And it's an important thing to understand about why he would have expected fruit.

In verse 14, when he doesn't find it, we see Jesus' only destructive miracle, that is, he produced lots of miracles that were always constructive or reconstructive, healing people, but this is the only one where he produces a miracle that actually destroys something as he utters a curse against the tree.

We know it's a curse because down in verse 21 it says, And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered. The curse he utters is, May no one ever eat fruit from you again.

It seems a little bit like a spiteful act against the tree, doesn't it? Like, why is Jesus so frustrated and so upset that he curses a tree?

[9 : 30] Is this some type of random act of anger on behalf of our Lord? No. Of course, the answer is no to that question. Jesus' curse on the tree was meant to prefigure the destruction of the fruitless.

He's displaying something for the disciples to see. Does Jesus ultimately care about the life of the tree? No, he doesn't. Was he so frustrated that he had to take out his anger on the tree?

No, he didn't. He's doing something here to teach the disciples and therefore us something as well. The coming destruction of the fruitless, of those who do not bear fruit.

Now, our minds, as the fastidious students, I'm sure we all are of the Scriptures, likely go to New Testament texts. Places like Matthew 7, the Sermon on the Mount, verses 17-19.

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit. The diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

[10 : 41] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Or John 15, verses 5 and 6. Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. So those who are in Christ produce good fruit.

verse 6 says, if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. So there's a judgment that comes on those in Matthew 7 who don't bear good fruit, fruit that accords with godliness.

And in John 15, those who bear no fruit at all, who are cut off from the life-giving force of the vine, and wither and are thrown into the fire. The judgment comes.

Now, the apostles wouldn't have had our New Testament text as part of their scriptures, but they also, as students of the scriptures, would have gone to their scriptures, the Old Testament texts.

[11 : 46] Ones like Jeremiah 8.13 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 is proclaiming judgment on Israel. Jeremiah 24. Jeremiah has a vision of Israel's judgment in terms of good figs versus bad figs.

In Hosea 9.10, Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel, like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season I saw your fathers.

But they came to Baal Peor and consecrated themselves to the things of shame and became detestable like the things they loved. Verse 16 and 17. Ephraim, another name for the northern tribe, is stricken.

Their root is dried up. They shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death. My God will reject them because they have not listened to Him. They shall be wanderers among the nations.

[12 : 52] So they would have been very familiar with this imagery. They would have understood that Jesus proclaiming judgment on the fig tree was a foreshadowing of the judgment that would come to the fruitless.

In either case, New Testament or Old, the theme holds. Those who are fruitless will be judged. And so we must ask the question at this point, do you bear fruit?

I must ask the question to myself, do I bear fruit? We should examine our fruit. Now our fruit does not give us merit before God.

It doesn't give us merit. It doesn't earn. I don't have a big basket of fruit and I have enough fruit, enough good working out of my life that He'll put it on a scale and say, your good fruit outweighs your bad fruit.

Welcome to my kingdom. This is not what's happening. We're not meriting ourselves to Him. If you are found in Christ, God is pleased with you because of the righteousness of Christ.

[13 : 55] This is the beauty of the Gospel. Because none of us are ever going to be able to amass enough good fruit to outweigh the bad fruit. This is not a possibility for us to earn our way.

But if we are in Christ, we have been made perfect in Him. This is the glorious truth that God is pleased with us regardless, that nothing takes us out of His hand, that when He looks at us, He sees Jesus.

Even when we fail, even when we bear the guilt of that, we know that we've failed, we know that we don't walk in the way that we should walk. He looks at us and He is pleased. Beloved, this is precious for us to know.

This is what enables us when we fall flat on our faces, when we commit grievous sin against God, to stand back up and look at Him to repent, to enter back into His presence, to be back in relationship with Him because Christ has purchased that for us.

This is the reality of those of us who have placed believing faith in Jesus Christ. However, we are instructed, we are meant to test that salvation, to be sure of it, to know without a doubt that we are found in Christ by what?

[15:14] Our fruit. the outworking of the reality of who we are. Old has passed away. New has come. Right? I am now a good tree.

I was once a bad tree and I produced bad fruit, but I am now a good tree and therefore I produce good fruit. But I should examine that. 2 Corinthians 13.5 Paul says, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

He's writing to the church. Those that we would all presume were in the faith. He says, examine yourselves. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test?

The test is this issue of fruit, which is ultimately an issue of worship. How do you spend your life? What do you ultimately care about?

How do you align everything that you have and all that you do to show that you worship the one true God? You don't worship yourself. You don't worship the things of this world. You worship God.

[16:20] This is what God is concerned about in the Old Testament. Obedience to the law was ultimately an act of worship. Aligning the Old Testament peoples, aligning themselves with God, worshipped Him by obeying His law.

This is what God is concerned within the New Testament. This is what Jesus is concerned about. It's heart worship that matters. He could have spoken about all kinds of things.

We're now in the 11th chapter of Mark. We've come through 10 chapters already and we've seen Jesus teach on numerous occasions. He could have spoken about lots of things. Political issues, social issues, there were troubles in this day.

He could have spoken to all of those things. He would have had wisdom for all of those things, but He instead spoke repeatedly about heart worship. He knew that if we would align ourselves with God, that all those things would begin to sort themselves out.

The primary thing reigns over those secondary things. Jesus constantly pressed at people. You were created for something. God is calling you back to Him. Worship Him from the heart.

[17:21] It's not merely the exterior that matters, but the interior. Let's look at one example. We should turn back to Mark chapter 7. There's one example of His teaching on this. Begin reading in verse 14.

And He called the people to Him again and said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand.

There is nothing outside a person that by going into Him can defile Him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile Him.

The fruit, right? And when He had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile Him since it enters not His heart but His stomach and is expelled?

Thus He declared all foods clean. Mark's little parenthetical addition commentary. Jesus is saying all of these regulations about food, don't you see that this isn't what changes your heart because it just goes into your stomach and goes back out of you.

Verse 20, And He said, What comes out of a person is what defiles Him? For from within out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[18:51] All these evil things come from within and they defile a person. So the evidences of someone's heart not being shaped by God, not being made new in Christ is the bad stuff that's coming out of them.

Those things that are not fruits of the Spirit but are rather fruits of the flesh. This issue is pressed constantly throughout the Gospel account.

It's pressed in all the Scriptures as a matter of fact that true worship of God is an issue of our hearts. That works out in proper ways. Hear me say that. It works out in proper ways but it's primarily about our hearts and the fruit is the way in which we test this.

The issue is continued in Jesus' activity in the temple picking back up in verse 15. You see, the temple was at the heart of Israel's worship.

Metaphorically, it was the heart of the nation. Just as proper worship now proceeds from our hearts figuratively and in a practical sense, proper worship proceeded from the temple.

[20 : 02] If the leaders of the temple were corrupt then the people of God were also corrupted. This was a truth in this day. The apostasy began at the temple and this is what Jesus is going in to sort out and to cleanse from this place.

This is why and this is much debated I'll tell you but this is why I believe that Jesus started His ministry with the cleansing of the temple and then ends it here as He's wrapping things up with a second cleansing of the temple.

Now I'll tell you there's a lot of argument about this kind of thing but John records it very early in his gospel account John chapter 2 verses 13 through 17 it seems that Jesus goes and makes a side journey takes off goes to Jerusalem does some temple cleansing in that account we see that He makes a whip of cords I love this one He's so frustrated that He braids up something and drives people out in this account here there's a different record of what said to Him and what proceeds after what happens in the actual temple event so I think He began it here He spends three years ministering to the people of Israel and He comes back now and I think this is why He went in to scout out what was going on He's back again on the Passover week He's going to see if they've sorted things out in Israel or not He's sorely disappointed so He goes in to cleanse it once again an interesting parable that he tells which I think gives us some clue to the validity of my stance here is Luke chapter 13 verses 6 through 9 he says and he told this parable a man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came seeking fruit on it and found none first cleansing he came seeking fruit on it he found none and he said to the vine dresser look for three years now

I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and I find none cut it down why should it use up the ground and he answered him sir let it alone this year also until I dig around it and put more on manure then it should bear fruit next year well and good but if not you can cut it down so you see this three year gap he even speaks about in this end why because he had taught them the way they should align their hearts he taught them the proper fruit that should proceed and they had yet to do it so he does at the beginning he concludes the ministry with his miracles cleansing the temple we've got one more miracle which is the miracle of the resurrection but except for that we don't see any other miracles in Mark's gospel account this is the last one except for the resurrection that he does Jesus was upset about the improper use of the court of the

Gentiles this is the outer court of the temple of the worship the Gentiles were allowed in this arena of the court we see that there are money changers there they were turning various currencies into Tyrian coinage this was the coinage that was accepted in temple worship they were selling pigeons or doves which were required for sacrifice Leviticus 5 7 says but if he cannot afford a lamb then he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation for the sin that he has committed two turtle doves or two pigeons one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering so these activities would have been things that needed to happen people would have needed to purchase a turtle dove or purchase pigeons they would have needed their coinage to see that Jesus actually drives out both those who sold and those who bought so it would actually seem that the activity itself wasn't so sinful that these things were permitted to happen but not in this place they had come into a place that was meant for something altogether different and they had turned it into a place for the exchanging of money for the extortion of

[24 : 14] God the court was also not to be used as a thoroughfare he stopped people from cutting the corner around the temple and cutting across this temple court on the outside and then we get some clue that it's possible that there was some unfair trade happening because he says in verse 17 at the end but you have made it a den of robbers so lightly there was beyond the fair exchange of money and selling of these sacrificial animals they were extorting people above and beyond what they should have been to do this thing but he is altogether displeased with what is happening in the court and he drives them out people could have been there so the fact that he drove people out

probably mean he kind of herded them out and that's something I would have loved to have seen both the account with the whip and then him flipping over tables in his anger and pressing people out of this place

I mean one man couldn't have done this by his own human physical strength it was probably because he was mean that we have righteous anger we could wrongly do that the main point of this text now I would exhort you that at times speaking the truth in love means turning over a few tables there's actually not enough of that in our culture today people who are willing to contend for the truth people who are willing to toss a table now and then and stand up for the Lord we need more of this we need mighty men right not masy pansy Christians but people who will stand firm on the word of God and do what is necessary to correct doctrine at times in love these things should be done we should not primarily make Jesus action here about setting an example for our zeal although true we shouldn't make it primarily about that

I want you to! me to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah I want to share with you a story that I particularly love I realized in this past few weeks that when we preach through the book of Nehemiah that's now been two summers ago which just kind of made my head explode Nehemiah is a prophet of God who has returned to Israel he has been the cup bearer for King Artaxerxes the Persian king and King Artaxerxes has begun to let the Israelites go back to the nation and they have yet to rebuild Jerusalem so the major activity of Nehemiah is he goes back and he leads the people in rebuilding the city which was the visible way in which people saw the glory of God like how are the people of Israel doing so he went back and he built the wall they rebuilt the temple at this time and he had some antagonists all throughout the story one of those antagonists was a guy named 13 we see that

Nehemiah goes back to King Artaxerxes for a time and some things transpire in that time beginning in verse 4 now before this Eliashib the priest who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God and who was related to Tobiah prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering the frankincense the vessels and the tithes of grain wine and oil which were given by commandment to the Levites singers and gatekeepers and the contributions for the priests now these things are storehouses built prescribed to be built and there were things put in them to care for those who were leading people in the worship of God right instead of that Eliashib clears a mountain gives it as a house to Tobiah verse 6 while this was taking place I was not in Jerusalem for in the 32nd year Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king and after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God and I was very angry and I threw! the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God with the grain offering and the frankincense so he comes back and the house of God had been used for something that it was not meant to be used for this was not the purpose that this place had been built for provision for the worship of God so he goes in and he cleans up another event I would have loved to be held he throws all of Tobias furniture out onto the lawn and tells him to get Nehemiah in this way prefigures Christ imagine that the Old Testament followers of God would have seen this and understood this this cleansing using the temple for the proper use was not meant to be used as a place to sell things was meant to be used for the worship of [29 : 47] God so we would wrongly understand it that way primarily that this is about having zealous anger although it can mean that the example of our Lord has its place and its time in our day we can also wrongly take the main point to be a prophecy of the coming destruction of be completed and when it is it will be destroyed in 70 AD by Titus Vespasian who was a Roman general at the time later became a ruler you're welcome Clay I hope I pronounced that properly so the temple was to be destroyed and is to this day but this is not mainly what he's saying here in some way we can see some foreshadowing because we know what came to pass but I don't believe this is what he meant to teach the disciples at all he does so in other places though like Mark chapter 13 verse 1 and 2 he says and as he came out of the temple one of his disciples said to him look teacher what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings and

Jesus said to him do you see these great buildings there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down so there we see right a prediction of what would happen but I don't think that's primarily what he's trying to accomplish here so neither of these is the main point so what is what is the main point again it's Jesus coming judgment on the fruitless this is how

Mark's literary prowess if you'll allow serves us as we look at the story of the fig tree and the story of Jesus cleansing the temple together bookended in this way one helps us understand the other and the other helps us understand the one we're supposed to see these things in conjunction he's coming to the very place in which people are supposed to worship God rightly and they're doing it wrongly in this place fruitless in this way and so he is expected to see people rightly worshipping God by being concerned with God's concerns and we must ask ourselves again at this point do you love the things that God loves do you love the things that God loves Jesus quotes in his condemnation in this cleansing process from Isaiah 56 7 and Jeremiah 7 11 now we've talked already a bit about how he said but you have made it a den of robbers this is the thing this is the bad fruit that you have produced or the fruitlessness if you prefer that you have produced Jeremiah 7 11 has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes behold I myself have seen it declares the Lord and he puts us along with Isaiah!

56 The activity that they should have been about in the court of the Gentiles was prayer for the nations they should have been concerned about God's glory globally they should have been concerned that everyone everywhere would see God rightly and worship Him from the heart this should have been the matter that was moving at them to worship Him rightly in this place the same is true for us today we're concerned about the things that God is concerned about that we love the things He loves namely His own glory to be the activity of those who fear God and want to worship Him from the heart turn with me to Psalm 96 let me just emphasize this point to you let's read to you verses 1 through 9

Psalm 96 oh sing to the Lord a new song sing to the Lord all the earth sing to the Lord glory and strength ascribe to the Lord the glory do his name bring an offering and come into his courts worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness tremble before him all the earth this is what we are meant to be concerned about all the activity of our lives are meant to press at people our lives and their lives to sing praises!

[35 : 17] glory everywhere that we go that is the fruit of hearts that are changed hearts that are devoted in worship to God now you'll notice in verse 18 and 19 he's once again caused a bit of controversy the chief priests now have entered the scene and are offended and the scribes as well the intellectuals the religious intellectuals of the day and they begin to seek to kill him which is not a new thing at all right because they feared him though they were losing control of the crowds they could no longer keep their thumb down on them because

Jesus is coming and he is destroying their power right their apostolic power it doesn't it's not a reality of a thing they've created this new religion by which they control the!

they're going to see Jesus crucified at the end of this week on Friday this is Tuesday that we're in the Passion Week by Friday they're going to see him put to death and praise God by Sunday he's going to raise again we have life in him as a result his sacrifice on our behalf did a little just quick flip through the end of Mark just to see!

how much longer I thought we would be in Mark's Gospel account I think it's going to take us through May to complete it so we're going to spend months gosh I'm horrible at math in this way on the calendar eight months I feel like that is it's a good chunk of time right in a week right Jesus is going to say so much in this last week to the apostles and to us it's going to really cause us to face the realities as this all winds down to an end and cause us to deal with all the implication of the Son of God sacrifice on our behalf we're really going to have to do that together as I hope we do every Sunday anyway it's really going to press us into that how should we live properly in response to if we are found in Christ our lives are going to look different they're going to be different from the lives of this world

God's going to set us apart he's going to sanctify us in his truth he's going to lead us in the way we should go when we're going to have to wrestle with all of that to find ourselves to examine ourselves!

[38 : 15] find that we are we are reoriented now those things are done we are now picking up new passions and desires and those are the passions and desires of our Lord let's pray together