

**“A BAD DAY AT THE TEMPLE”**  
**Mark 11:12-19**  
**2018 Lenten Series - His Last Week**  
**February 25, 2018**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**On the surface,**

**this event – the cursing of the fig tree –  
seems to reveal an angry, petulant side of Jesus -  
- we would just rather not know about.**

**However, there is much more to this event than meets the eye.**

**Mark used a style of writing**

**that often “framed” a piece of scripture  
between two pieces of another story –  
like bookends.**

**- using the two pieces to reflect back upon  
- and interpret the middle piece.**

**Using this very skilled form of writing,**

**Mark expects us to consider both incidents together -  
- what happened to the fig tree  
- and what happened in the temple  
actually interpret each other.**

**Let me show you what I mean.**

**THE FIG TREE:**

**The whole event begins with a fig tree.**

**As Jesus and His disciples left Bethany  
on their way into Jerusalem and the Temple,  
Jesus was hungry.**

**Mark tells us that Jesus spotted a fig tree  
which unfortunately had no figs.**

**On the surface,  
Jesus' response to the fig tree was pretty harsh:  
"May no one ever eat fruit from you again."  
- which amounted to a curse on the fig tree.**

**Take a deeper look at this incident.**

**The month was March-April  
and according to God's basic design for the fig tree  
there would *never* be figs on the tree at that time of the year -  
as Mark wrote: "It was *not* the season for figs."**

**Yet, finding no figs,  
Jesus cursed the tree to permanent barrenness.**

**A very important phrase is the last half of verse 14:  
"And his disciples heard him say it."**

**The cursing of the fig tree  
had a much deeper meaning –  
meant *specifically* for the disciples.**

**Jesus and His disciples are on their way to the temple -  
- and Jesus is very subtly pointing out  
the temple and the fig tree share one thing in common:  
- *neither* of them are bearing fruit!**

**Just as Jesus has *symbolically* destroyed the fig tree -  
- Jesus is about to *symbolically* destroy the temple -  
- and for *exactly the same reason!***

**Remember . . .**

**. . . the primary reason Jesus has entered Jerusalem  
is to confront those who have *not* been living  
according to God's will;  
who have been treating people unjustly  
for their own profit and comfort!**

**And the temple is at the center of the problem.**

**Consider this:**

**on the Day of Atonement,  
the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies  
to represent the people before God.**

**However, the other 364 days of the year,  
the high priest represented Rome!**

**Instead of being a voice for the people  
and instead of advocating for justice -  
- the high priest, the priests, elders and scribes  
were mere puppets for the Roman regime.**

**And *that* would *never* be acceptable to God!**

**Consider this passage from the prophet Jeremiah:**

**<sup>5</sup> If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with  
each other justly, <sup>6</sup> if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless  
or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if  
you do not follow other gods to your own harm, <sup>7</sup> then I will let**

you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. <sup>9</sup> " 'Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, <sup>10</sup> and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe" - safe to do all these detestable things? <sup>11</sup> Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD. Jeremiah 7:5-7; 11

Harsh words, indeed.

Aimed directly at those who have followed unjust paths.

And this from the prophet Micah:

<sup>6</sup> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:6-8

The evidence is *overwhelming!*

God is *not* pleased with injustice!

And the temple has become a "den of robbers."

A haven for those who deal in injustice.

**THE TEMPLE:**

Which brings us to Jesus and the temple.

Just as Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem

**was to confront the Roman oppression of the people -  
- Jesus' entry into the temple on this occasion  
was to establish God's justice  
against high-priestly collaboration with Rome.**

**Just as Jerusalem was the center of Roman domination in Israel;  
the temple had become a source of Roman domination -  
- the high priests owed their rank and privilege to Rome  
- local priestly authorities collected the annual tribute for  
Rome  
- the priests were using religious language to maintain Pax  
Romana**

**So, Jesus takes action.**

**Actually, He took four separate actions:**

- 1. Began to drive out the buyers and sellers**
- 2. Overturned the tables of the money changers**
- 3. Overturned the seats of the dove sellers**
- 4. Would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple**

**Although there were some questionable practices,  
most money changers and animal vendors were quite legitimate  
and absolutely necessary for the temple to function normally.**

**It all took place in the huge Court of the Gentiles.**

**Money needed to be changed into coin acceptable at the temple.  
Buying animals or birds on site  
was an excellent way to make sure they were ritually clean.**

**When Jesus interrupts this normal trade,  
He has in effect shut the temple down.**

He has *destroyed* the temple - symbolically.

What *exactly* was so offensive about the temple?

Well, Mark quotes Jesus as saying:

"Is it not written: "'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The temple had become a "den of robbers."

It had, in effect, become a "safe house"  
for those who were "robbing" the people.

It was a haven for the priests, elders and scribes  
who were mere puppets of the Romans -  
- who were allowing injustice  
for the sake of their own prosperity.

They were using the relative safety of the temple -  
- and their own positions of power and authority  
- to further their own interests  
by serving the interests of Rome.

For their own safety and prosperity,  
these priests, elders, and scribes  
had elevated Rome above God!

And *that* was absolutely *not* acceptable to God!  
It never was . . . it never is . . . it never will be!

So, knowing what the eventual outcome of His actions will be,  
Jesus acts -  
- being obedient even if it leads to His own death

- serving God as best He knows how
- Jesus *destroys* the temple . . . symbolically.

**PETER REMEMBERS:**

**And with that . . .**

**. . . Jesus and his disciples leave the city for the evening.**

**Now, if you'll peek ahead a couple of verses further**

**here's what Mark wrote about the following morning:**

**<sup>20</sup> In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. <sup>21</sup> Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"**

**Now, if Peter was as smart as I think he was,  
he would have connected the dots.**

**Peter would have come to the realization  
that just as the tree was "shut down" for lack of fruit  
so was the temple.**

**Peter would have recognized  
that the fig tree was "sacrificed"  
to show the disciples what will happen to the temple.**

**It is a lesson that is made more powerful with an illustration.  
And the fig tree is a *perfect* illustration!**

**What God *expects* from the temple  
is far, far different from what the temple is producing!**

**When worship substitutes for justice,  
God rejects God's temple . . .  
. . . and the same holds true for the church.**

**When the church worships the “church” -  
that is, when it worships itself  
more than it worships God -  
- it is failing to produce the fruit God expects.**

**When the church becomes a fortress  
to protect itself from the world  
instead of going out into the world  
to “preach, teach and baptize”  
it is failing to produce the fruit God expects.**

**When the church is more concerned about itself  
than about the suffering and injustice of the people  
it is failing to produce the fruit God expects.**

### **CONCLUSION:**

**In the very beginning of Mark’s gospel,  
we read that Jesus began His ministry by preaching:  
"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near.  
Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15**

**Indeed, there is no better time than the season of Lent  
to repent.**

***Repent* in Hebrew means “to return” –  
especially “to return from exile”  
an image associated with “way,” “path,” and “journey.”**

**It is time for us as individuals -  
- and as a church -  
- to return from our self-exile from God.**

**It is time to return to God's paths of righteousness.**

**The Greek word for repent  
indicates "to go beyond the mind that you have."  
To repent is to embark upon a way  
that goes beyond the mind that you have.**

**It is time for us to boldly continue  
producing the fruit God expects from us.**

**Sisters and brothers,  
we are a very good church!**

**We could be better.**

**We have a great Mission Statement.  
We could do more to bring that mission statement  
to bear the fruit that it promises.**

**During Lent this year,  
let's give some thought – prayerful thought –  
to that which God may be calling us.**

**God deserves the best church we can be.  
Let's build that together.**