

The Wrath of Jesus

Mark 11: 12-25

¹² The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "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.'"

¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

¹⁹ When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

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

²² "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³ "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.

²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Fruitless

¹² *The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.* ¹³ *Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.* ¹⁴ *Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.*

Isn't Jesus mean?

Isn't this proof that God is frivolous and vengeful?

That he can fly of the handle and wipe entire nations off the map.

Or that he really doesn't care, isn't loving or compassionate?

It's just a helpless fig tree for crying out loud!

What did that fig tree ever do except not bear fruit?

I mean, what do you want from a fig tree... except maybe figs.

Okay, a fig tree is supposed to have figs, but it was out of season.

It's the wrong time of year.

Jesus is expecting the impossible.

What person in Palestine expects fruit from a fig tree out of season?

Well, actually... everyone.

Fig trees, even out of season in Palestine have figs.

In fact, the leaves are an indication that they should have figs.

Fig trees in that region bear fruit out of season twice outside of the main one.

Okay, so Jesus could have expected figs.

And okay, a fig tree is supposed to have figs.

Why does he curse it?

Why does Jesus blow his top over this simple incident?

And why does the gospel record it for us to read and puzzle over?

I understand Jesus' frustration if that is what it is.

I have a fig tree that hasn't yielded edible fruit for years.

But the kids like to climb in it so at least there's that.

I pick up all the leaves and unripe fruit that fall from it.

Reading this passage, I've looked up why it might not bear fruit.

It could be the soil, or the watering, but there are some bad trees.

Experts say, if you have a bad tree, dig it up and try again.

Hmmm, sounds a lot like what Jesus says about branches that don't bear fruit.

They are cut off and thrown into the fire.

And in an additional note, Israel was symbolically referred to as a vine and fig.

Hmmmm.....

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Did Jesus get up on the wrong side of the bed?

Or is he having a really bad day? Or neither?

Understanding the Second Temple

Solomon’s Temple is the First Temple, destroyed in 586 BC.

The Second Temple was finished in 516 (started 521) BC.

King Herod completely renovated and rebuilt this temple (20-19 BC).

The Temple was the representation of the very presence and rule of God.

It was the focal point of relationship with Yahweh.

Parts & Access:

Royal porch, outer court of the gentiles, court of women, inner court (Jewish men only), temple proper (priests) and holy of holies (high priest once a year).

The outer court also became known as the court of Gentiles.

They were not allowed into the inner parts of the temple.

In other words, it was as close as they could get.

Now the Sadducees controlled the second temple.

Sadducees were a sect tied to the Romans and were a sophisticated elite.

They did not believe in the miracles like the resurrection.

They allowed the outer court to be used for trade.

They exchanged “pagan money” for “temple coin” with

which you could then buy a sacrifice if you didn’t bring your own.

What started as a convenience became a scam.

Gentiles who wanted to pray had to contend with animals & merchants

Those who wanted to learn would have to deal with vendors.

So what do you think made Jesus mad?

Israel was supposed to be the light of the world and a blessing to all.

All the nations were to come and worship God because of them.

How do you think the Gentiles thought of God now?

Note his words, “My house shall be called a house of prayer **for all nations.**”

The Temple had become a corrupt place, misrepresenting God, a place of ambition.

It made God angry – spiritual oppression.

Did the fig and vine bear fruit?

Withered

²⁰ *In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.*

²¹ *Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"*

So now do you understand why the fig tree was cursed?

Why it bore no fruit?

Why it withered?

It was a physical lesson of a deeper spiritual truth being illustrated.

It is not accident that the cleansing of the temple is bookended by the fig tree.

There are things that God will not stand for.

And that is blasphemy.

It is the first commandment – thou shalt not take Yahweh's name in vain.

It isn't about bad words.

It is about putting your own words into God's mouth.

It is about putting your own attitudes into His Temple.

It is about making the church into something it is not what he calls it to be.

And it should make you uncomfortable.

It might even make you mad the way the priests got mad
and plotted Jesus' death.

We might not be so extreme, but we kill Jesus and betray him by ignoring him

We blaspheme God by making the church what we want it to be

Rather than becoming what he calls us to be.

But that is the point isn't it.

This passage highlights that those who were responsible for the mission of God

Stopped believing in the mission

Became self-serving and complacent

Generated a power base for themselves

And in fact became the unforgiving oppressor

What is the mission of God's people?

Faith & Forgiveness

²² *“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. ²³ “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

This passage may seem to have very little relevance to the rest.
In fact it doesn't seem like an appropriate response to Peter's comment.
But after some thought, perhaps it is.

I mean, who can stand against the corruption and withering of the church?

Think of not only the historic and world-wide scandals

But also the personal disappointments and abuses.

Our church has been called to swim against the tide of pop Christianity

In an attempt to try to be faithful to the mission of God.

Sometimes it may feel easier just to give up hope.

The discouragement is enormous.

How do you teach a people to carry their cross and follow Jesus?

It is foolishness!

But that ultimately is the gospel.

A kingdom has come.

And despite the withering discouragements and challenges,

Jesus says, “Have faith in God.”

You can move mountains.

There is only one caveat.

When you stand and pray for this mountain to move,

“If you hold anything against anyone, forgive them
so that you may be forgiven.”

What?

Yes.

Faith and forgiveness go hand in hand.

You see, the greatest power in the world is exercised by God,

When Jesus says of the very people who crucify him,
Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Forgiveness is not to excuse or ignore the wrong

But to name the wrong and not participate in its evil.

Do you really want to be free? Do you want to do the impossible?

Do you want to overcome adversity?

Forgive and be forgiven.

The Mission of God's People – of the true church is to live the good news.

Is that what we're doing?