



The Lord Comes To His Temple

Key idea:

Like the fig tree, the Temple is utterly barren of fruit and Jesus pronounces it to be dead, never to bear the fruit of true worship of God again.

Key text:

Mark 11:11-25

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. 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 area 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, they 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 “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 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 him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Key points:

1. Mark 11:11-25 weaves the story of the unfruitful fig tree and the Temple together. Mark commonly uses this device to alert the reader that the two stories must be read and interpreted together.

2. The fig tree gave signs of life and fruitfulness but was barren so Jesus cursed it and it withered completely and would never produce fruit again. Jesus did as an enacted parable of what was to happen to the Temple.
 - a. It was not the season for figs, but the tree should have had early figs, or figs left from the previous season. However, it had nothing but leaves - it was an unfruitful tree.
 - b. The main point was not even early figs, but rather how the fig tree was a picture of the Temple - the appearance of life from a distance, but when inspected nothing but barrenness.
3. Jesus drove the merchants from the Temple because the worship of the Temple was as barren as the fig tree. The Lord had come to His Temple, inspected it, and pronounced that its days as the place of worship were at an end.
 - a. The Temple was meant to be a place of worship and prayer, and in the New Covenant, it was to be a place for the Gentiles and eunuchs, those who had been forbidden from entering the Temple under the Old Covenant (Isaiah 56:1-7).
 - b. Jesus said that instead of being a place of true worship and prayer the Temple was nothing but a den of robbers, the place where those who had violated God's Law wrongly thought they could retreat for protection (Jeremiah 7:8-11).

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. Why is it important that we read the story of the fig tree and the Temple together? What false understanding might I draw from the fig tree if I do not read it as a parable of the Temple? What false understanding might I draw from Jesus' actions in the Temple if I don't read it in light of what happened to the fig tree?
3. Only Mark tells the reader that it was not the season for figs. Why does he include this detail? How does that force me to focus on the relationship between the fig tree and the Temple?
4. Why does Mark include the detail that the fig tree withered from the roots? What does this tell me about the future of the fig tree? What does it tell me about the future of the Temple?

5. How does Malachi 3:1-2 (The Lord will suddenly come to His Temple, and who can stand when He comes) help me understand what happened when Jesus drove out the merchants?
6. The incident in the Temple is often called the “cleansing of the Temple”? Is that what is really happening here, or is it something much more radical? How does the fig tree help me answer this question? How do Jesus’ words in Mark 13:1-2 (The Temple will be destroyed, not one stone will be left upon another) help me answer this question?
7. Why does Jesus quote Isaiah 56:7? How does Isaiah 56 show that the worship of the Temple was corrupt and unfruitful?
8. Why does Jesus quote Jeremiah 7:11? How does the context of Jeremiah 7 show that the worship and understanding of the Temple were corrupt and vile before God? How does Jeremiah 7:1-15 relate to what was about to happen to the Temple in the coming years?
9. What do the incidents of the fig tree and the Temple tell me about the relationship between the Old and New Covenant? What place does a physical Temple have in the New Covenant?
10. What do the incidents of the fig tree and the Temple tell me about the nature of true worship? What makes my worship pleasing to God? What would make my worship false and unfruitful?
11. Are there any areas that the Spirit is showing me that God wants to prune and change in my life to make it fruitful?
12. Who can I reach out to this week to share the Good News of what Jesus has done?