Preparing the Environment for Jesus

Message 53

4.28.19

Mark Series

Mark 11:12–25 (CSB)

**THE BARREN FIG TREE IS CURSED**

**12**The next day when they went out from Bethany, he was hungry. **13**Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he went to find out if there was anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. **14**He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And his disciples heard it.

**CLEANSING THE TEMPLE**

**15**They came to Jerusalem, and he went into the temple and began to throw out those buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, **16**and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. **17**He was teaching them: “Is it not written, **My house** **will be called a house of prayer** **for all nations**? But you have made it **a den of thieves**!”,

**18**The chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to kill him. For they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was astonished by his teaching.

**19**Whenever evening came, they would go out of the city.

**THE BARREN FIG TREE IS WITHERED**

**20**Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. **21**Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”

**22**Jesus replied to them, “Have faith in God. **23**Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown 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, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received, it and it will be yours. **25**And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing.”

# Introduction. Jesus has entered Jerusalem for His final week of life.

A. The Triumphal Entry has just happened.

1. Crowds of people praised Jesus and celebrated with Palm branches and singing.

2. Jesus rode into the city on a donkey’s colt, a symbol of peace.

3. Jesus came into the city and immediately went to the Temple.

4. At the Temple, no one was there to meet Him.

5. Because it was late in the evening, Jesus left for the night and went to the town of Bethany.

B. The next day, Jesus is going to the Temple.

1. Jesus is going to invest a large part of his last days in the Temple teaching.

2. In the process, many people are going to love Him and many are going to hate Him.

3. But before Jesus starts teaching in the Temple, He does 4 things that prepares the Temple for the presence and ministry of Jesus.

a. First, He curses that which does not produce.

b. Second, He cleanses that which is defiled.

c. Third, He emphasizes the power of faith that is placed in God.

d. Fourth, He teaches the importance of forgiveness in worship.

C. Today, I’m covering a lot of information quickly.

a. Regardless if this is your first visit or you’ve been a Christian for years, the message I want us to hear today is the necessity of preparing ourselves and our environment for the presence of Jesus and His Teachings.

b. Jesus wants to have a relationship with all of us: individually and corporately.

c. But, just as our houses are not always ready for company, our lives our often not ready for Jesus to be Himself in us.

1. Have you ever been to someone’s house and you just couldn’t be yourself?

2. Maybe their house was too dirty or too clean?

3. Maybe you had to wear pants?

4. The Holy Spirit lives in us, but it is possible for us to grieve Him so He can’t be Himself in us.

5. Jesus couldn’t be Himself in the Temple of Jerusalem without doing 4 things.

6. If we will practice these 4 things, we too can experience the ministry and presence of Jesus in a fuller way.

To prepare my life as a Temple for Jesus, I need to take at least these 4 steps:

# 1. First, I must curse what doesn’t produce.

A. As Jesus is heading to the Temple, He finds a fig tree with leaves but no fruit.

1. Because Jesus doesn’t do things by coincidence, we have to ask ourselves, “What is Jesus doing?”

2. We know that Jesus is going to the Temple to deal with some problems there.

3. On the way, He finds a tree that looks good but is not producing what it should.

a. The tree was promising fruit but was not producing fruit.

b. This is exactly what the religious leaders in the Temple were doing.

c. They looked spiritual, but they had not fruit.

d. They advertised a close relationship with God, but on closer inspection, it was only show.

B. Jesus uses this fig-tree as an enacted-parable to demonstrate what He was getting ready to do in Jerusalem.

1. Jesus was going to expose the religious leaders and their false religion.

2. So Jesus does the only miracle of destruction found in the Gospels:

a. He curses the tree and causes it to die.

b. This is the only miracle like this in the ministry of Jesus.

3. His point was this: What doesn’t produce is cursed.

4. I think we have to be careful with this:

a. Please don’t curse your neighbor who isn’t mowing their yard.

b. Don’t assume someone is cursed because they aren’t as productive as you are.

c. I want you to notice that Jesus did not curse people, He cursed an object.

1. To bless is to encourage life and prosperity.

2. To curse is to call upon God to bring death and destruction.

d. Nowhere in the New Testament are we ever told to curse another person, and that includes our enemies.

1. Jesus, in M**atthew 5:44**, told us to Bless those who curse us.

2. J**ames 3:9-10** said that blessing and cursing is not supposed to come out of the same mouth.

3. *God has given you permission to BLESS people, but curses are His domain.*

e. The curse of the fig tree is a symbol of God’s judgment of the temple.[[1]](#footnote-1)

f. The temple was not ready for the presence and ministry of Jesus.

C. If we would be honest with ourselves, many of us are not ready for the presence and ministry of Jesus either.

1. People look at us and thing we have it all together.

2. But when they get close, they realize that *our lives are full of thoughts, activities, and desires that produce nothing in the Kingdom of God.*

3. That’s because it is possible to be busy for Jesus without worshipping Jesus.

D. All of us have ideas, activities, and influences in our lives that are not helping our walk with Jesus.

1. In order for you to become closer to Jesus, you may have to curse somethings and cause them to die.

2. **Hebrews 12:15 (CSB)** **15**Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many.

3. Some of you are hanging on to the trees of bitterness, anger, hatred, and unforgiveness.

a. They promise you a sense of control or a sense of fairness or justice.

b. But what they offer is death and destruction.

4. Some of you are hanging on to things in your life that promise fruit and blessing, but are lying to you.

a. What I encourage you to do is to ask God what are those things in your life that need to be blessed and what needs to be cursed.

b. And when He speaks that to you, and it is in agreement with Scripture and the clear teaching of the Church, then bless what needs to grow and curse what needs to die in your life.

# 2. Second, I must take out the trash.

A. Jesus comes into the Temple and finds it full of everything but worship.

1. Jerusalem was a metro-area, where people from all over the known world came to worship.

2. This led to a lucrative business of selling sacrificial animals and exchanging money at a very high exchange rate.

3. In other words, well-meaning people came to worship God but were taken advantage of in the process.

4. To take advantage of people is a violation of the character of God.

5. Jesus drove this truth home by flipping tables and by swinging a whip.

6. *Jesus is mad because the religious leaders had made the Temple about their own personal gain instead of the glory of God.*

7. Whenever you use God’s resources for your own gain, you will bring His judgment upon you.

B. So what does Jesus do?

1. He takes out the trash.

2. God intended for the Temple to be a place of prayer for ALL NATIONS and peoples.

a. Not just for the rich.

b. Not just for the locals.

c. The Temple was designed for All People to be able to know God.

d. God’s judgment came upon that Temple because they had turned a place of prayer into a place of profit.

C. We all have trash in our lives that is hindering us from walking closer to Jesus.

1. Again, it could be habits, behaviors, friends, addictions, or wrong beliefs.

2. I really feel that God wants to tell someone here that you already know the trash you are supposed to take out, so be bold and do it.

3. Preparation precedes revival.

4. If you want to have room for more God In your life, you are going to have to make room by taking out some trash.

# 3. Third, I must make Jesus the focus of my faith.

A. The Temple was the object of faith in Judaism.

1. Everything about their life revolved around the Temple and the worship there.

2. But Jesus demonstrated that He was more powerful than the Temple.

3. This was made clear when Jesus told His disciples that everything you pray for in Jesus will be done.

B. Does this mean you get whatever you want in prayer?

1. Is Jesus giving us a blank check to pray for whatever our heart desires, and we can expect it?

2. The answer is no.

3. Let me show you that from Scripture:

C. God doesn’t answer all of my prayers because not all of my prayers honor God.

**Jeremiah 17:9–10 (CSB)**

**9**The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it? **10**I, the Lord, examine the mind, I test the heart, to give to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve.

1. If your heart is far from God, your prayers will be far from God’s will.

a. And outside of God’s will, you will not be honoring Jesus.

b. in **John 14:13-14**, John records the same teaching of Jesus that Mark does in a little different way. He says, **13**Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14**If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.,

2. We must be honest in recognizing that not all of the prayers we pray are about Jesus.

1. Sometimes our prayers are extremely selfish.

2. Sometimes our prayers are extremely sinful.

3. Sometimes our prayers fall short of what God has for us.

D. It is possible for our prayers to look good but to have no root.

1. Jesus is enacting an illustration of faith through this fig tree.

2. The tree looked good and had the appropriate leaves that signified it had fruit.

3. But when Jesus got close, there was no fruit and so Jesus cursed it.

4. It is possible for our prayers to look good and sound good and to be absolutely devoid of any power or relationship with Jesus.

5. Just because you pray, it doesn’t mean that you are connecting with God and the authority He has for us.

a. ILLUSTRATION: Bring husband and wife up to platform.

b. Have husband look at phone while wife tells her husband about her week.

c. Husband: You have 1 line: ummhmmm.

d. These two are not connecting.

e. This is not communication.

6. Many times we are not connecting with God while we claim to be in prayer.

7. Then we wonder WHY God doesn’t do whatever we ask.

E. When we make our lives all about Jesus, then we experience the kind of power that causes mountains to move and cursed things die.

1. This isn’t about you performing some kind of trick at a party.

2. It’s about people being able to see Jesus in me and through me.

3. Prayers prayed in your name will fail, prayers prayed in Jesus’ name will conquer.

# 4. Fourth, I must make forgiveness a regular part of my worship.

Mark 11:24–25 (CSB)

**24**Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received, it and it will be yours. **25**And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing.”

A. At this point, Jesus has cursed a fig-tree, cleaned out a temple, taught at the temple, and now He drops one more truth-bomb.

1. So far, we are seeing that for me to be ready for the presence and teaching of Jesus, then I must curse what doesn’t produce, take out the trash, and make Jesus the focus of my faith.

2. Lastly, I must make forgiveness part of my worship.

B. To forgive someone who has wronged us is not natural, it is supernatural.

1. It doesn’t come easy nor does forgiveness come cheaply.

2. It always costs something to forgive others.

3. It is when we forgive others that we are most like our Heavenly Father.

C. I think it is interesting how Jesus connects the power of prayer and faith with the necessity of forgiving others.

1. Jesus basically says that if you believe and don’t doubt, you will see miracles.

2. Because of this, (Therefore) you will receive what you have prayed for AND you must also forgive others.

3. We could spend all day talking about what this looks like, so let me narrow our focus down to this:

a. If you won’t forgive people, your prayers won’t be answered.

b. If you won’t forgive those who have wronged you, your faith won’t be effective.

c. If you don’t forgive others, God won’t forgive you.

4. I can’t be powerful in prayer, if I am strong in hate.

5. I can’t be powerful in faith, if I refuse to forgive.

6. I can’t worship Jesus, and experience His love for me, if I don’t love those who have hurt me.

# Prayer

1. James R. Edwards, [*The Gospel according to Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcmark?ref=Bible.Mk11.12-14&off=2871&ctx=ws%E2%80%99+hideout+(v.+17).~+The+curse+of+the+fi), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)