

Jesus Cleanses the Temple Mark 11:12-25

On Palm Sunday Jesus came into Jerusalem, a humble King, lowly and riding upon a colt. Now he come into the temple (cf. Mal. 3:1-2). What does he find? Rank hypocrisy. This is not a random scene about an unhelpful tree and unhealthy church but a potent sign of coming judgment. Unique to Mark, the cursing and withering of the fig tree sandwiches the cleansing of the temple because it symbolizes what will happen (vv12-14, 20-25). Jesus confronts sin and foreshadows the consequences of his time, but he also teaches us how to deal with corruption in and outside of us with strength and joy.

House of Prayer Hypocrisy is the pretense of being or having something when in reality you aren't or don't. This is the all hat, no cattle, all foam, no beer, all talk, no action problem. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus sees the leaves of the fig tree which give the appearance of having fruit (v13). When he sees it doesn't he curses it to never bear again (v14). When Jesus comes to the temple, it looks beautiful and wonderful and on the outside, the way it ought to be as a "house of prayer for all nations", but inside is another story (Is. 56:7). The temple was supposed to be a center of mercy for Jews *and Gentiles* (1 Kgs. 8:41-3). In the old covenant, a Gentile is not the same thing as unbeliever. The court of the Gentiles was one of four parts of the temple, the biggest because God told Abraham he would be a blessing to all the nations. The Sadducees and Sanhedrin turned it into a stockyard for commerce. There was some legitimacy to buy animals for sacrifice, but it had become corrupt (cf. Dt. 14:24-26). The church is now the house of prayer for all nations.

Righteous Anger Jesus isn't flying off the handle but surgically confronting the corruption of God's house. He has a right to expect early figs and a place for Gentiles to pray. Jesus is only explicitly described one time as angry (Mk. 3:5), but it would be a fair description of him here (vv15-6). He overturns tables, drives out sellers, and forbids commercial traffic. Then he teaches (v17). Jesus' anger is on behalf of others. He isn't controlled or dominated by it (Eph. 4:26). His anger is not opposite to but a revelation of his love. We should model our anger after his—HWJBA, how would Jesus be angry?

Den of Robbers Quoting the prophet Jeremiah, Jesus says the Jews turned the house of prayer into a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11). He references Jeremiah's temple sermon which confronts the use of religious observances to cover up sinful practices and predicts the destruction of the temple (Jer. 7:4-15). The temple goes from a prayer house to a brigands' den where the leaders plot their revolution. Just as Jeremiah warned Israel that God was sending the Babylonians, Jesus is condemning their disobedience to God and schemes against Rome, their trust in "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." Christians are tempted by the same false confidence. There is no substitute or counterfeit for the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-3).

Faith & Forgiveness The fig tree is withered to the root (v20). There is no saving the temple. Jesus isn't thrilled about this—he loves his country—but he isn't in despair. "Have faith in God" is his exhortation (v22). When he says *this* mountain can be thrown into the sea by faith, he's talking about the temple mount, not seismic forces. The destruction of the temple, the end of a good thing that became an idolatrous thing, was a matter of faith. When a church, an institution, an organization has become corrupt to the point of no return, believers leave in faith that God will raise them up to rebuild the ruins (Is. 61:4). This is something we rely on God for, trusting him to give it (v24). When you are dealing with entrenched corruption it's the easiest thing in the world to think you are spotless and above it, a lonely principled crusader against the unwashed compromisers. This makes us whitewash our sins and demonize our adversaries. But Jesus will have none of it. It's in this revolutionary context he commands, seemingly out of nowhere, that *whenever* we stand praying, forgive anything you have against anyone—this from the guy whose murder just got plotted (v18). No matter how crazy or corrupt a situation gets, our "rules", stay simple. Trust God, repent and forgive your neighbor.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 11:12-25

12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it. 15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" 18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. 19 When evening had come, He went out of the city. 20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." 22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. 25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

1. What did Jesus do in the temple and why did he do it (verses 15-17)?
2. The fig tree is a picture, a symbol, of what Israel is supposed to be like. Healthy trees have fruit. What are the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)?
3. This scene involves conflict, a fight between Jesus and the leaders of the temple. He teaches his disciples how to act in the middle of a conflict. What does he tell them to do (verse 25)?
4. Draw a picture of Jesus throwing over tables and making room in the temple for people to worship.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. –Mark 11:25