

Belief, prayer and forgiveness are woven into the fabric of those who follow Jesus. Christian faith (*Gr. pistis*) is not wishful thinking; it is a confident expectation. What is our faith in (Matt 11:22)? It is not in ourselves or the strength of our belief but in God, His character and His ability to accomplish His will on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is teaching on “whatever you ask for in prayer” (v.24). Prayer is much more than listing off our requests, it is being in communion with and conformity to God and His will. It is hearing more than petitioning. When we hear God’s voice, and pray in accordance with His will, there is nothing that is impossible. But echoing the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus warns about unforgiveness as a hinderance to our prayers. Our ability to forgive is tethered to our ability to love God and love others.

What are the mountains in your life that only God can move? When you bring them to God in prayer, have you spent time listening longer than petitioning? Spend time together in prayer but begin by waiting quietly for at least one minute asking God to show you how to pray in alignment with His will. And as you hear from God, pray in faith, that He can accomplish more than you can imagine.

WRAP-UP

The day after Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He returned to the Temple and was angered by what He saw—a marketplace exploiting worshipers in a place meant for prayer. His act of overturning tables was not a loss of control but a righteous response to religious corruption that hindered genuine worship, especially for Gentiles. Mark connects this event with Jesus’ encounter with the fig tree, symbolizing fruitlessness and spiritual hypocrisy. Through this “living parable,” Jesus exposes the empty religion of those who outwardly appear faithful but bear no spiritual fruit. The lesson extends to believers today: true faith is shown through fruitful lives grounded in belief, prayer, and forgiveness, not religious show or judgment of others.

MEMORY VERSE

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.'" - Mark 11:17 NIV

Challenge –

As you prepare for prayer this week, set aside all pride and your need to see your will done and ask God to reveal any unforgiveness you need to release. Then humbly ask the God’s will be revealed to you so that you can pray boldly in alignment with Him.

The Fig Tree and the Temple Gospel of Mark Ch. 11 - Week 1

INTRODUCTION

The day after Jesus had entered Jerusalem on a donkey to the cheers of the crowds, He returned for a confrontation at the Temple. In what seems to be an uncharacteristic demonstration of anger, Jesus overturns tables and drives out merchants and vendors in the marketplace which had been set up in the Temple courts. How do we explain this sudden outburst? As it turns out, Jesus Himself tells us what has provoked Him, and demonstrates it through a living parable of the fig tree. Mark uses his “sandwich” style of writing to bookend the clearing of the temple courts with Jesus’ encounter with a fig tree.

Ice Breaker

Has there been a recent event that pushed you to the breaking point resulting in an outburst of anger?

Key Passages

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.'"

- Mark 11:15-17 NIV

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Temple Marketplace

On the day Jesus arrived in Jerusalem He went to the Temple and looked around at everything there before He left for the night. But when He returned the next day, He did more than look around.

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. - Mark 11:11 NIV

In Jesus' day the Temple was divided into four courts, the Gentiles', the women's, the Israelites, and the priests; each progressively closer to the Holy of Holies where only once a year the High Priest could enter to make atonement for the people.

6 And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- 7 these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." 8 The Sovereign LORD declares--he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

- Isaiah 56:6-8 NIV

As you read Isaiah 56:6-8 how do you think God feels about the Gentiles (non-Jews) who love and serve Him? How would a marketplace in their Temple courtyard have affected their ability to worship God?

There was a place in the Temple Courts for anyone who loved God to worship Him. But in the outermost court, where the Gentiles worshiped and all people passed, a marketplace was set up requiring that foreign coin be exchanged for Jewish coins and "acceptable" animals were being sold for people to offer as sacrifices. When Jesus looked around, what He saw produced a righteous zeal because those in authority were using religion to exploit the people who wanted to worship God.

15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." - John 2:15-17 NIV

We don't always get it right when we express what we feel is "righteous anger". What or who was the target of Jesus' anger? Who or what do we see as the target of "angry Christians" today? How did Jesus treat the sinners He encountered (woman caught in adultery, tax-collectors, woman at the well)? How did He respond to those who abused their religious authority?

If we are targeting "sinners" with our "righteous anger" then we have missed the point. It is God's kindness that leads to repentance, and Jesus welcomed the outcasts of society into His house. But His anger was reserved for the abuse of religious leaders who created barriers between God and those who needed Him most.

2. Parable of the Fig Tree

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. ... 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!" - Mark 11:13-14, 20-21 NIV

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" - Luke 13:6-9 NIV

Before and after Jesus clears out the Temple courts, He has an encounter with a fig tree. The fig tree has been used in parables and symbolically referred to in the Old and New Testament. There are differing opinions concerning what the fig tree represents in Mark's Gospel. Some think it is the corrupted temple system of commerce. Others see it as representing the nation of Israel. We don't always understand the symbols used in parables, but we can look for lessons God wants to teach us through them.

What do the parable in Luke and Jesus' encounter with the fig tree in Mark have in common? What "fruit" might Jesus fail to find in the Temple? Why would God want to remove a "fruitless" tree? What kind of "fruit" does God look for in the lives of His people? What is the remedy suggested in Luke?

We all want to bear fruit for God's kingdom. But sometimes we don't. Perhaps we need to dig out the weeds, loosen the hardened soil of our hearts and feed on God's Word for a while. Then give God time to change our hearts and produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8).

3. Belief, Prayer and 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." - Mark 11:22-25 NIV