

# Cleansing the Temple

"Follow Me to the Cross" Series, March 29 & 30, 2025 | Mark 11:12-25

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## Why did Jesus disrupt the Temple?

### **Jesus stopped things that were genuine problems.**

First, He drove out anyone selling things in the Temple courtyard.

He paid special attention to the money-changers. They were turning everyday currency covered in pagan images into the Temple money used to pay the Temple tax. This was necessary, but they did it for a big fee that lined the pockets of the rulers of the Temple. This was robbery, and Jesus turned over their tables.

Jesus also turned over the seats of the pigeon merchants. Pigeons were the sacrifices of the poor, and they were over charging the poor. This was robbery, too.

The Temple had become the quickest way through the crowded city. You get the picture of a sacred place being used for everything but sacred purposes. Jesus stopped all of that.

### **Well, He didn't stop all commerce everywhere in the massive Court of the Gentiles.**

The Temple in Jerusalem consisted of an actual Temple in the center.

There were inner courts for priests, and others were surrounded by the massive Court of the Gentiles.

This was where all the buying and selling was going on, and it happened on an industrial scale. In one year, more than 250,000 lambs were sacrificed during Passover! Jesus stopped just a fraction of this commerce.

### **However, Jesus did make an important point about corruption in the Temple.**

Commerce had happened outside of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, until just a few years before Jesus arrived in Jerusalem.

The Temple authorities—the chief priests and scribes—moved it to the Court of the Gentiles to rob the people more efficiently and effectively.

So, Jesus made His point. He got their attention!

And now the wealthy, powerful leaders in Jerusalem were solidly committed to ending Him.

### **And in Mark 11:17, Jesus explained that the Temple was missing its purpose.**

We read:

***And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."***

Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament and reminding people of what God wanted.

The Jewish people were dreaming about a future when God would kick Gentiles out of Israel and the Temple and help Israel rule the world.

But the prophets saw a day coming when people from all nations would come to the Temple, worship God, and find God for themselves!

In **Isaiah 56:8** God says: ...

***"I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."***

In bringing in commerce, the priests had disrupted prayer.

In bringing in corruption, the scribes had robbed the people.

In crowding out Gentile worshippers, the Temple authorities forgot their purpose.

Jesus would not stand by passively and let that happen.

**Still, what Jesus did in the Temple seems out of character, and we don't fully see why. Yet.**

Here, Jesus gets angry and turns over tables.

He looks more like an Old Testament prophet than our loving Lord.

We can see the problems He saw, but why are they such a big deal?

What is Jesus really driving at? And does that say anything to us? Let's keep reading ...

Cursing a fig tree reveals Jesus' motivation and message.

**Jesus cursed a fruitless fig tree in Mark 11:12-14:**

***On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.***

Stay with me for a minute, and what happened here is going to explain why Jesus did what He did in the Temple. It was morning. Jesus was on the way into Jerusalem, and He was hungry.

He saw a fig tree ahead in leaf. It was spring, but figs were not in season. However, there were buds that would later ripen into figs. People would eat the buds too, but even these buds were missing. And when the buds are missing, the tree is not going to produce fruit later in the season. This was a sick tree.

And Jesus cursed it. The next day as Jesus and the disciples walked by the tree again, they saw that the tree was dead. It had withered right down to the root. Why did He do that?

**Let's look at what Jesus did through the lens of the Old Testament prophets.**

Prophets delivered messages from God—sometimes through dramatic actions.

Ezekiel built a model of Jerusalem and laid siege to it to symbolize the coming of an enemy army. (Ezekiel 4)

Jeremiah wore a yoke to call the people to submit to God's judgment. (Jeremiah 27)

These actions brought God's message to His people.

Like them, Jesus was delivering a message!

**When you put the fig tree and the Temple together the way Mark does, we finally see Jesus' message.**

The fig tree was barren, and Jesus cursed it. Later, the fig tree withered and died.

It's important to know that fig trees frequently symbolize Israel.

Look at **Hosea 9:10**:

***Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. ...***

And a barren fig tree frequently symbolizes the disobedience of God's people.

Now, Jesus' disrupting corrupt activity in the Temple is sandwiched between two passages about a fig tree which means that the fig-tree passages are pointing to the Temple passage, helping us to understand what it is all about.

Jesus is really pointing to the Temple. The Temple and its leaders are barren—they aren't producing the fruit that He expects of them. Instead, they are corrupt, pursuing all kinds of money-making schemes and ignoring their purpose. He is pronouncing judgment on them. As we will see later, Jesus is saying that in a few decades that corrupt Temple will be destroyed.

Jesus cleansed the Temple as a warning! Turn and bear fruit, or judgment is coming!

### **Does Jesus need to cleanse us the way He did the Temple?**

Jesus cursed the fig tree for not bearing fruit.

He was judging the Temple and its leaders for not bearing fruit.

He was calling them to repent, receive Him, be cleansed, and bear much fruit.

Clearly, Jesus expects us to repent, receive Him, be cleansed, too.

And right here in this passage, there is an unmistakable message:

Clearly, Jesus expects His people to bear fruit.

**When we talk about fruit, we all kind of know what we're meaning. But let's get a bit more precise.**

The Bible uses the word picture "fruit" to describe the outgrowth of our spiritual lives.

For instance, in **John 15:8** Jesus Himself says:

***By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.***

What, though, is fruit? **Fruit symbolizes the produce or outflow of a healthy, spiritual life.**

Fruit grows out of our spiritual lives in ways like what happens in nature. Like with bamboo.

### **Some bamboo varieties grow almost like weeds.**

In year one, bamboo puts a few canes above ground, which fuel roots growing underground.

Then in year two, the colony puts up more, bigger shoots which can grow four feet in a day!

When the colony is fully established, it sends out runners that start new colonies.<sup>1</sup>

It starts underground, comes above the soil, and eventually spreads.

That's what bearing fruit looks like, and that's what Jesus expects of us!

### **Bearing fruit for a disciple of Jesus starts with a Changed Heart.**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://lewisbamboo.com/pages/how-bamboo-grows?srltid=AfmBOorObHApD\\_6bZgBUS-UnXUoDih\\_GyGWI673IYdc4\\_AicJ6-QML6u](https://lewisbamboo.com/pages/how-bamboo-grows?srltid=AfmBOorObHApD_6bZgBUS-UnXUoDih_GyGWI673IYdc4_AicJ6-QML6u)

We can't just decide to bear fruit. Spiritual fruit doesn't happen until our hearts change. That's what the Temple leaders were lacking and what we may be lacking. Our changed hearts begin with repentance. We turn away from sin and turn ourselves toward God. That's what Jesus is really looking for: changed hearts. A changed heart IS the overflow of a healthy, spiritual life, and it produces more fruit as well.

### **Bearing fruit includes Changed Actions.**

When we think of fruit, we probably most often think of changed actions. Jesus wants us to show that we are His and that we love Him by obeying Him. So changed actions are important fruit of a healthy, spiritual life. But there is a mystery at the heart of changed hearts and changed actions: Changed hearts must lead to changed actions, and changed actions can only come from changed hearts. Otherwise, we're just trying hard, but that's not fruit, and we can only try hard for so long.

### **Bearing fruit produces Changed Lives.**

In the natural world, fruit is always about multiplication. Plants put out flowers and create fruit to make new plants. And Jesus tells us that to follow Him is to be changed by Him AND to make more disciples. That expectation is part of why Jesus expressed anger here—the Court of the Gentiles was so clogged that people could not pray and new people could not come to faith in God. Instead, Jesus expects His disciples to bear fruit by introducing people to Jesus and helping them learn everything they need to follow Him. He expects us to make disciples.

### **Bearing fruit also results in a Changed World.**

Our faith does shape the world around us. The fruitless lives of the Temple leaders filled the Temple and Jerusalem with corruption. When our hearts are changed and our actions change, then we fill our lives and the spaces around us with a new kind of righteousness and justice. When we see people around us living changed lives, that fills the world with more ambassadors of the Kingdom of God doing the same things that we do. We will never make the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God, but we do influence and shape the world around us. That's bearing fruit.

### **But bearing fruit only happens by faith.**

#### **Jesus' expectation that we bear fruit does not create a spiritual to-do list.**

Jesus is replacing the legalism of the first century with a heart change. He is not substituting one legalism with another. Jesus is clearly looking for us to bear the fruit of changed hearts, actions, and lives. But that doesn't become a new checklist. What is happening is more organic, and what is required is more profound than a to-do list.

**Instead, in Mark 11:22-24, Jesus tells us that what we need is faith.**

***And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."***

At first, it sounds like Jesus is telling Peter how he and the disciples can work miracles.

But really, Jesus is addressing the bigger question: What do the Temple leaders and other Jewish religious leaders lack? What does everyone lack?

We lack faith. We need faith. All along, Jesus has been calling us to faith. Not faith in ourselves. Not faith in the world. Or faith in the future or faith in faith.

**This isn't a call to magical thinking like Dorothy and her ruby slippers.**

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy got a pair of ruby-colored slippers. She is told that they are magical and powerful and that she should never take them off.

In the end, it turns out that she can return to Kansas if she closes her eyes, clicks her heels together three times, and repeats the sentence, "There's no place like home."

It kind of sends the message that if you believe hard enough, anything can happen.

Jesus isn't offering us a pair of magic, ruby slippers to click together.

Instead, He is saying that what we need is faith in God through Him. That leads to fruit.

**The Temple authorities lacked true faith, so they had no fruit.**

They could not see Jesus as the Messiah.

That meant that in some ways, they simply did not have faith in God that was open to seeing what He was doing when He was doing it.

They had no true faith but only a form of legalism that kept them in power and their pockets full. But genuine faith is what moves mountains and causes fruit to grow, so a lack of faith leads to a lack of fruit.

**True faith makes impossible things—like salvation and bearing fruit—possible.**

Jesus is saying in Mark 12:22-24 that faith makes impossible things like moving mountains possible. What kind of impossible things does He mean? He doesn't mean impossible things like me conjuring a jumbo jet out of thin air. That's magical thinking.

But the things of a vibrant, healthy, spiritual life are impossible in some ways.

We cannot save ourselves; that is impossible. But with faith, God can save us.

We cannot bear fruit ourselves; we cannot will fruit into being. But with faith, God bears fruit through us! True faith makes salvation and fruit-bearing possible.

***We, too, can bear fruit!***

**Chuck Colson showed us what bearing fruit looks like.**

Before he met Jesus, Chuck Colson was a chain-smoking, hard-drinking political mastermind.

He served in the Nixon White House and was involved in the Watergate coverup.

He spent seven months in prison, but that was also a turning point in his life. During his fall from grace, Chuck Colson found amazing grace in Jesus Christ. His heart had been changed, which changed his actions and his life's mission. Instead of smearing political opponents, Colson became known for being kind and thoughtful. He founded Prison Fellowship, which ministered to incarcerated people and helped them find new life and hope in Jesus. He dedicated his life to advancing the Gospel of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> That's fruit bearing!

### **This church is full of people bearing fruit.**

Anxious people are now trusting, proud people are humbled, and greedy people are now generous. Old chains are broken, new lives are built. Many of us here have met Jesus because we were introduced by someone else here at Valley! Just last year, over one million people received humanitarian aid because of this church. That's fruit! Valley is full of people bearing fruit!

### **We can all bear fruit—starting today.**

This afternoon, we can spend time with God in prayer and Bible study, letting Him have the access to our lives that He uses to change our hearts.

When we spend time with family and friends, the difference will quickly become noticeable. Our words will be different—we will be kinder and more supportive. Our actions will be different—we will be servants and generous.

When we go to the office on Monday, we can give away the life that God has given us. We can just talk about the good things God is doing in our lives, and people will want to hear more.

When we plan our futures—what we are doing with our careers, what we're doing with our money, what we're doing with the time we have left—let's ask, "God, how do you want to change the world through me?"

In faith, we can be true fruit-bearers. Now. And for as long as God gives us life.

### **The Bible describes another tree in Psalm 1:3, and its outcome was much better.**

Let's be honest. The fig tree in Mark 11 suffered a pretty bad fate. Not good.

But there is another tree described in Psalm 1:3. It's another metaphorical tree that represents the person of faith. That person is deeply rooted in the love of God and the Word of God.

**Psalm 1:3** describes that person this way:

***He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.***

That tree, that person is healthy. That person, that tree bears fruit.

I pray that you will be like that tree!

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2012/04/chuck-colson-dead/>