

# Matthew 11

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[ 0 : 00 ] So imagine that you are, for some reason, flying in a helicopter above my house. And you see me come out carrying a set of golf clubs.

And your first thought is likely that I plan to use those clubs to play golf. Seems reasonable.

This idea is strengthened as you fly above my car and I drive to a golf course. And the logical conclusion is again that I intend to play golf.

And I even unload my clubs and enter the clubhouse. And even if you see me delay for an hour or so at each month or something, you still will suspect I have done all of these things with the ultimate purpose of playing golf.

Now, to be honest, I haven't played golf in years and I actually don't have a car in London. But the point I want to make is that we assume when people go somewhere, they go there for a purpose.

[ 1 : 06 ] We know that people have goals in traveling to a destination, even if they sort of delay that goal. Sometimes, though, we have these odd habits when we come to read our Bible.

For years, for example, I made no real effort to ask questions of our text. Any text, but this one in front of us in particular.

You know, we stop reading wherever our English Bible has a new heading printed in between paragraphs. And we assume that a particular given story ends there.

But that approach would produce a really odd understanding of our text today. And so in the beginning of our text, we see what has been called Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where he rides this donkey into the city in order to fulfill a prophecy from Zechariah 9.9, that the king of Israel will come into his city riding on a donkey.

But so many times we neglect the full account of Jesus's triumphal entry, that he goes not just through the gate, but into the temple.

[ 2 : 34 ] Why does he go to this temple? And what was his goal? And you might suspect that we're going to find our answer in Mark 11, 1 to 25.

Just like you would assume that I had a goal of playing golf and traveling to a golf course, we would be right to assume that Jesus had a real and significant purpose in entering the temple, even though we find out that he delayed his purpose until the next day.

So the main point this morning is that when God enters the scene, he renders judgment. But for Christians, that judgment is in our favor.

When God enters the scene, he renders judgment. But for Christians, that judgment is in our favor. We're going to think about this in three points.

The four word to fruit, the false fruit, and the faith fruit. So first, the four word to fruit. So if you spend any time in the gospel of Mark, the question ringing throughout this book is, who is Jesus?

[ 3 : 49 ] Crowds of people constantly gather to him and yet seem to miss the point. Over time, his disciples at least come to understand that he truly is the Messiah.

But they are still confused as he tells them about how the Messiah must be killed and rise from the dead. That's not what they expected from their Messiah.

They expected the Messiah to ride triumphant into Jerusalem and crush the enemies of God's people, whom they identified as the Romans.

The celebration surrounding Jesus' entry, triumphal entry into Jerusalem, is because he was finally taking on some expected behavior of what people thought the Messiah would do.

So again, we think about how I mentioned Zechariah 9.9. It predicted the king of God's people would ride into the city on a donkey.

[ 4 : 59 ] And it's clear in this text that the people understood Jesus to be taking on that prophesied role. That's why they're celebrating this event. But the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, however,

comes in startling contrast with the way that Jesus leaves Jerusalem.

He comes into the gates, hailed as king, and he goes out of the gates carrying the cross that would kill him.

This surprising change in how he was treated happened because of what he did inside the city. He did not continue to act like the expected Messiah. He does not kick out the Romans. But he turns his blows against the Jews themselves.

So as Jesus entered the temple at the end of verse 11, he looked around. See that?

[ 6 : 25 ] But not like a tourist. Like a judge assessing the scene upon which he would render his verdict. And the judgment that would come from that verdict.

And that sets the stage for this encounter with the fig tree and Jesus' return to cast out the money changers.

When he looked around as he entered the temple, he laid eyes on the corruption inside it. And when he returned, he would complete the goal he came to do in the first place.

The point has been so far to show that often when God enters the scene, he intends to render judgment.

But think about this. Judgment is not always a bad thing. And we have to keep that in mind. Because judgment can be rendered in your favor. But most of the time, in Scripture, when God comes in judgment, it's not a pleasant thing.

[ 7 : 39 ] In Malachi 3.5, we read, Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

We see here how, again, when God comes upon the scene, he renders judgment. Think even of Genesis 3.8, all the way back there, which occurred right after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

So, think about that for just a second. They heard the sound of God coming and hid themselves because they knew the judge was coming and that they would fail his judgment.

The four words of fruit is that Jesus' arrival at the temple was not a sightseeing trip, but was God the Son coming to render judgment on how his people were using his temple.

[ 9 : 17 ] That brings us to our second point, the false fruit. So, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem forms a sort of prologue, if we could put it that way, to the stories about Jesus and the fig tree and cleansing the temple.

The point of the triumphal entry was truly that God had entered his temple to render judgments and the accounts that follow in the entry explain what judgment Christ rendered and why.

Mark's gospel as a whole uses this interesting storytelling technique called sandwiching. And this means that Mark begins to tell one story and then he interrupts it by telling another story and then he comes back to finish the first story after he tells that second.

So, you get the one story in the middle of the two bits like a sandwich. You get it. I'm sure. And here, in this instance, the account of cleansing the temple comes in between the beginning and the end of the fig tree account.

So, this is one example of one of these sandwiched passages and the middle story tells us something important about the meaning of the whole passage.

[ 10 : 58 ] That's how we figure out what the purpose of Mark telling us both these stories is by putting them together. So, if we think about verses 12 to 14, if you turn your eyes there, many find these verses troubling, that Jesus would react so viscerally to the lack of fruit on the fig tree.

Especially considering that this text itself tells us that it was not the season for figs. And there's a curious thing.

There's another detail, however, that should give us pause. And that is that the tree, the fig tree, was in full leaf. So, when I was in theological school studying to be a minister, the church where I interned, there was a guy who was one of the world's leading experts in figs.

Which is sort of an interesting thing. I didn't know that that was sort of a field of study, but I'm not really surprised. But, I asked him about this passage at one point, we were discussing it, and he told me there are breeds of fig trees that grow figs before they grow leaves.

Or, you know, at least the leaves come so close in time to the figs that it appears as though the figs come before the leaves.

[ 12 : 30 ] Cash is out the same way. So, the point for our text, though, is that full leaves, full leaves, you know, it's not just some.

Full leaves means that this tree is claiming that it has ripe fruit. The leaves are an advertisement for fruit.

So, if you're driving down the road and you see a cart with a sign beside it that says fresh fruit, you expect to find fruit in the cart.

Right? And by being in full leaf, this tree announces that it has fruit for the taking and eating.

And yet, this tree is false advertising. fruit, although it claims to have fruit, it's barren.

[ 13 : 40 ] And in light of that, it is startling how Mark smashes this account of the barren fig tree falsely advertising fruit with the account of Jesus cleansing the temple.

We saw already that Christ came to render judgment and then he rendered judgment against this tree and cursed it so that no one will ever partake of its fruit again.

And then Christ entered the temple and cleansed it of the mind changers. What is even more striking here is whom he indicted.

In verse 18, Jesus does not even convict those who were selling in the temple courts, but instead the chief priests and scribes, the religious leaders of Israel.

A quick reading of any of the gospels shows that Jesus is compassionate for sinners who are broken and repentant and come to him for help.

[ 15 : 09 ] It also shows how he has no patience for hypocritical leaders. And I'll text clearly demonstrates why he so vehemently opposed them.

Notice how Jesus did not politely ask the money changers to leave. He drove them out. There's a violent aspect to this.

In fact, John's account of this event tells of Jesus making a whip fit to drive them out. The religious leaders and the whole temple setup had become like that fig tree that advertised fruit but was in fact barren.

Which is exactly why Mark sandwiched these passages together. When Jesus entered the temple he found corruption in how this area of the temple had been filled with those who had turned God's house into a pawn shop.

While the chief priests and scribes carried themselves as the holiest in the world they were in full leaf. On the inside they were dead and far from God.

[ 16 : 41 ] They had no fruit. They were polished on the outside and making every claim to bearing fruit for God but on closer examination proved that they were barren and fruitless.

And we think of Jeremiah 8 13 When I would gather them declares the Lord there are no grapes on the vine nor figs on the fig tree even the leaves are withered and what I gave them has passed away from me.

The point is God does not take kindly to those who claim to serve his kingdom and yet prove to be fruitless.

God will reject those who root themselves among his people but bear no fruit. Christ came to his temple and found them to be covered in lush leaves on the outside but there was no fruit to be gathered.

the religious leaders had covered themselves in ceremony but had taken no care to see that their hearts bore fruit of true love for God true repentance over sin or true brokenness for other people.

[ 18 : 13 ] And that should address us today as well. There are many there are so many undue criticisms against the church that she's full of hypocrites which is interesting because we do claim to be sinful and then prove it so we're not hypocritical in that sense but there are some times when it strikes home doesn't it?

Maybe not here I doubt that but broadly speaking and at least at the individual level we feel that sting at times. There are times in our lives when we struggle with sin but but rather than opening up about it and seeking help we clean ourselves up for the world.

It's not that bad. it can be easy to forget that the church is a hospital for sinners and start to think everyone else has it together and so we should look to part two.

Usually when we start to buy that lie we put on a face and try to convince everyone that we've got our affairs in order and it's not impossible that even someone here can think that going through the

motions of going to church and sounding like a Christian is enough.

It's not difficult to build an external religion and set aside the matters of the heart. but this text shows us that Christ does not care about your leaves.

[ 20 : 15 ] And if you wave your leaves about pretending to be in full fruit when Christ comes to the fruitless trees he will find that he never knew you.

The temple adorned the nation of Israel as her majestic leaves. Yet Christ found Israel Jerusalem itself barren.

And so Israel and the fig tree were left in the end cursed and without fruit or leaves. God said of spiritual adulterers in Hosea 2 12 and I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees of which she said these are my wages which my lovers have given me.

I will make them a forest and the beasts of the field shall devour that. the false fruit was then the outward claim to have inner fruit of love and service to God which proves to be a sham.

Which brings us to our third point the faith fruit. So I mean right it can make us really uncomfortable to discuss how Christ curses those who make false claims to bearing fruit for him.

[ 21 : 54 ] I get that because it might cause us to question what means to have fruit in our lives or if we have enough fruit we begin to worry if we are the fig tree.

fruit in and I'm trying to let that discomfort sit for a few minutes on purpose. It's good at times to let the law have its full effect so that the gospel is all the sweeter.

And although my second point drew attention to how we should be convicted by our tendencies to develop a false sense of security based on external religion at times fortunately our passage doesn't end with the barren temple and the cursed fig tree.

In verses 20 and 21 as the disciples pass this cursed fig tree they point out to Jesus how it is now dead withered from its roots.

And this brings one aspect of the story to a head. A tree without fruit is dead and those who would block people from true worship of God by filling his house with vending tables are likewise dead.

[ 23 : 29 ] But how does Christ respond to that? In verse 22 Jesus pointed them to have faith and then recounts the incredible things that can be done in faith and the blessings that we receive by faith.

I mean sometimes biblical texts become familiar to us and we don't really pause and read them slowly to think about them. And the thing is if we're paying attention to this interaction between Jesus and the disciples it can seem like a really odd transition on Jesus' part which he does frequently.

Jesus look at that dead tree you should have faith. So what do we do with that? He is making a profound point.

He formed a contrast in this response between dead external fruitless religion and living by faith. People can be very good at building a religious facade even ones that seem very godly. And what Christ said in contrast to this is not that people need to try harder or that they even need to do different works but that they need to believe.

[ 25 : 11 ] This is what the gospel calls us to do is it not? Let go of our own works because none of them measure up anyway. Let's be honest.

and come to Christ by faith to receive salvation. For those who are in Adam the law demands perfection and breathes fire and offers only damnation.

For those in Adam the gavel of God's covenantal courtroom has sounded and screams guilty and the recompense is death.

For those who claim to the law and remain cordially attached to their own efforts to be acceptable to God there's no hope.

But one of the best words in the Bible right but for those who have come to Christ by faith Christ offers to us the forgiveness of all of our sins.

[ 26 : 26 ] In Christ we are able to look not to our own works but to make appeal to the cross as the reason that God should forgive us.

As the Father has poured out all of his wrath due to sins there. we can point to Christ's perfect life and point to him as our representative who stands in heaven to plead our case before the throne of God's court.

For the Christian the gavel has also thundered but for those who cling to Christ by faith the verdict does not ring out guilty but justified.

No one can read the list of your offenses to God's courtroom because someone has poured blood on it. Just one final note about our text here in Mark.

Many have suggested that the place where these money changers were selling their goods was in the outermost section of the temple property and this area was set aside for Gentiles because they were not allowed to enter the innermost parts of the temple where only Jews could go.

[ 28 : 07 ] By setting up these sales tables the nations were effectively blocked from coming to worship God.

And yet we read in Isaiah 56 6-8 and the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast to my covenant these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer their burnt!

offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted! on my altar for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples the Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel declares I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered God longs to bring the nations to his house of worship and the good news is that each and every person is welcome to come and trust in Christ by faith God will deny no one entrance into his kingdom if they come to Christ and trust in him and Christ will drive out those who would block you from coming to him all of us here should rejoice at that invitation whether you need to trust

Christ today for the first time that could be and this is the moment to do it or you simply need to hear the promises of the gospel anew to refresh your faith come to Christ now and drink from the fountain of life giving water the life that he offers us is eternal Christ came to the temple in judgment and he cursed it just as he triumphantly entered Jerusalem Christ will triumphantly come again at the last day he will render judgment and will issue curses for all those who have trusted in false religion but for those who trust in him he will render the verdict of not guilty and will welcome us what a striking word isn't it welcome us into the new creation where we will be given a crown of life and loved by him forever let's pray