

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 13TH-14TH, 2025 // GOSPEL OF MARK

HOSANNA! (MARK 11:1-11)

Jesus has been on a journey towards Jerusalem with His followers alongside a group going to the holy city to celebrate Passover.

- Approaching Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Bethpage and Bethany (v. 1) near the Mount of Olives to the east.
 - To stand on the Mount of Olives was to face the temple and to face the eastern gate into Jerusalem.
- In Ezekiel, the prophet sees the glory of the Lord return to the temple via “the gate that faced east” (Ezk. 43:4).
- Jesus sends two of His disciples ahead to the little village to get a donkey and colt for Him to ride in on.
 - The disciples reach the village, find the colt exactly where Jesus had told them it would be, and bring it to Jesus (vs. 2-7).

Jesus’ act of entering Jerusalem in the manner that He did was symbolic of His kingship.

- Part of that symbolism involved Jesus riding a colt as He entered the city.
 - This was a fulfillment of Zech. 9:9, which described the savior king of Israel (the Messiah) riding on a colt to bring salvation.
 - His coming would break all instruments of war and bring peace to the “city of peace.”
- As He rode into Jerusalem towards the temple, the crowds threw out cloaks and branches (v. 8) on the road to welcome Him as King.
- They cried out “Hosanna” (v. 9), which literally means “save us,” and quoted Ps. 118:26.
 - Couple all these things together with the Messianic language of the Davidic Kingdom (v. 10), and we can imagine how this entrance would have been quite the spectacle.

Luke 19:37 says that Jesus “came near the path down the Mount of Olives,” and it is implied that Jesus entered in through the eastern gate in fulfillment of Ezekiel 43.

- Where does “the glory of the Lord” go once it enters into the holy city through the eastern gate? Straight to the temple as God’s chosen King, Prophet, and Priest (v. 11).

BARRENNESS AND CORRUPTION (MARK 11:12-19)

After spending the night in Bethany, Jesus returned to Jerusalem the next morning and “he was hungry” (v. 12).

- As was the right of any Jew under Mosaic Law, Jesus looked for some breakfast in a fig tree growing by the road.
- Because the tree had leaves, Jesus assumed the tree would have fruit, but there was no fruit.
- The tree’s promise was empty.

In disgust, Jesus pronounces a curse on the tree (v. 14), which later withers and dies.

- This is a bit disturbing, as it is the only destructive miracle ever attributed to Jesus. Was Jesus just hangry? Does He just hate fig trees?
- The story has nothing to do with fig trees. The tree is only a symbol of that which outwardly appears fruitful—like the leaves on the tree—but is barren and dead in reality.

WHERE HAD JESUS JUST BEEN THE NIGHT BEFORE? WHERE WAS HE GOING THAT MORNING? THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM.

Under the “leaves” of the showy and outward religion of the Jewish leaders, there were barren and unbelieving hearts.

- True fruit was not being produced. The “showy-ness” and impressive structures of external religion were there but no true fruit!

WHAT DOES JESUS FIND WHEN HE COMES TO THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM?

He finds lots of people. During the week of Passover, the population of Jerusalem would swell up to five or six times its usual size.

- Worshipers would come to celebrate the feast that reminded them of when God rescued their fathers from slavery and brought salvation through the blood of a lamb.

Jews coming to worship from all over Israel for Passover needed animals to sacrifice, and it was easier for many to buy them in Jerusalem rather than travel with them.

- Selling animals for sacrifice was not wrong, but it was where (in the temple complex) and how (“money changers”) this practice was taking place that infuriated Jesus so much that He overturned their tables and chairs (v. 15).

The priesthood and religious leaders of that time most likely gained a healthy profit from sales in the temple.

- Jesus’ disruption of their business was an attack on one of their sources of wealth!
- Referencing Is. 56:7 & Jer. 7:11, Jesus said to 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!” (v. 17).

The original intent of the temple was for it to be a place where people met with God in prayer and worship, but the religious leaders’ greed had turned it into a “den of thieves” where people were exploited and taken advantage of in the name of God.

- After Jesus cleansed the temple, the religious leaders started looking for a way to kill Him (v. 18).

FRUITLESS RELIGION IN GOD’S HOUSE

Church activity as a form of entertainment, revenue, or exploitation of the sick, old, poor, or gullible

- Cliques or social structures that exclude or bar people from certain people groups
- Routine or ritual for the sake of tradition

FRUIT THAT PLEASES GOD IN HIS HOUSE

Prayer, in all its forms, as the key activity in the house of God (Is. 56:7; 1 Tim. 2:1)

- People from all walks of life being welcomed, loved, and helped (Mt. 21:14)
- Power from God working to change lives because of God’s Word proclaimed and the Holy Spirit at work (Eph. 3:20)

HAVE FAITH IN GOD (MARK 11:20-25)

Early the next morning, Jesus and His disciples passed by the fig tree Jesus had cursed (v. 20).

- To their amazement, the fig tree had withered from the roots up.
- In its immediate context, this was a prophetic sign of Jerusalem and the temple’s destruction because of the Jewish people’s fruitlessness and ultimate rejection of God’s Messiah.
- Fruitlessness leads to God’s judgment.

Fruit reveals identity. You do not pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles (Mt. 7:16).

- It is false advertising for us to claim a relationship with God through Christ and live lives that look nothing like Christ and do nothing He has commanded us to do.
- Who we truly are is revealed more by how we live rather than what we say about ourselves. If we are not producing fruit, there is an issue!

HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN PRODUCE SPIRITUAL FRUIT?

We must be connected to Christ in true saving faith, and we must continue to abide in Him daily (John 15:5).

- Abiding in Him means maintaining an intimate, close connection with Him through prayer and reading His Word. This leads to inner transformation and the Spirit-filled/led life that produces fruit and fulfills God’s purpose for us.

NO FRUIT? WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The soil is not good (so there are no roots)—there is no believing and trusting heart, so there is no real saving faith.

- The branches are not as connected to the vine as they need to be—there is a lack of discipleship and “abiding in Christ.”
- It is not the season for fruit bearing yet—there will be fruit very soon, but the fruit is growing.

Jesus turns this miracle into a teachable moment as He tells us that if we only have faith and believe, God will respond to our every request and prayer, and we too will be empowered to do amazing things (vs. 23-24).

- We are to pray, believing in our hearts that we will receive what we are asking for, and with a kind of confidence that God hears and answers our prayers.

PRAYING WITH FAITH (V. 24)

What this does not mean: God will give us anything we want no matter what (what we ask for must be in accordance with the will of God, 1 Jn. 5:14).

- What this does mean: the requests we make to God through prayer should be offered up with expectancy and trust that He hears us and will respond.

FORGIVENESS AND PRAYER (V. 25)

Our relationships with God and people are connected. If we harbor bitterness or refuse to forgive, our fellowship with God gets blocked.

- We do not earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others, but a forgiven heart should be a forgiving heart.
- Unforgiveness makes prayer ineffective because it hardens our hearts!

THE TOXIC LIE OF UNFORGIVENESS

Refusing to forgive someone is like drinking poison in the hope that it will kill someone else.

- It poisons our relationship with ourselves. We start believing our self-righteous delusions that our hatred is perfectly justified.
- It poisons our relationships with others and our relationship with God. It is hard to love and to pray God’s will when our hearts are hardened.

TWO MAJOR OBSTACLES: DOUBT AND UNFORGIVENESS

Doubt does not mean having questions, but a heart posture that does not trust God will certainly hinder prayer (Js. 1:6-7).

- We must boldly take our requests to God with unwavering trust in His character and promises!
- If we hold on to bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness, we create a barrier in our relationship with God (Mt. 6:14-15).

THE RETURN OF THE KING

- If we are not careful, a first reading of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem and His cleansing of the temple can lead us to a judgmental, self-righteous posture of heart.
- The point of Jesus’ frustration was that the people of God were claiming to represent Him but, in reality, were neglecting their responsibilities.
- Not only that, but in their greed they were exploiting others, in their selfishness they were excluding others, and in their coldness of heart they were misconstruing the very purpose of the House of Worship.
- Jesus came looking for fruit but instead found barren, dead, self-centered, lifeless religion.

BARREN, LIFELESS RELIGION

- Looks alive but bears no fruit (vs. 12-14, 20-21)
- Is impressive religious activity based in tradition and institutional loyalty without true, God honoring worship (vs. 15-19)
- Rejects God’s authority and practices very selective, curated obedience (like refusing to forgive) while staying in control
- Driven by a fear of people, not the fear of God

GENUINE, FRUITFUL FAITH

- Bears fruit through repentance, faith, obedience, and abiding in Christ
- Centers on prayer and a genuine trust in God, not the machinery of “magic prayers” while there is inward doubt and heart hardness (vs. 22-24)
- Forgives freely (v. 25)
- Submits to Jesus’ authority, not our own pride and desire for control
- “Does my faith merely look alive on the outside (like a plastic tree), or is it the real thing? Does it bear fruit through trust, prayer, forgiveness, and surrender to Jesus’ authority?”