

Where's the Figs?

(Mark 11:12-21)

(preached 8/9/15; Sunday AM)

Introduction

Take your Bibles and open them to Mark 11:12...

We are going to begin this morning by reading
Mark 11, verses 12 to 21...

Last week, Jesus entered into Jerusalem as the King
of king...

After walking into the temple in verse 11, he heads
back out of town to Bethany...

Today is the next day, and he is on his way back to
the temple...

Let's pick up the action in verse 12, and we will
read through verse 21...

***12 On the next day, when they had left Bethany,
He became hungry. 13 Seeing at a distance a fig
tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would
find anything on it; and when He came to it, He
found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season
for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat
fruit from you again!" And His disciples were
listening.***

15 Then they *came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling [b]doves; 16 and He would not permit anyone to carry [c]merchandise through the temple. 17 And He began to teach and say 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 robbers’ [d]den.” 18 The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

19 When evening came, [e]they would go out of the city.

20 As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.

21 Being reminded, Peter *said to Him, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.”

Let us pray.

A man has the idea of making counterfeit \$12 dollar bills.

He plans to head to some country stores and try to pass them off as the newest denomination of the federal government...

So, he prints up some and heads out of the city to pass these off to some simple minded people out in the middle of nowhere...

After he drives a few hours into the middle of nowhere, he comes upon a general store that sits at a crossroads...

He grabs a \$12 dollar bill from his stack and walks in to the store...

An old man is sitting behind the counter....

The man think to himself, "this is too perfect."

So, he buys a coke, pays for it with a real dollar, and then asks the man if he can give him change for these new \$12 dollar bills that the gov't has released.

The old man doesn't miss a beat and never even looks up..

He simply grabs the \$12 bill out of his hand, never looks up and simply says

How do you want your change for this?

You want two \$6 dollar bills or there \$4s?

Though that is a joke, the counterfeiting business is no joke.

For years, counterfeiting has been alive and well.

Almost anything can be counterfeited these days.

From \$100 bills to \$1000 dollar pocketbooks...

I have entitled this message, "The High Price of a Counterfeit."

And that would seem to be just the opposite of what you would think when it comes the counterfeits...

I mean... shouldn't counterfeits cost less?

Isn't that the point of producing a counterfeit?

Isn't the purpose to produce a cheaper product and sell it for a lower price.

And that would be right.

But we are going to see that counterfeit religion comes at a very high price this morning...

It came at a high price to the Jews in Jesus day, and it comes at a very high price in our day and age as well...

IT has been said that it is a deadly mistake to worship the wrong god...

And most of us would whole heartedly agree with that...

But it is just as deadly to worship the right God in the wrong way...

The Jews of Jesus day were very guilty of that...

They thought they pleased God with their temple worship....

They thought that God was pleased with their good works...

However, neither of those were true, and their counterfeit religion is going to come at a high price...

Because in the text today, Jesus is going to curse the Jewish religious system of his day...

And that curse is going to extend beyond the religious system to the religious leaders and the followers of that false system of worshipping God..

And he is going to do it in a most memorable way for the disciples...

Because he is going to paint a picture of the curse through a fig tree along the road...

We have a simple outline this morning as we move through these verses...

In verses 12-14....Seeing the Curse in a Fig-less Tree

In verses 15-19, Seeing the Curse in a Fruitless Temple

And then in verses 20-21, Seeing the Curse in the Life-less Branches

The challenge for us this morning is to determine who genuine is your faith.

Do you possess a counterfeit faith?

OR is your faith genuine? IS it the real thing?

Do you worship the right God...

And if so, do you worship him in the right way?

If not, the curse that has fallen on the Jews has fallen on your life.

And like them, unless you repent of your phony religion and turn to Jesus Christ in faith, the curse will follow you to the grave and beyond...

Let's look a little closer at this incredible story in Mark 11....

Beginning with...

I. Seeing the Curse in a Fig-less Tree (12-14)

Look back at verse 12 for a moment...

12 On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry.

If you remember from last Sunday, we are now in the final week of Jesus' life..

In the first 11 verses of Mark 11, we saw Jesus make his arrival in Jerusalem.

This is an event that is commonly called Palm Sunday because of the palm branches that the crowd placed in the road to welcome Jesus as King...

However, the crowd that welcomed Jesus would soon chant for his crucifixion..

And so, we are in the final week of Jesus' life...

He will be crucified on Friday as the ultimate Passover lamb.

But in the days leading up to his death, He is still leading and teaching...

On this day, Jesus heads back into Jerusalem...

Though we don't know for sure, I think this is Tuesday of Passion Week.

Because I think that Palm Sunday was actually a Monday...

Here is the deal...

If you think the Triumphal entry was on a Sunday, you are forced to have a day in the final week of Jesus' life that we know nothing about...

And folks that hold to Palm Sunday being on Sunday, they usually believe in Silent Wednesday.

Others, like me, who hold to a Triumphal Entry on Monday don't have to accommodate a day of silence...

In this case, either view makes little difference...

But as we move through this week, I want you to understand why I think this is a Tuesday....

And so o the next day, which I believe to be Tuesday, Jesus heads back to Jerusalem...

You will remember that at the end of his entry into the city, he went in the temple for a brief look but then left.

Today, He is going back to the temple to express His displeasure with it...

But before he gets there, he is simply on the road and gets hungry.

Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, so he would have physical needs...

Jewish breakfast was typically mid morning, but on this morning, Jesus was hungry a little bit earlier...

And when you are hungry, everything looks good...

Well, everything but maybe coconut...

But anyway, Jesus spots a fig tree covered in leaves..

On a normal fig tree, the immature fruit appears right along with the leaves...

And though the figs would not be ripe, they were still edible.

That is why the end of verse 13 says that it was not the season for figs...

Which would be referring to fully ripe and mature figs...

However, if you saw leaves on a fig tree, you would assume that figs were present, even if they were not fully ripe...

And since Jesus is hungry, he heads toward the tree expecting to find some small figs to satisfy his hunger for a little while...

But when he gets closer, he sees that the tree has no fruit on it despite its leaves...

I remember one holiday when my family gathered to eat.

I think it was Thanksgiving, and we are all so hungry...

The blessing is said. The family lines up and everyone makes their own plate.

On that day, I just remember craving some ham and mashed potatoes...

So, I piled them both high on my plate, hurried to sit down and dig my spoon deep in those potatoes..

As soon as they hit my tongue, I knew something was very wrong...

Come to find out, one of my aunts or cousins had brought mashed cauliflower instead of potatoes...

She hoped to make us healthy; instead, she just made us disappointed and sad...

Now, if you have never seen mashed cauliflower, it looks just like mashed potatoes...

But upon closer inspection, especially with your taste buds, it is nothing like mashed potatoes..

Now, the tree on this morning looked like a tree that would normally have some fruit on it, but upon closer inspection, there were no figs...

You can't judge a book by its cover...

And on this day, you can't judge a fig tree by its leaves...

And Jesus uses this fruitless fig tree as a lesson for the disciples...

He knows here HE is headed.

He knows what he is about to do in temple in a just a little while...

Though Jesus was hungry, and though there was fig tree along the road, this is all going to be a great illustration for the disciples and for us....

The fruitless fig tree is a picture of the fruitless religion found in the temple...

Just like the fig tree, the Jewish religious system looked good from a distance, but upon closer inspection, it bore no fruit...

The tree has no fruit, and the temple has no future.

It is all about to come crashing down...

False religion always ends in destruction.

That is a warning that still needs to be heard even today.

You may be covered in the leaves of religion today...

You may go to church and live a moral life, but if you are bearing no fruit, your life will end in destruction....

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control..

The fruit of the Spirit is a life of repentance and turning from sin...

The fruit of the Spirit is a desire to study and read and be taught God's Word...

The fruit of the Spirit is to be putting off unrighteousness and putting on righteousness...

Are you bearing fruit today?

Or are you covered in leaves of self-righteousness that look good but can never save?

Jesus has no use for a fig tree that looks good but bears no fruit...

And he has no use for someone who claims to be a Christian but has no fruit to support that claim...

And so, Jesus curses the tree in verse 14, and we get a preview of the curse that is about to fall upon the false religion of Jesus' day...

So, let's move from seeing the curse come to a Figless Tree to....

II. Seeing the Curse in a Fruitless Temple (15-19)

In verse 15, Jesus heads into the temple...
dead

And his first order of judgment is to drive out those
buying and selling there...

Now, the temple was a large area of roughly 30 - 35
acres...

WE looked at this diagram of Jerusalem last week
to see that the temple sat on the highest point in the
city.

But the temple was made of many areas...

Here's a couple more pictures of a model that has
been made of the temple courtyard...

The area that Jesus entered is the outer courtyard of
the temple..

This area was open to both Jews and Gentiles..

And on this day with the Passover approaching, it
would have been like Black Friday in our day.

People would be purchasing sacrifices to offer to
God at Passover..

The high priest had established areas for buying and selling animals so that people coming to the temple did not have to bring animals with them as they travelled...

And though that may sound like a nice thing to do, it was all designed to put more money in their pockets..

What had happened is that the high priest figured out something...

If he began rejecting animals that people brought from their homes....

And began offering “high-priest approved” animals, he could almost force the people to buy them and make a little profit as well..

Religion had become big business for the Jewish leaders and they had oppressed the poor in the process...

So, Jesus heads into the outer courtyard and begins turning out tables of buying and selling..

He then disrupted the business of money changers...

This was another way for the Jewish leaders to make money...

Jews over 20 were required to pay a temple tax each year, but the Jewish religious leaders would not accept the Roman money that most Jews used...

So, they offered the “service” of trading in Roman money for “Temple approved” currency...

Except they did the exchange for a fee of 10%, which became a great burden to the people while making the leaders rich..

Jesus then turned his attention to the “dove-sellers.”

The dove was the sacrifice of the poor.

One would think that doves were been given to the poor to sacrifice out of compassion, yet the religious leaders made money at every turn.

And doves were no exception, but Jesus would have no use for that, and so he turns over their tables as well..

And in verse 16, he even stopped people who were carrying merchandise through the temple courtyard.

The religious leaders had allowed people to use the courtyard as a shortcut in town in hopes of increasing the traffic into the temple...

And increasing more buying and selling and profit for them.

But Jesus stopped people who were simply using the temple as a convenient way to get to the other side of town...

Then in verse 17, Jesus teaches the crowds that the temple was designed for worship, praise and prayer to God...

Yet, it was now a shopping mall, where profits were more important than prayers...

Where money was more important than the Messiah.

Where gold had replaced God...

And the truth is the love of money is the root of all evil...

And it had corrupted the Jewish religious system...

And it eventually corrupted the Roman Catholic Church....

And it corrupts churches even today...

Along with Christian publishers, Christian pastors, and Christian leaders...

The temple of God had become a treasury of greed,
and Jesus was not pleased...

The fig tree promised fruit by its leaves, but the
hungry man who came to it left disappointed...

The temple promised true worship of God for the
spiritually hungry but that man left broke and
disappointed...

There is a saying that I use often and it is not
anything new...

But there is a lot of truth in it...

If you throw a rock in a pig pen, the one that
squeals is the one you hit...

That is true in ministry as well...

And Jesus had just hurled a giant rock at the Jewish
religious leadership...

And guess what?

They squealed...

Look at verse 18....

***18 The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and
began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were***

afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

When you go after the bull, you get the horns...

And now Jesus is at the center of the chief priests and scribes bullseye...

Evil men hate to be exposed.

The chief priest and the scribes were getting filthy rich over their temple business...

And they had no interest of giving it all up just because one rabbi from Galilee man with a few fishermen as followers was making a lot of noise....

So, it was time for him to die.

We know because we can look back that all of this was happening in God's perfect plan.

It was no accident that all of this is taking place around Passover...

God had purposed for his Son to die on a cross as the Passover lamb...

While all the lambs were being slaughtered in the temple on that same day...

The anger over Jesus is going to peak at just the right time so that he ends up on a cross in front of the largest Jewish crowd gathered for Passover..

So, Jesus turns over tables, teaches and then walks out of the temple in verse 19...

All of that brings us to our final section in verses 20-21...

III. Seeing the Curse in the Lifeless Branches **(20-21)**

Though Jesus is going to use this occasion to teach about trusting in God...

I don't want to ignore these verses because they bring this whole section full circle...

This is the following day as the disciple head back into Jerusalem..

This would be Wednesday of Passion week, and the disciples and Jesus are headed back into Jerusalem..

Since they would most likely take the same route, they pass by the same fig tree that Jesus had cursed the morning before...

And Peter notices that it has withered from the roots up...

The day before, there were leaves but no fruit.

Now, there is neither fruit nor leaves.

And that was a picture of what was coming to the Jewish religious system...

It still had leaves in the days of Jesus, but once they rejected Christ and the Romans crucified Him, their religious system would crumble.

In 70 AD, the temple would be destroyed.

The Jews would be scattered all over the world.

And their religious system as it was practiced Jesus day would vanish just like the leaves on that fig tree.

That was a reminder to Peter that Jesus' curse had to come to pass on that fig tree...

And it was a reminder to us that it is still in effect upon the Jewish religion even today...

There is no temple today.

There are no sacrifices.

Though Jews are still around but their religion today is just as fruitless today as it was then.

And that curse will remain upon them until they turn in faith to Jesus as their Messiah...

Only then will the curse be lifted and blessings begin to flow...

But before you think this is a message of judgment applied only to the false religion of the Jews....

I would remind you that false religion is not confined to them...

False religion can take many forms...

There are atheists who have the religion of unbelief...

There are Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses that have the religion of good works...

And there are church-attending folks who have the religion of self-righteousness....

Conclusion

For the first 23 years of my life, I was filled with self-righteousness...

And it wasn't based on the fact that I was even a good person....

In fact, I knew I sinned.

My conscience screamed at me at times...

What my self-righteousness was based on was the fact that I wasn't as bad as some guys I knew...

If I could drink a little less than my buddies, or say a fewer cuss words, or go to church a few more times than my friends...

I figured God was pleased with me.

And then add on the fact that I thought if I did a few good things every now and then, I was simply adding to my goodness...

Then you had the recipe for self-righteousness.

As long as the news continues to do a few stories on some really bad people, I felt like I was home free with God.

And that is the trap of self-righteousness.

There is so much evil in the world that you will always find someone worse than you...

And that keeps you holding on to your goodness until you eventually carry it to hell with you.

The Jews in the temple in Jesus' day thought to themselves...

“We are good. After all, we are God's chosen people. Surely, he must be pleased with us.”

Yet, they were dead wrong, and so blinded by their religion that they killed the One they should have Crowned as King...

But that is what self-righteousness does...

It blinds you to your need of a Savior...

If you are already a good person, why in the world would you need a Savior...

Don't be blinded this morning by your own leaves of self-righteousness this morning...

God doesn't want leaves of self-righteousness that are found in good morals..

Or going to church regularly...

Or helping others...

He wants to see the fruit of repentance and then the fruit of the Spirit at work in your life...

And once you have fruit, the leaves will only add to your beauty before the Lord..

Don't leave a fruitless fig tree this morning because fruitlessness leads to a withered and then dead tree...

Repent of your sin and believe the gospel today!

Let us pray.