

The New Temple of God

Աստուծոյ Նոր Տաճարը

Mark 11:12-26

In the month of April I covered the entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem, Palm Sunday. Today, let us continue Jesus' journey towards the cross. After his triumphal entry to Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples were on their way leaving Bethany.

¹² On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. (Mark 11:12-14 ESV)

They were hungry and Jesus saw a **fig tree**. It had no fruit, but looked nice with **lots of green leaves**. Mark indicates that the season was not right for bearing fruits anyway (11:13). Yet, Jesus cursed the fruitless tree.

Was Jesus passing through a tough time? It is like you wake up in the morning and your car does not start and you curse the car saying, "May no one drive this car again!"

I don't think so. We will look at these passages together. What do I mean passages? There are three events in today's sermon:

**The cursing of the fig tree (12-14);
the cleansing of the temple (15-19);
lessons from a withered fig tree (20-25).**

The first and last stories are **about the fig tree**; they are like a sandwich holding the middle story which explains the main point.

Let us discuss what is happening.

Fig trees are important trees in the Middle East. They provide shadow in a hot summer. They are tough trees; to bear fruits they do not need irrigation.

Concerning not having fruits during the March-April season, the following explanation makes sense.

“Every fig tree produces fig knobs **before** it produces leaves. Once a fig tree is in leaf one therefore expects to find branches loaded with *paggim* (Hebrew word for early fruit) in various stages of maturation. This is implied in 11:13, where Jesus, seeing a fig tree in full foliage, turns aside in hopes of finding something edible.”¹

Let us not forget that the fig tree metaphor is used in the **Old Testament** to describe the Israelites. (Hos 9:10; Nah 3:12; Zech 10:2).

“Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires” (Micah 7:1).

The tree is full of leaves but bears no fruits.

So is the nation of Israel, as its heart (its spiritual center, the Temple) is a big beautiful building and yet there is no “fruit”.

What’s the use?

Therefore this story, the fig tree story will lead us to the next story, **to the Temple.**

Just like the tree, the Temple of God is fruitless.

“Jesus dramatizes the end of the Temple by an enacted parable. The leafy fig tree, with all its promise of fruit, is as deceptive as the temple, which, despite its religious commerce and activity, is really an outlaw’s hideout.”²

No wonder Jesus stressed the fruit. He said,

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:19-20).

Mark has given us a sandwich story. In order to understand the outer layers of the sandwich we need to understand the inner part, **the cleansing of the temple.** To study the story of the cleansing of the temple out of the context is dangerous. Most likely you have heard people saying, **“Let us clean the church like Jesus did”**.

Not so fast.....

Let us examine the temple incident:

¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶ And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came they went out of the city. (Mark 11:15-19 ESV)

You all know how the temple became the center of worship for the Israelites. It was a huge building. It was a shiny building. Josephus described it?

"It is a building covered all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays."³

They needed 20 people to open the gates of the temple.

Each Jew above the age of 21 had to pay an annual tax to the temple, half a shekel a year. With this money the temple committee bought animals for sacrifice for the atonement of sins. Every morning and evening there was an animal sacrifice... twice a day ... twice a day ...

What was happening in the temple? Outside the main building there was the gate and there were "mini banks" for money exchange, shops to buy animals. It was like a marketplace... Of course there were people who misused the system and made a lot of money in this market. Do not forget that even gentiles came; there was a court where only gentiles could enter. Those gentiles could not enter the main temple; they could even lose their life if they entered forbidden places.

if you read carefully, Jesus did not expel just the merchants; he expelled both merchants and buyers.

“And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.” (Mark 11:15-16)

-I believe Jesus is condemning and judging the temple authorities who misused the Temple. For some the temple replaced GOD.

“Harking back to the old prophetic books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus is reminding his hearers that the Temple had always been an ambiguous thing. Right from the time it was built and dedicated by Solomon, it was clear that it could never in fact be the full and final dwelling-place of the true God.”⁴

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27)

“Although God had promised to bless Israel through the Temple, if Israel began to take for granted, to use the Temple and the promises attached to it as an excuse for immoral and unjust behavior, then the Temple itself could and would be judged. That’s what the early chapters of Jeremiah are all about, including the quotation that comes here: **‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’**? But you have made it a den of robbers.(Jeremiah 7:11)” (Mark 11:17)⁵

The fig tree was fruitless, so was the temple. **The temple was a place for sacrifice.** Those sacrifices were not enough. They were outdated.

“Jesus has been taking the place of the temple during his ministry. He announces forgiveness, heals the sick, and restores persons to society. He replaces the tables of the money changers, where worshipers had to pay for atonement, with the Lord’s table, where he announces that his free offering of his life provides forgiveness of sins. The pouring out of his blood will replace once and for all the system of animal sacrifice for atonement. **His death is where humankind can be reconciled to God.**”⁶

Now Jesus is the new Sacrifice, and the new Temple. Through Him we will worship our Lord. He is the new Temple.

And indeed, **the tree had withered**. Peter suddenly remembered what Jesus had said about the fruitless fig tree:

“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.”(Mark 11:22-23)

In the context of the temple there were many obstacles (court of this and that...). **Mountains represent the obstacles and walls hindering us from seeing God and worshipping Him.** Therefore mountains would be brought low, valleys lifted up, and all nations would come to worship the Lord.

As Watts says: “it is a feature of the ‘Messianic Age’ that all obstacles to God’s returning people will be removed, particularly mountains (Isa 40:4; 45:2; 49:11; cf. 64:1-3).”⁷

This means **have faith** in God, **keep praying**, and **believe** that God will remove the obstacles that hinder nations from worshipping Him.

Jesus ends his teaching with the concept of prayer with a forgiving heart.

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25)

Why did forgiveness appear here? I think Jesus is warning the disciples that one of the biggest obstacles that will hinder nations from coming to the Kingdom of God will not be just **their hostility, but lack of forgiveness**. In fact, all this happening in the Passion Week where the disciples will see **Jesus dying on the cross**. They will see how **Jesus will forgive** for those who are **betrayed him, or crucified him**. They will witness those things. While Jesus was on the cross he said: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”** (Luke 23:34)

What can we learn?

1. Are we fruitful?

I cannot answer this. Each of you should examine his/her life. Are you fruitful according to the Bible? Abide in Him, live in Him, experience daily His love and presence... there is no other way. **Our body is the temple of God.** It is pruned; it is disciplined; it is shaped to have a Christ-like character. This means we will bear fruit. What if we do not bear fruit?

2. Do you separate church life from daily life?

Do you have a “holy” temple and an “unholy” temple? Holy moments and unholy moments? Inside and outside the church we are called to live a life that glorifies and honors God.

Are we playing a game with God? Do you live a double life? If so, you cannot bear fruit. In fact, that will dry you up; you will look green but bear no fruits...

False security: (Those who lived double lives Jesus called robbers and thieves. They were cheating outside the temple and the temple was a “secure” place for their atonement...).

3. Do you pray with a forgiving heart?

Prayer is not imposing our will on God, rather opening our heart to God to live under His will, trusting Him. In prayer God reveals my inner soul which needs healing and construction. Many times, we hurt or someone hurts us.

Let us learn from **Jesus to forgive**... That will be great decision. If you cannot forgive, it means you have not tasted God’s forgiveness in your life.

Amen

1. James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 339
2. *Ibid*, p. 340
3. David Garland, *Miracles of Jesus*, p. 98
4. N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, p 151
5. *ibid*
6. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 446
7. Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, p 334