

MARK 11:12-18

This day was not only a monumental day in the day of our Lord, but a monumental day in redemptive history. It was Tuesday of Passion week.

Saturday He arrived in Bethany and stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. There is no indication He left Bethany on either Saturday or Sunday. Crowds came from Jerusalem to see Him there on Sunday. They were coming to see the resurrected Lazarus as well. The leaders not only wanted Jesus dead, but also Lazarus.

On Monday, there was a very bizarre event — the false coronation of the true King. It was not an official or authorized coronation. It was not recognized by anyone on earth. He came in humility and heard the Hosannas from a crowd of hundreds of thousands. And with all the fanfare, you might have expected Him to be fitted with some position in Jerusalem.

Instead He “cased the temple” with the disciples (v. 11) and left. He visualized where everything was so He could do what He would do the next day (vv. 12ff).

Two things happened in vv. 12-19 — the destructive act against the fig tree and the destructive act against the Temple. The fig tree is a metaphor for the Temple. It is a judgment passage of what is to come. This is a pronouncement of judgment on the Temple.

History of the temple: around 1834 B.C. Abraham was told to offer Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22). In 988 B.C., David purchased Mt. Moriah — from 982 B.C. and following Solomon builds the temple. Following that, the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple and smashed it to the ground — this was divine judgment for the apostasy of the people and the temple.

By 515 B.C., Zerubabel’s temple is completed after the return of the Babylonian captivity. In 186 B.C. Antiochus desecrates the temple. In 165 B.C. the temple is rededicated. In 20 B.C. Herod decides to take what is left of the temple and decides to build a monument to himself — for 85 years he built on it, until 64 A.D. And six years after it is completed, the Romans come, smash the city and crush the temple so that not one stone stands on another.

The story of the temple is the story of repeated tragedy. God is patient before He brings the destruction because apostasy lasted a long time before destruction came. There will be yet a destruction that will be greater than any other of the destructions. It will be thousands of years before another is erected.

1. The curse previewed and portrayed in the analogy

Jesus left Bethany (v. 12) and was hungry. Why? Because He was human. (And He may have been praying and ready for a meal.) He is coming with focused passion and righteous anger and He has a plan that He set up in His mind when He looked at everything.

Here is a magnificent picture of Jesus — in His humanity He is hungry and in His deity He is coming to judge.

In the distance He saw a fig tree. These trees are often used in Scripture of judgment. They were everywhere, even along the roads. They were large (up to 20x20) and used for shade. They grow fruit before leaves. Buds of fruit, then come the leaves. Early on the fruit is not yet ripe and ready for harvest, but it is still edible. Because there were leaves, there should have been fruit. There wasn't. It was a false hope, a pretense of fruit. His response is His only destructive miracle in His ministry.

The tree had the appearance of fruit but no reality — it pictured the false pretense of religious worship — hypocrisy to the max. And on the following day He repeatedly identifies the Pharisees as false leaders and hypocrites with repeated diatribes against them.

The whole temple was dead from the roots up — all leaves and no fruit.

In Lk. 13:6-9 there is a similar story told by Jesus that adds to this account. Then there was time before judgment; in this story, “time is up.” Judaism was a bankrupt system, the nation is cursed and His disciples were listening. I think it was an unmistakably clear parallel that was stunning to hear. Did they remember Dt. 28 — blessing and cursing?

This is a severe warning of religious hypocrites and those who follow them.

2. The curse is previewed and portrayed in action (v. 15)

Matthew adds that not only did they enter the temple, but they entered the temple *of God* — in contrast to the ungodly activity that was there.

The last thing the people would have expected was for the Lord (Messiah) to attack them. The disciples knew what was coming — He'd done it before at the beginning of His ministry. His whole ministry was focused on how God was treated and how God was worshipped. He was never concerned with the passing elements of this world. He was concerned with how God was worshipped.

Jesus saw and knew all the abuses in the culture. He knew they needed reforms. But He never attacked anyplace but the temple, because what concerned Him was man's relationship to God. And when the worship was corrupt and fouled, then everything else was guaranteed to be corrupt. The measure of any society is its worship. That's why Christ went to the temple. In three years of His ministry, the temple was no different than when His ministry started.

And then it happened — He began driving out the money changers. This is an astounding thing for one man to do. This is not a cleansing of the temple — it was no different when He finished. It was an attack on the temple and a preview of what is to come. Remember that there are temple police and protectors — priests and levites. I think He used the power He once delegated to Samson. It must have been something to see.

There was no repentance, renewal or reform when He finished. It was a preview of what is yet to come.

In the temple there was a massive outside courtyard of the Gentiles and it is that section that had been turned into the temple bazaar. The animals (up to 250,000 during that week!) were brought into the temple area; the priests would reject the sacrifices that were brought so they could sell other animals to them along with wine and salt for the sacrifices and charge up to 10x the appropriate rate and then also bilk them on an exchange rate for temple money. It is extortion — the temple mafia. He stops it all dead in its tracks and no one could pass through.

Why did they not resist Him? Because this is a divine work. This is the man Jesus who is hungry! But his lack of breakfast had no impact on His work!

Early in the book of Mark, He said He was the Lord of the Sabbath; now He says He is the Lord of this place too. He is the Lord of the temple and worship.

He validated what He did because of what Scripture said. Here He validates His work (v. 17) — He expounded His quotation in the midst of the melee! *This is My house!* It is a place of prayer and worship. The Psalmist knew what it was to be (Ps. 27:4). David saw the temple as a refuge and place of prayer and communion. That's what it was by God's design. In Ps. 65:4 David says that the holy temple would give satisfaction. Our Lord Jesus is furious — not satisfied.

Jesus quotes from Is. 56:7 — God never intended for the temple to be limited to Jews. There was no place for all the nations to go but to this temple. It was a place for all people to seek the face of God. That's a long way from this place. The proselytes of this place become sons of Hell.

The warnings in this passage come from Isaiah and Jeremiah, who prophesied of the destruction of the first temple. This place is run by thieves who stole from people.

The chief priests heard what He said and sought to destroy Him — they were afraid because His wisdom was greater than theirs, His power and authority and influence and popularity were all greater than theirs. They were afraid of losing their position and power and of Rome coming down on them. The people were just astonished at His teaching — but that was temporary.

What is Jesus predicting in this? The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

When leaving (v. 19) the disciples did not (because of darkness) notice the withered fig tree until the morning. The fig tree — from the roots up — was rotten to the core. That's Jewish religion. What Jesus curses He also destroys.

That destruction started to happen not in 70 A.D., but it began on Friday of this week when the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The system was exposed. The destruction started when Jesus died. True worship shifted at that moment from the temple to the cross. And that's where all true worship has been conducted ever since — at the foot of the cross and at the

empty tomb.

The destruction started on Friday and ended in A. D. 70. Where does the world now go to worship? At the cross. Where do they find the message of the cross? The church. The church is now the house of prayer and the house of God. This is where our High Priest establishes His work of intercession.

Peter who was there wrote, “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” If you say this is the house of God, it better be. If anyone has corrupted the house of God at all — what God has ordained for honest and true worship, take it from Peter, you will experience judgment. And if you want a picture of that judgment, turn to Revelation 1. This is not a friendly picture.

In Rev. 1:14 Christ is doing the same thing as in Mk. 11 — He’s casing the place; He’s coming in a fierce form. He is not coming in sweet dulcet tones. He is going to speak loudly and forcefully. He is going to use the sword. He is in full glory. There is nothing more serious than meeting with the Lord.

What is He looking for? Revelation 2 tells us. He’s looking for churches who left their first love and without repentance He will judge. And He is looking for churches that compromise with the culture (2:14ff) and those who tolerate sin (2:20ff), and churches that have nothing but programs for dead people (3:1ff), and churches that are neither hot nor cold — the unchurched. And He is also looking for faithful people in faithful churches.

John had the right response (1:17) — fell at His feet like a dead man.

Look at the church like the Lord of the church looks at it. This is the most serious work you will ever be engaged in — this is nothing to trifle with. If you want to be creative with change, go into business. Do not trifle with the church of God.