

Sermon Title: Burning The Flag
Date: Jan 21, 2018

Read Matthew 21:12-22. Jesus' actions in the temple must be read against the story of the fig tree (in fact, the story of the fig tree would be incomprehensible without it, which is why they're told side by side in Matthew and Mark). In Luke, Jesus tells a parable with a similar message (Luke 13:6-9). In each passage, the fig tree is a symbol of the temple (including its leadership and the flavour of Judaism they represent). What kind of "fruit" was the temple supposed to produce?

The leaders of the temple and Jerusalem (the high priests and Sadducees) had lost sight of the purpose of the temple (as evidenced by their displacing the worshippers and setting up a market in the temple courts), and have become like terrorists (i.e., traitors committing treason. After all, they're plotting to crucify the true king, the Messiah). In short, the temple lost its reason for being and had developed a different purpose.

- What should organized religion in general, and our church in particular, learn from this?
- What checks and balances should there be to keep a religious organization focused on the main thing?

The sermon suggested that the opposite of organized religion is disorganized religion.

- What are the pros and cons of each?
- Is it possible to follow Jesus without organized religion?
- If it were, would that be faithful to the mission he's given his followers (such as commands to make disciples, love one another, etc.)?

Religious organizations need their members to help them stay on track and to pursue their mission as best they can. From this passage, we can see there's a lot at stake. Yet church membership is in decline.

- Why is that? What are the pros and cons of membership? What cultural trends influence our thinking in this area? (Think broadly. E.g., marriage and voting are also in decline.)
- How can we encourage people to pursue the mission Jesus has for his church *together*?