

Holy Monday: Cursing the Fig Tree and Cleansing the Temple

Small Group Follow-up Study for Mark 11:12-25

RE-READ

[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

[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.

[20] As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. [21] And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." [22] And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. [23] 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. [24] Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. [25] 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."

RECAP

It's hard to miss what scholars have called the "Markan Sandwich." Nine times in the Gospel of Mark (3:20-35; 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21; 14:1-11; 14:17-31; 14:53-72; 15:40-16:8), Mark begins a story, introduces a second story, and then returns to and completes the first story. As James Edwards notes in his commentary, "Each sandwich unit consists of an A1-B-A2 sequence, with the B-component functioning as the theological key to the flanking halves." In other words, in our case, we need to look to the story of Jesus cleansing the temple to help us make sense of what he was doing in cursing the fig tree. Why does Jesus cleanse the temple, then, as he does?

- He cleanses the temple as an act of judgment against Israel for her unfruitfulness.
- He cleanses the temple as a call for Israel to repent and return to God.
- He cleanses the temple to make room for the Gentiles he is going to save through his death.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise in your mind that you would like to discuss?
2. How do you usually respond to the attacks made against Christianity around Easter time? Do you ignore them? Do you entertain them? Do you confront them? Why do you approach these attacks the way that you do?
3. What do you think of Bertrand Russell's attack against Jesus' character from the latter's cursing of the fig tree in Mark 11?
4. What sort of things can we do to try to measure our own level of fruitfulness? How can we insure that we aren't deceiving ourselves in the process?
5. What does repentance look like for the man, woman, or nation who has been marked by unfruitfulness? What can be done to cultivate fruit in one's life?
6. What should our response be to Jesus' cleansing of the temple so as to make room for the Gentiles? What can we do this Easter season evangelistically to help "fill the temple," as it were, with Gentiles? What will you do?
7. Given our conversation tonight, what should we be praying for ourselves and for our church?