

WITHER OR NOT

mark 11

Mark chapter 11 is our text.

Mark 11.1-33 - Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."

So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna!

'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'

Blessed is the kingdom of our father David

That comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!"

And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."

And His disciples heard it.

So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. When evening had come, He went out of the city.

Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not

doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?”

But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’ ” —they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.

So they answered and said to Jesus, “We do not know.”

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

There’s a lot of movement in this passage. We see Jesus doing a lot of coming and going. Coming and going from Jerusalem. Coming and going into the Temple. Coming and going from the fig tree. And as He goes you see some people receiving and some people rejecting.

But overall, a theme that comes out of this text is the idea of faithfulness and fruitfulness. Jesus talks specifically about our fruit and our faith as His disciples. And as we move on toward Christ’s death in this narrative, we can’t help but notice that the same people here who are shouting ‘hosanna, hosanna’ will in a few chapters be shouting, ‘crucify Him! Crucify Him!’

And what we see a number of times is Jesus arriving somewhere and evaluating the state of fruitfulness and faithfulness, both spiritually and physically.

Look at verse 11:

Mark 11.11 - And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Now down to verse 13:

Mark 11.13a - And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it.

As we see Jesus evaluating the Temple and inspecting the fig tree we should think about two other familiar passages:

**Psalm 1.3.a - He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither.**

and,

1 Corinthians 6.19 - Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

So, devotionally speak, *we* are the Temple and *we* are the fig tree. And God's operation continues in the same way as it always has. He evaluates our faithfulness. He evaluates our fruitfulness. He comes to the door of our hearts and says, "Can I take a look in here?"

And the reason He does this is hinted at up in our chapter, verse 12, where it says, '**He was hungry.**'

God is *hungry* to do work and to further His Kingdom. He's passionate about it and motivated to do it, because He is *hungry* for intimacy with us. Jesus is *hungry* to get close to your heart this morning. He's jealous for you and excited about bringing forth fruit in your life. He's persistent in wanting to transform us so that we can make a difference in this world and so that people can be saved from an eternity in hell. It reminds me of every boxing movie ever made where, eventually, someone utters the line, "He's a *HUNGRY* young fighter!" And that's the idea. Jesus is amped up to do some damage. He's amped up to snatch people out of the Devil's grasp. And He's passionate about then intimately involving Himself in those lives. In our lives.

And so He's sent His Spirit and He's given us His word so that our lives can be evaluated. To see if we're connected to His living water and bringing forth fruit. To see if we're living as He intended or if we've perverted those plans in some way. That's what He was doing at the fig tree and in Jerusalem and in the Temple.

But here's the difference for us: The gates of Jerusalem were open. The doors of the Temple were open.

The default position of the door of our heart is *closed*. That's the image that we're given in Revelation 3:20:

Revelation 3:20 - Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

And in that section, Jesus is talking to the Church. And so the idea is that His desire is to come in, take a look around and make changes so that we're not blocking ourselves from His Lordship over our lives and therefore from the living water that is necessary for our faith and our fruit.

As Jesus came into Jerusalem He came on a colt. Signifying that He was there to be their King. Each day as we wake up, God's presence is there by His Spirit and by His word, knocking on our hearts saying, "I'm here to be your King today."

And, while the knee-jerk, at least for me, is to say, 'yeah, Lord, I'm down. I'm faithful. I'm doing everything I need to be doing,' this text gives us a number of practical ways to evaluate

ourselves concerning how fruitful and how faithful we're being. Because the human heart can go from 'hosanna' to 'crucify Him' pretty fast.

Everyone was excited at the Triumphal Entry. Not so many were excited a few days later when being a Christian was actually going to cost something.

The same thing can happen with us if we're not careful. We can bring in pollutants to the Temple of our lives. We can become Pharisaical in our thinking. We can shut ourselves off of the fruit production that God intends for His people in Psalm 1. Because, if we ignore God, He allows us to wither ourselves. God doesn't *force* you to be spiritual. And we may knee-jerk and say, 'Oh yeah, Lord, I'm a tree. I'm bringing You in as King in my life.' But do our branches hold fruit? Because that's what Jesus is hungry for. Fruit. Not leaves.

Am I willing to invite the Lord into my heart? When He comes knocking will I actually open up my life to Him and establish Him as King or do I keep the Lord at arm's length? Do I praise His entry or do I fear it? Resist it? Reject it?

Or, looking at some of the other situations in our text, am I willing to do menial things for God? I was cracking up the other day reading those crazy passages in Leviticus about how, under certain circumstances, the priests had to do your laundry. If your garment had mildew on it, you had to bring it to the priest who washed it for you and watched it for a week, then determined whether it was clean or not. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and He stops His guys and says, 'Hey go pick up a colt for me.' Can't we send like a 10 year old to do that? I'm one of the 12! I'm an important guy! But God often asks us to do small, from our perspective menial, things. It's a demonstration of our faith. And is that fruit present in my life?

Am I willing to worship the Lord and pray to Him? That's what the Temple is supposed to be about. Is that an important, intentional part of my relationship with God or have I moved on from those things to other things like the people carrying wares in Herod's Temple?

Am I willing to sacrifice in the way that God has asked me to? Jesus came in and purged the Temple of all these unBiblical practices. But, so often, we choose to not sacrifice the way God commands us to with our time or our money or our talents.

Am I willing to step out in faith? Not philosophically, but *actually*? Jesus takes a bunch of time here to talk to His disciples about how taking steps of faith was meant to be a regular part of their Christianity. Not doing things that are without leading or without purpose, but being bold and full of faith, doing new things for God that glorify Him and extend His message. Mentally we're all willing to be full of faith, but I think practically I tend to bury the Master's coin in the sand more than I should. That's something that needs to be evaluated in my own life. Because that's not what God is looking for.

Or how about forgiveness? Am I willing to forgive? Is there any fruit of forgiveness and mercy in my life? Because if I'm holding grudges and resentment and discompassion and prejudice, then I for sure am cut off from the flow of living water that Jesus provides. Because Jesus is the ultimate forgiver. And if we aren't forgiving people, then we're probably a lot more withered than we realize. And that's not what we want.

Jesus has come near to us today. He's hungry for relationship with us and He's zealous to bring forth fruit in our lives. We saw that in our study of Philippians.

How hungry are we for Him? How fruitful and faithful are we individually, right now? We can find out by opening the door of our hearts, by inviting Jesus in to evaluate us, and by taking stock of what's on our shelves. *Is there forgiveness? Is there sacrifice? Is there prayer? Is there faith?*

Those aren't the things we do to *BECOME* fruitful. Those are things that will exist in our lives if we're in the spot the Lord wants us to be, planted by rivers of living water, intimate with Him.

Take inventory today. Because Jesus has come to do something in you and with you.