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# The Lesson of the Fig Tree

ANNUAL RIVER SERVICE  
MARK 11:12-21

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*"Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"*  
Mark 11:21

Today we read about something that Jesus did that we do not expect. As He is making what will happen next about this fig tree, Jesus enters the Temple. There He overturns the tables of the moneychangers and merchants. He stops the buying and selling of animals that would be used for sacrifices in the Temple, stressing the need for prayer for all nations. Then, amidst this chaotic scene in the marketplace, we are back at the fig tree. And Peter tells us that the fig tree is now withered.

*Poor little fig tree*

have figs! At first look, it makes us think about power and control, instead of humble service,

To understand the lesson of the fig tree, we need to step back and see the big picture. One story begins only to be interrupted by another story and then resumes again. Our text is a story placed inside a story. Our text only to get interrupted by the story of the Temple and then we finished the story of the fig tree. The point is, that the two stories interpret each other. They help us understand each other, and they grab our attention by creating drama.

So, think of it this way: Jesus sees a fig tree in leaf. Typically, when there are leaves, there are figs. And even if the figs are not yet figs. So even though it was not in season, there still should be something to eat. But when Jesus goes up to grab some fruit, He finds nothing. So when it comes to the fig tree: it *looks* like it will have something, but it is *deceptively fruitless*.

It is the same with the Temple. The Temple should be a fruitful place of worship. It looks like it would be a holy place with all these animals around for sacrifice, but it is deceptive. It is not the House of Prayer that Jesus has called them to be. It has become a den of robbers. Like the fig tree, Jesus rebukes the Temple. And the day came not long after Jesus when the Temple, like the fig tree, was torn down. So the point of the fig tree is to underscore the how the people were *worshipping* God. The point of the story is: *a fruitless Temple*. And what is fruitless will be torn down.

in our story they are useless. In fact, this is a reminder for each on of us. As we look at our

and the Temple, one day they will simply be torn down for being fruitless. Life is too important; it is too sacred; it is too short to not be intentional with it. What are we doing with our lives? Do they hold simply the promise of fruit, but are deceptively fruitless? Have we stepped back to get some perspective lately and lifted our lives up to Jesus lately, asking for guidance?

What model would Jesus have for us? Remember, in our passage, Jesus did rebuke what was not glorifying to God. Recall that He was in the Temple area, overturning the tables, and stopped all the buying and selling of animals. By doing this, Jesus did not just stop business, but by stopping the sale of animals, Jesus was putting the whole sacrificial system to a halt! These animals were used as sacrifices in the Temple, so by stopping all this, Jesus is already showing that the need for the Temple and the animals is gone because *He* is the sacrifice. Jesus is laying down His life. He will die so that we may be forgiven.

Amidst the fruitlessness of the Temple and of our lives Jesus comes, doing what we cannot. Breaking the cycle. Giving back meaning to our lives so that we might bear good fruit. Jesus is not calling us to curse a fig tree or to curse anything else, but He is giving us the example of laying down our life for others. Giving up our life in glory to God. This is the kind of worship that God desires from us. This is how we are fruitful. This means giving God everything. Our very lives. Yes, it is all we have. Yes, it is hard. Yes, Jesus is there, calling us once again in a way that we did not expect.

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After laying down His life for us approaches the Cross and He tells us how to practically live this out in daily life.

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And to this call to pray, Jesus tells us to do one other practical thing in our daily lives: forgive. This too is something that can hold us back from being fruitful to God. Following Jesus is not rocket science. It is more a matter of the heart. We know what it means to nurse a grudge.

to be controlling. We know that those kinds of things can be easier for us broken people to do than to be loving and honest and talk to someone else face-to-face. We will do those kinds of things, or will we pray and forgive?

Praying and forgiving do not come natural to people, which is why they can be hard. And it is why Jesus came. To change us so that we would not be like a fig tree that looks good on the outside but is somehow missing fruit. He came to change us so that we might worship God in Spirit and in truth. So that we would have meaningful lives that make a difference in the world. It costs us our life to live like this. But that is what Jesus did for us.

Jesus walks up to it and looks at it, will He find good fruit? The choice is ours. Amen.

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