

## Mark 11:12-21 — Nothing But Leaves

**January 19, 2020**

Open your Bibles to Mark 11:12. As a church, we are studying the Gospel of Mark. We are in the final week of Jesus' life. Last week, we saw Jesus arrived in Bethany, just two miles outside of Jerusalem, next to the Mount of Olives. It was a Saturday night when he arrived. He stayed in the house of his friends Mary, Martha, and their brother, Lazarus—that is the Lazarus Jesus recently raised from the dead.

After Jesus arrived in Bethany, the Gospel of John tells us large crowds came to meet Jesus and Lazarus. For obvious reasons, both were amazingly popular. Lazarus was popular because he came back from the dead. Jesus was popular because he raised Lazarus from the dead. If we heard something like that happened in our town, we would check it out for ourselves too.

These large crowds showed up to see Jesus and Lazarus either on Saturday night or all day Sunday. That means it was either on Sunday or Monday Jesus went into the city of Jerusalem for the Triumphal Entry. While the traditional date of the Triumphal Entry is Sunday, the Gospel of John leaves open the possibility that it could have been a Monday.

In the Triumphal Entry, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt, a baby donkey. This happened all like Zechariah 9:9 prophesied it would. There were thousands of people on the sides of the road energetically cheering for Jesus. They called him their king. The Gospel of Matthew says the entire city of Jerusalem was stirred up with excitement for Jesus.

The amazing part is when Jesus came to the temple, the crowds disappeared. At that point, it was late. Jesus and the disciples returned to Bethany alone. What happened to the massive crowds? While they were noisy and excited earlier in the day, it turns out they were just empty hollow fans of Jesus, not genuine followers of Jesus. They were cheering for him because it was the fun and popular thing to do, not because they were genuinely committed to him.

Today, we come to the next day in the final week of Jesus' life. Jesus returned to Jerusalem. This time it was not for the fun of a cheering crowd. It was for violence. Jesus attacked the temple and threw out some of the corrupt people and practices taking place in it. Let's read the text.

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 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. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. 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. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 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." 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. And when evening came they went out of the city. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Mark 11:12–21 (ESV)

This is another Markan sandwich. We have seen these type of stories earlier in this Gospel. Mark liked to use them. A Markan sandwich is when Mark started one story, stopped it to put another story in the middle, then returned to the first story to finish it. The reason he did this was because the two stories were

designed to interpret one another. They were designed to work together to teach one thing. That is what these two true stories were intended to do this morning.

How do these stories function together? Jesus' cursing of the fig tree was a preview of God's judgment on the temple. The cursing of the fig tree was a preview of the destruction of the temple by *analogy*. Jesus' attack on the money changers and animal sellers in the temple was a preview of the temple's destruction by *action*. These stories work together to teach us about the coming destruction of the temple, one by analogy, the other by action.

Since both of these stories are a preview of the temple's coming destruction, we need to begin knowing a little about the temple. The more important thing for us to understand is there is a close relationship between the temple in Israel and the spiritual heart of the people of Israel. If God was not pleased with the spiritual leaders of Israel and the heart of the people, God would send judgment on the people and the temple. If the spiritual life of the people was good, the state of the temple was good. The spiritual life of God's people and the state of the temple went together. Let me show you how this worked itself out in history.

### **What is the history of the temple?**

The story of the temple began in Genesis 22. Abraham was told by God to go to a specific place called Mount Moriah where he was to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on that mountain. Abraham and Isaac dutifully climbed the mountain and began to follow through on what God commanded. Isaac was bound and placed on the altar. Abraham had the knife in the air ready to sacrifice his son. At the last minute, God called out and stopped him. As the story continues, we see

God providentially provided a ram not far from them that was caught in the thicket on that mountain. God directed Abraham to sacrifice the ram as a substitute sacrifice for Isaac that day. That prefigured what Jesus came to do. Two thousand years later, on the same mountain, Jesus died as the lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Abraham and Isaac's story in Genesis 22 is the beginning of Mount Moriah being a special place where a substitute sacrifice died in our places, but there is a lot of temple history from Abraham's time until Jesus' time. Let me give you some of it.

Nine hundred years after Abraham, around 988 B.C., the Angel of the Lord was judging Israel for David's sin. God told David to go to this same place, create an altar and make a sacrifice there.

Now the angel of the Lord had commanded Gad to say to David that David should go up and raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 1 Chronicles 21:18 (ESV)

David bought Mount Moriah from Ornan the Jebusite. David offered a sacrifice there, and God's wrath was averted. David then said the following:

Then David said, "Here shall be the house of the Lord God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel." 1 Chronicles 22:1 (ESV)

David declared Mount Moriah to be the future location of the temple. While God didn't allow David to build the temple, he did allow David's son Solomon to build the first temple on Mount Moriah. The temple was the place where lambs would day as substitutes for the Israelites.

Solomon's temple was a huge building by the standards of his day. It was filled with gold, intricate carvings and beauty. Unfortunately, 300 years after it was

erected, the people of God drifted far from God. While the sacrifices were still taking place in the temple, it was all empty, hollow worship. People were just going through the motions. People's hearts were far from God. God sent judgment on his people. He used the Babylonians to bring his people into captivity. As part of God's judgment by the hands of the Babylonians, God had the Babylonians destroy Solomon's beautiful temple.

Thankfully God is gracious. Seventy years later, God graciously brought back to Israel a portion of the people exiled to Babylon. Eventually the prophets challenged them to rebuild the temple. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, they were able to build a modest temple. It was nothing compared to Solomon's temple, but it was something. According to Ezra 6:15, in the year 515 B.C., the second temple was finished. Soon the people fell back into the same cycle. Their worship started off as genuine, but over time the hearts of the people drifted away. Worship turned into empty ritual. Worship looked good on the outside but the hearts of God's people were far from him on the inside.

Once again God sent judgment. This time it was in the form of a ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes who captured Jerusalem in 167 B.C. We don't read about this judgment on the temple in our Bible because the Old Testament stops at 400 B.C., and the New Testament picks up with the birth of Jesus. This judgment of God took place during those 400 silent years. Antiochus desecrated the temple. He dedicated the temple to Zeus. He slaughtered pigs on the altar to infuriate the Jews. Three years later, Judas Maccabeus retook the temple, and a modest revival of genuine worship briefly returned. For the most part, worship in

the temple continued to be empty and superficial. People came to go through the motions, but their hearts were in love with other things

The year 20 B.C. came along, and King Herod came to power. He was not a Jew. He was an Idumean, but he loved building projects. He decided to rebuild the temple. This third temple was really more of an overhaul and expansion of the small temple build by Zerubabel. Herod's temple was amazing. He began to build it in 20 B.C., and it wasn't finished until 64 A.D. It was an 84-year building project. Then in 70 A.D., only six years after it was finished, the Romans came and smashed the whole thing to the ground, leaving not one stone on top of another. Just like the Babylonians plundered Solomon's temple of its gold and riches when it was destroyed, the Romans plundered Herod's temple of its gold and riches when they destroyed it.

As I mentioned earlier, the story of the temple is really the story of the heart of God's people. When the people genuinely sought God, the temple was built and did well. When the people's faith became superficial, and their worship was merely going through the motions, God destroyed the temple and sent his people into captivity. This happened first to Solomon's temple by the Babylonians. Next it happened to Zerubabel's temple when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated it. It happened a third and final time by Titus Vespasian, the Roman general who destroyed Herod's temple in 70 A.D. Since then, a new temple has not been built. That should not trouble us. Now we have something even better than the temple.

That is a brief history of the temple. These verses are a preview of the destruction of Herod's temple that would happen in 70 A.D. Let's see why the temple was destroyed and what we can learn from it for our lives.

### **The fig tree was cursed.**

**On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Mark 11:12 (ESV)**

Jesus and the disciples left the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany where they stayed the night. They were heading back to Jerusalem. It was morning. Jesus was hungry. Was that because Mary and Martha refused to feed him breakfast? I don't think so. It was probably because Jesus was up early in the morning praying. He wasn't around for breakfast. As we have seen in this Gospel, getting away early in the morning to pray was Jesus' pattern. Of all weeks to be praying, the final week of his life was an especially important time for Jesus to get away to pray for strength and wisdom from his heavenly Father.

While Jesus was up early praying, he was still a human being. Skipping breakfast left him hungry. He had a big day ahead of him. He knew he would be throwing things around the temple. That would take a lot of energy. There were no McDonald's or Chick-Fil-As available on the way to Jerusalem. He was looking for food.

**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. Mark 11:13 (ESV)**

This is a little confusing, especially when we get to the next verse and Jesus curses the fig tree for not having fruit. It says that it wasn't the season for figs. Why would Jesus expect to find figs on this tree when it wasn't the season

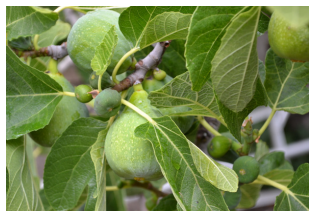
for figs? Who could blame the tree for not having figs? It made no sense for Jesus to be angry with this tree.

When we run across perplexing verses like this in our Bible, we have two options. We can either say the Bible is crazy and doesn't know what it is talking about or we can decide there is probably something we don't know and do some research to find the information we are missing.

I did a little research and here is what I discovered. On fig trees, *the fruit comes first, the leaves comes second*. In the spring, in March and April, the fig tree produces fruit on the old shoots from the

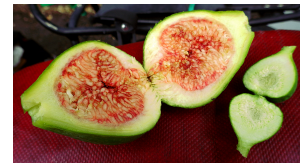


year before. After the first fruit begins, then the trees leaves follow. These are



called the early figs. The first figs come in the spring on last year's shoots. There is a second harvest at the end of the growing season, between August and October. It is a larger crop and is the season

figs are harvested. The later figs grow on the new shoots the tree sprouted that year. The later fig harvest is larger, and the figs are juicier.



This verse says it was not the season for the fig harvest. That happens in the fall, but the tree was in full leaf. That meant the early figs should have been on the tree because the early figs grow before the leaves. When Jesus saw a fig tree in full leaf, he had a right to expect the early fruit to be on the tree because that is the way fig trees work.



Remember the final week of Jesus' life took place during Passover. Passover was in the spring. That is why when Jesus saw a fig tree in full leaf, he had the right to expect the early fruit.

Jesus was hungry and hoping for figs. Then he was disappointed. For some reason, this great-looking fig tree had leaves but no fruit. It was nothing but leaves! Let's read Jesus' response.

And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. Mark 11:14 (ESV)

Jesus cursed the fig tree because it looked good but was unfruitful. It was a good-looking tree but it was a useless tree! Jesus killed the tree by cursing it. This is the only destructive miracle in the Gospels. It is a powerful one. Jesus cursed and killed a fig tree for not producing the fruit it looked like it should possess.

For those of you who think it is too strong to say Jesus cursed the tree and killed the tree, let me just quote the words of Peter at the end.

And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Mark 11:21 (ESV)

If Peter said Jesus *cursed* the tree, I will say Jesus *cursed* the tree.

So the fig tree had the appearance of fruit but didn't have the reality of fruit. It was a useless tree. Many times in the Old Testament, the fig tree was used as an illustration of Israel. This is a good illustration of the worship at the temple in Jerusalem. It was lots of impressive, good-looking outward show, but no spiritual fruit was coming from all the outward show. Just as Jesus cursed and destroyed the fig tree because it looked good but was unfruitful, Jesus was about

to curse and destroy the temple, because while it looked spiritually impressive, it produced no spiritual fruit for God in the lives of the people.

If we go to the Gospel of Matthew and look at the parallel account of the cursing of the fig tree that Mark just described, shortly after Jesus cursed the fig tree in Matthew, Jesus went after the spiritual leaders in the temple for the same thing. The spiritual leaders were responsible for making the temple and their lives look good, but in reality, there was no spiritual fruit being grown from their lives. They were rotten to the core. In Matthew 23 we have almost an entire chapter of Jesus just throwing the religious leaders under the bus and accusing them of being more concerned with looking good in front of people rather than being good in front of God. Here is a little sample of verses from that chapter.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Matthew 23:25 (ESV)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew 23:27–28 (ESV)

So the whole temple system was nothing but leaves in the eyes of Jesus. It looked good on the outside but there was no fruit. The leaders of the temple were rotten in their hearts. That is why Jesus cursed the temple and pronounced its destruction. We will read more about the destruction of the temple in Mark 13. It happened just 40 years after the time of Jesus.

Incidentally, this parable of the fig tree should be tied with another parable of a fig tree that Jesus gave earlier in the Gospel of Luke.

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" Luke 13:6–9 (ESV)

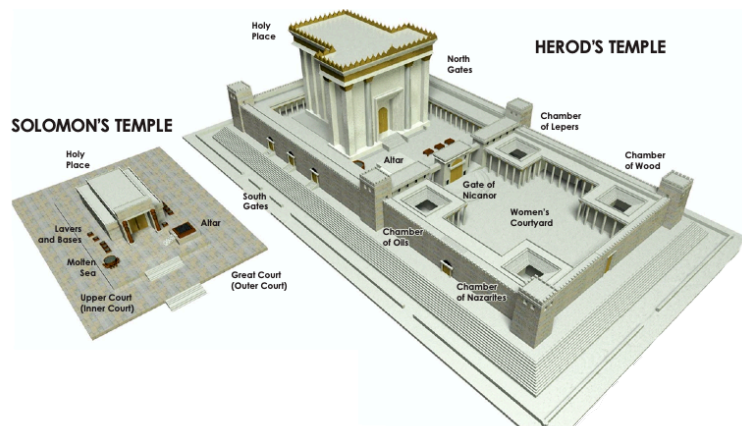
Here was a fruitless fig tree that was given one last chance to bear fruit before being destroyed. That is a perfect picture of what happened with the coming of Jesus. Temple worship was just a show. It was not making a difference in people's lives. God sent his own son to call the people and the spiritual leaders to repentance. God gave them one last chance. Rather than repent at the words of Jesus, they determined to kill Jesus. Their one final opportunity was now over. That is why Jesus was giving us a preview of the temple's destruction. Now let's see the curse in action.

### The temple was judged.

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. Mark 11:15 (ESV)

Let's begin by learning about Herod's temple so we can picture how things unfolded. Earlier, I told you about the first temple, which was Solomon's temple.

That was an amazing piece of architecture. The second temple, built by Zerubbabel, was much smaller than Solomon's temple. The third temple, which was built by Herod



and was the one in existence during the life of Jesus, was much larger than Solomon's temple.

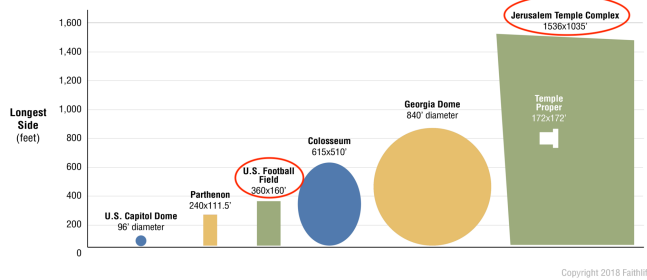
While the size of Herod's temple was much larger than Solomon's temple,

that was nothing compared to the size of the temple complex.

Let me show you a comparison.

The temple complex was much larger than today's football stadiums. It covered 35 acres.

Temple Mount Size Comparison



What did the temple complex look like? It would have looked something

like this. The temple was

surrounded by a massive

courtyard called the court of the

Gentiles. Around the edge of that

was Solomon's portico.

The temple complex was

not just impressive with its size. It was impressive with its looks. Much of the

temple was built with white marble. Many parts of the temple were covered in

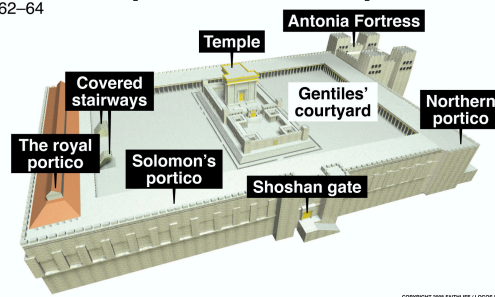
gold. Josephus tells us travelers couldn't look at the temple from a distance when

they were walking to the city because the gold and white marble reflected the sun

with such brilliance. The temple was blinding to look at.

Herod's Temple on the Temple Mount

Circa AD 62-64



The temple was built on a mountain and in the form of a mountain. The closer you went to the center of the temple, the higher in elevation that section of the temple was raised.

The highest point was in the center. It was called the holy of holies, where only the high priest could go once a year. Below that was the court of the priests, where they offered sacrifices. The next lower court was the court of the men. There, Israelite men were allowed to go. The next lower court was the court of the women. After that was the massive court of the Gentiles, which was the huge paved area around the temple. It could hold thousands. The edges of the Gentiles court was covered with a roof. It was known as Solomon's portico. It was supported by massive columns. Josephus tells us these columns were so large it took three men touching their hands together to wrap their arms to wrap around one of the columns.

The massive court of the Gentiles was intended to be the place where people from all nations could come to pray to God and learn about God from his people. Things were very different in those days. There was not a church on every corner. There was only one temple on the earth, and this was it. When foreigners wanted to worship God and learn about God, this courtyard was their place to come. That was as close as they were allowed to the temple, but in God's economy, that was good. They had a place to come and learn about God, and it was a big place to come and learn about God.

Unfortunately, the Jews were often not excited for the Gentiles' presence, even in their own courtyard. Separating the temple proper from the court of the

Gentiles was a low wall with signs on it that said, “No foreigner may enter within the railing that surrounds the temple. Anyone apprehended shall have himself to blame for his consequent death.” Let’s just say the Jews were not visitor-friendly. They really didn’t want Gentiles in the temple. To be honest, as we will see in a moment, they didn’t even want Gentiles in the courtyard of the Gentiles.

This massive courtyard for the Gentiles, which should have been a place set aside for teaching about God and the worship of God for the Gentiles, was turned into a marketplace that resembled the Clay County Fair. In the courtyard of the Gentiles that was turned into a shopping mall, people could purchase animals for sacrifice and exchange money for their temple tax right. The Sadducees oversaw this temple business. They struck a deal with the merchants and allowed them to use the courtyard of the Gentiles as a marketplace for a high fee. This lined the pockets of the religious leaders.

From what I could learn, the animal vendors were originally located outside of the temple toward the Mount of Olives. Under the high priest Caiaphas, he repurposed the court of the Gentiles into an animal market for the convenience of the Jews and for his financial profit. This left absolutely no place for Gentiles to worship! Convenience for the Jews and extra cash for the priests had shut out the Gentiles and their opportunity to learn about God from the house of God. This was ruthless, heartless, and selfish.

In addition, the priests were using this marketplace in the court of the Gentiles as a way to fleece people of their money. If you brought a lamb for sacrifice from your home, it needed to pass the priestly inspection. If the priest

claimed your animal didn't pass inspection, you were forced to purchase one of the temple lambs. The problem is there was a huge markup on those animals. It was a like going to a sports stadium. When you go to the snack stand, everything is triple the price of the grocery store. There is a huge markup on stadium food. Since you are not allowed to bring your own food into the stadium, they have you cornered. That is the way it worked in the temple. People were forced to buy their pigeons and their lambs from the temple markets, and the prices were jacked sky high to line the pockets of the religious leaders and take people's money. Instead of a house of worship, it was a house of robbers.

In addition, every male age 20 and older was required to pay the temple tax. People came from nations around the world for Passover. The problem was that you were only allowed to pay your temple tax with the Tyrian shekel, also known as the silver drachma. This meant you needed to exchange your money into that currency. That was the role of the money changers in the court of the Gentiles. Once again, there was a super high markup with much of the kickback going to the Sadducees. How high was the markup? Some historians believe it was as high as 25 percent.

Worship at the temple looked impressive. The temple complex was 35 acres. It was white marble covered in gold. It was one of the wonders of the world. What looked spiritually impressive was empty and hollow. The temple of God was turned into a tourist trap. It was no longer a place where worshipers were served in God's name. It was a place where they were ripped off in God's name. Instead of being a place where the nations could learn about God and

pray to God, their courtyard was transformed into a massive overpriced shopping mall. There was no place on the planet left for the Gentiles to worship God and learn about Him. The temple was all good looking leaves, but it had no spiritual fruit.

In John 2, the first time Jesus cleared the temple, John said the cleaning of the temple was a fulfillment of Psalm 69:9.

**For zeal for your house has consumed me... Psalm 69:9 (ESV)**

Now we see more zeal for God's house consume Jesus once again. Jesus started to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple. Can you picture Jesus driving the animal sellers out of the temple courtyard? Can you picture him fired up to the point that he scared these merchants away? This was Jesus gone wild.

Can you picture Jesus picking up the tables of the money changers and flipping them over? Money was going everywhere. Animals were running around the courtyard. He was knocking over the pigeon sellers. Jesus did this all without breakfast from the fig tree. What I find amazing is nobody had the power, strength or stamina to stop him!

I don't believe Jesus cleared out all 35 acres of this courtyard but I am sure he cleared enough of it to get his point across that this temple was cursed and condemned.

**And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. Mark 11:16 (ESV)**

We already know buyers and sellers were in this courtyard, but some historians point out that people were using this courtyard as a shortcut to get to



other parts of the city. It was a lot easier to walk through the temple courtyard than walk around the 35-acre temple complex. I think the people reasoned that if the temple's leaders treated the courtyard of the Gentiles as a common place, they could treat it as a common place too. Jesus took those people on. He wouldn't allow anybody to use the court of the Gentiles as a way to get to other parts of the city.

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." Mark 11:17 (ESV)

The popular opinion of the day was that the Messiah would rid Jerusalem from the Gentiles. Jesus did the opposite. He cleared the temple for the Gentiles. God's plan was that his people would be a light to the nations to reach the people of the world. Jesus quoted God's heart on this matter from Isaiah 56:7. Let me read it to you.

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah 56:6–7 (ESV)

God has always had a heart for the people of the nations. God desired for the people of the world to be drawn to him through the Jews. God's people had become fruitless. They looked good but were not doing good. Instead of having a heart to reach the nations, they didn't care about the nations.

When Solomon prayed the prayer of dedication for the original temple, he even prayed the temple would be used by God as a place for the nations to hear about God's truth.

“Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name’s sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name. 1 Kings 8:41–43 (ESV)

So instead of a house of prayer for the nations, the leaders of Israel transformed it into a mini-mall. They were all leaves and no fruit.

Do you think what happened to the temple in Jesus’ day can happen in the church today? Do you think it is easy for the church to think first about how we can serve ourselves rather than to be welcoming to the lost seeking truth in this world? Do you think it is easy to make the church a place that is convenient for us to be rather than to a place where those seeking truth can hear it?

It is so easy to forget God’s heart for the world around us and think of the church as a place that is for us, rather than a place where people can observe our worship and hear about God.

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. Mark 11:18 (ESV)

The chief priests and the scribes started thinking about bumping Jesus off when he came into Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry last week because he was too popular. He had massive crowds cheering for him. This week, it only got worse. Jesus attacked them and the crooked way they ran the temple. The Jewish leaders were getting closer to a decision to destroy Jesus. The tension lingered in the air. It would all come to a head at the end of the week.

And when evening came they went out of the city. Mark 11:19 (ESV)

Every evening Jesus headed back to Bethany two miles outside of town to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

### **A cursed fig tree is a dead fig tree.**

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Mark 11:20–21 (ESV)

The next morning, Peter put the pieces together. He saw the fig tree Jesus cursed dead and withered from the roots. It died completely at the curse of Jesus. Then Peter remembered the temple that Jesus also just cursed. It was also just a matter of time until it was destroyed, never to come back again. It all unfolded in just 40 years.

### **Application**

What does God want us to learn from this? There are two applications. One applies to us personally. The other applies to us as CrossWinds Church corporately.

**Personally — I have a responsibility to bear fruit with my life, not just grow leaves.** It is easy to think the Christian life is about living a good life. It is easy to think the Christian life is about looking good on the outside. That is not our goal. Our goal should be to bear fruit with our lives, not just look good with our lives. We want to make an impact on others and the world around us. Here are two ways our lives can be spiritually fruitful, not just leafy green.

**1. God has given each of us spiritual gifts and natural talents. We are fruitful when we use them, not sit on them.** Each one should set as our goal not just to attend church, but to use our gifts and talents to serve others in the church. Let me give you an example. This past week, the guys who run games

for AWANA went above and beyond the call of duty. They built a huge maze for the AWANA kids in the gym. The kids loved it. God's house was a great place for them. It was a fun place for them. It was great to see the joy on their faces as they loved coming to church. Jesus was pleased with it. That was being spiritually fruitful and blessing others, not just leafy green. Thank you guys for being fruitful and using your gifts!

**2. We are to invite people to church, not just attend it. We are fruitful when help other people hear the good news of Jesus.** It is easy to look leafy green but not be spiritually fruitful if we don't build relationships with people to tell them about Jesus. It is easy to forget that God has placed us where he has to tell people about Jesus and invite people to church where they can hear about Jesus.

**Corporately — God calls his people to have a welcoming heart for those who do not know him.** The temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations. It was to be a place where the people of all nations could come to learn about God. The Jewish leaders had transformed what was holy space to common space. They cut off the Gentile world to make it more comfortable for their little world. In the church, it is easy for us to do the same thing. It is easy to think of the church as a place for us, and what comes first is our comfort and convenience, not making the church a welcoming place to those seeking God. This is a good challenge for us at CrossWinds. How intentionally welcoming are we to people coming here to learn about Jesus? When we see someone new, how quick are we to take them under our wings? Could we be more intentional at building

bridges into our community so we can tell more people about Jesus? That is God's heart.

**The old temple is gone, but a new and better temple has come.**

Forty years after this, Titus Vespian destroyed Herod's temple. A little later in history, the Muslims erected the Dome of the Rock on the temple mount. Some people are upset that the another temple has not been raised. That is OK with us. We have something much better than they ever did. Our God is no longer with us in a building. He is with us in a body and his name is Jesus.

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. John 2:19–21 (ESV)



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