

Life Group Notes 3 November 2024: Paper on the Lectern

Mark 11:12-21

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Intro:

Sometimes we can get consumed by rituals and traditions in Church and things that started off as being helpful or well intentioned, become major points of division in churches. We need to stop and ask if these kinds of things are going to help strengthen someone in their walk with God, or if are they going to hinder people. These kinds of experiences are NOT just a modern phenomenon they happened in Jesus' day as well.

Let's continue our series on the book of Mark in Chapter 11 today. As a Start, **read from Mark 11:12-21.**

Q: Did you spot the Markan sandwich? What are the 2 peripheral stories? What is the middle of the sandwich?

These accounts, the curse of the fig tree (mentioned before and after) and Jesus' overturning tables in the Temple, are working together to bring us a beautiful message about the Kingdom of God.

We will start with the centre of the sandwich – **Jesus in the Temple**

Read: Mark 12:15-17 again.

Q: Why do you think Jesus did this?

People were selling the sacrificial animals at exorbitant prices and hindering the poor from being able to come and make sacrifices and worship their God. Jesus doesn't want anyone hindered from worship and so he makes a bit of a scene. This passage is often used as a justification for righteous anger and people often portray Jesus getting pretty worked up in this incident. These verses are however NOT teaching us about righteous anger – there is something far greater that is going on.

Q: Who did Jesus' target in his confrontation? Read v15b and spot the 3 groups mentioned.

Jesus targets the **money changers; those selling doves** and would not allow **anyone to carry merchandise** through the Temple courts. These 3 components are vital for the functioning of the Temple. If money cannot be exchanged into the holy currency, then monetary support for the Temple sacrifices and priesthood must end. If sacrificial animals cannot be purchased, then sacrifices must end. And if no merchandise can be carried through the Temple, then all religious activity must cease.

Q: What message do you think Jesus is sending to the world when he did this in the Temple?

Jesus is actually challenging the very essence of the Temple and almost seems to be implying that the Temple is no longer fulfilling its function.

Read: Mark 12:17 again – Now read Isaiah 56:6-7

Q: Do you see the Old Testament verse that Jesus has quoted? What was God's desire for those who could come to worship at the Temple/House of the Lord?

The Jewish nation saw their faith and religious practices – including the Temple and sacrificial system – as exclusively for the Jewish people and gentiles were only allowed in the outer most of the four Temple courts.

Read: Jeremiah 7:9-11 and look for the “den of Robbers” reference.

This is exactly what was happening when Jesus comes into the Temple. The rich were getting richer, and they were neglecting the poor and the oppressed and were marching into the Temple saying: I love God! Jesus is saying, don't come into the Temple and act all pious and hide behind God. Jesus is saying the ways of the Temple need to come to an end to make way for the new thing that God is doing, that will be by faith.

Now let's look at the fig tree...

what is happening in the middle will help us understand what is happening on the outside. The fig tree is actually not the point; Jesus is using the fig tree to teach the disciples about what is going to happen.

Q: Considering what Jesus did in the Temple and his actions, what do you think the fig tree is a picture of? Discuss in your group.

The fig tree represents the Temple. From a distance, the Temple looks healthy and vibrant, yet, on closer inspection, the Temple is not bearing any fruit – therefore, the Temple is going to have to be destroyed from the roots up – verse 20 – to make way for what God is about to do. The barren fig tree represents the barrenness of the Temple that is unprepared to accept Jesus' messianic reign.

The Temple and all of its holy practices had become restrictive and were failing to do the two most important things: to love God and to love others. Foreigners were being kept out and the poor and marginalised were remaining as outcasts.

Q: Do you think we have any religious practices at church that hinder the kingdom?

We need to remember, that a worship service is not a place where we gather to consume and have our own needs and preferences satisfied. No, a worship service is a place where we gather to bring glory to God. It's all about God.

And on to our final point

We need to have faith, pray, and forgive.

Read: Mark 11:22-25

Q: When you read this, what do you think it means – will God give us anything we ask for?

These verses are telling us that the old ways of the Temple are coming to an end and the new ways of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ are about to begin. The key part to understand this is actually the reference to the mountain. Notice that Mark doesn't say mountains rather it's a singular mountain and therefore, scholars tend to think that Mark is referring to the Temple mountain – Mount Zion.

The old ways of doing things that are bearing no fruit are going to be destroyed and thrown into the sea and a new way of prayer and forgiveness is going to emerge. The closer we are to God – the more our prayers are focused on things of the Kingdom of God and NOT just things that are going to make our lives better.

This does not mean we will get whatever we ask for – rather when we pray, we trust that God is a good father who knows what is best for us. We need to remember that prayer is not a magic wand granting us whatever we want, rather it is a connection with our heavenly father who loves us and wants what is best for us.

Q: What does Jesus encourage us to do in this passage? Read Mark 11:25 again.

Additional content: Read: Matthew 18:21-35.

Conclusion:

We don't need a temple because our lives have become a living sacrifice of worship because we have the Spirit of God within us. When we pray we begin to love those around us, we begin to care for those in need, the marginalised and the oppressed.

And when we pray, we begin to put forgiveness into practice. When we have faith in Jesus and pray – we will start to bear fruit of the Kingdom of God, and we will become a community that reveals to the world around us what God is like. And this is the new Kingdom that Jesus is building!