

Mark 11: 12-21

Introduction

- I. This passage is about fruitfulness (and fruitlessness)
- II. Fruit is an analogy for certain qualities God wants to produce in us
 - A. Gen 1:28: “Be fruitful”
 - B. John 15:1-17: “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last.”

The Passage

- I. The cursing of the fig tree (v. 12-14, 20-21)
 - A. It was the spring when fig trees had their leaves and might be starting to show their early edible buds.
 - B. Jesus curses something that should have been bearing fruit and wasn’t
 - C. Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree was not a flippant act of frustration, but rather a dramatic sign symbolizing his judgment on a group of people who should have been bearing fruit and were not.
 - D. The key to this story is to connect his cursing of the fig tree with his judgment on the temple—he saw fruitlessness in both situations.
- II. The judgment in the temple
 - A. What did Jesus see? (v. 15-16)
 - 1. People buying and selling animal sacrifices in the court of the Gentiles
This would have originally taken place outside the temple, but the high priest brought it inside for certain financial advantages. Animals were sold at extraordinarily high prices.
 - 2. Money changers exchanging Roman currency for Jewish currency at extremely high exchange rates.
 - 3. People carrying merchandise through the temple court as a short cut through the city
 - B. What was Jesus primary concern based on what he said? (v. 17)
 - 1. The people did not have a genuine heart for God
 - a. The temple was to be “a house of prayer”
= A place for engaging God in prayer, pursuing relationship with Him
 - b. But they had turned it into a market of commercial activity
The religious symbols were there, but the relationship was gone
 - c. Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7: “den of robbers”
In that passage God is warning the Israelites that their religious symbols won’t save them, unless they reform their ways and bring their hearts back to Him
 - 2. The people did not have a genuine heart for the nation
 - a. The temple was to be a house of prayer “for all nations” (not just Israel)
 - b. The Jews should have been welcoming the Gentiles but instead they had turned their court into a marketplace and exploited them financially, making it very hard for them to come to God

- c. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56, where God expresses his heart for foreigners who come to worship the true God
- d. As God's chosen people, the Jews were always called to be a light to the nations

III. What about us today?

A. Do we have a genuine heart for God?

- 1. Is our church service a house of prayer?
Why do we come on Sunday mornings? (to see friends, have a Bible study, appease our spouse, check a box, etc)
- 2. Are our lives a prayerful pursuit of relationship with God? (see 2 Cor 11:3)
In the midst of the activity (secular and religious), do we have a passionate heart for relationship with God?

B. Do we have a genuine heart for the nations?

- 1. What are things we do that make it hard for people to come to know God?
 - a. Live lives that are insular (only with other Christians)
 - b. Be judgmental towards outsiders
Paul says we are not to judge those who are outside but rather inside the community of faith (1 Cor 5:12)
 - c. Seek their approval too much and become too much like them and

IV. Jesus is looking for a people who will bear fruit (John 15)

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. In the temple scene and the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus takes dramatic action against a people who were not bearing fruit. Similarly, in John 15 he says that his Father "cuts off every branch of mine that does not bear fruit." How should we think about these strong actions? Are "unfruitful believers" (if there is such a thing) in danger of judgment?
3. In terms of the Sunday service itself, is Grace a "house of prayer"? What expectations do most people bring to Sunday morning? What expectations do you bring? How would you like to see Grace grow or change in this area?
4. In this season of your life, do you see yourself living with a genuine heart for God, or do you find yourself being distracted from a "pure and simple devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3)? What's a specific action step that would help you pursue Christ more purely right now?
5. As you consider your life, would you say you have a genuine heart for the nations (those who don't know God)? Of the three postures mentioned that make it hard for the nations to come to know God (see outline, III. B.) which do you fall into most? What is a practical step you could take to reach out at this time?