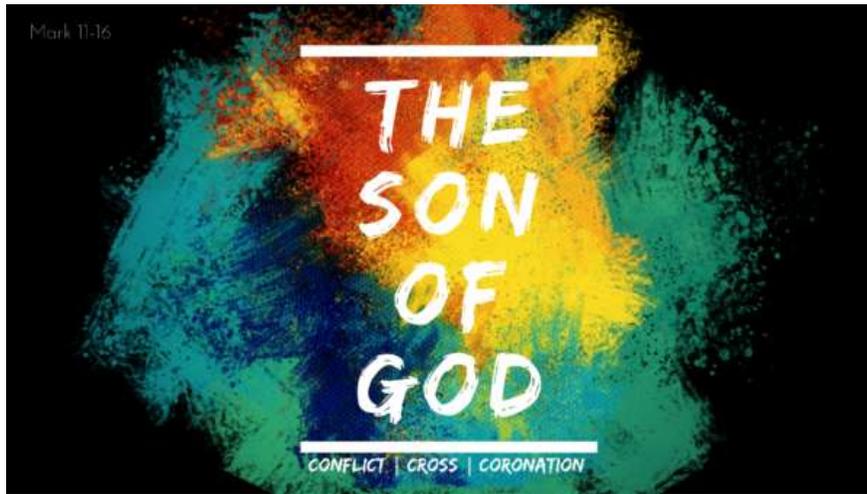


All Leaf, No Fruit!



Mark 11:1-25

I don't cook very often. The only time I do cook is when we're at the campground. Yesterday morning, I had the privilege of being at the campground, getting up early and frying some bacon on our gas griddle, slicing tomato, frying eggs, and toasting some bread. I don't know about you, but sometimes I don't like to eat all of those pieces individually. I like to put them together on what's called a sandwich. Sometimes I like sandwiches for breakfast, sometimes for lunch, and from time to time, we like sandwiches for supper. I'm so excited to get to be the speaker this morning because we're looking at one of Mark's famous passages where he arranges it in the form of a sandwich. If you're new to Hardin and you haven't been with us on this sermon series through the gospel of Mark, Mark has a literary technique called a Markan sandwich. It is where he takes a story, interrupts the story with another story, and then goes back and finishes the first story. Imagine a biscuit you cut in half and put some bacon in the middle of it. That would be pretty good, right. Mark starts telling a story, and that's going to be the top of the biscuit. Then he inserts the meat, which is the second story. When he finishes that story completely, the meat, he then closes the sandwich by finishing the first story, which is the bottom of the biscuit. When Mark does this, here's what

he's tipping us off to; you can't understand the meat until you understand the first story. The first story holds the second story together, and you're going to misinterpret the second story if you don't see it in light of the first story. It's the first story that you get, and you take the principle of the first story to help you understand the middle story. Now, this is my favorite Markan sandwich of the whole gospel. Let's read God's Word in verses 11-25. The sermon is titled, *All Leaf, No Fruit*, and as we begin to read this story, see if you understand why we entitled it this.

Scripture

"And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. 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 moneychangers 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." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done

for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

(Prayer)

Father, we ask You to add Your blessings to the reading of this Word. Anoint us to hear, anoint us to speak, and above all, and we mean this, we don't just say this lightly, it's so important, Father, we want to be doers of Your Word. In Christ' name, open our eyes to the truth of this passage, amen.

As the kids would say, are we there yet? We're almost there. When Mark chapter 11 opens up, Jesus is just a couple of miles from Jerusalem. They have left Jericho, made that eighteen to twenty mile trip up the road to Jerusalem, and they stop at Bethany and Bethphage. Jesus instructs some of His disciples to go into the city and find a colt that is tied that has never been ridden. He wants them to bring it to Him. After they make a saddle of cloaks for Him, He is going to ride the colt into the city of Jerusalem. He's not going to ride as most of the pilgrims will for the Passover meal. I don't know about you, but that just surprises me a little bit about Jesus. I'm not a big horse rider, but I've ridden a few times. From what little experience I have, can I just say if I'm going to choose to ride a donkey, I want to ride one that's been ridden before? How many of you in here would pick a donkey to ride into a city in a crowd and that donkey has never been ridden before? Wow! What in the world is Jesus doing? Now we know Matthew tells us that He's fulfilling what was prophesied by Zechariah in chapter 9:9 of his prophecy. Mark doesn't tell that because he's trying to get us into the city as quickly as he can. We know when kings and leaders came into cities, riding a horse meant they were coming in war, and if they rode donkeys, many times that meant they were coming in peace. But Jesus is riding a donkey that's never been ridden before. Do you think it's possible He's presenting Himself as the Son of God, the perfect man? If

you will remember in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and have dominion over the animal kingdom.

Now, as Jesus gets ready to go inside the city of Jerusalem, this donkey that's never been ridden is completely submissive to Him, the perfect man, the Son of God. There's a crowd in front of Him, a crowd behind Him and they take their cloaks and line the street. All of a sudden, you can hear the crowd in front of Him saying Hosanna, *ōsha 'nā*, in Hebrew, 'save us now.' The scholars say that as the first group was shouting hosanna, the second group behind Him would answer back, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father, David." In answer to that, the front crowd would shout out, "Hosanna in the highest, save us from Heaven!" Then Jesus comes into the city of Jerusalem with His disciples and He goes straight to the temple. By the time He gets there, Mark says it's late in the afternoon. Watch this, don't miss this...He looks around in the temple and He sees everything. Because it's late, they go back to Bethany.

Now, I want to give you just a little heads up. We've been preparing ourselves for Jesus to come to Jerusalem, go to a cross, and on that cross He is going to die, be buried, and rise again on the third day. But when He first gets to Jerusalem, He doesn't come to go to a cross. When He comes to Jerusalem, the first place He goes is the temple. For several days, when He comes into Jerusalem He goes into the temple. Now, if I tell you I went to Murray this week on Tuesday and I went to Culver's, you would think the reason I went to Murray was to go to Culver's. If I didn't go anywhere else but Culver's, you would know I went to Murray to go to Culver's. Now, let's slow down here a little bit. We've got on our minds that Jesus is going to a cross, but Mark is first trying to tell us that when Jesus comes into Jerusalem, He goes to the temple, He looks around, He sees everything, and it's late so He doesn't do anything, He goes home.

Now we're getting ready to see the Markan sandwich. The next morning, Jesus leaves Bethany and we know He's going back to Jerusalem. On the way, Jesus, being hungry, sees a fig tree in the distance and the fig tree is leafy. So being hungry, we suppose He goes over to the fig tree, but when He pulls back the leaves, there are no figs. Mark adds this, and if he hadn't

said this we would be cool, but Mark says, "For it was not the season for figs." Jesus, this guy who has just ridden an animal the day before that's never been ridden now talks to the tree. He said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Remember, this is our top bun, or top slice of bread, so to speak. Mark is now going to stop that story and interject a second story. But we aren't going to understand that second story until we understand the 'top' of the first story, as well as the 'bottom' of the first story. What is Mark trying to tell us? Jesus is hungry. In His hunger, He sees a tree, a leafy tree. He goes to the tree, but when He pulls the leaves back, there are no mature figs. Mark tells us there are no mature figs because it's not the season for mature figs, but Jesus curses the tree and that bothers us. If it were not the season for mature figs, why would Jesus curse the tree? Here's what you have to remember. At this time of the year, late March, early April, a fig tree that has full leaves would have little bitty figs, fig buds, so to speak. Over the next six to eight weeks, those fig buds would grow and mature into ripe figs. Jesus' hunger leads Him to go to this tree, but when He gets there and pulls the leaves back, there are no figs at all, not even the little buds that will grow into mature figs. So He tells the tree "may no one ever eat of you again." Now hold on to that.

He gets to Jerusalem, goes into the temple, which He has already examined from the night before and He immediately begins to drive out the animals, the people who are selling, and the people who are buying. He overturns the tables of the moneychangers, He takes all of the seats of the people who are selling pigeons and begins to turn them over, and He sees people passing through the temple just carrying things through the temple to another location and He stops them.

I want to make sure you see what's going on here. This temple is called Herod's temple; (remember we had Solomon's temple and Zerubbabel's temple) this temple started being built in 20 BC. It is now somewhere around 20 or 30 AD, possibly. This section of the temple that Jesus is in is called the Court of Gentiles. Conservative scholars believe this court was about three hundred yards by two hundred and fifty yards. That is about three football fields by two and a half football fields. That's about fifteen acres. It has a row of columns all the way around it. It has steps leading

up to it; it's open air. Other scholars believe that it was more like five hundred yards by three hundred and fifty yards, which means it was about thirty-three acres! There are sheep, oxen, people buying, people selling, people with their pigeons to sell to the poor, and they're set up at their tables. There are people there in the courtyard sitting at a money-changing table. That meant you brought your coin in, but you can't offer it to God in the temple and pay your temple tax because it has an image on it. The only coins that didn't have an image was the terran coin, which was like the old Hebrew coin, so moneychangers would take your money and give you the proper coin. Outside of the temple on the Mount of Olives, there were four main stations where you could go buy an animal and get your money exchanged. If you did, here is what happened. When you brought your animal into the temple and it was inspected by a priest, he would find something wrong with your animal, would turn it down, and say you couldn't sacrifice it to God. Now, you would have to turn around and buy an animal that had been inspected by someone inside the temple grounds. But when you bought your animal inside the temple grounds, they were charging you about six to ten times more than that animal would normally sell for. That's good for the business guy, but that's not good for the worshipper.

Get this picture. You come to worship, you come to buy your animal, and you realize you're being charged six times more than it's worth, you're not just going to pay that sitting down; you're going to haggle a little bit. You're going to bargain a little bit, try to get him down a little bit. You're probably going to tell him what it's selling for right outside of the courtyard. But he's not buying that, he's haggling back with you. He's telling you the reason why this is as much as it is, is because there's not really enough that is without blemish. Therefore, because of supply and demand, that raises the price. Now can you imagine all of this going on, and then Jesus showing up? He starts opening the doors to the stalls and the animals start running out. He starts driving out the buyers and the sellers. He starts crashing all these tables, turning over all of these chairs, and He begins to cry out, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer....but you have made it a den of robbers!'" Mark says He taught and He taught and He taught, and He said and He said and He said.

He uses the continual tense. In other words, He taught the whole time He was there! The next thing you know, those who were running the temple precincts, those who were in charge of the bazaar (the marketplace, so to speak) in the courtyard of the Gentiles began to fear because the people were being astonished at His teaching letting them know this was a place of robbery. It was a den; it's where the robbers make their living, but it's supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations. As they're being astonished, the leaders decided they have to get rid of this guy. Tell me you see this.

Are you ready? Mark says we can't understand that until we take the second half of this first story and sandwich it together. So here's what happens. Can I say this? Jesus is not cleansing the temple; He is clearing it out. After that day of teaching, after He clears everything out (Can you imagine clearing fifteen acres?), He goes back to Bethany and gets up the next morning. Now, we're going to find out next week that they're going to Jerusalem again and He's going back to the temple, but as He leaves Bethany and starts back to Jerusalem, they pass by the fig tree and they all saw it had withered to its roots, Mark says. Peter remembers what the Lord said to the tree and said, (Peter is always speaking first most of the time) "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" Can you imagine Jesus talking to a tree twenty-four hours ago that was full of leaves, and now it's withered all the way to the roots? Have you ever sprayed Roundup? Roundup changed our lives because it took the plant all the way down to the root. When the root goes, there is no life. Listen to this; when Jesus spoke to the fig tree, it withered all the way to the root. Now Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God." and then Jesus talks about two things, prayer, and forgiveness.

But before we talk about those things, I want to make sure you get it. What is Mark doing here? That courtyard had a doorway that led into another courtyard that was called the Court of the Women. There was another door that led into another courtyard called the Court of the Israelite. There was another door that led into the Court of the Priests, and then there was the Holy of Holies. There was this massive wall around that inner sanctuary. It was about one hundred yards by one hundred and fifty

yards inside this fifteen acre courtyard. There was a sign that said if you were a foreigner and went through that doorway, you literally took your own life into your own hands. If you were caught, you would be killed. The only place a foreigner could go in his worship of Israel's God, Yahweh, was that outer courtyard. That outer courtyard is now a place of merchandise. Get this picture. It's Passover, you're a foreigner, and you're coming to worship God. You're not a Jew, you come up the Mount of Olives, and you look over there and see that massive structure. It looks so *leafy*, but when you get there, *no fruit*. Between the oxen, the sheep, the birds, the noise, the moneychangers, the bargaining, and the haggling, you can't find a place anywhere to meditate, pray, and worship God.

What Mark is trying to say Jesus is saying is the temple is just like that tree...all leaf, no fruit. Don't tell me Jesus came to cleanse this temple. He didn't come to cleanse this temple because the teaching teaches the temple is withered all the way to the root. When the root dies, there is no life. What is going on in the temple is evidence that this is not what God intended it to be...a house of prayer for the nations, but it's a den of robbers. A Gentile man or woman who was spiritually hungry and came to Jerusalem wanting their hunger fed as they worship Yahweh, got to the place of worship, and there was no fruit, just leaf.

In a couple of days in Jerusalem, Jesus is actually going to stand on the Mount of Olives looking over at the temple, and He will tell His disciples that this building is going to be destroyed, and He warns them it's going to be taken away. At the end of this gospel, Mark is going to have Jesus die a death on a cross, and when He commends His Spirit to God, the moment He dies, the veil in this temple rips from top to bottom signifying there is no curtain that keeps man out of the presence of God because Jesus has offered Himself on a cross, and His blood has brought us into the very presence of God. We're going to learn in the rest of the New Testament that Jesus Christ was born with a DNA that traced back to Abraham through David, and He's Jewish. But He didn't come to be a Jewish Messiah who was going to rid the Jews of the Gentiles or Romans. He was actually coming to build God's true house, and in this episode, He rids the temple of the Jews, not the foreigners so that we would understand Christ didn't

come for the Jews only. He came for the whole world. We're going to learn from Paul's writings and other writings of the New Testament after the resurrection that when He died on that cross, He did something more than just tear that veil into. He tore down that middle wall between Jews and Gentiles. God's plan all along has been to take Jews and Gentiles and create a new body, a new temple, and that's the church. We are God's temple. God's temple is not a building that sits on a hill in a country. God's true temple is His people.

Can you imagine being Jewish following Jesus and Jesus tells you your temple has withered to its root and it will be no more? Then, it's going to be destroyed and you had better not go to the city looking for safety, you had better get out of the city because it's going to fall? Where do you go when you pray? Where do you go when you need to offer something for forgiveness? Therefore, Jesus' words are "Have faith in God." Don't have faith in a place, have faith in a person. The person you have your faith in is God. Then Jesus says something astronomical. He says if you would say to a mountain to remove itself, it would pick itself up and throw itself into the sea if you wouldn't doubt, and you would believe.

Then He starts giving us a principle of prayer that we need to come to God in prayer by faith believing we've already received before we even ask, then we will receive. Wow! I want to make sure you get this. If you and I were standing where Jesus was standing, and Celisa and I have been on parts of that temple mount, if we were to look to the southeast, we would see Herodion down in the distance. Herodion was another smaller mountain that was volcano shaped, and on the top of that mountain, Herod had built a fortress there in case of war or crisis. You have to remember that Herod was known as the builder. He's one of the ones who have been building this temple. It would not be finished until 66 AD. They would start working on it in 20 BC, so it was 86 years in its entirety before it would be completed. There was another little mountain beside the mountain he built Herodion on. Do you know what he did? Because he knew that mountain was a threat because some people could catapult over to his mountain, he actually had men move that mountain, manual labor. If we were standing where Jesus was standing and looked to the southeast,

you would see the base where that mountain had been removed. I don't know if that's in Jesus' mind or not, but He says 'have faith in God. If you have a mountain in front of you, if you're facing a challenge, don't go to the temple, come to Me. Talk to Me. When you talk to Me, don't have doubt because you're talking to Me. You believe. When you believe, you've already received. Now, go live as if you've received what you've asked Me for because you've had faith.'

Now let's remember, He's addressing Jewish disciples. That crowd is gone. It's just the twelve now, and He says 'while you're standing praying and you know you've got something against somebody, forgive so that your Father will also forgive you.' Now, we're not going to raise hands here, but in your spirit, how many of us are here right now and we know we have something against somebody? We think they did us wrong. I know. I hear you, "Bro Ricky, you don't understand!" I'm going to admit it; I don't understand. I don't. I want to make sure you understand what I don't understand. I'm not talking about the part of what somebody did to you. I'm talking about I don't understand why you haven't forgiven yet. It has nothing to do with what they did to you. The reason we forgive is because God has forgiven us. I don't understand how any of us in here could not forgive what someone has done to us when we understand what God forgave us of. You're going to tell me you're going to take that thing that's been done to you by someone, and you're not going to see it in light of everything you did to God that caused Him to put His Son on a cross to pay for what we did because we couldn't pay it ourselves? You're going to say He's forgiven you, and you're not going to forgive them? Here is what Jesus is teaching. When you get ready to pray and you know you have something against somebody, just stop praying and deal with it. If you don't deal with it, your Father is not going to deal with what you've done. Whoa! I know we want to water this down. You can't water this down. Do you know what the forgiven do? They forgive. Do you know what the ones who haven't been forgiven do? They don't forgive. Whether we forgive or not reveals us, not what they did, but that we've not been forgiven by God for what we've done. So when you're praying and that thought comes to your mind, you had better forgive, because if you don't it's a really good indicator you've

not been forgiven. You say you didn't know this...I know, and that's why you haven't forgiven. Now you know this, so now you're responsible.

Can I make a pastoral application here that's not in this biblical passage? I just want to stick it in here if that's ok, because like you, I've read the rest of the book. I had this pastoral thought. Am I all leaf, and no fruit? That would break my heart. It would break my heart to know I pastored a church that was all leaf and no fruit. It would break my heart if somebody saw me from a distance and thought wow, and then got closer, pulled the leaves back, got to see me in real life situations, and then they drew the conclusion, no fruit. Here's what I believe. As the church, we're the body of Christ. Jesus is the true temple of God. We are His temple; we are His body. Just as there was an inner sanctuary and an outer sanctuary, I think we have an innerness and an outerness. Our outerness is supposed to display our innerness. It would be sad if our innerness weren't being evidenced in our outerness. Here's my final thought. I believe we have a courtyard of Gentiles in our lives. We have a courtyard, a place where we meet people who are unbelievers, Jewish or Gentile. It may be a school, a class, a business, a hobby, an event, or a relationship. In that relationship, God has ordained for me to meet people to come into my life who get close enough to me to see whether or not I really am His or not His. What I'm wondering is, is there anything in our lives we need to clear out? There are some people in our lives who are spiritually hungry and they're coming to us, but in their relationship with us, all of the stuff in our life keeps them from actually seeing and being able to worship the real God. Will you let Jesus clear out your courtyard as well?