

## Mark 11.1-25 | Jesus Covers Our Sin

### Intro | Promise Fulfilled

Mark chapter 11 is the beginning of the most important week in the history of the world. The narrative of Jesus life, death, and resurrection is not the beginning of God's story—it is the **climax**. The story of God began in a garden when our first parents disobeyed the word of God. **God's death curse on the world was accompanied by a promise of life—some day a child would come.** That was not the only promise God made. God promised a man childless old man named Abraham that he would make him into a great nation. God promised that another prophet, like Moses, would come to speak truth. God promised that another high priest, like Aaron, would come and cleanse sins once and for all. God promised that, another King, like David, would rise and rule forever. The gospels could all be titled – **Promises Kept**.

All of these promises from God were delivered to a people he had chosen—the Jews. As recipients of the very words of God, the Jews had every advantage. **By grace, they had a unique relationship with God and, in contrast to the world, a unique relationship with one another.** Like the world, they were all under sin, but unlike the world, they had a means to atone for it. Like the world, they hurt and wronged one another, but unlike the world, they had the God's Word to uphold God's justice. But these advantages were the very things that became their undoing—that which was provided to help their faithfulness actually hindered their faith. And when the promised prophet, priest, and King walked into the temple—they not only did not recognize him, they murdered him. While this saddens, it does not surprise God. **The rejection of the Savior was expected, even planned, for salvation to come to the world.**

After the resurrection, Peter and John were arrested for teaching about Jesus in the temple. They were brought before the council of leaders, including the Captain of the temple, and charged not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. They refused and were released. They return to their friends and reported all that happened causing everyone to lift their voices declaring the Psalms saying: *Why did the gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The Kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against His Anointed—for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan and predestined to take place. (Acts 4.25-28)* **God planned for the failure of Jewish people and he's planned for yours too. [READ Mark 11.1-25]**

### Triumphal Entry | 1-11

Our text begins with Jesus' arrival on the outskirts of Jerusalem on the first day of the week of Passover. Jesus has not celebrated Passover in Jerusalem for several years. Every step was intentionally designed to lead him to this place on this day at this hour. He sends two disciples to obtain a young donkey for him to ride on. This is a shift in the ministry of Jesus who, for the most part, has kept his identity relatively private. More than once, he has silenced or otherwise avoided the crowds who want to make him king. **By finding the donkey to ride on, Jesus is going public.** This action is a deliberate fulfillment of a 500 year old prophecy from Zechariah which said: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9.9).* **In other words, this is a kingly act.** During David's reign, the donkey was considered a royal animal. All other Hebrew Kings who followed switched to horses. **Jesus choice is a revelation of WHO HE IS, namely, the promised Messiah and Son of David.**

In honor of the one who is King, the crowds spread their cloaks on the ground and line the road with palm branches. **By using palm branches, the people are revealing what they HOPE WILL DO.** In many ways this entire scene is a replay of **the Maccabean revolt that occurred 150 years earlier.** A Jew named Judas Maccabeus had led the Israeli victory over the Syrian occupation. The Syrian ruler, Antiochus, had killed thousands of Jews and desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar, forcing the priests to

eat its flesh. The revolt itself involved many battles, in which the Maccabean forces gained notoriety for their use of guerrilla tactics and their speed and mobility, in contrast to the slow and bulky Syrian army. **After the victory, the Maccabees entered Jerusalem in triumph and ritually cleansed the Temple restoring traditional Jewish worship there.** The successful revolt against Antiochus made Judas Maccabee a hero. At Jesus time, the crowds celebrated his victory by waving palm branches. **Judas, called “The Hammer,” stamped the image of palm branches into coins to commemorate the victory.** Today, Jewish festival of Hanukkah celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple following this victory. **The people are hoping Jesus is THE HAMMER reborn** ready to throw off the Roman tyrant as he did with Syria.

This is why crowds shouting *“Hosanna...Blessed is the kingdom of David...Hosanna in the highest”* which is both a praise and a plea to *“Save us.”* Even though the people do not recognize who Jesus is, **they understand the practical situation they are in—they cannot save themselves from this Roman oppression.** They are crying SAVE US...and Jesus actually will...but not how they think. **The Hosannas are appropriate to describe his work but not his ways.** Once Jesus enters Jerusalem, the fanfare subsides, and nothing happens. **Jesus walks into the temple, looks around at everything, and leaves.** Jesus doesn't do what they desire or expect. But when this happens, the problem is never with Jesus.

### **Cursing the Fig | 12-14**

The next day, Jesus is traveling back to Jerusalem. Before he arrives he curses a fig tree and when he arrives he cleases the temple. This is a side of Jesus we are not used to seeing—the **humble and compassionate King who is wrathful and angry.** This Jesus has confounded many scholars who offer many explanations for a Jesus that doesn't fit their expectations.

**The first event is the cursing of a fig tree.** Mark says that Jesus is hungry. He sees a leafy fig tree in the distance and approaches it to see if he can find any fruit. When he came to it, there was nothing but leaves because, as Mark says, it was not the season for fruit—it is Spring and not Summer. **Hungry Jesus proceeds to curse the fig tree declaring: “May no one every eat fruit from you again.”** Even though it sounds like someone who is just angry from an empty stomach, there is much more going on here. Agriculturally speaking, prior to the Summer season a fig tree will produce pre-figs along with the leaves. These small buds, the size of cherry's, are edible and often fall to the ground. But those that remain on the vine ripen into fruit in due season. The absence of these pre-figs, on the ground or on the tree, is evidence that the tree will not produce any fruit this season...or likely the next. It is a fruitless tree. Spiritually speaking, fig trees have often been a symbol of Israel in the Old Testament. **Jesus cursing of the fruitless fig tree is a declaration of judgment on an unfaithful Israel who is not producing fruit.**

### **Cleansing the Temple | 15-19**

The cleansing of the temple extends the meaning of metaphor. Although seemingly disconnected, these two events are actually both prophetic actions that symbolize the same thing. Once again, Jesus enters the temple to drive out those who are buying and selling in the Gentile courtyard. This is second time Jesus has done this. The first was in the beginning of his ministry following his first miracle (John 2). At that time, Jesus made a whip of cords, turned over tables, and drove everyone out. **Here, Jesus not only drives everyone out, but he keeps people out.** Jesus then begins to teach saying: *“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.”* Jesus is referencing a passage in the prophet Isaiah which speaks about the main purpose of the Gentile court that he just cleansed. This part of the temple was supposed to be a place where all non-Jewish people—from all nations—could come to seek the one true God's face through prayer. **The court is too crowded.**

The court is full of money changers and vendors. Every Jew was required to pay a temple tax at were required to pay a temple tax. The money changers were required because a particular kind of currency

was preferred. With all the money being exchanged, vendors of sheep to be sacrificed or other Passover supplies found the gentile court a profitable location to do business in. **Jesus sees that the evangelistic purpose of the Gentile has been hijacked; a holy place has been turned into a marketplace. Jesus words are true.** Instead of repenting of the truth, the Jewish leaders hear his words and *“seek a way to destroy him.”* Standing in the place of sacrifice in the midst of everything given to point them to the Messiah, they fail to recognize the true lamb who takes away the sin of the world. As “alive” as they appeared on the outside, they are “dead” on the inside. Any kind of spirituality that doesn’t increase your affection for Jesus and compassion for others is unfruitful and subject the God’s judgment.

### Faith in God | 12-19

These two scenes come full circle when Jesus leaves the city and encounters the same fig tree. When Jesus first encountered the leafy flourishing plant without any fruit, He angrily declared: *“May no one ever eat fruit from you again.”* After an afternoon at the temple, Peter notices the fig tree has already withered. Jesus response is strange...**HAVE FAITH IN GOD** he says. In four days, everything that Peter knows or presumes about the Jewish faith, and even about Jesus, is about to come crashing down. It won’t be until Jesus rises from the dead on Sunday morning (or longer) that **Peter will truly understand the role of the fig (or the Jewish system)** within the larger redemptive plan...let me explain:

### THE FIG LEAVES of Adam | Clothed in Nothing

In the beginning, our first parents disobeyed God, rejected His rule, and sin entered the world. This moment is recorded in Genesis 3: *6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Genesis 3.6-7.* Sin exposes us. Feeling guilt and shame for the first time, nakedness, man tried to cover himself. These were insufficient to hide their sin. His coverings did little to cover his physical nakedness and absolutely nothing to cover his spiritual nakedness. After confronting them in their sin, and cursing them, God makes coverings for them by killing the first animals—the first substitutionary sacrifice.

### THE FIG LEAVES of Moses | Clothed in Law

The story of God continues and through the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God raises up a people for himself. This people would come to be known as the Hebrews. After the Hebrews were redeemed from slavery in Egypt, God gave them the law, along with the plans for a tabernacle—a portable temple. The law and the temple afforded them another kind of covering—a way to atone for their sins. Substitutionary sacrifices were made and sins were covered. As time went on, this nomadic people became the nation of Israel. And what was portable became a permanent fixture centered in the heart of Jerusalem. The law, the temple, and all of the sacrifices God had commanded to make covered their nakedness...**think of it to be like a big FIG LEAF.**

The original tabernacle was less than half the size of the first temple, and the first temple was less than half the size of the one Jesus cleansed. **By appearances alone it seemed fruitful! But the Jews came to idolize the leaves more than the fruit.** 40 years from now, God would use the Romans to curse the temple and Jerusalem—to completely end any chance for Jewish fruitfulness. **He was removing the shadow and replacing it with what was real.** *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10.1-4*

### THE FIG LEAVES of Jesus | Clothed in Blood

**But God planned for their failure, and ours. In God's plan, faithlessness made a way for faith.**

Through faith in his death and resurrection, Jesus offers a permanent covering for our sin. We are no longer clothed in our own fig leaves that cover nothing, or even the temporary coverings God provided through piety, **ALL OF OUR NAKEDNESS is clothed in the blood and righteousness of Christ.** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10.19-22*

**Jesus accomplished that which the law never could**—the law could **cover sin, it could never produce righteousness.** Now, the law of God is written on our hearts. Jesus taught that the entirety of the law is summarized by two commands: **LOVE God and LOVE others.** This is a simple faith. It's no wonder that when Jesus tells Peter, "**Have faith in God**", he proceeds to characterize it by two things – **prayer and forgiveness**—one speaks to our relationship with God, the other to our relationship with others. **Is this the kind of fruit you have in your life?**

### CONCLUSION | Don't become unfruitful. 2Peter 2.3-11

Jesus said, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*" (John 15.5). **Faith in Jesus—connection to the vine—produces fruit like Jesus. God designed our faith to produce fruit—grace that saves is grace that moves.** A leafy fruitless life is not enough—Jesus judges this kind of unfruitfulness. If there is no fruit, regardless of appearances, **you are either still naked and blind or you have forgotten you are clothed.** Don't believe me, consider Peter's words: <sup>3</sup> *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

<sup>5</sup> **For this very reason** (because have been granted all), *make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*

<sup>10</sup> *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*