

Do you like confrontation? Some seem to delight in it, while others of us will go to great lengths to avoid it. Did you realize that confrontation is not always bad, and in fact, at times is essential? Jesus certainly modeled love, but at times, it was a love that confronted.

Last week, we began a new series entitled "The Passion Week of Jesus." I would remind you of the three objectives we spelled out for this study. 1) To grasp what actually happened to Jesus in the final week of His earthly life. 2) To appreciate more fully Who Jesus is, and what Jesus accomplished for us in the Passion Week. 3) To allow God to use this study to worship Christ more intelligently and devotedly at this Easter season.

In our first study, we looked at the Triumphal Entry of Jesus, which occurred on the Sunday prior to His crucifixion. In this event, we saw Jesus as King, and learned that Jesus' authority as king extends to three areas. As king, He has authority over His plan, over events, and over people. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey colt to the shouts of the people, and the waving of palm branches, He was making a public statement. He was indeed king--but not the type of king the people wanted and expected. He had not come to Jerusalem to conquer the oppressive Romans. He had come as a King Who would give His life for His subjects.

This morning, as we examine what Jesus did next, we'll see Jesus presenting Himself as a Judge. Our focus will be what happened to Jesus on Monday and part of Tuesday in the Passion week. In our series, we are using Mark's gospel as a guide to lead us through the final seven days of Jesus' earthly ministry. There are three scenes in Mark 11-12 in which Jesus acting as a Judge. In each episode, Jesus is displeased with what He sees.

As Christians, our highest aim is to please the Lord (2 Cor 5:9). How do we please the Lord? In part, by finding out and eliminating what displeases the Lord. What displeases the Lord? We'll find out next.

**Proposition: From the three scenes recorded in Mark 11:12-12:44, we discover three conditions which displease the Lord and which evoked His judgment.**

- I. The Lord is displeased with form in place of fruit (11:12-14, 20-26).
  - A. Jesus cursed a barren tree (12-14).
  - B. Jesus taught His disciples the importance of fruit (20-26).
    1. He gave a lesson in faith (22-23).
    2. He gave a lesson in prayer (24).
    3. He gave a lesson in forgiveness (25).
- II. The Lord is displeased with greed in place of godliness (11:15-19).
  - A. Jesus cleansed the temple worship (15-16).
    1. He stopped the abuse of worship (15).

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- 2. He stopped the disrespect of worship (16).
- B. Jesus corrected the people (17-19).
  - 1. We must approach God on His terms, not ours.
  - 2. We must not approach worship in a self-seeking way.
- III. The Lord is displeased with hypocrisy in place of humility (11:27-12:44).
  - A. Challenge #1: The Chief Priests, teachers, & elders (11:27-12:12)
    - 1. They challenged Jesus' authority.
    - 2. Jesus exposed their abuse of authority.
  - B. Challenge #2: The Pharisees & Herodians (12:13-17)
    - 1. They tried to trick Jesus.
    - 2. Jesus exposed their hypocrisy.
  - C. Challenge #3: The Saducees (12:18-27)
    - 1. They used doctrine to debate Jesus.
    - 2. Jesus exposed their error.
  - D. Challenge #4: A Scribe (12:28-34)
    - 1. He asked which command is most important.
    - 2. Jesus exposed the essence of godliness.

Note: Sometimes when we study the Bible, we "plow through" a few verses paying attention to minute details. This is not such a message. Our aim is to "climb to the top of the silo" and look out over a large section of God's Word, looking for general principles--in this case three...

#### I. The Lord is displeased with form in place of fruit (11:12-14, 20-26).

There's a world of difference between form and fruit. Form is external, while fruit is generated from within. Form impresses the eye but lacks substance, while fruit nourishes and provides lasting benefit. Jesus illustrated His displeasure with mere form in a vivid way in vv 12-14.

##### **A. Jesus cursed a barren tree (12-14).**

V 12 says, "And on the next day, when they were come from Bethany, He was hungry." Notice the setting. It was the "next day," that is, on Monday morning. Jesus was hungry--which reminds us that He was both 100% God and 100% man. As a man, Jesus felt real hunger and needed real food for nourishment. By the way, never forget that the pain of the spikes that tore through His ligaments which fastened Him to the cross was real pain. He had to suffer real pain. Why? Hebrews 2:14, 17 tell us, "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death...Wherefore, in all things, it behooved Him to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest..."

As Jesus was walking towards Jerusalem, something caught His eye. V 13 reads, "And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet." Here's the picture. A fig tree loaded with leaves but no fruit. That condition solicited Jesus' judgment in v 14, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever."

This incident has caused biblical scholars to pull their hair out. William Barclay comes to this staggering conclusion (269), "There can be no doubt that this, without

exception, is the most difficult story in the gospel narrative. To take it as literal history presents difficulties which are well-nigh insuperable." What difficulties? One, why would Jesus curse a fig tree for not having figs if it wasn't even fig season yet? Two, why instead of cursing the barren tree didn't Jesus simply do a miracle to make it produce figs? And three, why would Jesus do a destructive miracle for His own benefit when His other miracles are for the benefit of others (for instance, when hungry in the wilderness, He did not turn stones into bread).

These are good questions, but they reveal we've missed the point. What Jesus did to the fig tree WAS for the benefit of others. V 14 concludes with this, "And His disciples heard it." Jesus was teaching His listeners a most important lesson which was not entirely apparent until the next day.

**B. Jesus taught His disciples the importance of fruit (20-26).**

Notice that in His gospel account, Mark sandwiches the fig tree episode around the table-overturning episode in the Temple. Don't miss that. There are great similarities between what Jesus saw in the barren fig tree, and the type of religion He encountered in the Temple. We'll come back to the Temple scene in a moment, but for now let's observe the rest of the fig tree account.

Notice v 20, "And in the morning (Tuesday), as they passed by (heading from Bethany back into Jerusalem), they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots." Stop there. In less than 24 hours, the tree had gone from being full of foliage (and no figs) to being parched all the way to the root system. Peter noticed it, remembered Jesus' words on the previous day, put two and two together, and said this in v 21, "Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away." Peter was doing more than stating the obvious. He was looking for answers, "Lord, the fig tree is shriveled up just like you predicted, but how and why?"

Then came the lesson. Jesus is concerned about root issues. Don't forget this when we look at the temple scene. He's not impressed with fancy buildings and systems and titles. In fact, He is displeased with form when it takes the place of fruit.

What is it that pleases our Lord? He tells us in His response to Peter. Frankly, Jesus' response may seem a little out of place if we fail to remember the whole setting. In vv 22-25, Jesus gave three lessons on "fruit-issues."

*1. He gave a lesson in faith (22-23).*

V 22 "Have faith in God." The Christian life is a life of faith. We become Christians by believing in Christ, and we live it day by day the same way.

*2. He gave a lesson in prayer (24).*

Jesus used the fig tree episode to underscore the importance of prayer in the lives of His followers. "Whatever things you desire, when ye pray...(24)."

*3. He gave a lesson in forgiveness (25).*

V 25 "And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any." Now, what do faith, prayer, and forgiveness have to do with a cursed fig tree? These are the types of fruit Jesus is pleased with and wants to see in our lives. He wants us to be a people of faith, prayer, and forgiveness.

The cursed fig tree represents religious people, namely the Jewish leaders, who had impressive form but no genuine fruit. They should have been fruitful, but weren't. They should have exhibited faith, prayer, and forgiveness, but didn't. Jesus is no more

impressed with people who claim to be spiritual yet have no fruit than He was with a fig tree that had a lot of leaves but no figs.

Is there genuine fruit in your life? Are faith, prayer, and forgiveness real to you? Some people are all talk and no walk, all profession and no practice. Are you?

## II. The Lord is displeased with greed in place of godliness (11:15-19).

Watch carefully what Jesus did when He entered Jerusalem the Monday before His crucifixion. What did He do? Two very intentional, system-shaking activities in vv 15-19.

### **A. Jesus cleansed the temple worship (15-16).**

Mark recorded the first activity in 11:15, "And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves."

Notice Jesus wasted no time. On Palm Sunday (11), He went directly to the Temple, looked around, and left. Now we learn what His omniscient gaze saw.

On the back of your handout, you'll notice a sketch of the Temple area in Jesus' day. The Temple Herod built was a massive complex. It covered more than 30 acres, and was surrounded by great walls (Barclay, 272). Upon entering the Temple area, you first came to the Court of the Gentiles, followed by the Court of the Women, then the Court of the Israelites, and finally the inmost area known as the Court of the Priests. The incident in Mk 11 took place in the Court of the Gentiles.

God never intended for Israel to be a bucket that hoarded all His blessings. Israel was to be a channel through which God would work to bring the nations to Himself. But Israel failed. Take the Temple, for example. The court of the Gentiles was supposed to be a place where a God-fearing, seeking Gentile could come and find out about the true God. But do you know what the Jews had done with the Court of the Gentiles? They secularized it. They turned it into a business district. If a Gentile had visited the Temple and had seen what the Jews were doing there in the name of Jehovah, he would have been turned off. Just like Jesus was.

#### *1. He stopped the abuse of worship (15).*

In his classic book, The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis wrote, "The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid 'dens of crime' that Dickens loved to paint. It is not even done in concentration camps and labor camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clean, carpeted and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice." Too often, we're impressed by outward form. But externals can be misleading, eternally misleading. It was in the case of the Jewish, religious leaders in Jesus' day.

You say, "What were money-changers doing in the Temple?" They tried to make worship convenient. God commanded His people to bring animals without blemish to sacrifice. The Jews turned it into a business. They actually sold animals in the Temple. That made it convenient for people. They also had animal inspectors that were prone to "flunk" animals that people didn't buy at the temple. You guessed what happened. Sheer exploitation. Selling animals became a huge profit-making business for the priests. They could charge whatever price they wanted, and people had to pay. For instance, I read

where a dove cost 25 times as much inside the temple as it did outside (Barclay, 274), and also where a single merchant once offered 3,000 sheep for sale in one day! (Cole, 253) Jesus stopped this abuse of worship.

2. *He stopped the disrespect of worship (16).*

The Jews had cheapened worship in another way according to v 16, "And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple." Here's what had happened. The Jews were using the Temple court as a shortcut from the eastern part of the city to the Mount of Olives. Think of it! There was such disrespect for the worship of God that people actually cut through the temple to save time on business deliveries! Jesus put it to a stop!

Don't get the idea that this was a 60 second flipping of one table! Jesus was angry! He took drastic action to shut down the merchandising that day. Why? Because God's people had substituted greed in the place of godliness. Notice His second activity...

**B. Jesus corrected the people (17-19).**

Notice v 17 begins, "And He taught." Jesus used quite a visual aid that day! He also authorized His action by quoting from the Old Testament (Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11), "Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?" Two lessons stand out.

1. *We must approach God on His terms, not ours.*

We don't set the rules on how to please a holy God. He does.

2. *We must not approach worship in a self-seeking way.*

The Jews had turned the Temple worship into an ingrown means of greed instead of true godliness. Worship was self-seeking instead of God-seeking. Just look at the response of the so-called spiritual leaders in v 18.

Kent Hughes ask and answers a critical question, in his book Disciplines of a Godly Man (106), "Why do we worship--is it for God or for man? The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today's Christendom is that worship is primarily for US--to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment-focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance...The telltale sign of this kind of thinking is the common post-worship question, What did you think of the service today? The real question ought to be, What did God think of it and of those who worshiped? and What did I give to God?" Did you come to church today to get or to give?

III. The Lord is displeased with hypocrisy in place of humility (11:27-12:44).

God delights in humility (1 Pt 5:6). He despises hypocrisy. One thing that's obvious about the following exchange is that Jesus was not interested in soft-peddling the truth. Charles Spurgeon responded this way to the thought of compromising truth for popularity's sake, "What have you and I to do with maintaining our influence and position at the expense of truth? It is never right to do a little wrong to obtain the greatest good...Your duty is to do the right: consequences are with God." (taken from MacArthur's "Grace to You" letter, 2/21/95)

Beginning in 11:27 and all the way through chapter 12, Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Actually, they came to Him. Why? Because what

Jesus had done in the temple touched their billfolds and their pride. Four different parties tried to trick Him with 4 challenges. Let's survey the challenges.

**A. Challenge #1: The Chief Priests, teachers, & elders (11:27-12:12)**

1. *They challenged Jesus' authority.*

V 28 "By what authority doest thou these things?" How did Jesus respond?

2. *Jesus exposed their abuse of authority.*

V 29 "I will ask you one question." What was Jesus doing? Exposing their abuse of authority.

**B. Challenge #2: The Pharisees & Herodians (12:13-17)**

1. *They tried to trick Jesus.*

V 13 makes that clear, "And they send unto Him...to catch Him in His words." They asked Jesus a pretentious question about paying taxes to Caesar. How did Jesus respond?

2. *Jesus exposed their hypocrisy.*

V 15 "But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why test ye Me?"

**C. Challenge #3: The Saducees (12:18-27)**

1. *They used doctrine to debate Jesus.*

They conjured up this hypothetical scenario about a woman who was married to seven brothers who each died, and asked in v 23, "In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be?" The Saducees didn't even believe in the resurrection! Notice what Jesus did.

2. *Jesus exposed their error.*

V 24 "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?"

**D. Challenge #4: A Scribe (12:28-34)**

1. *He asked which command is most important.*

V 28 "Which is the first commandment of all? The scribes had developed an elaborate, legalistic system, and had detailed over 600 precepts a person needed to keep to be godly.

2. *Jesus exposed the essence of godliness.*

Jesus said there are really only two commands (30-31): Love God, and love your neighbor.

Obviously, we've hardly scratched the surface of these four challenges, but even so, one truth is perfectly clear. There's no question that the Lord is displeased when people substitute hypocrisy in place of humility.

Application:

This morning, we've learned what Jesus thought of the Jewish leaders and their worship. What would happen if Jesus were to enter our place of worship right now? What would He think of us? We need not wonder, for we've learned three conditions that displease Him. He is displeased when we substitute form for fruit, greed for godliness, and hypocrisy for humility.

The real question is this. Is YOUR life pleasing to the Lord? Do you know for sure that it is? "How can I know?" Let me ask you something. Do you WANT to please the Lord? Many people don't. They want to please themselves. But if you truly want to please God, then check three areas. Is there fruit in your life? Is there godliness? Is there humility? If not, repent today and experience the cleansing forgiveness of God.