

# The Greater Temple

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, thanks, Alex. Appreciate that. And welcome to everybody in the room. My name's Elliot. So good to be with you today here in God's house. We're going to be continuing our Mark series in a really interesting passage.

Excited to kind of bring it today. One quick housekeeping note. If you'll notice around in the four corners of the building today, we have set up communion stations.

So if you have been praying fervently to the Lord to be delivered from the prepackaged styrofoam-like wafers of Christ, this is your day of rejoicing. And so when we get to the end of the service in that moment and kind of have the moment of reflection, these stations will be available. So when you're ready, you can just go up and partake of that. And I think it'll be good to kind of get back in that rhythm. So when we get to that moment, that's what that's about. So again, to everyone in the room and those listening online, so excited to be with you today.

We're going to continue in the Gospel of Mark. And we're at a place where the pace is quickened and Jesus has entered Jerusalem and you can really feel the tension rising.

[ 1 : 09 ] So if you remember last week when Jesse preached, it concluded with Jesus made this triumphal entrance into the city and he went to the temple. And you kind of get the impression he wanted to do something, but it says it was late, so they left, right?

But obviously whatever was on his mind was weighing on him because the next day he's going to turn right around and head right back to the temple. And so that's where these passages are going to pick up today.

But before we jump into the Scripture, a quick note on the temple because I think to understand why this is such a big deal, a little history on that temple.

So it's kind of hard to overstate the importance and the place in the life and thought of the nation of Israel, this temple. So if you remember, since Israel has become a nation, God's presence has been with them in different ways.

And when they get into this land that God promised them, Solomon builds this temple and it's the place where God's presence is, right? Like they established this temple and it's the place where people come to draw near to God.

[ 2 : 20 ] It's the place where sin is atoned for. And it's got this huge place in the center of national life. Now unfortunately, not long after that temple's built, Israel starts this pattern of walking away from God.

And all through the next series of books, God keeps warning them that if you keep doing the things that are evil, then judgment is going to come and that judgment eventually does come and it winds up being both the ruin of the nation and that temple.

That temple is destroyed by an invading army and most of Israel is carried off into captivity. And when they come back, like when they're allowed to come back from exile, they start rebuilding this temple.

They start rebuilding the foundations of it. And that takes course over the course of several hundred years, different additions, really right before the events we see in the Gospels, there's just been another expansion by Herod.

But it's really important to think that like, there's a lot of history that happens in there. And during that period, the nation of Israel would have experienced things that prior to that would have been unfathomable, like things they just couldn't have even imagined.

[ 3 : 27 ] Alexander the Great, the Maccabean Reboa, the Romans rolling in and taking over. And like these were forces and things that, it would have been kind of like trying to explain to someone in the 1800s what was going to happen in the 1900s, right?

It's just large times of turmoil and kingdoms moving back and forth. And so you can imagine, if you're a nation like in those shifting sands, something like this temple really serves as like a center of kind of like national pride and hope.

You know, it's a call back to the people of God we were. So it's just got this really central place for them. But even more than that, it is still meant to be the house of prayer for the nations.

It's meant to be the place where you draw close to God and where you can have your sins atoned for. And so when Jesus is going to the temple, this isn't just some other impressive building in the city like you see in a lot of nations.

Like this is a really important central picture, like central thing in the nation. And so that's where we pick up the story. So in Mark chapter 11, verse 12, it begins with this.

[ 4 : 37 ] It says, On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry, meaning Jesus. And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. But 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 the disciples heard it. So really quick. So Jesus is on his way back to the temple.

But let's pause real quick and say, There's a really strange passage right here about this fig tree, right? And it's kind of interesting. It's odd in a couple of ways.

One, it seems odd in the text when you read it. It also, upon first read, it looks different than the types of miraculous things that Jesus does. We're going to read later in this text that after he says you're never going to bear fruit, that tree actually just withers away and dies.

And that seems like a really frivolous kind of thing, right? Like, you know, if you were hungry, and you were like, Man, I want me some orange. And you got up to an apple tree, and you were like, Why don't you have oranges on you? You know, and like, Seems like how we would react, right?

[ 5 : 41 ] Not how Jesus would react. And then thirdly, I would say this is one of those passages that frankly is just really difficult to understand if you don't have some broader contextual clues as to what's going on.

But it's a really important verse, so we're not going to skip it. Hold that thought. We'll get back to this fig tree, okay? But we get some clues in the rest of the passage, so let's keep going. And then they came to Jerusalem, and he entered the temple, and he began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the money changers 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, 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?

And the chief priest and the scribes heard it, and they 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.

And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to the roots. And Peter remembered and said, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered. And Jesus said to them, Have faith in God.

[ 6 : 53 ] 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 it shall 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 your trespasses.

This is God's word to us. So, Jesus has made his way back to the temple, and right out of the gate, something jumps off the page to us, and it's this.

Jesus is passionate about people coming near to God. So, if you'll remember from last week, when Jesse was teaching, there's been kind of a shift, like with the geographic change from Jesus being kind of in the northern, outlying regions, kind of nowheresville, and now he's come to kind of the center of urban and cultural life.

And as he's come to Jerusalem, the geographic change has actually brought about a change of kind of how he approaches things, right? So, up to this point, he's kind of been teaching in secret, he's kind of been doing things on the down low, but now that he's come here, it's just all out in the open.

[ 8 : 13 ] And so, like, private teaching has given way to very public confrontation. Can't hide it anymore, right? And so, again, you remember, he comes in here, whatever he saw bothered him, and now we learn that what he saw was that this place that was meant to be a house of prayer had really just become a place of commerce.

Like, it wasn't about God anymore, or it was about where can I put these things best to get a profit, right? And we're gonna talk a little bit more about what they were doing in a second, but you don't have to know all the details to know that Jesus is very grieved by it because the response he has is just different.

Like, we see a zeal and a passion that we really haven't seen from Jesus, at least not in this physical of a manner. There's kind of a physicality of this, right? He's throwing over tables, and we just haven't seen this intensity from Jesus, and that makes it really kind of stand out.

In one of the other Gospels, it tells us, not only does he turn the tables over, he goes and he finds some cords, and he makes a whip out of it, right? To, like, drive things out of the temple.

And if you think about that, that wasn't like, that was intentional. It wasn't like there was just a whip laying there, and he just kind of lost it and picked it up, and it was like, started slinging around. That was a controlled, measured, I'm going to come and make a whip and deal with this, right?

[ 9 : 35 ] So this isn't like rage or immaturity. Jesus knows exactly what he's doing here, right? And that's what makes this a really interesting verse. So let's look at it a little bit, and before we do, we probably need to lean into a little bit of tension right out of the gate.

So in our day, this verse gets looked a lot at by people who want to debate about things like, is it ever appropriate for a Christian to get angry, to speak harshly, to use physical violence?

And we kind of look at that and want to read into that. And the Bible has a lot to say about what makes God angry, what the anger of men and women look like, and that's certainly worth looking at. Those are important questions and debates. But the truth is, I don't think those are the primary reasons this verse is here. Like, that's not the main thing that the gospel writer has in view.

And really, wherever you land on some of those questions, I think the more important thing here is, what is it that's grieving Jesus? What is it that Jesus is actually getting angry about?

[ 10 : 43 ] Because if you're going to start flipping tables, the first thing you probably need to think about is this. We usually don't get angry about the same things that Jesus does.

So, when you think about what we get frustrated with and angry about during our daily week, there's a lot of nuance, there's a lot of things you can say, but I have found that most of the time when I'm angry, it comes down to one simple thing.

I want something, and something or someone is obstructing me from getting the thing that I want.

There is something that is providing obstruction or inconvenience to how I want life to go, and I feel very justified in being angry about it.

The examples of that are manifest, right? I mean, what are we talking about? Well, I mean, they call it road rage for a reason, right? Like, that's a low-hanging fruit. And I get it, you know, like, if you're driving and it's 55 and this guy's driving 55 and this guy's driving 55, you feel like you're caught in a purgatory that you'll never be able to escape, right?

Like, I understand that. But getting angry or insulting that person or trying to, you know, push them out, like, you know, just, you know, you know, like, letting that come out, is that really the same kind of thing we think Jesus would get frustrated with?

[ 12 : 08 ] We get frustrated, you know, because we go to a restaurant and the food doesn't come out as fast as we want or it's not as good as we want, right? And again, I get it. You know, you pay money, you're wanting some kind of service, but again, to get angry at everybody involved in that, is that, you know, you go to a sports game and, you know, the ref makes a call you don't like.

I mean, is that really because you're worried about the injustice of the universe or just, you know, because Johnny struck out? Like, I've actually found this one pop up. You know, so you, and most of you in the room know this even well better than I do, those of you that have children.

Like, you think you're a pretty reasonable human, a pretty calm and patient person until God puts some toddlers in your house. And then you discover not so.

And what I have found about that is even when my kids are doing things that are defiant or dangerous or things like that, a lot of the times when I get frustrated, if I peel it back and I step back, what I'm getting angry about isn't that I'm worried about the destiny they're setting for themselves or even I'm worried about them hurting somebody else.

What I'm really frustrated with is they are making my life harder right now than I want it to be, right? Like, we're trying to go to church, not the time to dump water on your head, right?

[ 13 : 28 ] But I get angry about that. But that's not what we see here. So before we talk about what Jesus is doing, I would just say, when you feel anger, you should always stop to consider, am I angry because of something like that?

Or is this truly something unjust, unrighteous, something that has stirred from the heart of God and that grieves him? Because there are so many verses in Scripture that frankly talk about how you need to get, you need to let God lead you out of a place of anger.

Do not be angry. Don't let anger overcome you. In your anger, sin not. Like the Bible has a lot to say about the types of anger that fallen people bring to the table.

So you might say, but we do see here that obviously there's something that moves Jesus' heart like that. And I think a good question if you're going to be a follower of Jesus is, okay, so then how will I know when it's appropriate, right?

Like how will I know when my anger is something that's something that God is prompting? And man, that question honestly is as broad based as your entire life of discipleship following Jesus.

[ 14 : 43 ] But I think I can simply say this. When you start to care about the things that Jesus cares about and you start to see the things that Jesus sees, you're going to start to feel the things that he feels, including the things that it's worth passionate, being passionate about changing.

And you get some clues like throughout the Gospel of Mark, what have we seen? Like there's been plenty of words where Jesus has been grieved or indignant or here, you know, again, frustrated or angry.

And the types of things we saw were where people were putting obstructions in the way of people trying to get to God. That frustrated Jesus.

When Jesus sees the effects of what sin does to his precious people, that makes him angry. When Satan tries to do something to hurt his sheep, that makes him angry.

Like those are the kinds of things that Jesus does. And that's what we see here in the temple.

People, it's the place where people are supposed to come close to God.

[ 15 : 48 ] And remember, in this old covenant, it's like here's where you had to do it. Like this is the place you come close to God. And while they're doing that, in this covenant, you would need sacrifices, right?

And obviously, it wouldn't be inappropriate to provide that, but what people have done is really take advantage of that need. Like take advantage of people trying to draw close to God and set up their wares in the place that's most economically advantageous and then take advantage of them, you know, maybe price gouging, whatever they were doing.

They've set up in this place that was intended to be a house of prayer and they've made it a noisy market. And the place they've set up, this temple, this court actually has an outer court where even Gentiles, even non-Jews can come, but how are you to come close to God when all you see is the same thing that the rest of the world does, right?

Trying to make a dollar. And Jesus is going to have none of this because he's passionate about people being restored to God. And so he drives them out.

And whether we're comfortable with it or not, that's what he does. He says, get out of here. This is not what this place is for. And when he does that, I think it shows us something beyond just the way he feels about it.

[ 17 : 07 ] Like by doing that, what Jesus is showing is he has the authority to do it. He's showing he has the authority to come in and cleanse this place.

That's why it makes the people who are in charge of it so mad. You're not allowed to do this, but Jesus does it. He kicks them out. Jesus has the authority to prune things that are unfruitful.

And that's kind of where we learn that Jesus isn't afraid to prune things that are unfruitful. So about that fig tree that we saw on the way coming down.

It's not coincidental that that is the picture image. That's the thing that happens on his way back to the temple, right? So he's got what's going on in the temple in his mind and he's heading down there. And on the way down he's hungry and he sees a fig tree.

Now this is the thing you've probably got to know about this. So even though it's not the season for figs, it is the time of year when it would have been unusual for a fig tree to start to be in full leaf, right?

[ 18 : 08 ] Like in some places it might have even had like young figs on it, but it's a tree that has started to look like it has life and fruit on it, right? It's the leaves of it proclaimed to the world around of it.

They offer the promise of fruitfulness and life. And Jesus on his way is hungry, right? And it's like this picture of you're hungry for fruit and life and there's this thing that offers it and then you get to it and there's nothing.

It's a mirage. I think all of us can probably think about some things in life that are like that, right? That offer the promise of life but when you attain it it's a mirage. And he's doing that against the backdrop of going down and what he's thinking about this temple and we see that this fig tree is really a picture of, you know, a fig tree and leaf is making a promise that it can't fulfill and so too is it with this temple and what's going on down there.

I think in a lot of ways this actually looks to me like in the Old Testament a lot of times when God uses prophetic imagery like when he sends a prophet to Israel he'll have him do something that is kind of just a picture image, right?

Like he'll say, look, I want to talk to people about what's going to happen in this city so I want you to take a pot and I want you to tell them that because of what they're doing judgment is coming and I want you to smash the pot and I want you to say that's what's going to happen like it's kind of a picture image to what's going to happen and so I think this looks a little bit like that to me and actually this isn't the first time that something like this has happened with the temple and you got to think this might have been in Jesus' mind let's look back at Jeremiah chapter 7 real quick so during that period when Israel had started to rebel against God God kept sending people to the nation to say even now if you come back if you repent I'll restore you but if you keep going how you're going judgment is going to come and we've reached the point where it's really reached ahead and it says this in Jeremiah 7 the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah stand in the gate of the Lord's house the temple and proclaim there his word and say hear the word of the Lord all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship thus saith the Lord of hosts the God of Israel amend your ways and your deeds and I'll let you dwell in this house but don't trust in these deceptive words this is the temple of the Lord the temple of the Lord the temple of the Lord for if you truly amend your ways and your deeds and you execute justice with one another and you don't oppress the sojourner and the fatherless or the widow or shed innocent blood in this place and if you don't go after other gods to your own harm that I will let you dwell in this place and the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever but behold you trust in deceptive words to no avail will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely and make offerings to Baal and go after other gods that you haven't known and then come and stand before me in this house that is called by my name and say we are delivered only to go on doing these same abominations has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes wonder what Jesus was thinking about when he was walking down to the temple that day you see back here in Jeremiah a proud nation had come to the place where they thought just because they had the temple they could do anything they were viewing the temple like a talisman or a lucky charm we've got the temple this is the house of the Lord and they were doing wickedness in it and it was cut off and now we see this same thing with the second temple the barren fig tree is like that barren temple the old covenant the way that people are supposed to draw close to

[ 22 : 19 ] God is not producing the fruit and Jesus is coming to declare he's cleansing it to make way for a new covenant and here's the thing Jesus isn't pruning this he's not pruning what's happening in the temple because he despises it he's doing it because he's come to fulfill!

the promise of it that's why he's here and really even this teaching on prayer at the end of the passage points to that right so you know there's this whole passage where they go back and they see the fig tree is withered and Jesus kind of looks like he gives them some pointers on prayer there and the truth is you really could probably preach a whole sermon just on good notes from that section like helpful things in prayer like the idea of if you want to move close to faith in God you need to walk in step with his spirit and part of that is to forgive like he forgave right like you can't be harboring unforgiveness and sort of see the flow of God part of that could be you know learning to ask God for faith like when there are mountains in your life right like things that seem impossible like trusting that the God who created who spoke worlds into being can actually move that stuff I mean again there's all kinds of things you could say there but I think for today's message and this kind of whole passage here it's really important to in mind right because this passage goes like they

go back and they see the fig tree and

Peter's like hey man that fig tree that you cursed it's dead cool and Jesus said I mean effectively Jesus response when he says have faith in God is that's not really impressive that's not really the impressive thing like you think that's something if you had faith like if you walked in a life the faith of the father you could see mountains moved but I think here Jesus probably has a really particular mountain in mind because of where he is and what's been going on in this passage right because to Jesus what he's really saying to them is the withering of a fig tree is not the really impossible thing that's not the really amazing thing the amazing thing would be to be able to make a tree that can produce no fruit produce it again why is Jesus in Jerusalem what did he come here to do what has he been telling his disciples now for several chapters what is the thing he's been saying to them that they have been really unable to accept and really just haven't understood why am

I going to Jerusalem I am going there to die that's why I'm going there and in that I think we see the real lesson here which is Jesus is the fig tree that was cursed for us because at the end of the day this isn't just a story about a fruitless nation or a fruitless temple or a fruitless system it's about us it's about us being the ones that can't bear any fruit and never could we're the ones that deserve to be pruned but Jesus is the one who was pruned he comes to be a curse to be made a curse so that we would not be cursed so that the thing that was impossible can be made possible and when he does that he makes it possible for a new covenant like a new way for people to draw close to God and after Jesus comes and dies and is risen back to life it just like we start talking about like where's the temple now the Bible starts talking crazy like God lives with you like in the temples that are his people in his bride like Jesus made like you couldn't do that you couldn't enter that holy place in the old temple without atonement and now God can come near to us he's truly made way for like a better reality spoiler alert you want to know what happens to this temple so later in the book of Mark we're going to see after Jesus is crucified it says when he dies there's a whole lot of stuff that happens and one of the things that happens is the temple like the curtain inside there that was representative of that separation between the holy place of God and where his people are it's torn in half signifying that blockage that is no longer there and the glory of

[ 27 : 25 ] God departs that place it is an empty temple and they try to go on with it for a little while but just a few short decades later that entire temple is torn to the ground by the Romans every stone of it is pulled down and it is never rebuilt that temple the doors to that temple are shut and you cannot go in by it but the good news of the gospel is the way back to the father has never been more open that's what Jesus has come to do he has taken that curse so that we can find mercy that we can find acceptance and we can be let in the band comes up today if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus maybe one of the things you felt or you thought in your life is there's no possibility of restoration for me my life and what it's been and what it's become and what

I've suffered like there can't be any fruit in that again this Jesus this passage shows us Jesus has made that possible Jesus is in the business of restoring things that no one else can in the book of Joel God says to his people this he says I can repay you for the years that locusts have eaten whatever you think is lost can be made whole again and if that's appealing to you at all if there's anything inside you that wants that come to him you can do that right where you are you can come up front like this place of worship this altar is open there'll be people to the side of the stage Jesus is calling he has welcomed you with open arms he has made it possible to come back to the father wherever you are for those of us who are followers of

Jesus I think the thing that sticks out to me in this verse is am I passionate about these things about people coming to God in the way Jesus is and maybe like as you like this happens a lot in these days particularly when there's shifting sands in our society you look around and you say there's so much evil out there there's so many things that are just so wicked and maybe there's a part of you that really is like man I wish like Jesus I could just throw all that out of the temple you know I wish I could drive some things God doesn't want you to ignore or be passive about evil things but here's the harder question this is the more difficult question am I willing to suffer in the way that Jesus suffered to see it made whole because it wasn't that whip in the temple that saved us it was Jesus submitting himself to a humiliating death on the cross that was the thing that bought our freedom and if we really want to be people that see people come to God that see the world changed if you want to see the world saved then you have to walk in the footsteps of the one who came to save it and I'm not trying to be coy here that is a hard thing to accept as the whole world as things come against you to say I'm willing to suffer and die to see!

it made whole but maybe there that's fine that's why we come to God's house to come before him and say you know father that's not the person I am and I don't get angry about the things that you get angry about I get angry about trivial things and I do damage to the people around me that's not who I am that'll be open to you as well let's go ahead and stand together as we take communion today communion again is an act that testifies that that we share in Jesus' death but also in his life that we get to enter into the father because of his body and blood if you're not a believer of [ 32 : 36 ] Jesus communion is not your next step like the first thing you need to come and accept that Jesus will make clean he'll restore you he'll forgive you for the things that need to be forgiven but for those of us who follow him who call Jesus our Lord this is a moment to ask him to minister to you to be here in a real way it's not just this symbolic act it's this moment of coming before him and saying Jesus I want fellowship with you and I want to be like you and through these representations please right now in your spirit minister me nourish me change the things in me that can be changed so we just take a minute to examine our hearts maybe there's something that God has spoken to you that you need to confess!

or ask him to help you with and he welcomes that with open arms so we're just going to take a moment to do that and then when you're ready no rush you go to the table you partake before a savior that loves you father thank you for being with us today thank you for going the entire way to make it possible to come to you that we don't come to you through the stones of a temple we enter in your spirit can be can strive with us because we have been made righteous God that you would bring your spirit and convince us of that in this moment we ask that in Jesus name amen amen amen