

## 好一棵枝繁叶茂、郁郁葱葱的大树——马可福音 11:12-20

### What a Nice-looking Tree Full of Showy Leaves—Mark 11:12-20

#### *Introduction and Outline*

- Scripture reading: John 2:13-17; Luke 13:1-9; Mark 11:12-20

**Mark 11:12-20** (NASB 1995)

**12** On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. **13** Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went *to see* if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. **14** He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples were listening. **15** Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; **16** and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. **17** And He began to teach and say 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 robbers’ den.” **18** The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. **19** When evening came, they would go out of the city. **20** As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots *up*.

- Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the temple are actually one event, because the temple *is* that fig tree. **The kind of superficial religious worship centered around the temple at that time is like the leafy but fruitless fig tree that Jesus cursed.**
- Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree is a destructive miracle, while all other miracles are constructive. Jesus did it as a parable to illustrate what is awaiting the Jews and all superficial and false worshippers. While other parables are fictional stories, this parable is uniquely a real-life enacted lesson.
- Outline:  
Title: What a Nice-looking Tree Full of Showy Leaves—Mark 11:12-20
  1. The Parable: Cursing the Fruitless Fig Tree (vv. 12-14, v.20)
  2. The Reality: Judging the Fruitless False Worship (vv. 15-19)

#### **The Parable: Cursing the Fruitless Fig Tree (vv. 12-14, v.20)**

- “He became hungry”: This shows Jesus’ true humanity. Obviously, he didn’t have breakfast in the morning. Whenever there’s a big event, Jesus always gets up to pray before dawn, seeking strength of wisdom from above. Verse 11 says Jesus “came into the temple and [looked] around at everything...”, what he saw in the temple made it impossible for Him to sleep or eat peacefully. He may have stayed up all night, praying.
- “Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf”: There’re two weird things about this fig tree: 1. It had leaves but no fruits; 2. It had so many leaves when it’s not even the season. Fig trees grow fruit and leaves

simultaneously, and sometimes fruit even appears earlier. So, when you see a lush, leafy fig tree, you can assume it is laden with fruit.

【Spiritual Insight 1】 Perhaps when God first created the fig tree, He already had this spiritual analogy in mind. The normal process of spiritual growth is to first bear fruit in the inner life, which then leads to outer expressions of a godly life. Before bearing fruit, one had better not show much appearance on the outside. A leafy fig tree with no fruit is extremely abnormal.

【Spiritual Insight 2】 Since it was 'not the season for figs,' it isn't too strange that this tree had no fruit. What's truly strange is the abundance of leaves. If there is neither genuine worship nor fake appearance, it won't be too bad; the worst thing about false worship is that its fake showy appearance makes the undiscerning who see it marvel in awe, saying, 'Wow, this must be the kind of life that's filled with devout worship!' As a result, people follow and copy such superficial practice, and that's how Judaism became such a big leafy tree with no fruit.

【Summary】 Rather be judged by man as not appearing pious enough, than to be judged by God as having deceptive appearance!

【Application】 If you know your spiritual life is lacking, do not accept any significant service invitation just to be nice, especially those up-front things seen by others. Of course, we want to see brothers and sisters serve more, but we never want anyone to go beyond the capacity of their spiritual life. Some say, 'Dream big dreams for the Lord! Don't settle for small things!' I say, 'Be content with doing the smallest things for the Lord.' Beware of the dream-big mindset. Dream only according to the size of your spiritual life; otherwise, you'll easily fall into the temptation of growing leaves without bearing fruit.

- “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!”: This is a curse, which Jesus rarely spoke. This fig tree aroused His holy and righteous anger because it's such an accurate picture of the overall condition of the Jews (c.f. the similar parable in Luke 13:6-9, where Jesus gave the fig tree 'three years.' Now, three years have passed, and the Jews still have not borne fruit).

### The Reality: Judging the Fruitless False Worship (vv. 15-19)

- “He entered the temple”: The temple was the most magnificent architecture in the world. Its centerpiece was a tall-standing majestic-looking building filled with splendid decorations inside. Outside were layers of courtyards: the inner court, the women's court, and the court of the Gentiles. If only the activities inside were quiet prayers or orderly worship, it would definitely be an awe-inspiring place.
- “...and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple”: Sadly, the scene inside the temple was a total marketplace. Religious leaders made much money from it. There were bleating sheep, mooing cattle, cooing doves, and clinking coins. In such an environment, who could focus on worshiping and seeking God? So, in righteous anger, Jesus drove out the money-loving merchants.

**Malachi 3:1-2** “And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple...But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.”

- “He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple”: The Greek for “merchandise” refers to any everyday life items, not goods for trade. Historians say some even used the temple court as a shortcut to get in and out of the city, passing directly through it.

【Principle to consider】 Although we emphasize that God is omnipresent and not confined to any physical building, does this mean we can be totally casual in church and do whatever we want, bringing all sorts of daily trivialities into the church?

【Further principle to consider】 Though the church isn’t the temple, the underlying principle remains the same. The New Testament says the bodies of Christians are temples because the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Therefore, what we seek, what we focus on, and what we avoid in every moment of our lives should be guided by this principle. When our lives become a noisy marketplace filled with worldly concerns, we cannot find any quiet corner to focus on seeking and worshiping God.

- "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations": Quoted from Isaiah 56:7. In Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple, he asked God to hear the prayers of all people there (c.f. 2 Chronicles 6:18-42). The temple in Jesus' time completely failed to fulfill this purpose.
- "You have made it a den of robbers": Quoted from Jeremiah 7:11. Jeremiah was speaking of Solomon's first temple, and Jesus says the second temple is the same, having become a place where robbers hide and divide their spoil. The religious leaders of that time were indeed a band of robbers!

【Connection】 What about today's church? 1 Timothy 6:5 clearly says there are those in the church who see godliness as a means of gain. Undoubtedly, some churches as a whole have become dens of robbers. Have you heard of pastors who charge for prayers? Five thousand for liver cancer, eight.....

【Consequence】 God destroyed the temple that had become a den of robbers. The first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians; the second was destroyed by the Romans. Today, standing in the very place of the temple is a golden-top mosque, which serves as a reminder of God’s judgment on false worship.

【Anticipation】 The prophecy about the temple in Isaiah 56:7 is **still awaiting fulfillment**—In the future glorious restoration of Israel in **the millennial kingdom**, the temple will truly become **a house of prayers for all nations**. Ultimately, in the eternal new heaven and new earth, the temple will no longer be a physical building, but **God Himself will be the temple** (Revelation 21:22).

【Now】 The New Testament says **Christians are the temple of God**, and that **the church is the temple of God**.

**1 Corinthians 6:19** “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God...”

**1 Peter 2:5** “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

【Application】 By the salvation of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are the temple of God, a house of prayer for all nations. **Our entire lives should be saturated with God-centered prayers, with worship, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication to Him.** That’s why the Bible commands us to pray for everything (Philippians 4:6) and to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), because we

are the temple, a house of prayer for all nations. Wherever we go, whatever we do, our hearts should be in close communion with God.

【Reminder】 Be careful about being one person in the church and a totally different person outside. When Christian couples argue at home over trivial matters just to have it their way; when Christian workers overload themselves just to maximize their worldly gain—these are like bringing oxen, sheep, and doves into the temple. The temple is meant for prayer of all nations, and the entire life of a Christian should be one of prayer, worship, and seeking God. **Do not let your temple become a den of thieves.**

### **Summary**

*A pastor says “Let us always remember, that baptism, and church-membership, and reception of the Lord’s Supper, and a diligent use of the outward forms of Christianity ... They are leaves, nothing but leaves, and without fruit will add to our condemnation. ... We must bear fruit, or we’ll be lost forever. There must be fruit in our hearts and fruit in our lives, the fruit of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and true holiness in our conversation. Without such fruits as these, a profession of Christianity will only sink us lower into hell.”*

What is true spiritual fruit? Let’s review:

**Galatians 5:22-23** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

**Please remember: These internal spiritual qualities are the true fruit we must strive to bear by the Holy Spirit.**