

The Confrontational Jesus *Mark 11:15-24*

Good morning.

Charles Wesley wrote a Hymn titled, “*Gentle Jesus.*”

Part of the lyrics read, “*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child; pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to Thee.*

Lamb of God, I look to Thee; thou shalt my example be: thou art gentle, meek and mild.”

Jesus Himself said in ***Matthew 11:28*** ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

Matthew 11:29 ***Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. NKJV***

My Question: “*If Jesus is known as gentle and lowly in heart, was He acting out of character when He cleansed the Temple?*

Can a gentle and lowly in heart Savior of the world become so passionate about something, that He could get angry?

Please open your Bibles to the ***Gospel of Mark 11*** as we continue in a verse-by-verse study of that Gospel.

Last week in ***Mark***, Jesus left Jericho and headed toward Jerusalem, and as they approached the Mount of Olives, He sent two of the Disciples to go and retrieve a foal of a donkey.

Notice the paradox here. Jesus is the Sovereign Lord who is in control, but He uses earthly things to **fulfill** His sovereign plan.

Unlike an earthly king, Jesus entered Jerusalem in total humility.

The Promised Messiah first visited the earth as a **suffering** servant to pay for our sin, before taking His throne. This was also a fulfillment of other prophecies about the Messiah.

But the Disciples didn't understand Jesus was not coming as the physical king to fight Rome, but instead, as the **King of Peace!**

Then we saw how Jesus cursed the Fig Tree.

The Fig Tree was a picture of Israel not fulfilling their call from God. When Jesus came to the nation there were leaves, which speak of a **profession** of faith, but they did not bear fruit.

We asked, "*Does the Lord **need** anything from His creation?*"

Jesus is the Sovereign Lord who is in control, but He uses earthly things to **fulfill** His sovereign plan.

Today, we will learn about the second time Jesus cleansed the Temple and we will learn more lessons about the Fig Tree.

I. Overturn the tables.

Read *Mark 11:15-19*

This is second recorded cleansing of the Temple by Jesus; His first cleansing is only recorded in *John 2*.

The first time Jesus cleansed the Temple, at the beginning of His public ministry three years earlier, happened after His first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

John 2:14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.

John 2:15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

John 2:16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" NKJV

Mark 11 describes Jesus' second cleansing of the temple, which occurred just after His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, days before His crucifixion.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, the crowds were loud, the city was shaking, and the Romans heard all the commotion in the city, from the Antonia Fortress.

This Fortress was a military barracks built by Herod the Great.

At this time Rome was occupying Israel, however, Rome allowed Israel to retain some independence over civil and religious matters, as long as it didn't interfere with Roman rule.

The Pharisees were afraid of losing the little power they had, and they were unwilling to submit to Jesus as their king.

The crowds were expecting Jesus as their king, to march over to the Antonia Fortress and confront the Roman occupation...

Jesus entered Jerusalem and confronted the bigger issue for His people as He headed toward the Temple, they had **defiled** God's house, their center of worship.

The **rebuilt Temple** was first constructed after the Babylonian Exile, but then it was expanded and remodeled under Herod the Great. That is why some called it Herod's Temple.

During the remodel, a Court of the Gentiles was built which was separate from the rest of the Temple, by a gallery.

During the Passover feasts, the Temple priests set up stalls in this gallery area for visiting people, which included stalls for sacrificial animals and money changing.

The people visiting the Temple were required to bring an animal to be sacrificed. If they traveled a long way, they could buy a sacrificial animal at the Temple, rather than bringing an animal.

If a person lived near the temple, they would want to use their own animal to sacrifice. However, most times the Jewish leaders would find a blemish or another reason to disqualify the animal.

Also, when the Jewish people would make their pilgrimage to visit the temple, they were required to pay a Temple tax, which was equivalent to two days wages.

But there was a catch,

The Temple tax had to be paid with **Temple** money and anyone from outside of the area needed to exchange their currency.

The money changers at the temple were allowed to charge a fee for their services as well as charging ridiculous prices for the animals that were to be sacrificed.

With both the selling animals for sacrifice and exchanging of the money for the temple tax, there was a lot of business going on.

Thousands of people, some who didn't know God, and others who only knew Him under the Old Covenant, were going to go to the Temple to worship the Lord.

When the visitors got there, it was like a garage sale mixed with a rock concert. But the religious leaders tried to say these activities made it **more convenient** for those visiting the Temple.

D. A. Carson said, "*Sadly, convenience and consumerism define a significant chunk of modern church culture in America.*"

The Temple went from being a place to meet with God, to a mockery, where the Jewish leaders were out for personal gain.

The actions of the money changers were a hinderance for people meeting with the Lord, rather than helping people worship Him.

Jesus saw these abuses and immediately responded; not gentle like a Lamb, but instead, He corrected the religious leaders.

After Jesus witnessed the abuse of these people in the Temple, He flipped over the tables and drove out the money changers.

By cleansing the Temple, Jesus was exercising His **authority** as the Son of the Father, who owned the Temple.

Jesus repeats what was spoken of through *Isaiah* the prophet...

Isaiah 56:7 Even them, I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." NKJV

Jesus went into Jerusalem on a donkey, and was called the Messiah; here, Jesus condemned these practices and called God His Father, which *John 5* says, this made Him equal with God.

We can only imagine the contempt and anger of the religious leaders towards this itinerate Rabbi named Jesus, at this time.

Jesus had the heart of a shepherd and when He recognized His sheep being abused, He acted with righteous anger when the religious leaders were **hindering** people from coming to God.

II. The roots of the Fig Tree.

Read *Mark 11:20-21*

Last week, when we read about the Fig Tree, we said, these particular fig trees **would never** have leaves, without also having figs; so, this tree was a picture of **false** advertising.

Jesus saw this Fig Tree, with a lot of leaves and approached the tree expecting to find it loaded with figs, but it had no fruit!

The Fig Tree was a picture of the nation of Israel, so when Jesus came to the nation, there were leaves which speak of a **profession** of faith, but the nation did not bear fruit for God.

Here, as Jesus and the Disciples pass this same tree, it is withered away from the roots.

The withered Fig Tree is a picture of Israel having no fruit. Israel's roots had *withered away*, as they **disconnected** themselves from the True and Living God.

The Apostle Paul said in *Colossians 2:6*, *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,*

Colossians 2:7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. NKJV

Because Israel was far from the Lord, this disconnection from God led to lifelessness and the problem began with its roots.

Ephesians 3:17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Ephesians 3:18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height —

Ephesians 3:19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I don't know a lot about trees, but I have learned a little bit that I would like to share with you this morning.

Maple trees, Beech trees, willows, pears, elms, and birch trees, are all known to be shallow root trees.

Trees that have shallow roots are typically found in places where there is plenty of water near the surface. They never have to grow deep roots, because they never had a lack of moisture.

There are **two problems with trees that have shallow roots:**

1. They require constant watering.

Unlike deep rooted trees that have water constantly flowing through them; these trees need constant watering.

2. It doesn't take much to blow them over.

Most of us would probably admit that we like it when life is easy. We don't want to struggle.

We avoid pain and conflict whenever possible. We prefer peace and success. We like it when life is easy, and we only deal with surface issues; like a tree with plenty of water near the surface.

Unfortunately, times of peace and success do little to prepare us for the kind of work God has in mind. God usually won't use believers with shallow roots, He wants us to dive in deep.

He doesn't call us so that we could sit passively by, soaking up His blessings, He calls us to minister to others.

As His followers, Jesus has called us to bear fruit, but you can't bear **good fruit** with a shallow root system. Our enemy will do everything in his power to uproot us and blow us over.

If our roots are only surface deep, we won't last very long.

When we were new believers, He put us near the surface to help us grow quickly, but as we mature in Him, Jesus wants to grow **our roots** deeper.

In order to help us, He takes our water supply deeper and deeper so that we have to press into Him, every day.

Most of our Growth comes during those times of struggle and persecution.

As persecution takes place in our lives, it can be painful, scary, and incredibly frustrating; but growth through persecution is an **essential** part of our spiritual growth with the Lord.

Through trials, God develops a root system in us; to sustain us during the dry times and maintain us during the stormy times.

We need to grow deep to be able to stand in this dark world.

Although the gift of grace is all that is needed to obtain salvation in Christ, there are some habits we need to maintain in order to grow deeper with the Lord.

The Lord gave us the Bible as an instruction manual for how to grow and mature in our faith in Him. We were also given a direct communication line with the Living God, through prayer.

We can't grow in faith if we are distracted from our relationship with the Lord, so we need normal times of devotional studies and prayer with the Lord, to hear from Him and grow!

Accurate beliefs are essential to a deepened life with God because they involve us in God's work, they empower us to love people, and they focus on the message of Jesus Christ.

Through the Word, prayer, and by the Holy Spirit, we can put down deep roots to withstand the winds of change, trials and fear; so, we can be strong enough to stand during difficult times.

We need roots that go deep into the heart of God Himself.

III. The kind of faith that works.

Read *Mark 11:22-24*

In our narrative, the Disciples were surprised at how the withering of the Fig Tree happened so fast.

Jesus explained this miracle was really the result of **faith**. Faith is **trust** in what the Lord has already promised in His Word.

Faith is not a force; faith is trusting the Word of God.

Some people misunderstand these words of Jesus, believing that if someone simply believes enough, and confesses what they want enough, it will come to pass.

Some people take these words of Christ as a blank check to be able to obtain whatever they want to have, but faith is not about enlarging our kingdom, it is about His will being done in us.

Jesus was actually describing the person who follows the will of God, will ultimately move mountains as they affect the world around them for Christ's Kingdom.

I heard a story about a man who was mad at the church because he asked the church to pray for a healing that never happened.

Warren Wiersbe said, *“This promise of God’s answer to the prayer made in faith was made to disciples, not to the multitude.*

*“Nor should we interpret **Mark 11:24** to mean,*

*“If you pray hard enough and really believe, God is **obligated** to answer your prayer no matter what you ask. That kind of faith is not faith in God; rather it is faith in faith, or faith in feelings.”*

Notice, *“**Whoever says to this mountain, “Be removed”:***

A mountain was a figure of speech for insurmountable problems; Jesus said if we trust the Lord, God can overcome any obstacle we may face.

William Barclay said, *“The phrase about removing mountains was a quite common Jewish phrase. It was a regular, vivid phrase for removing difficulties.”*

Jesus is saying mountain-like issues, which hinder God's kingdom, can be moved by trusting the Lord.

Christ followers can face issues in their marriages, issues while parenting, in our jobs, our finances, our extended families.

There are many mountain-sized obstacles in life, but the Lord said we can be confident in prayer for every one of those issues.

Matthew Poole said, *“Nothing is too big for true faith to obtain, but that faith must have a promise to lean upon.” (Poole)*

This passage sounds a lot like what Jesus said in *John 14*.

John 14:12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

John 14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. NKJV

David Guzik has said, “*This promise of God’s answer to the prayer of faith was made to disciples, not to the multitude. This is a promise to those who are following Jesus.*”

Jesus was telling His disciples, the way to get things accomplished according to God’s will, is to pray, in His name.

Notice Jesus said two things in *John 14:13*, **whatever you ask in My name**, **that I will do**, **that the Father may be glorified in the Son**.

Some folks say, “*I have prayed about something for a long time, and it has not come to pass.*”

The question is: *Was the prayer according to the Lord’s will and was it for His Glory?*

J. Vernon McGee has said, “*To pray in His person (the name of Jesus) means to be **standing** in His place.*” *Psalm 37:4*

In other words, as we pray in His name we are representing Him; so not our will be done, but His will to be accomplished!

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. NKJV

So, notice first we are told to *delight ourselves also in the Lord*, and then *He shall give you the desires of your heart*.

This means to be fully identified with and joined to Jesus Christ.

If we are seeking Jesus' will, while having Christ's motivation in our prayers, then we will receive affirmation to our prayer.

We have no right or privilege to go before a Holy God on our own and Jesus has no duty to hear or answer our prayers.

We are granted citizenship and the privilege of coming before God, because of who we are in Christ. We pray in Jesus' name because it is the **only** entrance we have to come to the Father.

Jesus said in *John 14:13*, "I will answer those requests that my Father may be glorified. When we present our request to God, we should ask, "Does this request bring Glory to the Father?"

IV. Practical Application.

I will paraphrase an article that listed 6 times Jesus got angry.

1. Jesus got angry with the human sinful condition.

In *John 11*, "***Jesus wept***" because He was so overcome by the human condition, and because of the death a friend; so He wept.

What made Jesus mad? The human sinful condition because Jesus feels empathy for what we are facing.

2. Rules being placed over people to appear self-righteous.

The Pharisees valued adherence to the law, over caring for people, which is not what God intended. Jesus was mad at rules and outward appearances that kept people from Him.

3. Kids Being Pushed Aside. Jesus was mad when kids were prevented from coming to Him.

4. Self-Righteous Judgmentalism (i.e., Religious Phonies)

Jesus was mad when religious leaders pretended to be holy, while ignoring the sinfulness of their hearts.

5. Making it difficult for people to come to the Lord.

Jesus loves everyone, so keeping people from having access to Him and making it difficult to get to God, makes Him angry.

6. Selfish Ambition. Jesus was more interested in what was in people's hearts than what they portrayed outwardly.

Jesus was mad at people doing the right things, but for selfish reasons.

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. NKJV

Can a gentle and lowly in heart Savior of the world become so passionate about something, that He could get angry?

Jesus' anger was usually directed towards the religious leaders and sometimes even at His followers. But Jesus did not show selfish anger, even at the things that were done to Him.

Jesus was angry when people were kept from coming to or finding the Lord. When the religious leaders would try to **hinder** a seeker from finding the Lord, Jesus became angry.

Jesus' mission was to leave heaven and come to earth to seek and save the Lost. The false religion of the Pharisees was actually hindering people from finding a relationship with God.

Jesus wants to flip the tables over on these six areas of religiosity. But Jesus also wants to offer Himself as the Gentle Jesus, to all who truly seek Him.

The kingdom is open for all, who will by faith, accept the free gift of righteousness, given us by Jesus Christ. Jesus created us to have a **personal** relationship with Him!

As His followers, we should always make it inviting for people coming to Jesus, finding eternal life and forgiveness in Him!

We are not talking about sloppy grace, but an authentic meeting with Jesus, who will then change the seeker's life for real.

2 Corinthians 5:17 if anyone is in Christ, they're a new creation

Jesus is always willing to forgive people who have a broken and contrite heart over their own sinfulness; but He will not stand for those who get in the way of others wanting to come to Him.