Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Nothing but Leaves
Scripture: Mark 11:12-21
Code: 41-57

Open your Bible to the eleventh chapter of Mark, the eleventh chapter of Mark. Before us is a monumental day in redemptive history, the history of the world, God's history. It is a serious day and it is a profound day because it is on this day that our Lord Jesus pronounces a curse, essentially, on the temple in Jerusalem. That curse extended beyond the temple, to the leadership...religious leadership of Israel, therefore encompassing Israel's religion and all who were part of it, who essentially made up the whole nation. It is, in effect, a curse on the nation, the Covenant chosen and blessed people of God are here cursed.

It is Tuesday of Passion Week. On Saturday He arrived in the vicinity of Jerusalem at the town of Bethany, about two miles to the east over the Mount of Olives. He stayed there on Saturday with His friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus whom He had a few weeks before raised from the dead. On Sunday He remained in Bethany and crowds of Jews came out of the city of Jerusalem that had gathered there for Passover and heard He was in Bethany and wanted to see Him and wanted to see the man who had risen from the dead, Lazarus.

So Saturday He arrives in Bethany. Sunday He stays there. Crowds come to see Him and to see Lazarus there. On Monday, He enters the city for the week of the Passover. And last week we looked at that and identified it as the false coronation of the true King. At the end of that day, according to verse 11 of Mark 11, He went into the temple and He looked around. And He didn't like what He saw. He had been there many times in His life. Three years before this, at the same kind of Passover season, He had assaulted and attacked the temple and He would do it again. But in verse 11 we find out that He is checking it out to plan His action for the next day. It is then Tuesday, in the morning He is returning with His disciples to Jerusalem and to the temple.

He comes not as the King of Israel to attack Rome, He comes as the King of righteousness to attack the temple. Verse 12 picks up the story. "On the next day when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. 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. He said to it, 'May no one ever eat food from you again.' And His disciples were listening. 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 and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. 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.' 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. When evening came, they would go out of the city. As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'"

This is the only destructive miracle in the gospels, the destruction of the fig tree. It is a parable, an analogy, a metaphor, an illustration of the coming destruction of the temple. It is a preview of judgment and a prediction of judgment. In fact, this whole passage that I read you has two components: the fig tree component and the temple component, but they both are previews of the same thing. The fig tree is a prediction to the destruction of the temple bu analogy. And the assault on the part of Christ is a preview of the destruction of the temple by action.

Now the temple sits at the heart of Judaism. And the curse that comes on the fig tree and thus on the temple demonstrates for us that God is not pleased with the temple. God is not pleased with the leaders of the temple. God is not pleased with the people who come to the temple. In a word, God is not pleased with Israel and the temple is the heart of Israel. If the temple is corrupt, the nation is corrupt. This temple was a massive, massive edifice. Before it was finally completed, it was under construction for 80 years, actually over 80 years. Let me give you a little history of the temple.

Genesis 22. Abraham is told by God to go to a very specific place, Mount Moriah, and there to offer Isaac, his son, as a sacrifice. When he gets there, both his father and son dutifully follow through on what God commands, but God spares Isaac, provides a lamb and a lamb is sacrificed on Mount Moriah. That is a very special place where that symbolic sacrifice was made because 900 years later, around 988 B.C., David purchased Mount Moriah from Ornan, that is recorded in 1 Chronicles 21, David buys this piece of land that juts out and is the peak on the east side of the great city of Jerusalem.

Six years later, his son, Solomon, begins to build the temple there, the place where sacrifices such as the one God provided in Genesis 22 will continue to be made. Solomon builds this great unparalleled building called the Temple. Its description is found, of course, back in 1 Chronicles and 1 Kings. It is a monumental feat of construction, overlaid with gold and all kinds of precious things in tribute to God.

Three hundred years later, pluse350, Babylon destroys that temple, levels it to the ground and plunders everything that's valuable. Why? Because God uses Babylon to bring divine judgment on false religion. Israel is apostate. The Judaism is corrupt. The people are corrupt. The leaders are corrupt. The priests are corrupt. Jeremiah says the shepherds are corrupt. The prophets are corrupt. The nation is therefore corrupt and because of idolatry, sin and unbelief, the great massive first temple is destroyed.

Seventy years later, the people come back from captivity. The want a temple. They are enabled by Zerubbabel to build a very modest temple, nothing like Solomon's temple. And in 515 B.C., that second temple, as it is called, is finished, according to Ezra 6:15.

A few hundred years pass. Antiochus, pagan ruler, warrior, desecrates the temple. He does it by putting a statue of the god Jupiter inside the temple, thus paganizing it and by doing something he knew would infuriate the Jews, he slaughters pigs on the altar. That second temple is thus desecrated. There's a modest revival of temple worship three years later under a man named Judas Maccabees, but the religion continues to apostatize. No more idols since the destruction of the first temple, but apostasy, false religion, hypocrisy, superficiality, false worship continued to prevail in that second temple.

Twenty B.C. comes along, a great king by the name of Herod, an Idumaean king decides that he will be the man who will build the temple. And so we get the third temple which was really a kind of overhaul, an expansion of the second temple. From 20 B.C., to 64 A.D., about 84 years, he builds that temple. Seventy A.D., six years after it's finished, the Romans come and smash it to the ground, leaving not one stone left on top of another and plunder it again as it had been plundered in the past. The stories of the temple is the story of Israel's repeated cycle of apostasy. He built the temple to worship God. You dedicate the temple, you dedicate yourself, you fall in to false religion, hypocrisy, superficiality, pretense and God brings judgment and the judgment comes at the point at the heart of Israel at the temple. The nation falls, but the temple is crushed. Once by the Babylonians, again it is for all intents and purposes, desecrated by Antiochus and again by Titus Vespasian, the great Roman general in 70 A.D. And as you well know, there has never been a temple in Jerusalem since.

Will there be? Yes. There will be a temple in the time of the Tribulation. We read that in Daniel chapter 9 verse 27, that will be again desecrated by the Antichrist who will commit there what is called the abomination of desolation. So there will be another attempt at worship that will be judged. And finally, there will be a fifth temple and that temple will be a temple full of glory, that is the temple described in Ezekiel 43 as the temple of the Messiah in the Millennial Kingdom. You could pretty much track the history of Israel by the story of the temple.

So what we have here is a preview of the destruction of the third temple. Two aspects of this text. One, the curse previewed and portrayed in analogy and two, the curse previewed and portrayed in action. The analogy is the fig tree. Let's look at it.

Verse 12, "On the next day when they had left Bethany, He became hungry." He left the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus where He would go each night to rest and sleep. In the morning He leaves, He's hungry. What...no breakfast? Probably not. He was probably up very early praying, that was His pattern. And this was the week of all weeks. This is evidence of His true humanity. He's

coming in to the city. He knows He's got a formidable day ahead of Him. What He is about to do is going to take a great measure of human strength and human energy and He needs food. He's hungry. He's on His way back. His heart is racing with the passion that He feels for the desecration of the temple. He knows He is going to go into that temple and take action, as evidence of God's curse and coming judgment on that temple forty years later, 70 A.D. He feels the hunger. He comes as the Son of God, full of divine wrath. He comes as the Son of Man, hungry.

Seeing at a distance in verse 13 a fig tree in leaf...now I'm going to stop right there and say that...that was a good indication of what He would expect because in the case of fig trees, the fruit comes first and the leaves come second. The fruit comes first, the leaves come second. The fruit that first appears on a fig tree comes in March and April, and that would be this time of year, Passover. It should have had small fruits, very immature but edible, according to Hosea 9:10 and Hosea 28:4. They could be eaten when one was particularly hungry.

The harvest, the season for figs referred to in this verse is mid August to October. That would be when they would be in full fruit and fully mature. But if there wee leaves, there should be some edible fruit because the fruit comes before the leaves. And so He sees the tree in leaf. He has a right then to expect fruit. He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it.

Now I just remind you, fig trees were everywhere in the land of Israel. This would be perhaps a fig tree growing by the side of the road, as opposed to a farmer's fig trees growing somewhere in his own private property. In fact, fig trees were everywhere. Numbers 13 says that when the spies went into the land of Canaan to check it out, came back and gave a report. One of the things they reported was the land is full of treasures, and among the treasures were the fig trees. According to Deuteronomy 8:8, they were everywhere in the land of Israel and they could grow very large, 20 feet high, 20 feet wide. And you remember Nathaniel in John 1:48 was sitting in the shade of a fig tree.

So our Lord had a right to expect some fruit, even though it wasn't the full season for fruit yet. So He approaches the tree. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves. And that really becomes a title for this message. "Nothing But Leaves." False hope, pretense to fruit.

His response is a parable...a parable. "He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.'" Matthew reports to us because Matthew reports on the fig tree. Matthew says "He said, 'Let no fruit grow on you from now on forever, therefore, may no one ever eat fruit from you again.'" He basically pronounced a curse that killed the tree. That's why I say, it's the only destructive miracle in the gospels.

How do you know it's a curse? Verse 21, "Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'" The tree had the appearance of fruit but it had none, not the reality, it was a false profession. And this is a graphic illustration of the pretense of temple worship...religious

leaves but no fruit, hypocrisy to the max. Our Lord expands on this, you remember, in Matthew 23 when He speaks to the leaders of Israel and says, “You hypocrites, you hypocrites, you hypocrites,” over and over and over throughout that entire diatribe recorded n Matthew 23. He addresses the hypocrisy of Israel’s religion.

The whole temple operation was nothing but leaves. The temple is there for cursed which means destruction is pronounced on it, damnation is pronounced on it and it came in the sweeping assault of the Romans forty years later. This needs to be tied in, this parable of the fig tree, with another parable of the fig tree that our Lord gave in the thirteenth chapter of Luke. In Luke chapter 13 verse 6, He began telling this parable, “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it and didn’t find any. He said to the vineyard keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any, cut it down. Why does it even use up the ground?’ And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too until I dig around it and put in fertilizer. And if it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, cut it down.’”

There’s another parable of Israel, a fruitless fig tree. And the Lord says I’m going to cut it down. And the plea is made, “Give it a little more time.” Well a little more timer has passed and there’s been no change and there’s been no repentance and there’s been no turning to Him and so the parable of Mark 11 picks up where the parable of Luke 13 ends. The temple is at last and finally a fruitless pretense of worship. That means that Judaism is spiritually bankrupt. The whole system and the nation with it engulfed in that system is cursed by God. That’s why I say, this is one monumental day.

And the disciples, it says, were listening, verse 14, they were listening. What were they thinking? Well I asked myself, what would I be thinking? What would I be thinking? I might be thinking of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.” But I might also be thinking Old Testament thoughts like Deuteronomy 28 that Israel’s disobedience, Israel’s idolatry, Israel’s unfaithfulness would produce curse after curse after curse after curse. From Deuteronomy 28, you remember when they first came in the land and the blessings and cursings were pronounced and they were told what the future was going to be based on whether they obeyed or disobeyed. You remember from Deuteronomy 28:15 on its curse, after curse, after curse, after curse, after curse, after curse on their disobedience, the disciples probably were processing that very familiar threat when they saw Him curse the tree and therefore cursed the temple and therefore cursed the nation.

The direct application of the curse is to the temple, but it expands to the temple leadership and the temple participants and thus to the nation and becomes very personal...very personal. Paul says they had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. They made a fatal flaw. They didn’t worship idols, that wasn’t what they did, that’s what caused the destruction of the first temple. And an idol caused the destruction of the second temple. The destruction of this temple is not about idols, it’s about thinking you can establish your own righteousness, Romans 10.

So, you see the curse portrayed and previewed in analogy. Secondly, the curse portrayed and previewed in action. “Then they came to Jerusalem and He entered the temple.” Matthew adds, “The temple of God...the temple of God,” to give a clear contrast between the ungodly activity that was going on there. He was not going to attack Rome. He was not going to elevate Israel, like the populace would have wanted Him to do to fulfill their messianic expectations. Rather He set to assault Israel and to assault Israel right at its heart where the judgment of God seemed always to fall when it came in cataclysmic form on the temple and from the temple reverberates to the nation.

Now remember, according to John 2:13 to 17, He did this to begin His ministry. Here He is doing it at the end which means in the middle He was trying to call them...listen...to true worship...true worship. His whole ministry and all that concerns Christ and all that concerns God, listen, is focused on one issue and that issue is worship...worship. “The Father seeks, John 4 says, true worshipers to worship Him in spirit and in truth.” “The Son of Man came to seek for the Father those true worshipers.” The church is made up of those who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ, and give no confidence to the flesh, Philippians 3. We are true worshipers. This is a very important point to make.

Our Lord walks through the world and was absolutely aware of everything. To what degree He exercised His omniscience, we don’t know. He put some restrictions on it occasionally. On other occasions it was clear that He knew things that couldn’t be known if He wasn’t God. But I’ll promise you this, He could make an assessment of His day.

And a deeper pone than anybody else could have made. Do you think He found disturbing realities in His life? Do you think He found in the town that He grew up in and in the nation that He lived in and among the people that He interacted with every day inequities, injustices? Of course. Nothing escaped Him. He saw every disturbing reality. He saw every successful criminal campaign among the tax collectors, who were basically stealing money from the people under sheer threat of life and limb. He saw that inequity. He saw the abuse of the poor who were deemed in the theological system to be under the curse of God and therefore to be left that way. He saw the terrible plight of the sick and the infirm who also were deemed to be under divine judgment and to be left that way as if they were Hindus and saying this is their karma. He saw all that.

And I’m sure there were many things that called for social reform and many things that called for political action. They needed reformers to take care of those things. They needed soldiers to protect people from criminal conduct. But He never addressed any of that, none of it. He didn’t talk about societal reformation, didn’t talk about political changes. He didn’t talk about changing the situation for poor people and for ill people, sick people. Was He disturbed by it? Sure, everything that wasn’t righteous disturbed Him. But He never deviated from a true and dominating issue that occupied His entire life and that was worship...that was worship. A man’s relationship to God was the issue with Him and nothing else ultimately could ever be corrected until that was corrected. Worship was always

the issue.

And so, He went to the temple at the beginning. He went to the temple at the end. And He confronted the corruption of Israel's religion all three years in between. When the temple is corrupt, it's because the leaders are corrupt. When the leaders are corrupt, the people are corrupt. When the people are corrupt, the nation is corrupt. If it's bad in the temple, it's bad everywhere. And I say to you in a general sense, the measure of any society is its worship. You cannot judge a people by their economic status. You cannot judge a nation by its economics. God doesn't. You can't judge a nation by its social equity. You can't judge a nation by its concern for protection of people from harm. That's superficial. You judge a nation by its worship. That's how God judges. And it's worship that determines eternal destiny.

The Lord always goes to the temple, to the heart of worship. That is why Peter said, and he got it, maybe he learned it this day, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." I think Tom got up this morning and said, "This is the house of God." Judgment always begins with the house of God.

Certainly I don't claim any reality in this, but people have wondered through the years why I get so exercised about what's wrong in the church. Because that's where judgment has to begin and anyone who is a true representative of Christ and wants to represent Christ has to represent Christ on behalf of the purity of his house. Our Lord found that the temple was a place of hypocrisy and blasphemy. He always goes to the heart of a people's worship.

Think about it in terms of our nation. Nothing will protect us from the judgment of God, nothing...economic, social, nothing...nothing will protect us except a right relationship to God. Anything less than that, all the rest doesn't matter.

So, He entered the temple. Now where would He have gone when He entered the temple? Well He would have gone in one of the gates and then the temple is a series of layers rising up to the top of Mount Moriah. At the very top of Mount Moriah is the *naos*, the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, the pinnacle, the high point, surrounded by a wall. Only the high priest goes in there once a year. Then, sequential courtyards go down the hill, lower than the *naos* at the top. First is the Court of the Priest where they offer the sacrifice. Then the Court of the Israelites, then the Court of the Women, then the massive, massive Court of the Nations, or Court of the Gentiles which is where He would be this time, would hold hundreds of thousands of people, a massive place. And there would be all kinds of shops there, the bazaars of Annas they were called because the priests made money. They were in commiseration with business people, people who provided the goods for them. They needed oil and wine and salt for the sacrifices and they needed animals for the sacrifices. So they had these vendors and they split the profits.

This place was a buzz. It was a cacophony of noises made by people and animals and He went into it and it says He began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple and overturning the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. First of all, those buying and selling were buying and selling animals. There were people who were bringing their animals in, they were being bought and then they were being sold to the people who came to offer sacrifices. It was a scam of the rankest kind because if you brought a sacrifice from home, let's say you brought a lamb without blemish and without spot from your own flock, and you brought that to the temple to give as a sacrifice, there would have to be a priest who would pass the animal. All the priest had to do was say, "This animal doesn't pass." The animal is not good enough for sacrifice and you would be required to buy an animal from the vendors inside the temple at ten times the price.

Then, you would also be required to have the half shekel temple tax in a certain kind of coinage and pilgrims came from all kinds of nations when they came in for the Passover, and if you didn't have the right kind of coinage, you would have to exchange your coins and the mark up was...according to one historian...at least 25 percent. If you were poor, you could give a dove as a sacrifice. According to the provision of God's Law in Leviticus 12, poor people could give a dove. And doves in their economy would sell for five cents at your local town but if you bought one in the temple, they say it would be four dollars. This is perversion, prostitution, travesty, extortion, monopoly, just a horrendous operation...noise, traffic. It was anything but a house of prayer. Jesus went in and just ripped into all of this. He started driving out the people buying and selling, the people bringing in their animals and taking them out.

I told you last week, there could be as many as a quarter of a million animals...lambs actually, slain in a Passover, we have a record of that in ancient records. There would be animals all over the place. Rejected animals, accepted animals, He drove them all out. And then He overturned the tables. He started kicking over stools on which the money changers sat, thrown over their tables, scattering their money everywhere, debris flying all over this massive courtyard with hundreds of thousands of people in it and throwing over the stools that the dove sellers were sitting on. Every crook, every exploiter of the poor, and all the rotten Sadducees and priests that oversaw the operation fell under His attention and His authority.

Pretty amazing when you think about it. It's a fulfillment of Psalm 69:9 as it says in John 2, "Zeal for your house has eaten me up. The reproaches that fall on you are fallen on me."

What strikes me is how does one man do that? And if you're looking for the Wow factor, it's here. He had the power, the strength, the stamina, the authority, the dominance to do this and no one could stop Him. This is a mighty display of power. Move over, Samson. In fact verse 16, Mark tells us, He wouldn't permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. Of course, the buyers and sellers were coming and going all the time and there are some historians who say that people had made...the ones that come from the east, found coming through the eastern gate would be a shortcut,

and so coming into the city of Jerusalem, they would actually come through the eastern gate and right across the temple area, just carrying their goods into the city, whatever they were doing, moving merchandise, Jesus stopped them dead in their tracks, halted the entire operation. Kicked over stools, crates, tables, stopped people, brought everything to a halt, basically evacuated the place of all these people.

It wasn't orderly. It would be full of debris everywhere. It wasn't a cleansing. It was a cursing. Later on in this same chapter, verse 28, the leaders say, "By what authority do You do this?" Which begs the question, "By what power are You able to do this?" This is like Daniel in the lion's den. The lions can't hurt him. They out number him. They're far more fierce than he is, they can't touch him.

Why did He do this? Why did He do it? If the people aren't responding to His three years of ministry, why does He do this? He does this to demonstrate His holiness. He does this because He has zeal for His Father. He does this to demonstrate, vindicate righteousness and justice. And in that, sends a warning of what is coming.

I think Luther took a lead from our Lord. You know, Luther was a very strong enemy of the Romish church. And if anybody in church history ever overthrew the money changes, he did it when he stopped the indulgences. That's the heart of Christ when the church is corrupt. The Lord hates those who pervert worship. Sure there are lots of things that weren't right and they were wrong, lots of things in society you could fix. But the Lord hates those who pervert worship and the Lord loves those who seek to be true worshipers. We could cry out to the Lord today and say, "Would You do the same in Your church? Lord, please come and throw out the buyers and sellers from the church." He did this in accord with Old Testament scripture, verse 17, "He began to teach and say to them," this is what He taught, this would be just a couple of sentences out of what must have been much more full exposition of these two passages, He uses two Old Testament texts, "Is it not written?" a formula for referring to the Old Testament, often used by our Lord. "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." That's right out of Isaiah 56:7...Isaiah 56:7. Let's just break it down. "Is it not written, 'My house...My house.'" That's why Matthew calls it the house of God, or the temple of God. This is My house. "My house shall be called a house of prayer." It should be a place of prayer. That's what it was for, quiet place, a meditative place.

I love what it says in Psalm 27 where in verse 4 David says, "One thing I've asked from the Lord and that shall I seek that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of My life." Why? Why do you want to go there? "To behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple." It was a place to go and contemplate God, contemplate His majesty, contemplate His glory, meditate in His temple. That would require a quiet place.

Psalm 65, "How blessed is the one whom you choose and bring near to you to dwell in your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple." Wow, a place of goodness, a

place of holiness, a place of quietness, a place where in 1 Samuel Hannah could go. Remember that story? Find a quiet place in the temple and cry out in prayer to God. This was no place for that. You couldn't meditate there. You couldn't pray there. You couldn't contemplate, you couldn't think about God, you couldn't receive instruction about God. All that was gone in the dirty business of making money in the temple.

Furthermore, it's not just a house of prayer but a house of prayer for all the nations, for all the nations. That's right, from its beginning it was designed for everyone. You see, Israel got the notion that they were the sole recipient of God's blessing and the truth is, they were called to take the truth of God to the ends of the earth. But they grew to hate the Gentiles. They had a Jonah attitude. They didn't want to go to the Gentiles, they didn't want the Gentiles to believe. They didn't want the Gentiles aligned with them, worshiping the same God. That was the history of Israel. That's why the church...one reason why the church came into existence, because the people God had chosen to be His witness nation in the world failed to witness, wanted nothing to do with the nations. They are set aside, the Lord carves out a new people made of Jew and Gentile, the church, and we take the gospel to the ends of the earth. That's the Great Commission...to do what they refused to do. From the very beginning when the temple was completed, it was to be a place of worship for all the nations.

Let me tell you something you should probably understand if you just think about it. Where else would Gentile go in the Old Testament? Where else would a Gentile go to find God? Didn't have a temple on his own land. Where would he go? It was the only place where Jew or Gentile could go. In 1 Kings 8 when the prayer of dedication is given before God, Solomon talking about the temple, he says in verse 29, "Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day toward the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there.'" He's saying to God, keep Your eyes on this place, God, keep Your eyes on this place, so listen to the prayer that Your servant shall pray toward this place. Listen to the supplication of Your servant, Your people, Israel, when they pray toward this place, hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive," is a house of prayer. That's where you go when you want to pray. Your prayer may be a prayer of adoration, of worship, it may be a prayer of petition, it may be a prayer of repentance. But it's a house of prayer.

But down in verse 41 it also says this, "Not only for Your people Israel, also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your namesake, for they will hear of your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm." That's the time when Israel was saying we understand our responsibility to tell the nations the truth about the true, the only God and they will hear and they will come and they will pray and when they pray hear in heaven Your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You."

It was always to be a house of prayer for all the nations because where else would the nations go? There was no other place on the planet. And he says, "Instead, You have made it a robbers den," that's right out of Jeremiah 7:11, right from that verse, Jeremiah 7:11. Jeremiah is predicting the

judgment, the Babylonian captivity in the destruction of the first great temple and its coming has this house which is called by My name become a den of robbers in Your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the Lord. The first judgment came because of the desecration of that place and turning it into a den of robbers. All along highways, robbers held up in caves, they would leap out of the many caves in Israel and they would rob and plunder. That's what this place has become, instead of a place of quiet and prayer, a place of plunder and robbery.

Well, that's why He did what He did, pronounced this horrific judgment. "The chief priests in verse 18, and the scribes heard and began seeking how to destroy Him." Boy, their anger is getting escalated. It was escalated on Monday because of the crowds. It's even more escalated now because of what He's done.

"However, they were afraid of Him for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching," or as Luke puts it, "was hanging on His words." The crowd was interested in listening to Him. The crowd probably, silently cheered His action in the temple because they were the ones being abused. And the leaders were panicked because of His popularity. They were afraid of Him because His power was greater than theirs, His authority was greater than theirs, His words were greater than theirs, His influence was greater than theirs, His popularity was greater than theirs, and jealousy and envy and fear of being rejected by the people and losing their position caused them to want Him dead. And that's very important because He needs to be dead by Friday to die the Passover Lamb on the Passover Day.

So, He keeps teaching these few days and this escalates their hatred because it demonstrates His popularity. Luke 19:47 says that He goes on teaching. Matthew 21:14 even adds that some people came to Him and He healed them. I told you the miracle in Jericho with the two blind men is the last specific recorded miracle our Lord performed, but there are these sort of postscript, non-described miracles that occurred even this week at the temple. This escalates the stakes for the leaders and they're going to have Him dead.

Verse 19 says, "When evening came, they would go out of the city." That's kind of every evening they would go back to Bethany. "As they were passing," verse 20, "by in the morning," this is Wednesday morning, "They saw the fig tree withered from the roots up, rotten from the core. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'" They put it together.

From the core...that's the temple. Cursed from the core, kill Judaism at its core, its temple. Peter's comment is the affirmation that what our Lord had cursed will be destroyed.

What about worship then? What about worship? Well the destruction of the old system started on Tuesday. It continued on Friday. When the temple curtain between the outer area and the Holy of Holies was ripped from top to bottom, that was a destructive act again by God and it was finished 40

years later by the Romans. What about worship? What about worship?

True worship is possible, not at the temple, but only at the cross...only at the cross. Only through the cross, there is no other place to go.

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