

## Falling Down on the Job (Mk 11:12-25)

Sunday Morning – July 7, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

### INTRODUCTION:

- Show “you had one job to do” memes - **Israel also had one job to do:**
- **Read Ex 19:4-6**
  - o (1) be a kingdom of priests who represent God to the world
  - o (2) be a holy nation that lives according to His rules
  - o (3) obey His voice and keep His covenant
  - o (4) do this because you love Him, because of all He’s done for you
  - o (5) go back and tell this to everyone, and see if they agree
- They weren’t doing so well; in fact, **they were failing in every way possible**
  - o compare Ex 19 to Mk 7; **does this look like success!?**
  - o they were falling down on the job
- This is a judgment passage about Israel’s failure:
  - o (1) how they’d perverted God’s system and ruined it,
  - o (2) destroying the souls of untold thousands of their people
  - o (3) it wasn’t a deliberate perversion; it was an accumulated mission drift that took hundreds of years to make happen;
  - o (4) tradition had crusted over the *Tanakh* like malevolent barnacles on a ship’s hull
- What can our congregation learn from this passage, so we can **avoid** making these same mistakes, or **stop** making them altogether?

### TEXT:

#### 1. The fig tree (v.12-14)

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. 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 his disciples heard it (Mk 11:12-14).

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- Mark doesn't tell us what this means
- Some people have problems with Jesus and the fig tree
  - o (1) They say Jesus is "mean" to curse a tree, and it's a pretty cheap and careless thing for God to do
  - o (2) Muslims often use this to say Jesus isn't divine – how could he be God if He didn't even know the fig tree wasn't ripe yet!?
- **So, what's happening, here?**
  - o If you see this as an enacted parable, then there's no problem
  - o **EX:** Ezekiel digging through the city wall and carrying his belongings into "exile" (Ezek 12)
- The fig tree is meaningless in and of itself, but it represents something else – **but, what?**
  - o (1) Jesus is hungry
  - o (2) He sees the fig tree, full of leaves and looking like it has something tasty to offer
  - o (3) When He gets to the tree, He realizes it's all a sham – the tree doesn't have any fruit
  - o (4) Jesus curses the tree, **"if you won't produce for me, it's over for you!"**
  - o (5) He said and did all this deliberately, so the disciples could hear it
- **So, what's the deal?**
  - o (1) something in this passage looks good and tasty on the outside,
  - o (2) but, it's really just a sham once you get up close and look at it,
  - o (3) and because of this, Jesus says, **"I'm done with you!"**
- **What's the sham? What's the deceptive thing that looks great, but's really worthless?**
  - o Well, what happens next in Mark's letter?
  - o Jesus goes to the temple!

## 2. The temple (v.15-19)

- Here is what happened:

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And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and 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 (Mk 11:15).

- You can't understand Jesus' actions unless you understand what's happening inside the temple:<sup>1</sup>
  - Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians
  - When the Persians let the Jews return from exile, they made a second one – rougher, plainer than the first (Ezra 3:12)
  - Herod the Great started expanding the second temple in about 20 B.C., and it wasn't finished – it'd been under construction for about 50 years (sort of like I-5 in Tacoma!)<sup>2</sup>
  - He'd kept the dimensions of the original, but had built up all sorts of stuff *around* it – the complex was the size of 35 football fields
    - Gentile courtyard and surrounding
    - Women's courtyard
    - Israelite men's courtyard
  - By Jesus' day the Romans appointed the Jewish high priest, which had become a political position that was controlled by a certain Sadducean family – with Annas as the shadowy “Godfather” figure behind the scenes
  - The Jewish Council had started allowing animals to be sold to pilgrims inside the temple courtyard, so they could buy them when they came to sacrifice at Passover (a “Passover pickup” *ala* Walmart!)

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<sup>1</sup> For the background on the activities inside the temple in Jesus' day, I am heavily indebted to Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (reprint; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 1:365-376 (original text) and 252-260 in the reprint.

<sup>2</sup> See Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.11 and Alan J. Hauser and Earl Kellett, “Temple, Herod's,” in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016).

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- For many years, these markets had been on the Mount of Olives - why is it a good selling point to bring the market right into the temple?
  - The same reasons why Walmart pickup is so much more convenient than shopping inside the store!
- How could you be sure your animal was “unblemished” and fit for sacrifice?
  - The market’s in the temple; the priests could pre-inspect everything for you! No fuss or hassle!
  - USDA Approved = “Levite Approved”
- What do you think merchants had to do to get a booth reserved inside the temple market, and get the pre-inspection stickers for their animals?
  - They had to pay ... a lot!
  - This was big business; perhaps 250,000 animals would be sacrificed at Passover (people grouped into companies of 10-20 and bought a communal sacrifice)
- Who do you think they paid, so they could use the temple?
  - The “treasury” (aka high priestly family)
- Passover (and Pentecost, following) was the most important day in the religious calendar; as many as 3,000,000 Jewish pilgrims might come into town for Passover<sup>3</sup> – how would you exchange your money?
  - Well, what could be more convenient than having an exchange counter *right there*, in the temple!?
- How many vendors and moneychangers would you need to service an influx of over 3,000,000 people in one week, most of whom need to exchange their money and buy a Levite-approved animal to sacrifice?
  - A lot! An awful lot!
- It’s almost as if this Sadducean family needed a huge, flat, controllable area where they could pile in more vendors and moneychangers,

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<sup>3</sup> See Josephus (*Wars*, 6:422-427 and 2.280) for respective estimates of 2.7 and 3.0 million Jewish pilgrims at Passover in 65 A.D.

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charge more fees, and collect more money for themselves ... like the temple courtyard!

- This is what this could look like for an average Jewish pilgrim, coming to Passover from his home in Corinth:
  - o (1) come to city
  - o (2) go to temple
  - o (3) exchange money
  - o (4) walk four paces, buy pre-inspected animal for his group
  - o (5) walk four more paces, hand animal to priest, go through quick ritual
  - o (6) leave temple, duty over, party starts
- Do you think this is what God had in mind when He instituted Passover, just before He rescued them from Egypt?
- Do you think this setup contributes towards reverence, awe and thankfulness to God?
  - o It seems like this setup is designed to make somebody a whole lot of money
  - o and it doesn't seem as if God is anywhere within 500 miles of this arrangement!

And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple (Mk 11:16).

- To make matters worse, people were using the temple as a shortcut into the city so they wouldn't have to go around

And he was teaching them and saying 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 den of robbers," (Mk 11:17).

- This verse tells us why Jesus was so upset

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- He cast the vendors and the moneychangers out, and began to teach the crowds *why* He did it, **and what was the reason?**
  - The temple is *supposed* to be a place for people who love God from all nations
  - Instead, they've turned it into a bazaar; a circus; a den of robbers
- This entire operation, this carnival bazaar, is taking place in the Gentile courtyard – the only place where Gentiles can come to worship God
  - **(1)** How well do you think they can worship God when this carnival is taking up their space?
  - **(2)** What kind of message do you think it sends to the Gentiles when you set up a bazaar in their worship area?
- Everything is backward, everything is not how Isaiah 56 said it should be, and the Messiah is in front of them and *nobody cares!*
- Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 – **why did He do it?**
  - **(1)** vv.1-2: keep justice and do righteousness
  - **(2)** vv.3-7: God loves outsiders:
    - **“these 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 peoples,” (Isa 56:7).**
  - **(3)** v.8: God's family is larger than Israel:
    - **The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered,” (cp. Jn 10:16)**
- The religious system Jesus sees in front of Him doesn't match what God's word says - **what happened?**
  - The entire system, **the entire religion**, has become a shell game to most of the leaders and most of the people
    - **(1) Sadducees:** politicians who want to maintain power, use God as a cardboard prop (Jn 11:47-48)

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- **(2) Pharisees:** legalists who push works-righteousness (Mt 23:23-24)
- **(3) People:** many only want miracles and an easy solution (Jn 6)

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and 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 (Mk 11:18-19).

- Jesus attacks the corrupt system, and the Jewish leaders want to kill him!
- The nation (the different Jewish denominations, their leaders and the people) have fallen down on the job – **they don't remember or care what they're there for:**
  - **(1)** What happened to evangelism?
  - **(2)** What happened to being a kingdom of priests?
  - **(3)** What happened to being a holy nation?
  - **(4)** What happened to being a light to the world, to draw people to God by your own peculiar example?
  - **(5)** What happened to opening your arms to people from all over the world who come to seek God?
  - **(6)** Where did this commercialization come from?
  - **(7)** Where did this corruption come from?
  - **(8)** Where did this casual attitude come from?
  - **(9)** Where did this nasty elitism come from (e.g. Gentiles kept out)?
  - **(10)** Where did this nasty attitude about women come from (e.g. women not allowed inside temple proper)?
  - **(11)** What has happened to Israel?
  - **(12)** Where are the people who fear God?
- The whole system has become nothing more than a shell game, and that's why Jesus is upset – **and that's the key to Jesus and the fig tree, too!**

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### 3. The fig tree again (vv.20-25)

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered,” (Mk 11:20-21).

- It’s been 36 hours, and the tree is shriveled up and dead
- **So, what does the tree represent? What’s the thing that, like that tree from a distance:**
  - o (1) looks good and grand on the outside,
  - o (2) but, it’s really just a sham once you get up close and look at it,
  - o (3) because it doesn’t have any fruit
  - o (4) and because of this, Jesus says, **“I’m done with you!”**
- It’s the people of Israel:
  - o Everything looks great and grand on the outside
  - o Big, shiny temple
  - o Lots of people bustling around
  - o People anxious to follow the law, according to the rules the scribes and Pharisees give them
  - o Lots of stuff going on
- But, it’s all **fake**, it’s all a **shell game**, it’s all **nothing** – it’s rotten to the core, like a worm waiting for you to find it inside a juicy apple
  - o (1) it’s a lot of hustle and bustle for no reason
  - o (2) they’ve lost their way
  - o (3) they’ve forgotten what their job is
  - o (4) they’ve fallen down on the job

And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God,” (Mk 11:22).

- He’s telling them to reject the whole corrupt system and to run away; run back to simple faith, trust and allegiance in God and His Christ:

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- **(1) away** from a system that's built on tradition, not on the Scriptures (cp. Mk 7)
- **(2) away** from a tradition that sees Messiah as a prop for political purposes
- **(3) away** from a system that has a Messiah who doesn't atone for sins
- **(4) away** from a system that's run by corrupt politicians who pretend to love God
- **(5) away** from a system where you earn salvation by works righteousness; by following man-made rules
- **(6) away** from a system that hates people who aren't Jews, and keeps them in the outer courtyard
- **(7) away** from a system that won't let women come into the temple, and keeps them in the inner courtyard
- **(8) away** from a system that turns the sacrificial system of atonement, forgiveness, and thanks to God into a Levite version of Walmart pickup
- The parable:
  - **(1)** The fig tree is Israel
  - **(2)** Israel is unfruitful
  - **(3)** So, Jesus curses the tree and says, "you're done!"
  - **(4)** The tree dies in 36 hours, shriveled up from the roots
  - **(5)** God judges us when we fail in our mission as a global church, and as an individual congregation
- Jesus explains the lesson:
  - **(1)** have faith in God;
  - **(2)** trust Him and His promises; not a ruined system that's lost its way and forgotten why it's there
  - **(3)** remember your mission; to preach the life-changing Gospel and make disciples - individually and as a group
- What Jesus says next are just quick pointers about what that looks like:

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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 what he says will 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 (Mk 11:23-24).

- If you trust God ... you’ll pray like you *actually believe* He can fulfill the promises He’s made (cp. Jas 1:6)

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses (Mk 11:25).

- If you trust God ... you’ll come to Him with a sincere heart, not one that’s loaded with hatred for others
- **Is it any wonder these two commands parallel what Jesus said is the main point of the OC law; to love God and to love your covenant brothers and sisters (Mk 12:28-32)?**

## CONCLUSION

- Real faith and trust in God has **nothing to do** with impressive religious buildings, fake externalism, political dealing, or Levite Walmart pickup arrangements in the temple courtyard
- It just this:
  - o **(1)** God saved me from myself
  - o **(2)** So, I love Him with everything I have
  - o **(3)** And, that means I try to do what His Word says, because I love Him and want to do what He says
- Jesus announced judgment on the people because they’d ruined the religious system

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- (1) we know they'd ruined the system because they rejected Jesus, the One the entire system was pointing to
- (2) they'd forgotten their purpose;
- (3) they'd forgotten why they were there
- (4) if your GPS is supposed to take you to Rapid City, SD, and it wants to take you to Denver (no matter how much you change the route preferences), then there's something wrong with your mapping app!
- **What is our purpose, as a congregation?**
  - (1) If Jesus returned, how would He say SKRBC is fulfilling its purpose?
  - (2) How would He say you're fulfilling your purpose?
  - (3) Would Jesus say SKRBC had fallen down on the job?
  - (4) Would Jesus say we'd forgotten what we're here for?
- These are questions that have been rattling around in my head for months, and ones that Andrew and I will need your help in thinking about:
  - (1) What can we do better to be a kingdom of priests, to show Christ and His Gospel to this community?
  - (2) What can we do be more dedicated members of God's holy nation, trying to live pure and reverent lives for God?
  - (3) What can we do better to be a light to the world, drawing people to Christ by the way we live?
  - (4) What can our congregation do better to open our arms to people from all over the world who come to seek God?
  - (5) What can we do better to bring Christ's love and mercy to bear on people in our community who need it?
  - (6) What can we do to stop being so insular, so hermetically-sealed – like a pill bottle with a seal that doesn't want to come off?
  - (7) What can our little church do to make sure we don't perpetuate the mistakes Jesus criticized in this passage?
  - (8) What can we do, as a congregation, to make sure we don't fall down on the job and forget why we're here?