

Study Guide: The Withered Fig Tree

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Introduction

Have you ever talked with an atheist about religion? Or a former church-goer about the church? How have those conversations gone? Could you describe their view of religion in a way they would approve? How have they come to their conclusion? Is there anything about their observations with which you would agree? Why or why not?

Read Mark 11:12-25.

I. Look at the Fruit (12-19)

Jesus' cursing of a fig tree is puzzling. But when you consider the fig tree incident is split into two parts so that the story of Jesus overturning of the moneychanger tables in the temple can be in the middle, we see that Mark leads us to connect the two actions.

- Read Jeremiah 8:13, Joel 1:6-7 and Amos 4:9. How is the fig tree used in these verses? What was the condition in Israel that brought about God's judgment?
- When Jesus enters the temple, he is upset by the sight of the money-changers. Deuteronomy 14:23-26 permits money-changing for travelers to Jerusalem with their tithe. So why is Jesus so upset? According to verse 17, for whom was the temple supposed to be?
- What had Israel's view of religion done to their view and interaction with "outsiders"?
- Do you ever find yourself standing in judgment over people outside the church? Do you ever find yourself purposely isolating yourself away from people outside the church? What might Jesus be saying to you?

II. Overturn the Money-changers and Move the Mountain (20-24)

Read verses 20-24

- What in your life needs to be overturned so that you might be a "light" to those outside the church?
- These verses are often taken as a form of hyperbole, that you can move mountains if you just have enough faith. Is Jesus speaking about mountains (plural) or a particular mountain? (Psalm 121 is one among many Psalms of ascent which are called such because Jerusalem was in the hills and the temple was built on a "mountain") How might this connect with the fig tree?
- Read John 2:13-19 for John's account. What else will be "thrown down" (or destroyed) in order to cleanse the temple and make it possible for the gentiles to be included? How does this allow gentiles to be included?

III. Forgive (25)

Jesus rejects religion (following the rules in order for God to accept you) as a way of approaching God and instead builds a relationship with sinners by providing the means for their inclusion.

- In light of this, how does verse 25 become a necessary application?

Wrap-up

- Do you believe Jesus had to die for you to enter God's presence? If Jesus' death is enough to purchase your way into God's presence, do you believe it's enough to purchase others' way as well?