

"SYMBOLS OF WRATH & LOVE"

Monday Meditation

***Scriptures for Monday of Holy Week:**

- Jesus curses a fig tree (Mark 11:12-14; Matt 18-19)
- Jesus cleanses the temple (Mark 11:15-18; Matt 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-48)

It is Passover Week. The biggest celebration on the Jewish calendar and the city is packed with pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate. Jesus and his company find lodging in Bethany, a small town two miles east of Jerusalem. It where Lazarus, whom he had earlier raised from the dead, and his sisters Mary and Martha lived. Certainly, there would be no lack of people willing to give lodging to Jesus and his band of followers after seeing the miracle he had performed there.

Today is Monday. Yesterday, people had lined the street waving palm branches as he entered Jerusalem. On Friday, they will kill him and on Sunday morning, he will conquer death and sin by rising from the dead. There's a lot of work to do. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he had gone to the temple and was appalled at the condition in which he found it – people using it to enrich their own pockets rather than worshipping Almighty God. He'd have much to say about that, but it was late and people were cleaning up and going home after a busy first day.

That time had now come. He'd gotten up early to spend time with his Father, but now he gathers his followers and sets out for Jerusalem with fire in his bones. But what is this? Along the way something catches his attention: a fig tree in leaf! What a welcome sign of summer's impending arrival. But how strange that this tree is a couple weeks early?! It's like blueberries in June. Figs in this part of Israel are normally not ready for a couple more weeks, late April. But nevermind, the Bible says that he is hungry. So, he alters his course to gather some figs for the day.

Upon arriving at the tree, however, another strange sight: no figs! This "early bloomer" had promised fruit, but failed to deliver. Outwardly, it looked good, but it was a dry tree. What is the glory of a fig tree, if not the figs? And so, understanding that this was symbolic of Israel, Jesus curses the tree saying "May no one ever eat fruit from you again."

Hold that thought.

The closer they get to Jerusalem, the thicker the crowds streaming into the city and the Temple, its epicenter, become. Jews from all over the world are here to make sacrifices to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They could not bring these sacrifices on the long journey, so they intend to buy them in the temple. A dove was the smallest of offerings, reserved for the poor, but who could afford these prices?

Jesus' anger is rekindled seeing a carpenter sadly turn away, unable to afford the meager dove price. The Temple of God was intended for all Jews to worship their God! Yet the Jewish leaders reduced it to a Mall of Mammon for their own profit. In his zeal, he overturns the tables and chases out the money changers. He teaches the people that the temple had been corrupted, quoting Isaiah: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations", but just as Jeremiah had said, they had made it "a den of thieves."

And yet, he is never out of control. The same Jesus who accepted the praise of children the day before, the same Jesus who was gentle and humble of heart, shows his love for all of them by cleansing the temple of those who would corrupt it. He was angry at the sin that is so evident within.

Two symbols stand prominently in my meditation today: **the fig tree** and **the temple**. They both relate to Israel and they both relate to us. Israel is commonly symbolized in the OT by a vineyard, tree or a planting (Jg 9:8-15; Is 3:14; 5:1-7; Jer 12:10; Ez 17:2-10; 19:10-4). As a planting of God, it was expected that they would bear fruit (Ps 1:3; Jer 17:8-10). It was not the basis for their relationship with God, but rather fruitfulness was a symbol of God's blessing their faithfulness (Dt 7:13; 28:4). Conversely a lack of fruitfulness was the result of their disobedience (Dt 11:17).

The fig tree that Jesus encounters on his way to Jerusalem is particularly poignant because Israel's Messiah had come to Jerusalem. *Greg Lanier points out that "Several times the prophets describe God as inspecting Israel for "early figs," as a sign of spiritual fruitfulness (Mic. 7:1; Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10-17) – but he finds "no first-ripe fig that my soul desires."

As Israel's God approaches his holy city, looking for "early figs", what does he find? Not a house that is ready to welcome him, but a Temple that has become a "den of thieves." In cursing the fig tree, he proclaims that judgment has come upon Israel for rejecting the Messiah. But as Lanier concludes, "all is not lost. God promises to one day replant Israel and produce healthy figs from her again" (Joel 2:22; Amos 9:14; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 8:12; Ezek 36:8).

Monday, April 6, 2020

by: Pastor Grant

The fruit we bear is a reflection of our hearts. Just as a fig tree is supposed to bear figs, so also Christians bear the fruit of the Spirit (Eph 5:22-23) rather than the fruits of darkness (Eph 5:19-21). In addition, fruitfulness to the Christian means a ministry that leads others to God through the leading of the Holy Spirit (John 4:35-36; 15:1-8).

Similarly, with the ripping of the veil the earthly Temple has been destroyed and rebuilt in the body of every believer. Paul says "Do you not know, brothers, that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (2 Cor 6:19-20).

On this Monday, the second day of Holy Week, contemplate Christ's purifying judgment. He had come to her to save Israel, but she rejected him. He cursed the fig tree because it had shown promise of bearing fruit, but failed to do so, and took the privilege of bearing fruit away for good. Similarly, as found the temple polluted by greed, power and distraction rather than holiness and prayer.

The parallels are obvious:

1. What kind of fruit is your heart producing? Would Jesus find any at all, or does it just "look promising" on the outside?
2. What will Jesus find as he enters the temple of your heart? Is there a house of prayer? What does he need to chase out?

Tomorrow, Jesus returns to Jerusalem and we see what happens to the tree. May God give grace this week.

In Christ,

Pastor Grant

