

Message Transcript

ONLY LEAVES | THE KINGDOM REVEALED

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Traders Point how are we doing? Let's go ahead and kick things off with a celebration—Women's Night was this past Friday, thirty five hundred women gathered across our campuses Friday night. God was moving. We're still hearing stories that are getting flooded in.

And also, you've got to know to pull a night like that off it takes a ton of staff, but also there were hundreds of Difference Makers that made that night possible. Can we go ahead and put our hands together and show some love to all of the Difference Makers? So good.

Well, today we are continuing in our series in Mark. Go ahead, if you have a Bible, and get to Mark, chapter 11.

I want to start today with a shared experience. I want to put something in the middle of the room that I think you are going to be familiar with. Have you ever seen something that looked one way from a distance but the closer you got the more you realized it wasn't what it appeared to be? Right? The outside was creating an expectation the inside couldn't deliver on. It's a very different reality from the expectation.

For me, I remember growing up playing basketball in the gym a lot. And sometimes you would see a guy come in and he looked the part. He had all the gear. He had on the shooting sleeve, the leg sleeve, brand new shoes, tights, fingers taped. He looked like he was sponsored by Nike.

And then the game would start and it was not the same. He looked like he could hoop, but the game determined he could not. He couldn't hit water if he fell out of a boat. You know what I mean? As my friend, Cory, says, "That man is all hat, no cattle." He was appearing one way but the reality was very different. This summer I was on the beaches of Michigan. Some say it's the Cabo of the Midwest. But that's where I was. I'm enjoying the day. And what do you need when you are on the beach, under the sun? A nice cool drink, sparkling water, and a bag of chips.

Now, I'm going to tell you this bag of chips was drawing me in. It was telling me one thing. On the exterior it was giving me a message that this was going to be able to satisfy my hunger. I just needed a little snack.



I'm telling you that what I am showing you in this video, this video has not been altered at all. I opened this bag and I look inside and the outside did not match what was on the inside. Look at this. There were two-and-a-half chips in the whole bag. Right? There is a difference between the appearance and the reality.

And it's one thing when a bag of chips presents itself as full and turns out to be empty. It's another thing when a person does it, and not just when it means they are a liability on the court but in a relationship, when someone presents themselves one way, but then the closer you get you discover they are not who they presented themselves to be. Under candlelight you looked one way. But now you are U G L Y, ugly. How did I not see that?

And, unfortunately, some people have experienced this with Christians. Maybe you're one of them. They heard what we said. They heard about who Jesus is. And then what they got presented with was something very different. When they got close the experience didn't match what they thought it would be. You know, this past week I was at The Bait Shop. And that's probably the only time I've ever said that phrase in my life. I'm at The Bait Shop. I'm uncomfortable. I don't really belong there, but I'm trying to strike up a conversation with the guy, trying to get common ground. And I'm looking around and in the background there is worship music. I'm like, "I know worship music. Here we go."

And we start talking a little bit and I asked him a question. I said, "Hey, man. Where do you go to church?" And this is what he said. He said, "I love God. But I've given up on people." You could just feel the air get pulled out of the room. And what he was describing was he experienced that. He thought it was going to be one way on the outside, but then once he got closer it wasn't what he thought it would be.

And church, this is supposed to be the opposite. The people are supposed to be the ones who point to God. We clear the way to get people to Him. That is our purpose. But, unfortunately, he experienced a gap between appearance and reality. And I want to say that who we are really matters. Not just with our confession of our faith, but with the fruit of our faith. A changed life from the inside out has eternal implications that we will be judged for.

You know, the heading we've put on this part of Mark is The Kingdom Confronts. And what we are going to see today is a very confrontational Jesus. Looking at things from a distance it looked one way. But as He gets closer they reveal a very different reality. So, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, go ahead and grab them and get to Mark, chapter 11. We're going to start in verse 12 today. Alright? Mark 11, starting in verse 12.



And as you get your way there, remember that last week Jesus had just arrived in Jerusalem. And He rode in on a donkey. He rides in on a donkey and from a distance this looks like God's place. These are God's people. This is His city. The Passover festival is happening. It's a festival to celebrate God rescuing them. Millions of people are there. The Temple is filled. But things aren't always what they seem.

Today Jesus is going to get up close and He's going to look at two things that from a distance look one way but upon closer inspection prove to be something very different. And the two things we are going to look at today in Mark, chapter 11 don't look like they go together. But I just want to encourage you to trust the process. They are very connected.

And Mark, the author here, puts them together in a way in hopes that we don't miss it. There is going to be a sandwich of sorts as we go through the content. And everyone loves a good sandwich. Right?

Fig Tree
Temple
Fig Tree

So, I want you to think of our content in the form of a sandwich. First, that top bun is going to be that fig tree. The meat in the middle is the Temple. And that bottom bun is a fig tree. That's all going to make, hopefully, a lot more sense in the next few minutes. Alright? So, fig tree, Temple, fig tree. You guys ready? Let's do it. Starting in verse 12. It says:

"The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He noticed a fig tree in full leaf a little way off, so he went over to see if he could find any figs. But there were only leaves, because it was too early in the season for fruit. Then Jesus said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat your fruit again!' And the disciples heard him say it." Mark 11:12-14 (NLT)

What is happening here? Is Jesus just hungry? Or is there something more going on? It says that Jesus sees this fig tree from a distance. And fig trees were pretty large. They could be 19 plus feet. And this was a sprawling tree with all of these leaves. The description it gives us is full leaf.

So, even though it's not technically the season for figs, this tree, because of what it was portraying on the outside with all of these leaves it should have had figs or at least it should have had the buds, which are edible. But Jesus is walking to this tree with this expectation. I'm leaving here with something. Something is going to satisfy My hunger. But He gets there and He sees underneath all of the leaves there is no fruit.



This is worse than my bag of chips on the beach. Okay? He gets all of the way there and then it says He curses the tree. He says, "May no one ever eat your fruit again." Hold onto that. Because now we are going to jump into the middle part of our sandwich. We're going to go directly to the Temple in verse 15. It says:

"When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people buying and selling animals for sacrifices. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, and he stopped everyone from using the Temple as a marketplace." Mark 11:15-16 (NLT)

So, what's going on? Well a Temple full of people what does that present itself as? Like a tree in full leaf. From a distance there were plenty of leaves. So, the assumption was that there was going to be a lot of fruit underneath that. But under closer inspection, once again, only leaves.

A lot of activity. People were buying and selling animals for sacrifices. You've got to put yourself in the context of this. During Passover people would travel from all over, different places, to come here to Jerusalem for Passover. And it was much easier to travel without your sacrifice.

Now, I've never traveled with a baby lamb but I have traveled with small children and I can tell you, it would probably be easier to go ahead and send your sacrifice ahead of you. And the Temple knew this. So, people would set up. And there is a real problem with supply and demand, for you to get the authorized sacrifices that you needed. They were willing to help you, "But we've got to bump those prices up a little bit."

And then it says there were money changers. Once again, as people traveled from outside of Jerusalem they didn't have the right currency. So, they were going to have to exchange it, which the Temple was more than happy to help them with, "Stop by our table right over here." And they would do it for a cost. The exchange rate was super high. It was corrupt. The whole system was. On the outside the Temple was showing itself as one thing, but on the inside, as Jesus got closer, it was disgusting.

This was also the verse where we see that Jesus is not, in fact, the Mr. Rogers of Galilee. He comes in and He flips over tables. He shuts down the whole operation. Jesus was different. I want you to think about this. He walks into the Temple. He flips over the tables. He stops them from doing what they are doing. All of them. How? Because He had an authority about Him.



We've read about it through the gospel of Mark. He had authority that no one could put their finger on. The way He taught was not like the other scribes and teachers. It was like it came straight from God. Yeah. That's the point. And here He is in this moment shutting it down with a different kind of authority. Why? What is it? It's because Jesus is the invisible God made visible. He is the love and the grace and the peace and the joy of God. He is a comforter. And Jesus is the visible image of God's justice and righteousness.

So, once again, He steps in and He sees there is a gap between appearance and reality. There was an expectation that the Temple was supposed to be one way, but He found something very, very different. Look at this in verse 17: "He said to them, 'The Scriptures declare, "My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations," but you have turned it into a den of thieves.'" (NLT) So, what it was supposed to be was a house of prayer for all of the nations, "But you've turned it into a den of thieves." Now, a house of prayer for all of the nations, in the Temple, where they were in this spot, was very specific in the Temple. It was the court of the Gentiles. This really large space. Think like two football fields by three football fields.

And that was as close as any non-Jewish person could get to the Temple. And they had corrupted it. This was their only experience with God's Temple. They'd made it into a corrupt marketplace. So, it was supposed to be a light to the nations, but it had become a hideout for religious outlaws.

Think of the boldness. Where do outlaws hang out? Off the beaten path in a secret place. In a cave. In darkness. But here they were hiding under the leaves of religious activity. They would do this under God's nose.

And Jesus brings a very different Kingdom. He's confronting the idea that they thought was going to come when the Messiah, the new King comes. They thought the Messiah, the new King, would come and cleanse the Temple of the Gentiles. But He confronts this right here and it turns out He's actually cleansing the Temple for the Gentiles. Because Jesus didn't just come to save Jerusalem. He came to save all of the nations. And He's bringing that into play right here. So, just to summarize it, everything we've experienced so far, two different things that looked very different from a distance than they did up close—the tree, which looked beautiful from a distance, but there were only leaves, no fruit. And Jesus, as He makes His way into the Temple, finds the same thing to be true. Only leaves, just leaves, no fruit.

And what we see throughout Scripture is that Jesus is consistently confronting religious environments where the outside looked alive but where the inside told a very different story. I want to read one example to you in Matthew, chapter 23, verses 27 through 28, this is Jesus speaking. He says:



"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness." (NLT)

It's heavy. Jesus confronting the religious elites. And I don't know about you, but a lot of us, when we read that we're like, "Yeah, Jesus. Get them. Get them." We all turn into Sophie Cunningham, "They are the problem. Jesus, they are over there. They are over there. Go get them. Get them, Jesus."

But what I want us to do is instead of looking out there, instead of looking back 2,000 years, before we point our fingers at the Temple, I want us to look inward. Because here's the question that I want to put before all of us today... Jesus wasn't just walking around back then in the Temple. He's still walking around. He's still present.

If Jesus walked into Traders Point today, what would He find? It gets real really quick. What would He find? Would He find a church with just leaves or a church bearing fruit? Would we find Jesus out in the lobby flipping tables because we've lost sight of what matters most? Would He check us because we've forgotten our first love?

Or, at Traders Point would He find what He was looking for in Jerusalem? Faithful people praising God. That He would find a house of prayer for all nations. Because Jesus isn't impressed by leaves. He's looking for fruit. Right? So, before we start pointing out, I'm about to make it a little bit more personal too.

If Jesus walked into your house today, what would He find? Because a lot of times we can even point out, "Yeah, at Traders Point I've seen some things that they do." But make it real. What would He find in your home? Would He find just a lot of leaves or a house bearing fruit? If Jesus walked into your house would you find Him flipping over your kitchen table? Is your house a house of prayer? Has your table become a place for all nations where you're clearing the way so people can come to know who Jesus is?

Because Jesus isn't impressed by leaves activity. A group that gathers together under one roof socially but not spiritually is leaves. When we attend church when we can but we don't treat one another with the love of God, it's leaves. When we carry Bibles that are drenched with highlighters but the pages have never made their way into our hearts, it's leaves.



Jesus is looking for fruit. Fruit is when our lives come alive to what Jesus wants to do. And there is only one way to get the very specific kind of fruit that Jesus is looking for. And He tells us. It's in what's called a farewell discourse. As Jesus is about to go to the cross He tells us, "The fruit that I'm looking for only I can produce and give it to you. And He tells us exactly how that happens. It's in John, chapter 15, starting in verse 4. He says:

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5 (NLT)
It says, "I am the vine. Remain in me." Maybe you've heard it this way, Abide. "Stick close to Me. I am the source. I am the One who is going to produce. I am the One who is going to give you the ability to bear fruit if you abide in Me."
I just want to be really clear with this:

There is an expectation for Christians to bear fruit

To be clear, fruit doesn't make you a Christian. It's not like you are presenting what you have and God is inspecting it and saying, "Okay. If that is good enough, then I will accept you." No. Fruit is the evidence that you belong to Christ. Can I show you what I mean? In Philippians, chapter 1, verse 11. Paul says: "May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation," What is that? Well, it says it right here, "the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ," who produces it? Jesus, "for this will bring much glory and praise to God." (NLT) Which is the will of God for you and me. I want to read you one more. Galatians, chapter 5, verse 22. It says:

"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit," who produces it? The Holy Spirit, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)

Is this how the people who know you best would describe you? Not, "Oh, yeah. He is a Christian. She goes to church." No, no, no. The people who know you and see you up close—because you can hide behind leaves and some other people—but the people who are right there with you, if you asked them, "Hey, the fruit of the Spirit here. If you were given a handful of words or phrases to describe me, is that what you would see? Love, and joy, and peace, and patience? How about this one? Kindness, gentleness?



Is that what we are not just saying with our mouths, but we're showing it with our lives? Church, this matters. This is not only an expectation that we bear the fruit of our salvation, there are consequences if we do not. For ourselves and for others. Look at this is John, chapter 15, verse 6. It's the next verse. Jesus says: "Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers." (NLT)

Now, church. We can either be the fruitful tree that produces fruit through the Holy Spirit, that we abide in Jesus, and we get to be a part of the process of bringing people to Jesus, we are God's plan A, or we will be someone's excuse for not believing in God. Will we be a part of their salvation story where the first thing they saw about Jesus was the fruit in our lives and that would be the catalyst?

This is what is so important about the mission of our church. It's not just gathering together to say we believe in certain things. It's action oriented, that the faith that we have, the love that we've experienced overflows into our lives. And what we've experienced, we want everyone to experience. So, we say, "We want to clear the way and get as many people to Jesus to see Him face to face, because He's the only One who can save anyone."

We want to be equipped for battle. This life is not just about me and going through it. I am fighting a spiritual battle. There are powers and darkneses and principalities that are kind of keeping people from the Good News that Jesus came to bring and I'm putting myself out there to go against that so that they can come to know who Jesus is.

We are deployed for impact. Deployed to make a difference in the lives of those around us. Is there the fruit of your salvation? That's what Jesus is getting to. He didn't just expect to see people who believed in God, He's looking for fruit. And if you remember our sandwich, it was fig tree, Temple... So, what we are going to see next is that as Jesus works through all of this, as He is brokenhearted, not only just over some fig tree. It's going to be very different than what we thought it was, He's brokenhearted over the Temple and now He's going to come back face to face with the tree in verse 20. It says: "The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it had withered from the roots up." (NLT)

What's happening? And why that detail—from the roots up?
The fig tree is an object lesson, an acted-out parable of Jesus' judgment on Israel



See, the fig tree is more than just a tree. The fig tree is an object lesson, an acted-out parable of Jesus' judgment on Israel. And Jesus... This is just one in the many lines of prophets who have used very similar language to talk about Israel. I just want to read one. Jeremiah, chapter 8, verse 13. It says:

"I will take away their harvest, declares the Lord. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them." (NIV)

The prophets repeatedly used fig trees and the absence of their fruit to portray Israel's spiritual condition and coming judgment. What Jesus is saying here with the Temple and the tree is that judgment is here. And this is the same message, if you remember, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. His cousin, John the Baptist, who cleared the way, who set up Jesus' ministry, had a very similar message. Look at what John the Baptist had to say, talking about the season that they are in. He says:

"Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire." Matthew 3:10 (NLT)

Guys, I know this is heavy. But I also know that this is real. And this is what Jesus says. And I also know that this is not God's will for anyone, that they would be cut, severed, gathered, and thrown away into the fire.

We know through the life of Jesus and the gospel that God's will is that all would be saved. That God sent His only Son as a sacrifice. That we would never have to experience any of that. But it's also true that judgment is here. The ax is still on the roots. And me and you have to make a decision.

What Jesus is saying is, "Hey, judgment has come to Israel. Judgment has come to the people of God." He spoke and the tree withered from the roots. What does that signify? He is signifying, "Hey, there is something wrong at the foundational level. There is something wrong with the root system. There is something wrong with the Temple roots. The way that it is built, it will not be able to produce the type of fruit needed for the Kingdom that is coming." But, the good news is that the King has every single thing that we need.

So, as they approach this tree they notice that it is withered and then Peter has a realization. Look at this in verse 21:



"Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, 'Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died!'" (NLT) Peter, a little slow to the draw on this one. Right? It's starting to click just a few paces slower than anyone else, but he finally had this light bulb moment. He has this O M J moment—Oh My Jesus. "You said that thing then and now, today, that thing, it happened. You spoke it and now this tree has shriveled up from the roots upward."

I'm guessing everyone is waiting to see what Jesus is going to say next. What is going to come out of the mouth of the King who speaks and trees wither. And look at what He says. It may surprise you.

"Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'Have faith in God.'" Mark 11:22 (NLT) What? What about the tree? He says, "Exactly, have faith in God." What is Jesus doing here? Well, if you remember He just took a wrecking ball to the Temple. And for a lot of us that doesn't really mean much. But to the Jewish people it meant everything. The Temple was a sign of God's presence. It was a sign that God was with them.

Most of the Old Testament is this progression of: Who is going to build the Temple and when is it going to come? When will God have a resting place for His presence? And then they finally get it. And, oh, it's such a celebration. And it's a really big deal. And God dwells with His people and they have it for just a little bit.

But they refused to completely submit to the authority of God. So, He hands them over to their enemies. And there is a long series where they go without it. But then they rebuild the Temple. Even though it was destroyed they get it back. And, once again, hope is found all over again.

But it's almost like in this moment Jesus is signaling to them, "Hey, you're going to lose that Temple. But in My Kingdom you won't need that Temple. I am the Temple." That is what Jesus is saying. It's what He told them in John, chapter 2, verse 19. Jesus said:

"'All right,' Jesus replied, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'" (NLT)

What is He talking about? Well, we know that He's not talking about the Jewish temple because that would be destroyed within forty to fifty years of Jesus flipping those tables never to be rebuilt again, even to this day.



But there is another temple that would be destroyed but raised and it was His body. And some of these same people would take Him to a cross. And His body would be destroyed. But what we know is that three days later He resurrected. And to this day He is an everlasting temple, the place, the meeting spot, where we can come to know God and to be in His presence. Guys, what this is that the Temple was never meant to be a new kingdom. There is a new place where God will meet with His people. And Jesus is telling us, "Hey, you have direct access to Me. Abide in Me. Stay connected to Me. And you will produce fruit." Right? It was never meant to be about a building. It was just temporary.

Like for all of us, we're meeting in beautiful campuses all throughout our city, but it is just a building. It can be destroyed. And we can bring in Chip and Joanna to build even more campuses, but there is only one Kingdom and one temple that is eternal and it is the body of Jesus Christ that is resurrected and will never be destroyed again. Amen? Amen.

So, He's telling them about this new Kingdom and eluding to this new temple and what things are going to be like now as He is confronting the old way. And He's going to share a little bit here in verse 23. Jesus says:

"I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours." Mark 11:23-24 (NLT)

Alright. So, Jesus is kind of carrying this through. He's saying, "Hey, because of the new Kingdom, because of the new temple, because you're going to abide and have direct access to Me, you are going to have power like you've never dreamed of. You are going to see the miraculous. You are going to see Me move in you. You are going to see Me produce fruit that you could have never produced on your own with that direct access. You are going to live a life of the miraculous.

But what it is not is name it and claim it. Whole branches of Christianity have taken verses like this and taken them out of context and said, "Yes, God is just some cosmic genie. If you can think it, if you can dream it, you ask for it and God will deliver it to you. And if you don't get it, it's because you don't have enough faith. But for the small price of \$9.99 a month..."

No, that is not what this is. We see in all of Scripture about the teachings of what He is saying. Prayer isn't, primarily, about getting God to do what you want Him to do. Prayer is about aligning our hearts to get what God wants us to do.



Here is what Jesus taught us to pray, "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God, I want what You want more than what I want. God, I trust and submit to Your authority. God, I believe that You can open doors that I can never open on my own. God, I believe that if You close a door that I want open, You have good reason for it. So, I trust You."

Prayer is not begging God to bless our plans. Prayer is where God reveals what He is already doing, and where we ask for the wisdom and courage to join Him in His work. We don't pray to get God to join us on a side quest. We pray so we can join God on His mission.

Amen? Truth? Yeah. That's what Jesus is saying we are a part of. And that is so much better than some name it and claim it gospel where we can get what we think we want. Jesus is offering an invitation where we can actually be one with Him and the Father. That type of fruit can overflow in our lives. Prayer is where we learn to abide. Prayer is where we stop manufacturing and we let the Spirit produce what only the Spirit can produce.

Jesus is telling them, "Hey, the Temple—yeah, the Temple was supposed to be a house of prayer. Now you, my church, will be a house of prayer." And in verse 25 He's going to add an extra line to help us out with our prayer lives. Okay? He's going to add a little more detail that when we start to pray, we need to hold onto this. Verse 25, He says:

"But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too." (NLT)
Come on. What? "God, we had a good thing going. I abide in You. You abide in me. We have a thing. God, I love You. People are the problem." It's almost like He knew that. And He's forever bound up this idea of loving God and loving people together.

And the question I want to put before you is one maybe you wouldn't ask if you were reading your Bible by yourself. But this week you are not. So, who are you holding a grudge against? Because we can see here that there is a direct correlation that the Holy Spirit, from what I've experienced, will keep bringing up in prayer any grudge that you have, any unforgiveness in your heart, until you forgive. That's what will happen.

You'll notice when you go into prayer holding some kind of bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness you will come wanting to pray about these things, but you'll notice the Holy Spirit is like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. But what about this?" And He will bring you to a place where, eventually, you will ask for the power to forgive or you will stop going because you believe it's too hard and you don't want face it anymore. There is a direct correlation between our ability to abide in Jesus and our willingness to forgive others.



I can tell you what has helped me is one thing and it became very painfully clear to me where I was in prayer, I thought I had forgiven someone, I thought I was moving in that direction but the Holy Spirit revealed to me, "You have not forgiven them. You're trying not to hate them. And that's not the same thing."

And in that moment, how do you do that? How do you forgive someone who has hurt you? How do you forgive someone who is not even asking for forgiveness? The only thing that I have found is that forgiveness comes in the light of the cross. If we sit in that moment in prayer and we're reminded as we talk to Jesus about what Jesus did for us, that's the only way.

And when you're sitting there and you are thinking about this grudge that you have and this unforgiveness in your heart, then you remember your King. And you remember that Jesus would come and He would be nailed to a cross and with His dying last words He would say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

He forgave those who were killing Him, those who He came to die for who wanted Him dead. He forgave them. When we were still His enemies Christ died for us. In light of that, since I have been forgiven of so much, that is the only thing that I've found that gives me the power to truly forgive those who have hurt me. Do you really see, in light of the cross, how much He forgave you for? Because it's almost like in this moment Jesus is saying, "Yeah, there is going to be power that comes. You are going to have connection to stuff that you've never had connection to before."

"You are going to be able to see things that you wouldn't believe if I told you. You're going to be able to flip this whole Roman Empire on its head. You're going to see millions and billions of people come to believe in Jesus because of your faith. And if you want to see faith that moves mountains, I need you to start with forgiveness."

So, we have this faith and we see forgiveness and we see this fruit. All of this is happening, this whole conversation is coming, in the aftermath of Jesus flipping over the Temple. And as you imagine, press is getting out and the people, the religious leaders don't love what Jesus did. He shut down the whole operation. So, they gather together and they're talking about it. And they are like, "Hey, man. This guy shut down our Temple. I mean He shut down God's Temple. What are we going to do?"

And you know that there was a circling together. But, like I said, Jesus has this authority. No one wants to face Him. So they are trying to figure out, "What are we going to do? How are we going to say it? Who's going to go?" And they finally work up the courage to get in front of Jesus to confront Him, to test Him. And basically, I can't go into all of it, but this is the crux of the conversation.



They are saying, "Who do You think You are? What gives You the right to come in here and to turn over what we are doing? Who do You think You are?" And the religious leaders finally ask the question. It's underneath all of this and it's underneath what it is for me and you, whether or not were going to believe in Jesus or not. Look at what it says in verse 28. It says:

"They demanded, 'By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?'" (NLT)

Church, this is what it comes down to. This is what it always comes down to. In this moment it's playing out a little bit differently, but Jesus is confronting religious people who appear surrendered to God, but have not submitted to His authority. Their appearance didn't match the reality of their heart. They were portraying themselves one way, but inwardly it was something very, very different.

And this is the human story all the way back. If you trace this back to our ancestors you will see the human problem is a problem with authority, bowing down and trusting God with our lives.

Adam and Eve, they had everything. They walked with God, a perfect relationship with Him. They were in paradise. Nothing that they longed for. God provided for them in every single way. And still it wasn't enough. Because there was one tree, one tree that God said, "Hey, you can have everything but just trust Me, submit to My authority, don't eat from this one. It won't go well for you." But, eventually, they just do it. They can't live with the idea that there was something that they can't have. And they think, "Well, maybe if I had whatever God is trying to keep from me then I will have more. If I could just have control and authority over my own life, that's what I need to do."

And if you remember the story. There was this snake that comes in and tricks them. They decide to take the fruit and they eat it. They didn't want God's authority anymore. They wanted to be like God themselves.

I want you to read something in Genesis, chapter 3, verse 7. It's a small detail. It says:

"At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. (NLT) What kind of leaves? It's almost like this whole thing goes together, huh? They had paradise with God. They had everything. But they left with only leaves. And we've been trying to cover ourselves with fig leaves ever since.

But if you know this story, it doesn't end with fig leaves. They do have to leave the garden because of their disobedience. But before they go, God covers them with animal skins. It's a sacrifice. It's the first one. And He covers them, but it's temporary just like the Temple.



But the gospel, the Good News, is that a new sacrifice has come. Jesus, the Son of God, would come to cover the whole world using His body and blood to do what... He would be the sacrifice that we eternally need. He would be the sacrifice that covers all of our sins.

Jesus is the One who has the authority and has proven it. He proved it through miracles. He proved it by showing He has authority over demons, authority over sickness, authority over nature itself. And when He went to the cross He proved that He had authority to lay His life down and pick it up again. And before He went back to heaven He said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." The keys are His. The question is ours. Are we going to submit to His authority?

Maybe you are here today and you are a skeptic. And I'll say I just learned about this word. Skeptic just means to see something from a distance. What I want to invite you into today is to come close. To see Jesus for who He is. To believe that He does have the authority. That He is offering you an invitation to get close, to see for yourself.

But you have to believe. Believe that He is who He said He is. Believe that He is the Son of God. Believe that God loved you so much that He would empty heaven for you. Believe that Jesus would live a perfect life for you and go to a cross dying the death you deserved, paying the penalty that we should have paid. All because He loves us.

And what we get to do in this moment is to accept that gift, that gift of salvation. To repent and to say, "Jesus, I submit to Your authority as Lord and Savior. And there is an urgency to this. What I want to say is don't leave here without surrendering to the authority of Jesus. Because the words of John the Baptist were true then and they are true today. I don't say this to scare you. This is the real time. This is the season that we are in. The ax of God's judgment is poised; it is at the root of the trees. And it's prepared to sever any tree that has not produced good fruit. From what I can tell through Scripture, true, good fruit only comes from one place—a life surrendered to and abiding in Jesus.

And that begins with placing your faith in Him, submitting to His authority, and being baptized. What is baptism? Baptism is a symbol of your salvation. It's when you go into these waters and you stand and you are lowered into a watery grave, you share in the death of Jesus, and then you are raised to new life.

There is a problem with the root center. We must be born again. That is a symbol, a visual of what God is doing on the inside. Eternally we move from dead people's bones to alive in the Spirit. In a moment, the Spirit of God begins to work and the fruit becomes evident in our lives.



The fruit of our salvation.

What I want to challenge you with today is to let today be the beginning of God producing the fruit of your salvation. So, what I want to do right now is I want to welcome us into a time of prayer. So, at all of our campuses if you would just right where you are close your eyes, bow your heads. And if you want to pray this prayer with me for the first time, I encourage you to do so.

Father, thank You so much for today. God, thank You for the new Kingdom that You've come to bring. God, thank You for hard words that wake us up like smelling salts to make a decision because it matters. Judgment is here. And You've come for fruit. And there is only one way to get it. We know it's only through You. You can produce that.

So, God, I pray right now, and if you are praying this with me, pray it. I believe. I believe, Jesus, that You are who You say You are. I believe You are the Son of God. I believe You lived a perfect life. I believe You went to a cross. I believe You died, but I believe that You resurrected three days later. I believe You have authority over heaven and earth. I believe You are the way, the truth, and the life to the Father. There is only one way and it's through You.

God, we repent. We repent of living a life of fig leaves and trying to cover ourselves and hiding from You. God, I pray in this moment that we would come before You and trust You to clothe us, And the only thing that can clothe us, Jesus, is Your body, Your blood, Your sacrifice. So, we surrender to You. And, God, I pray for all of us, that we would learn to abide in You. That we would come to know how good You are, how much You love us, and how much more You constantly have for us. That we would know being with You is the best place that we would ever want to be. And, God, that we would trust You to produce in us what we could never produce on our own.

God, I pray that Your Holy Spirit would fall on all of those who have believed. God, I pray that You would stir up and soften their hearts and You would begin today producing the fruit of their salvation. That it would lead them to an act of obedience to be baptized. To share in Your death and to see the picture of people being raised to new life in You.

Jesus, I pray for everyone here that we would be known by our fruit, we would be known by You, we would resemble You. That, God, to a watching world they would see love like they have never seen, they would see joy like they have never seen, they would see peace. And, God, over and over again we would use our lives to point to You and we would see more and more people come to know You as King. Jesus, it is in Your perfect and holy name we pray. And everyone said: Amen.

