

The Gospel According to Mark - Withered

The Gospel According to Mark - Withered Mark 11:11-21

Sermon Summary

Our text today follows the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but Jesus knew there were serious problems which were destroying the people of Israel spiritually! Jesus had to confront the hypocrisy, the lies, the deception, the injustice and the wickedness which was rampant in the religious community of His day! Jesus goes to the heart of the problem with a very tangible illustration of a withered life when He speaks against a fig tree that was bearing no fruit and it withered. The withered tree represented Israel and the fact that they were bearing no fruit because they had turned their backs on God and rejected their purpose for existence. Israel's spiritual life had withered. An example of the withered spiritual life of Israel could be seen in the ungodly activities taking place in the temple which had become a den of thieves rather than a house of prayer! This kind of spiritual sickness was no new thing and unfortunately still occurs till this day! A church or individual who rejects their God-given purpose in life will have a withered spiritual life which will effect every area of their lives.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Read the passage.

Mark 11:11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Mark 11:12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

Mark 11:15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'[a]? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'[b]"

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

Mark 11:19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples[c] went out of the city.

Mark 11:20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

Mark 11:21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

Questions to Ponder

1. What are some things we can learn about God from this story? (God has a purpose for each and every person He ever created Psalm 100:3/God has offered us a personal relationship with Him but will not force that relationship on us. Joshua 24:15/God is grieved when people reject His offer of a personal relationship Ezekiel 33:11)
2. What can we learn about humankind, as well as ourselves, from this story? Sometimes people refuse to listen to God and rebel against His ways. Jeremiah 32:33/People need Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:15/People need answers. 1 Peter 3:15/People need purpose. Proverbs 29:18
3. What is God saying to you specifically through this passage as it pertains to your life, marriage, family, and work? 1 Peter 2:9-12
4. In light of what you've learned through this message and the subsequent discussion, what actions or attitudes do you need to adjust or enact to be obedient to God?

Full Sermon Notes

That song raises some pretty deep questions! Were we honest when we sang those words? "We only want to hear Your voice, we're hanging on every word! We want to know You more and more, we're hanging on every word!" Where we honest when we sang... "when You speak it changes what we see and what we seek"? Today, on this Father's Day, will we Father's allow the word's of God to change what we see and what we seek? Will those of us in this room who claim to be followers of Jesus, will we truly follow His instructions, His teachings, His example, or will we find ourselves spiritually withered and our families left vulnerable to the intrusion of evil? The answers to those questions will be discovered in the coming days and weeks of our lives as we either let God's Word of Truth change what we see and what we seek, or we choose to ignore His truth and wither away spiritually. Let's pray and ask God to give us ears to hear and eyes to see! Prayer.

Our text today follows the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which Andrew preached on about a month ago, the week before Easter. And I deeply appreciate the message he preached last week and Jay's message the week before. Challenging to say the least! After the people celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Jesus knew there were serious problems that were destroying the people of Israel spiritually! Jesus had to confront the hypocrisy, the lies, the deception, the injustice and the wickedness which was rampant in the religious community of His day! Jesus goes to the heart of the problem. Let's read the first part of our text and the last verse of our text in Mark 11:1...

Mark 11:11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Mark 11:12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

Mark 11:13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

Mark 11:14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

Now let's skip down to verse 19...

Mark 11:19 When evening came, they went out of the city.

Mark 11:20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

Mark 11:21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

The Tragedy of a Withered Life

The withered tree represented Israel and the fact that they were bearing no fruit because they had turned their backs on God and rejected their purpose for existence. Israel's spiritual life had withered. This was no new thing. Jeremiah had received a message from God which described the same kind of situation back in the Old Testament...

Jer 32:30 "The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me with what their hands have made, declares the LORD.

Jer 32:31 From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused my anger and wrath that I must remove it from my sight.

Jer 32:32 The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done--they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem.

Jer 32:33 They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.

Jer 32:34 They set up their abominable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it.

Jer 32:35 They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.

Now I know you might be thinking, "but Pastor Larry, what does this have to do with my life? We don't do stuff like that! We would never sacrifice our children to an idol!" Maybe not physically, but I'm here to challenge everyone of us in this room today, and especially Fathers! What are the idols you refuse to give up to God which are spiritually sacrificing your family, your spouse, and your children, to the intrusion, invasion and destruction of the world. Are you sacrificing your children on the altar of career, materialism, adultery, porn, dishonesty, addiction, anger? While most would never think of physically sacrificing their children to an idol, if you have idols in your life and your spiritual life is withered as a result then the spiritual vulnerability of your family is real. They are unprotected! Satan is having a field day! How many parents make daily decisions without ever considering the consequences for their children?

“Okay, Pastor Larry, sorry I asked the question, “what does this have to do with me!” You were talking about Israel, can you just get back on that. It’s easier to hear about their sin and their withered life! If you’ll just keep it about them, I’ll even throw you an occasional ‘amen brother!’” Okay, back to Israel, but I can’t guarantee it won’t come back around to you and me. Here’s a question about Israel...

What was Israel’s purpose for existence?

We discover Israel’s Purpose in Isaiah 42...

Isa 42:5 This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

Isa 42:6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

Isa 42:7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Isa 42:8 "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

So let’s break it down. What was the purpose for God choosing Israel in the first place? They were to be...

A righteous people! Not a self-righteous, I’m better than you because I’m a chosen one!

They were to be a holy, set-apart people, who not only talked righteousness, but who lived in true righteousness and set the example for two groups of people. First they were to be...

A covenant for the people (you don’t neglect the family/their first obligation in their relationship with God, beside their relationship with Him, was to be their obligation to the family of God, which was a covenant agreement, a promise, a commitment, a responsibility)

But God wanted His family to grow to include other people of other nations, so they also had a purpose to be...

A light for the Gentiles (you don’t reject the outsiders)

But they consistently refused to be on mission for God! They wanted to see the label, “Chosen People” as being special and better than others rather than being a “Chosen People” on mission for God to people God also loved and wanted to bring into the family! In fact, God spelled this out when He said a part of their purpose was...

To open eyes that are blind!

In other words, they were to help people blind to the truths of God discover and see the truths of God! And if they did this it would help them accomplish two other parts of their God-given purpose in life...

To free captives from prison and To release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

But here’s the sad news...

The chosen ones rejected their calling.

It was no longer what God could do through them for His glory to help those lost and blind and chained by sin, living in darkness, but what they could do on their own for their own selfish desires, and their own glory. This so troubled Jesus that we see in our text today, the verses we skipped a moment ago, we see Jesus in the most aggressive posture He had ever taken in His ministry. And He had good reason. The ones who had been tasked with setting the example in righteousness, living by the covenant promise, being a light, opening the eyes of the blind, freeing those living in spiritual bondage and dungeons of darkness, were now themselves living in sin, blinded by their own selfish wants and desires, walking in darkness, bondage and had broken their covenant with God. And we have in our text...

An Example

Mark 11:15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were

buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves,

Mark 11:16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

Mark 11:17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations' ? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

How sad! What was happening was that merchants who had an in with the leaders and rulers of the temple were setting up shop to sell animals to the poor people for sacrifices. But here's what was going on. These merchants were shady people and were selling blemished animals, which couldn't be sold for other purposes, probably at pretty high prices, even though the animals for sacrifice were supposed to be unblemished. But they didn't care. Money was their god, their idol, their goal in life. And here's the deal: This was not a new thing either. God once again had spoken to Jeremiah many years earlier in the Old Testament...

Jer 7:1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

Jer 7:2 "Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message: "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.

Jer 7:3 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.

Jer 7:4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

Jer 7:5 If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly,

Jer 7:6 if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,

Jer 7:7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever.

Jer 7:8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

Jer 7:9 "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known,

Jer 7:10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"-safe to do all these detestable things?

Jer 7:11 Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

So here's what they were saying and doing. The people had put their trust in the temple of God rather than God himself. They believed that God would never let His temple be destroyed so they figured they could live anyway they wanted and then run to the temple and they would be safe!

"Okay, Pastor Larry, what does all this have to do with my life?" You asked that question earlier, are you sure you want to ask it again? Okay...

Did you know there are people who believe they can live any way they want to during the week and as long as they attend church on Sunday, they'll be fine! I need to explain some things to you! Please hear what I'm about to say.

Just coming to church doesn't make you right with God!

Even being a member of the church does not make you right with God!

The way to have salvation is through a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ! If you are willing to admit you have sinned and need a Savior, believe Jesus died on the Cross to be your Savior, and you call upon His name by inviting Him to be your Savior and letting Him begin the process of becoming your Lord on a daily basis, then you will find forgiveness of your sin, a new purpose in life, and the promise of eternal life in heaven some day! What is that purpose? I'll tell you in just a moment. But I must explain something extremely important and you desperately need to understand this. And on this Father's day, it's vital that Dads get this.

When Jesus comes into your heart He becomes your Savior and the penalty for your sins is covered. Jesus took your punishment. However, you've planted some bad seeds in the ground and there may still be a difficult harvest coming. You've been forgiven and God will help you get through the consequences, but consequences for sin are real. You must understand this! When you face consequences for sin, that's not God punishing you, that's consequences and results of sin. Sometimes when people face the consequences of their sin they want to blame God by saying He's punishing them. That's not it. Let me put it this way. If you've asked God to forgive you for your sin and you've truly repented and turned away from

those sinful behaviors, then Jesus took your punishment on the Old Rugged Cross! The Bible clearly says this...

Rom 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Rom 8:2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Now if you are a follower of Jesus and you're living in sin, God will discipline you to try to get you to turn from your sin and back to living for Him! God's Word says a true child of God will at times be disciplined! Discipline is not the same thing as punishment. So if you know Jesus as your Savior and have been forgiven, Jesus took your punishment, but if you go back to living in sin, there will be some uncomfortable discipline! Why? Because God wants to turn you away from sin and it's horrible consequences! So I want you to know, that just because you are a Christian and have been saved, that doesn't exempt you from the consequences of sin. Your punishment was taken by Jesus, but why would you want to continue in sin and face it's horrible consequences in this life? Let God forgive you and get you through the consequences and for God's sake and for your own sake, and for the sake of your family, stop sowing bad seeds and start planting some seeds of righteousness and then you can look forward to a new harvest! Paul said this...

Gal 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Okay, now that we understand that, let's finish our message today by looking at our God given purpose and the wonderful harvest we can look forward to as we fulfill that purpose!

Our Purpose

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Pet 2:10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Pet 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

1 Pet 2:12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

We don't work for our salvation, it is a gift from God, but once we are saved, we are called to do good works for His glory.

The Northshore Purpose

"To see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the one's He gave His life for transformed!"

Why is it so important to fulfill our purpose?

Eight Reasons

God Deserves Our Best!

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

People Matter To God!

Luke 19:41 As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it . . .

People are spiritually Lost!

Mat 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

People Need Jesus!

1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--

(Saved from what?) The penalty of sin, the power of sin, hopelessness, despair, bitterness, hate, eternal separation from God

People Need Answers!

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

People Need Community!

"Sometimes you wanna go . . .where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came. You wanna be where you can see our troubles are all the same. You wanna be where everybody knows your name."

Anybody remember where that comes from? Yep, Cheers. Have you ever felt like an outsider, like an alien? God told this to the Hebrew people...

Exo 23:9 "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.

People Need Cultural Relevance without Compromise

Mark Mittleburg put it this way...

"The job of the missionary is to communicate the complete gospel message – without altering it or compromising it in any way – in the context of the culture he or she has been called to reach."

Billy Graham said this...

"Instead of becoming salt and light, we have been content to withdraw into our separate ecclesiastical ghettos, preoccupied with our own internal affairs and unconcerned about the deepest needs of those around us. In the eyes of many, religion has lost its relevance."

People Need Time!

"In today's world, if Christians aren't willing to invest time developing meaningful relationships with lost people, then we have by our inaction placed a value of zero on their souls." Itm

It takes time to make a disciple who will make a disciple who will make a disciple! We would like to have a revival, a spiritual awakening where everyone comes to Jesus in a miraculous crusade meeting. The truth is, reaching people is most effective when believers take the time to build relationships with people who don't know Jesus. Not just to win a convert, but because you really care about that person and because their life matters to God! When people know you genuinely love them, they will be open to your life's message! You know I said it takes time to make a disciple who will make a disciple who will make a disciple. Do you know how many times you would have to follow this process to win every person alive in the world? What process? One disciple reaches one person and disciples them, let's say for six months. Then those two reach two more and spend six months discipling them. Then those four reach four and so on. How many times would this process have to happen? We're about to do some math! Ready? Before I answer the question, let me share with you a few facts...

There are roughly 7.53 Billion people on planet earth. That includes the three to six who are on the space station!

Avery Willis, Jr. wrote this back in 1979, it's important to remember when he wrote this because he will be talking about future dates that we have already flown by. He said, back in 1979...

"World population has outstripped our comprehension. If we could have begun winning converts at the rate of one a minute the day Jesus arose, we would have won only one billion persons from then until now. Obviously, that is not fast enough to reach our world! Suppose we could win three thousand persons a day as the disciples did at Pentecost. How long do you suppose it would take to win the approximately six billion expected to be on earth in the year 2000? Fifty-four hundred seventy-nine years! If Abraham had won three thousand converts each day, and his descendants had continued doing so, it would be approximately a.d. 3000 before we could evangelize just the people who will be living on the earth in the year 2000."

Now for the moment you've all been waiting for. The answer to the question of how long would it take to reach the population of the world if we did the disciple making process Jesus taught? One disciple reaches one person and disciples them, let's say for six months. Then those two reach two more and spend six months discipling them. Then those four reach four and so on. How many times would this process have to happen? Ready? Only 33 times!!! And it would only take 16 1/2 years to do this process if each person spent 6 whole months to make each disciple! The amount of people reached would be 8 billion, 589 million, 934 thousand 592! That's over a billion more people than live on our planet!

Here's the sad thing. How many people do you know who would be willing to spend six months meeting with someone once every week or so, to help them become a disciple?

Writers Rusaw and Swanson put it this way...

"The test of your spiritual growth is simple – How has your heart grown in the past twelve months? Are your arms open wider toward others, or are they wrapped around yourself? Do you have room for anyone else in your life? An acquaintance pondered this question and said to me, 'you know, when I first became a Christian, I had a really small house but a really big heart. Now I have a really big house but a really small heart. I want a bigger heart.'

Mat 9:37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

Mat 9:38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

A Person or A Church Without Purpose Will Have A Withered Life

If there were no purpose in this life, when a person accepted Christ as Savior, he or she would be immediately taken to heaven. But we are not. We are here because we have a God ordained job to do. Like the Hebrew people, we are called with a purpose. Listen and apply this to your life...

Isa 42:6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

Isa 42:7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Jesus put it this way to His disciples just before He ascended back to heaven...

Mat 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mat 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mat 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Let's pray!