

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 33, Cleansing the House of Prayer

Speaker: Neil Chotai

Passage: Mark 11:12-26

Big idea: An effective prayer life must exhibit 4 qualities in God's Temple.



Many of you know that my background is Indian from the Indian subcontinent. We moved to Canada to a place called Oshawa, about 45 minutes away from Toronto. When I was growing up, we would take trips into Toronto to do some grocery shopping at some Indian stores. When my parents said we were going to Gerard St. that meant hurry up and get in the car, we're going to go to Toronto and we're going to go to the Indian food district and we're going to watch a Bollywood film. To top off these wonderful days, my mom would shop for coconuts, meaning she was planning to make a coconut dessert, my favourite.

So, we would come home, and my dad would open up the coconut. He had a knack for opening coconuts, making sure that the water did not spill out. He would then save the water and let me drink it, I love it.

I was about four or five years old, and I watched my dad open the coconut like Superman, watched the water pour into a container, and was ready to rush and drink the water. But my father said 'STOP', and he showed me the inside of the coconut, it was absolutely rotten. It stunk! It was a horrible putrid smell, so we got rid of that coconut for sure.



What looked good on the outside was rotten to the core on the inside and it was good for absolutely nothing.

In Mark 11:12-25, we are looking at Jesus passing a fig tree on the way to the temple in Jerusalem. We are going to see that what looked good on the outside was actually rotten on the inside.

The way Mark writes this passage of Scripture is like a sandwich. He writes a narrative of the fig tree, part A, then the narrative about Jesus at the temple, and then another narrative of the fig tree Part B. So, it is like a fig sandwich.

<sup>12</sup> The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

<sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. <sup>17</sup> 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.'"

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

<sup>20</sup> In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. <sup>21</sup> Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

<sup>22</sup> "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. <sup>23</sup> "Truly[d] I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. <sup>25</sup> And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Mark 11:12-25

Today's Message Title

# Cleansing the House Of Prayer



What looked good on the outside was rotten on the inside. And there was cleansing that had to take place.

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

It is the day after Jesus came into Jerusalem and was given a red-carpet treatment by the people, he entered. He went to the temple court, looked around and was evaluating the temple and its mission. Because it was late, he went back to stay the night in Bethany with the disciples.

The place where Jesus was saying was really busy because it was time of the Passover. Jesus and the disciples decide to go back to Jerusalem and along the way Jesus gets hungry. We have to remember that Jesus is 100% God but also 100% man. Which means he 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.”

Jesus goes and he sees a big tree and looks for fruit, but he only found leaves. It is interesting that Mark says that it was not the season for figs.

If it was not the season for figs, why would Jesus, who knows everything, go to the fig tree to find something to eat?

The fig season is usually in the fall in the Middle East. However, in the spring fig trees send out little knobs or buds called *Paggim*, and then after that leaves come out. These little buds are actually edible. And it is believed that these buds should have been present when Jesus approached the tree.

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.”

Finding no figs or buds to eat, Jesus actually curses the fig tree, that it would never produce fruit again. This is the only record in scripture where Jesus performs a destructive miracle. But this is an object lesson for the disciples and for us. Jesus uses the fig tree to illustrate the great sin of hypocrisy by the people of Israel. That on the outside they were presenting a pious exterior, like a beautiful big tree, on the outside Israel looks all put together. But on the inside, it is corrupt, it is putrid, it is rotten to the core.

Mark 11:15-16, “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, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.”

Now Jesus and disciples come to Jerusalem and enter the temple. We see a different view of Jesus in this passage of scripture than what is recorded throughout the gospels. Usually when we look at Jesus in the scriptures, we see a nice guy healing the sick, feeding everybody, and teaching. But this is a different view of Jesus, the view of God’s judgment.

Jesus sees what is happening in the temple courts and it makes him angry, and he begins to drive out people who are buying and selling there. He overturns the tables of all the money changers and the benches of people who are selling there. In one of the other accounts of Scripture it depicts Jesus using a whip to drive people away from the temple courts, for he will not let people use the temple court as a to cross the city.

Now Jesus is not angry because he is hungry. Jesus is angry with a righteous anger because of what is happening in the temple courts. Remember at the beginning of my message I talked about the coconut on the outside looked good but on the inside it was rotten. And then Jesus went to the fig tree, and everything looked good on the outside, but it bore no fruit. This narrative is there to mirror or reflect the state of the temple. It looks good on the outside but on the inside, there is corruption. What Jesus was doing was fulfilling prophecy of the book of Malachi 3: 1-3.

The temple in Jerusalem was the biggest building in the city. You could see it from anywhere. Similar to the CN Tower in Toronto. It was a prominent building; you could not miss it. The temple was constructed in four parts. The inner section, called the holy of holies. The high priest would go into the holy of holies once a year and offer atonement for the sins of the people and only the high priest was allowed to go in there. Outside of the holy of holies was the court for the Jewish males to worship in, and outside of that was the court for the Jewish women to worship in. And then out from there that was the area or court of the gentiles. This is where the gentiles would come and worship the living God.

The area or the court of gentiles was being used not for spiritual purposes but for commerce. There was a huge problem with this, for several reasons.

1. When worshippers came, they would bring animal sacrifices. Usually when they brought this animal sacrifice one of the priests would look at it and if they found something wrong with the animal (and they usually did), the priest will say this is not acceptable. So, the people would then have to go and find the right animal sacrifice. People would then sell acceptable animals in the court of the gentiles for people to buy, pre-approved by the priest. They would then charge more than the one they already bought.
2. On top of high fees for sacrificial animals, the temple charges a tax. But the temple would only take a certain type of currency so then visitors would have to exchange their local currency with the temple currency, and the exchange rates were high.
3. The temple was also being used as a shortcut for people to cut across the city. What was for prayer and worship was now a highway for travel and a open platform for theivery.

This was all a ploy to rip off the people and make the priests rich. This was something like Jesus could not ignore. And to add insult to injury they're doing it in the area or the court of the gentiles. So, if you are a follower of the living God and you want to pray at the temple there was no place for you to pray. All of this was a rotten stench in the nose of God. This is not what the temple was supposed to be for. And that is why Jesus is angry and upset. What God had given the people as a place to worship him has turned into a mockery of worship unto God.

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.’”

Jesus then quotes two Old Testament prophets.

The first passage is from Isaiah 56:7, “my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”.

...these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.”

**Isaiah 56:7**

**(NIV)**

The Jewish leaders and Religious leaders allowed the area for the gentiles to be a noisy, smelly marketplace ignoring the promise that God had given to all peoples that they could worship the living God.

<sup>11</sup> Has this house, which bears my Name,  
become a den of robbers to you? But I  
have been watching! declares the Lord.

**Jeremiah 7:11**

**(NIV)**

The second prophet that was quoted was Jeremiah. Instead of allowing the temple to be what it was meant to be a place of prayer that allowed it to become a place for robbers. In which people were robbing the worshippers from worshipping.

The religious leaders were allowing the Jews to worship in a perverted way because they were making so much money by having the “right” sacrifices and giving the “right” currency for the temple tax. They were not allowing the gentiles access to God which was promised to Abraham back in Genesis 12 in the promise that all nations will be blessed through him.

I really wish I could have been there just to see what Jesus was doing in the temple court area. It would have been absolutely amazing to see Jesus full of this passion about how bad the religious system became and how it was rotten and a horrible fragrance to the Lord.

Judgment was given upon the people in the temple. And, 40 years after Jesus is resurrected, the Romans destroy the temple. The very temple that Jesus was standing in, the very temple that he was cleansing. All to the lament of the people of Jerusalem.

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.”

The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and it is also believed the Herodians (which were the political elite), despise what Jesus was doing. They had had enough. So, they actually start trying to find a way to actually kill Jesus. This is the first time this response is recorded in Marks gospel and in a couple of days Jesus was going to die on the cross.

And then there was a reaction from the whole crowd, and they were amazed at his teaching. At what he was doing especially in the temple courts. And I'm sure the crowd was absolutely pleased with the fact that he was destroying the system that was causing them great pain.

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

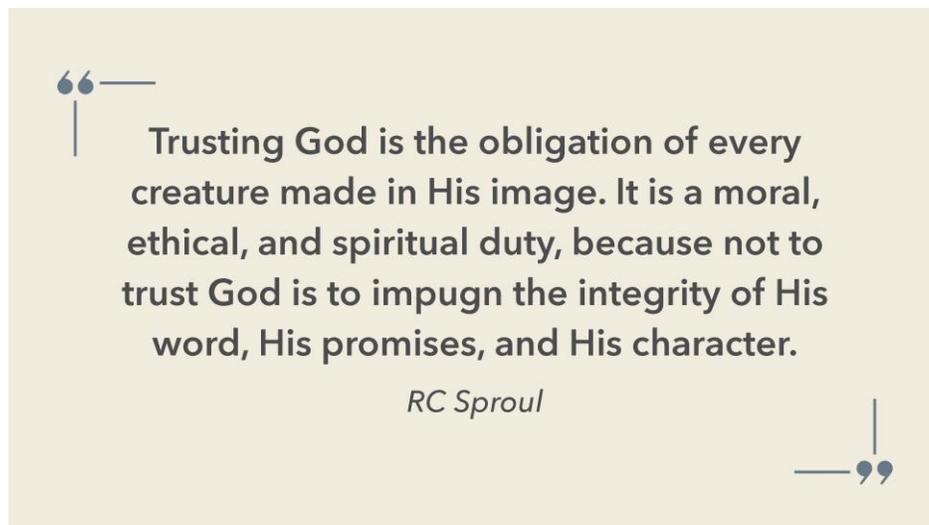
After this incident at the temple Jesus stays until the evening and then he goes with his disciples out of the city. He is not staying in Jerusalem.

Mark 11:20-21, "In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!'"

Mark returns to the scene of the fig tree. This time the fig tree looks extremely different. It has withered from its roots; it is dead and only good for the fire now. Jesus had predicted that no one would ever eat from that tree again. Peter remembering what Jesus had said called his attention to the tree. Jesus does not in any way interpret the event, but the meaning is obvious. Jesus' predicted judgment on the temple will come to pass as surely as his prediction of the withering of the fig tree did. The tree represents Israel and is often a symbol in the Old Testament for God's victory. Israel had proven herself to be unfruitful with respect to God's purpose for her. Her worship had become hypocrisy. As the fig tree was judged so was the nation of Israel.

Mark 11:22, "'Have faith in God,' Jesus answered."

Jesus answers the disciple to have faith in God. He says it as a command. A command from Jesus to all of us. What Jesus was actually saying is trust God.



Jesus uses this incident of the fig tree and what just happened at the temple to give some lessons on faith and prayer. The source of the power for performing the miracle is God. He must be the object of our faith. The command to have faith in God is a call against what is displayed in the cursing of the fig tree and in the cleansing of the temple, showing infidelity which is faithlessness.

Mark 11:23-24 "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

Jesus says a familiar rabbinical saying about uprooting mountains. Jesus had talked many times about faith during his ministry to the disciples. Faith is not chosen arbitrarily as a condition of prayer; it is the basic condition of all our relationship with God. This metaphor that Jesus is using is not to be taken literally. We never read Jesus moving in the mountains physically although as God he could if you wanted to. Many have taken verses like this out of context and have created a theology in which if you have enough faith, you can do anything. But what Jesus is talking about is all according to the will of God.

Mark 11:25, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Jesus continues to speak up on prayer and states that forgiveness is a part of it. To be effective prayer it must be offered in the spirit of forgiveness. Prayer not only comes from the heart of faith but also one full of forgiveness.



**“Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.”**

*CS Lewis*



This forgiveness does not have anything to do with salvation, but it has to do with our relationships with one another. There is a grave warning here to those who do not forgive, that if they do not forgive then our father in heaven will not forgive their trespasses. Forgiveness is interlinked with the gospel. God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others are connected, they are linked. It is because of the gospel or Jesus Christ.

## **BIG IDEA**

**An Effective Prayer Life  
Must Exhibit 4 Qualities  
In God's Temple.**



What is God's temple? The answer to that question is not something that is made of brick and mortar, but something that is made of flesh and blood. We are the temple of God.

1 Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”

Prayer is what began your faith journey with Jesus Christ and prayer is what will sustain you. If we do not have an effective prayer life in communicating with God then we are like the temple in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. We look good on the outside but on the inside not at all. We must be effective in our prayer life as an act of worship to God but also to be effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

## **Adoration of God**

The temple was in existence for people to come and to give worship to God. To adore God for their history of him protecting them, loving them, caring for them, and promising them life. So going to the temple was to give adoration unto God not just for the Jews but also there was way for gentiles as well. It was for all peoples and nations.

The house of prayer needs to have adoration to God there has been adoration of God that takes place.

We adore him for his faithfulness each and every moment of the day, that he is with us not forsaking us. Psalm 89:8, “For the redemption that he has given us we give him the praise. Through the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus in the grace he gives us”. Ephesians 1:7, “For his steadfast love which is better than life that we lift up our hearts we lift up our hands and we praise God” (Psalm 63:3-4 ) from whom all blessings to flow.

They were not doing this at the temple. They were not adoring God. The religious leaders and the high priest were not doing this in the proper way. They were tainting this adoration by not even adoring God. But God calls us and wants us to adore him. It is not for his sake that we adore him but, in a way, it is the pleasure that we receive in worshipping him. So, it is actually good for us.

Do we adore God in our prayer life? Do we take that time to adore him, or do we just go directly to him and ask for something that we want?

## **Repentance of Sin**

Now this is the sin that we constantly face in life. We are all entangled in sin because we are sinners but are redeemed by the grace of God. So, it is this battle between the spirit and the flesh. And we need to go daily and ask God to forgive us of our sins in humility and in repentance to him. And this draws us closer to God who renews us each and every day.

We go to God and ask for his mercies and renewing us in the spirit daily (Psalm 51:1,10-12). When we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us. When we confess our sins, we obtain mercy.

At the temple they thought they were repenting of their sins. But in actual fact they were sinning in the temple courts. They were not there for the poor they were not there for those who came from a long way they wanted to make sure that they had made more than a profit by ripping off the people. They made the temple into place that should be where sins are forgiven to place where sins were committed that could not be forgiven because there was no repentance, there was no sorrow, what was meant to be used for good was used for evil.

## **Faith Full Petitions**

Notice the wording I used, faith-full-petitions, as opposed to “faithful petitions”.

Jesus said believe, do not doubt the will of God the father.

Matthew 7:7-8, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

We must come to God in faith filled prayer, believing according to his sovereign will. So, we come to God with petitions, we come to confess with prayers and believe that God will answer.

At the temple none of this was happening, for the petitions were given without any faith. Because the people were there paying lip service to a god that they never even wanted to connect with or could care less about. It was a cultural practice. Many times, in our context Christianity has become a culture in which you live, you go to church, and you pay lip service to God that you no longer worship. And then something happens, your prayers are not answered because you have no faith in the God that will meet the needs that you have.

Do we bring our petitions to God full of faith? Do we just pay lip service? Do we allow the enemy to bring doubt into our life?

## **Love for All People**

The reason Jesus came to earth was for the redemption of humanity because of love. God is love. If God has reconciled us with him and forgiven us, should we not forgive one another. When you go to prayer with unforgiveness in your heart, you are basically telling God that my grievance against this person is far greater than the grievance I caused you. So, we are saying the issue we have with our brother or sister is far bigger than the sin that prevents us from having relation to Jesus. That does not sound correct at all. That is wrong. Because if God has forgiven us much, should we not forgive those we are in this life together with.

1 John 4:7-12, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”

In this passage of Mark, the religious leaders were blatant in their hatred of the gentiles. It was absolutely blatant. That was the only place where the gentiles would go and worship the living God before the resurrection of Christ. That was the only place. They impeded them from worshipping the living God. Even though scriptures in the Old Testament states that those who are gentle can worship the living God. There was no love of God in them, they despised one that was made in the image of God just like them.

And when we have something against an individual, we are doing the same thing. That we are despising someone made in the image of God just like us.

To have an effective prayer life, we must adore God, repent from sin, have faith, and love others.

### **An Effective Prayer Life In God’s Temple**

**Adoration of God  
Repentance of Sin  
Faith Full Petitions  
Love for All People**

