

The Cursed Fig Tree (Mark 11:12–22) KRCN 19 July 2026

1. It was near the time of the Passover. As you have already learned through our Bible Academy, this was one of Israel's three major annual feasts. It was also the beginning of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, making it the longest and most significant holiday season in Israel. Perhaps for that reason, every Israelite male made it a point to go up to Jerusalem during this festival.
2. It was at this time that the event took place. After arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple and caused what many would have described as a disturbance. The local people may well have thought that some country man from Nazareth had come into the city and started causing trouble. But Jesus' disciples, who were with Him, understood the scene very differently.
3. John 2:17 says, *"His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for Your house will consume Me.'"*
4. What does this mean? Does it mean that overturning the tables of the money changers was simply an expression of His "zeal for God's house"? Does it mean that His zeal justified driving out the merchants with a whip? Surely it cannot mean that a passionate concern for the temple is enough to justify such acts of force.
5. The disciples simply *remembered* the Scripture that said, **"Zeal for Your house will consume Me."** They recalled that these words had already been written somewhere in the Old Testament. But where? They come from Psalm 69:9: *"For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."* (Psalm 69:9)
6. Therefore, the fact that the disciples remembered this Scripture does **not** mean they were trying to justify what appeared to be Jesus' violent actions. Rather, they recognized that the prophecy of Scripture was being fulfilled. Just as the Psalm had foretold, Jesus acted in the temple that day with the intensity of one who appeared almost like a madman. In what others saw as reckless behaviour, the disciples saw the Word of God coming to pass.
7. John's Gospel records another prophecy connected with this same event. John 2:19 says, *"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'"* If we call the previous event the **cleansing of the temple**, then this statement is a prophecy concerning the **destruction of the temple**.
8. The fact that the Apostle John places these two accounts side by side suggests that they are not unrelated events. Rather, the cleansing of the temple and the destruction of the temple belong to the same redemptive purpose. At least, this is how John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, presents the story in his Gospel.
9. When we read these two events together, we see that Jesus teaches that the cleansing of the temple would ultimately be accomplished through its destruction and restoration. In other

words, the true cleansing of the temple would be completed through the death of Jesus Christ, and its restoration through His resurrection. By His cross, the house of prayer—the house of the Father—would be rebuilt.

10. Among the Jewish festivals there is one called the **Feast of Dedication**, more commonly known as **Hanukkah**. During this festival, children traditionally play with a four-sided spinning top called a **sevivon** (or dreidel). Each of its four sides bears a Hebrew letter: **נ** (*Nun*), **ג** (*Gimel*), **ה** (*He*), and **ש** (*Shin*).
11. These four initials declare, **"A great miracle happened here."** They commemorate the recovery of the temple after it had been desecrated under foreign rule. The image of Zeus that had been set up in the temple was removed, sacrifices were once again offered with lambs rather than pigs, at the appointed times prescribed by the Law rather than at arbitrary times, and worship was restored by the true people of God instead of pagan worshippers.
12. While the memory of Hanukkah and the rededication of the temple was still vivid in the minds of the people, Jesus came to the well in Samaria. There He spoke of worship that would be offered **"in spirit and in truth."** He declared that the place of worship would be **neither this mountain nor Jerusalem**. Nor would it be defined by Hanukkah or any other feast. Rather, it would be worship offered **"at this hour."** What kind of worship was He speaking of? He was pointing to the event of the cross, where He Himself would offer His own body as the once-for-all sacrifice.
13. If we ask, *"How can we possibly offer such a sacrifice?"* or *"What is the true worship offered in spirit and in truth?"* the answer is this: it is the sacrifice offered by Jesus Himself. He cleanses the temple by allowing His own body—the true temple—to be destroyed. In this sense, the true Feast of Dedication begins when Jesus goes up to Jerusalem at Passover, willingly endures the scourging, and ultimately gives His life on the cross.
14. Keep this background in mind as we return to today's passage. Our text comes from Mark 11. Interestingly, it records the same temple cleansing event that we find in John's Gospel. Yet Mark presents it differently. Rather than standing on its own, the cleansing of the temple is deliberately placed in the middle of another, larger event.
15. Mark 11:12 begins, *"The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry."* By now, you may already sense what is about to unfold. It is the account of an event that begins with the hunger of Jesus. The Passover was drawing near, and during those days Jesus travelled back and forth between Bethany and the temple, teaching the people.
16. As Jesus left Bethany and made His way toward the temple, He was hungry. In the distance He saw a fig tree covered with leaves. The presence of leaves suggested that the tree was alive and flourishing. Naturally, He approached it expecting to find something on it. But there was nothing. Why? **Because it was not the season for figs.**

17. Yet Jesus pronounced a curse upon the tree. It sounds almost like verbal violence. He poured out His anger on a tree that had done nothing wrong. From our modern perspective, it seems no different from what He had done in the temple. As the disciples listened to those words of judgment, they continued on with Him into the temple.
18. There the incident reached its climax. *"He 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 11:15). He appeared to be deeply angered. Hungry and now visibly upset... Today we might even describe such behaviour as an uncontrolled outburst of rage.
19. By evening, Jesus returned to Bethany. The next time they passed the fig tree, the disciples noticed that it had withered from the roots. When they pointed this out to Jesus, He simply replied, **"Have faith in God."**
20. What are we to make of this? *Have faith in God?* Does that mean words like these possess supernatural power? Was Jesus saying that the curse He had spoken that morning had somehow taken effect? Does faith in God justify acts that appear violent—or even destructive? Surely that cannot be what He meant.
21. When people read this passage, many immediately think of Jesus' teaching about the mustard seed. They assume He is saying that if we have even that much faith, we could tell a fig tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would happen. Does Jesus mean that if we simply believe in God, a curse spoken in the morning will come true by evening?
22. Yet that is not the context of this passage. The withering of the fig tree is closely connected with the cleansing of the temple. Why? Because Mark intentionally places the temple cleansing between the cursing of the tree and the discovery that it has withered. Faith in God is not presented here as a means of performing miraculous feats. Rather, it is intimately connected with God's work of cleansing His temple.
23. As the other Gospels also make clear, this points forward to the death of Jesus—to the destruction of the true temple. Therefore, when we read the account of the fig tree in Mark, we may understand the tree as foreshadowing Christ Himself. The death of the fig tree parallels the death of Jesus, through whom the temple is truly cleansed and a new and living worship—in spirit and in truth—is established.
24. Seen in this light, the death of Jesus as the true Fig Tree carries several meanings. First, it is the death of One who bears no guilt—an innocent death. Second, the tree's withering from the roots points to the completeness of His death. Third, through this death, true worship in spirit and truth is accomplished, and the reality of the kingdom of God is revealed.
25. Why, then, did Jesus curse the fig tree as He passed by? It was not because He was merely hungry, nor because the tree had somehow failed to fulfil its duty as a fig tree. Rather, the cursing of the tree is another way of speaking about the cleansing of the temple. Just as a

gardener prunes a vine so that it may bear more fruit, this act points to the cross of Christ—the cleansing that brings forth abundant life.

26. Do you understand why I have spent so much time today explaining what may seem like a difficult passage? It is because, although we come to the Scriptures expecting to find eternal life, the message of Scripture does not always align with what we naturally expect to hear.
27. When we read about the withered fig tree, we often conclude that the lesson is that we must bear fruit worthy of repentance. Some even say that, although it was not the season for figs, the tree should at least have shown some sign of good faith by producing the early figs that appear in spring. In other words, when we read Scripture through the lens of our own expectations, we often arrive at conclusions that miss its true meaning.
28. We do this because we assume that the fig tree represents ourselves. Once we make that assumption, it becomes easy to draw moral lessons from the story. But let me say this as clearly as I can: **the fig tree does not represent us.**
29. It points instead to Jesus Himself, who willingly goes to His death. It reveals the kind of death He would endure and what He intended to accomplish through it. By His sacrifice, Jesus would offer to the Father the true and perfect worship—not on this mountain or in Jerusalem, but the worship offered **in spirit and in truth.**
30. That is why we so often miss the point when we read about the death of the fig tree. Like a dog that has lost the chicken and only stares at the rooftop, we end up looking in the wrong direction. We long for our own salvation, hope to achieve it by our own efforts, and imagine that such an achievement would somehow satisfy God's justice. Yet this passage declares something entirely different: salvation is accomplished by Christ Himself, through the offering of His own body.
31. Jesus said, **"Have faith in God."** But what kind of God are we to trust? Not a God who merely demands moral improvement, requires religious offerings, or waits for us to prove ourselves through suffering. Rather, we are to trust the God who offers **Himself** as the sacrifice in order to make us clean. May we rest in His saving work and rely wholly upon His grace.