

Universal Studios Tour illusions: The Burning House **illustration 1** The facade **illustration 2**

When it's a film company, showing something to be what it's not, is expected

When it comes to religion & spiritual matters, it's unacceptable

Main Point: **God rejects those who manipulate and misuse religion,
but receives those who meet Him in faith & mirror His forgiveness**

Mark 11:12-14 The next day when they went out from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he went to find out if there was anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And his disciples heard it.

There's a Markan Sandwich structure here

Mark 20-21 Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.

²¹ Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered."

It is significant that this is the only time in Jesus' first coming in which He used His power to bring perm. judgment

Many have found this action from Jesus to be perplexing

Joseph Klausner- *"...a gross injustice on a tree which was guilty of no wrong and had but performed its natural function"*

Manson- *"It is a tale of miraculous power wasted in the service of ill temper..."*

Why not use His power to produce figs?

Because the point wasn't the tree and its fruit- it pointed to something else.

The sandwich structure should make us look more intently at the middle section

Here's the shocking truth: When Jesus goes to the temple, He's not cleansing it (contrary to section headline),
He's cursing what it has become

Jesus knows it isn't the season for figs. He's not being childish or petty, He's acting out a parable that the disciples will remember, Peter will tell Mark about, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Mark will tell us about

And here's what we'll find: **The greater danger isn't having no fruit,
it's projecting to have what you don't**

Jesus uses the fruitless tree on the Mt of Olives to reveal the fruitless religion across the valley on Mt Zion-

Jeremiah 8:11-13 They have treated the brokenness of my dear people superficially, claiming, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. ¹² Were they ashamed when they acted so detestably? They weren't at all ashamed. They can no longer feel humiliation. Therefore, they will fall among the fallen. When I punish them, they will collapse," says the Lord. ¹³ "I will gather them and bring them to an end." This is the Lord's declaration. "There will be no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, and even the leaf will wither. Whatever I have given them will be lost to them."

As He cursed the tree, He will reject the empty ritual at the Temple

Mark 11:15-19 They came to Jerusalem, and he went into the temple and began to throw out those buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. ¹⁷ He was teaching them: "Is it not written, **My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?** But you have made it **a den of thieves!**"

¹⁸The chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to kill him. For they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was astonished by his teaching. ¹⁹Whenever evening came, they would go out of the city.

Some would argue that Jesus is acting to reform/ cleanse the temple. But the question becomes,

In light of the New Covenant and His ultimate sacrifice, what is He trying to reform?

And why try to reform or cleanse something He knew and prophesized would soon be destroyed (Mark 13:2), as David Garland puts it, “*without any great anguish*”?

Hooker, “*as an act of reforming zeal it would have to be judged a failure: the money changers no doubt soon recovered their coins, and the place was restored to order.*”

If His goal was to cleanse it, it didn’t stay clean for long

The logical conclusion is that He is not intending to cleanse the Temple.

What He is doing is what the prophets of old did- ‘PROPHETIC PROTEST’. It’s symbolic of a greater judgment.

- Jeremiah 19- Jeremiah shatters a clay jar in front of the leaders.
Message: *Just as the jar is broken beyond repair, so judgment will come on Jerusalem.*
- Ezekiel 4–5- Ezekiel builds a model city, lays on his side around it for hundreds of days, and even shaves his hair to divide and burn it.
Message: *Jerusalem will be besieged, suffer, and be scattered.*
- Mark 11- *As the tree was cursed & withered, so will the Temple and what it’s become*

The temple had become a national shrine, exclusive to Israel’s identity; even a symbol that served to divide Israel from the nations.

But God had a broader desire for its purpose that was not being fulfilled by those in place- Israel was to be *for* the nations, as the vessels of God’s dwelling

Objection: “*But it’s obvious that His issue was the business they had made out of it, look at the verses He quotes.*”

Again, yes, that’s a part of the issue, but not the main thing.

Two reasons- **1. The sandwich structure points to an issue of unfruitfulness, not business**

Notice in v15 that He also throws out the buyers (not just the sellers).

What then is Jesus doing, if not just rejecting greedy business practices in a holy place?

He’s rejecting the temple system itself!

Jason Meyer, “*Jesus has not cleansed or restored the temple. He has caused all activity in the temple to cease.*”

This is why the Pharisees are mad enough to start to try to find a way to kill Him (V18)

2. The context of those verses Jesus quotes

Isaiah 56 is a chapter revealing that God’s plan of salvation is intended to be for the nations, not just Israel. It’s for those who up to this point had no access

Isaiah 56:3-8 No foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord should say, “The Lord will exclude me from his people,” and the eunuch should not say, “Look, I am a dried-up tree.”
⁴For the Lord says this: “For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold firmly to my covenant, ⁵I will give them, in my house and within my walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give each of them an everlasting name that will never be cut off. ⁶As for the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to become his servants— all

who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold firmly to my covenant—
7I will bring them to my holy mountain and let them rejoice in my house of prayer. Their
burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, **for my house will be called a
house of prayer for all nations.**”⁸ This is the declaration of the Lord God, who gathers the
dispersed of Israel: “I will gather to them still others besides those already gathered.”

Is that what is happening the day Jesus enters the temple? No.

But one day it would all change, and Jesus is the one to bring that change

Why does Jesus quote Jeremiah 7?

In Jer. 7 the people were not pursuing God, but their sin. Not only that,

they were using the temple rituals as a way to keep them safe...so they could keep sinning.

Jeremiah 7:1-11 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ²“Stand in the gate of
the house of the Lord and there call out this word: ‘Hear the word of the Lord, all you people
of Judah who enter through these gates to worship the Lord. ³“This is what the Lord of
Armies, the God of Israel, says: Correct your ways and your actions, and I will allow you to
live in this place. ⁴Do not trust deceitful words, chanting, “This is the temple of the Lord, the
temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.” ⁵Instead, if you really correct your ways and
your actions, if you act justly toward one another, ⁶if you no longer oppress the resident
alien, the fatherless, and the widow and no longer shed innocent blood in this place or
follow other gods, bringing harm on yourselves, ⁷I will allow you to live in this place, the land
I gave to your ancestors long ago and forever. ⁸But look, you keep trusting in deceitful words
that cannot help. ⁹“Do you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to
Baal, and follow other gods that you have not known? ¹⁰Then do you come and stand before
me in this house that bears my name and say, “We are rescued, so we can continue doing
all these detestable acts”? ¹¹**Has this house, which bears my name, become a den of
robbers in your view?** Yes, I too have seen it. This is the Lord’s declaration.

Robbers do not do their robbing in the den; the den is where they go hide out after robbing so
that they can get away with it.

Jesus is attacking a false hope they have, that they can live as treacherously as they please
and simply go through the motions outwardly in the temple to be in good standing with God
and not deal with His judgment.

This was not just Jesus’ assessment that no one else saw, it was evident this is what was happening.

Josephus on the behavior of the Jewish Zealots during the war with Rome-

*“For this reason, I think even God himself, hating their impiety, turned away from our city, and no longer
judging the temple to be a clean house for Him, brought the Romans upon us and cleansing fire on the city.”*

All wickedness is an abomination to the Lord, but religious wickedness in His name is especially detestable

Jesus is pronouncing judgment on:

- **ethnic divisions over spiritual fellowship**
- **ritual sacrifices over the ethical mercy**
- **abuse of the holy things turning them into fruitless things**
- **merchandising of religion that obstructs access of others to God**

The tree withered after Jesus' indictment against it, and in less than a generation the temple would be destroyed as well by the Romans (AD 70)

Daniel Akin- *"It was popularly believed that when the Messiah came He would purge the temple of Gentiles. Instead, Jesus comes and cleanses the temple for Gentiles."*

There are some who have made much of the death of the tree but have neglected the death of the purpose of the temple to reach all people and bring them near to God. Like Jonah, they mourn more for the plant, than the people.

HOW DOES THIS CARRY OVER TO US TODAY?

Too many people are too easily impressed with leaves.

BIG leaves, GREEN leaves. THICK STRONG leaves, MANY leaves...yet no fruit

What kind of people would Jesus bring an indictment in in our day?

- The **Sunday only** "Christian" (Consumer, transactional)
- The **social media only** "Christian" (For the likes and follows)
- The **brand manager** "Christian" (more concerned with looking like a strong Christian than actually being one; unaddressed unconfessed sin)
- The **religious activity** "Christian" (Always at events doing much, never in devotion, always with others never with the Lord)
- The **moral facade** "Christian" (they don't drink/ smoke/ dance/ cuss.. but don't forgive, repent, & do gossip)
- The **crisis only** "Christian" (Emergency to get out of a pickle. Prays for a way out never for a way deeper)

What if God combed through our leaves, what would He find?

Immediately after Peter realized the fig tree has withered, Jesus responds with a lesson on what He is replacing fruitless religion and empty ritual with-

A real relationship with God through faith & with others through forgiveness

Mark 11:22-25 Jesus replied to them, "Have faith in God. ²³Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours. ²⁵And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."

It was the common thought that the temple made your prayers more effective, but if Jesus will do away from the temple, where will prayer happen? Real prayer will arise in a heart full of faith and forgiveness

Much has been said of verse 23. We have to keep the context in mind:

Jesus didn't say, "whoever says to A mountain"; He said "whoever says to *THIS* mountain".

What mountain is He talking about? Standing on the mount of Olives, the only mountain near and in front of them is Jerusalem, and specifically, the temple mount 

The important thing here is the phrase "it will be done for them"- not their power, but God's

- **Prayer is not** getting God to bend to our will, but pulling ourselves towards His Boat's mooring line: The rope doesn't pull the dock towards the boat; it pulls the boat towards the dock
- **Prayer is not** a tool to overcome the unwillingness of God

Jesus taught that God is ready and eager to give to us all that is good for us.

We're not trying to convince God to do something He doesn't want to do;
we're trying to align our wills to His, so that we might understand whether something is good for us
right now, at a future time, or not at all

ill.: Teaching Ariel to ride her bike, but her wheels need air and she needs a helmet
I am excited for this moment more than she is, yet she feels I need to convince me

To be clear, there are some things that Christians should not ask and that God will not give.

As a parent wants to gift their child many things, but knows that not all things the child asks for will be
beneficial for them.

It's interesting that Jesus pairs faith-filled prayer with forgiveness

God takes forgiveness extremely serious. If we will refuse to forgive, it calls into question if we have grasped
the forgiveness we've been gifted with in Christ.

*"Unforgiveness happens when someone else's sin becomes bigger than the cross.
The debt others owe us seems bigger than the debt we owed God."*

If you've been wronged or hurt by someone else, the path forward includes forgiveness.

Forgiveness is often slow and costly, yet we are called to it.

Forgiveness does not mean minimizing the harm. It means placing the injustice at the foot of the
cross rather than carrying it yourself.

*Restoration does not always mean reconciliation with the offender, especially if
repentance is absent. Rather, it means reconciliation within your own soul.

The good news of this passage- Jesus tears down the need to project a false version of ourselves and He opens up
the way for real, broken stumbling sinners to come near as they are and be transformed by His Spirit

CALL UP WORSHIP TEAM

3 Invitations

- **repent of projecting something you're not- you don't have to**
- **remain near to God in faith** (abide in me....)
- **release forgiveness**

PRAY

BULPEN-

Figs start to bloom in the spring and become fully mature in the summer. (this takes place right before Passover)

Immature figs were still eatable.

The leaves signaled there are figs. But it wasn't so.

The barren fig tree is representative of the barren Temple and the people's unpreparedness to accept Him

Jesus main issue wasn't just with exploitative businessmen, although that may part of it.

David E Garland, "If money cannot be exchanged into the holy currency, then monetary support for the temple sacrifices and the priesthood must end. If sacrificial animals cannot be purchased, then sacrifice must end. If no vessel can be carried through the temple, then all cultic activity must cease."

Pilgrims were required to bring a spotless sacrifice; the inspection was rigorous, and it made more sense to buy one there that was approved, than bring one with you on your long journey.

But the markups were astronomical- some estimate up to 16 times the normal price.

The same was true for exchanging foreign currency into the approved temple currency.

Jeremiah 7:11 → Mark 11:11 He went into Jerusalem and into the temple. After looking around at everything, since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

This is all happening with the backdrop of the book before us

In Mark 5:13 pigs with unclean spirits were cast into the sea;

Mark 9:42 Jesus said anyone who causes those who believe in Him to fall away, it would be better if they were cast into the sea

This mountain has become like unclean pigs that cause the nations to stumble

In quoting Jeremiah 7, Jesus makes the point that something holy can be perverted

It was the common thought that the temple made your prayers more effective.

One rabbi later wrote, *"From the day on which the temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer have closed... A wall of iron divides between Israel and their Father in heaven."*

The curse is from the roots up (v20), but the blessing is a veil torn from the top down

The temple promised one thing, but proved to be another. Once a beacon of light, now only a flickering candle about to be extinguished.

Hudson Taylor, *"God uses men who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him."*

John Newton, "Come My Soul"-

"Thou are coming to a King!

Large petitions with thee bring!

For His grave and power are such-

None can ever ask too much!"

Are we bearing the kind of fruit that is a welcome banner to sinners and sufferers?

Or are we creating barriers for those not like us?

Fruit of repentance (Matthew 3)

Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5)

How can we bear fruit? Remain/ Abide? Dwell

John 15:1-8 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.

God’s focus would shift from the Temple and its sacrificial systems as the lighthouse for salvation, to Jesus’ atoning death and triumphant resurrection as the way to Him. Thus, when Jesus gives up His life, the veil in the Temple is torn, from top to bottom.

The tree gives the impression that it has something it doesn’t- fruit. The Temple and its participants give the impression that they have something they don’t- service to God and true communion with God that reaches the heart

V22-24 faith that overcomes, is sustained by grace and characterize by forgiveness

As Jesus wouldn’t be confined to the tomb, God would not be confined to the Temple

David Garland, “He replaces the tables of the money changers, where worshippers had to pay for atonement, with the Lord’s table, where he announces that his free offering of his life provides forgiveness of sins.”

Hosea 6:6

Mark doesn’t describe the crowd as applauding what Jesus has done, but more as being baffled by it

Some estimate that the entire outer court of the temple could hold 75,000 people easily

Religious activity is not necessarily the same as spiritual fruit

God responds with care to those who know they need Him,
but He responds with judgment to those who act like they don’t

Access to God belongs to those all who come in humility seeking mercy & grace

Anyone who dares implement obstacles on others is soon coming under judgment

**Faith is trust in what God can do,
Forgiveness is a response to what God has done**