

Mark 11:12—25
February 10, 2019

More than ever, in our internet age, we are barraged advertisements. Everyone seems to be selling something. And sometimes, these advertisements make promises that sound a little too good to be true.

False Advertising is as old as dirt, some companies are just better at it or stick to it longer. According to the NY magazine, The Week, Listerine (the mouthwash) has a long and somewhat notorious history of false advertising claims.

“Listerine was the first over-the-counter mouthwash sold in the United States in 1914 and by 1921 it was already falsely marketing its product. Declaring itself a cure-all for common cold ailments like sore throats and coughs, a dandruff preventative, an after-shave tonic, and a safe way to protect yourself from cuts, bruises, wounds, and stings, Listerine was slapped with numerous false advertisement lawsuits.”

Further...for decades, Listerine claimed that it cure the common cold. Gargle twice a day and keep the cold away. But studies found this not to be true.

To quote from the lawsuit,

“Warner-Lambert has represented that the latest or most recent tests prove that children who gargle with Listerine twice a day have fewer and milder colds and miss fewer days of school because of colds than children-who do not, when studies or tests conducted between 1967 and 1970 do not prove or support this representation.”

“In 1975, the Federal Trade Commission ordered the company to spend \$10 million in corrective advertising, seeing as their product was no more effective in treating colds than gargling warm water.”

Okay. Anyone fighting a cold, do NOT use Listerine. It is of no use. Listerine is of no use fighting the common cold.

When a company makes claims that it can't back up, that is a nuisance. When an institution makes spiritual claims it can't back up, that is more than a nuisance. It is deadly.

It is one thing to get sucked in by the claims of a product, it is another thing to get sucked in by the claims of a religious institution.

Today, we join Jesus again and this time we see what might be simultaneously the strangest and scariest account in Mark.

PROP: Jesus is not fooled by the fake.

Fake religion most of all. People can build a wall of religiosity bedecked with good works or good deeds or good intentions and all the while be fake. Others might be fooled but Jesus never is.

Jesus is not fooled by the fake.

“On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.

¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶ And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” ¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they

feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came they went out of the city.

²⁰ As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." ²² And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Mark 11:12-25

So, for those of you scoring at home we have Jesus cursing a fig tree, clearing the temple and then a dead fig tree.

Huh. What is going on?

Let's find out—

1. On the Way to the Temple (Mark 11:12-14)

When last we were with Jesus, he entered the city of Jerusalem to the shouts and acclamation of thousands. But no one in the temple seemed to notice or care.

The next morning after getting an Air-B N B in the town of Bethany, Jesus and his disciples begin the nearly 2 mile walk back to the temple. They must have had an early start because it appears that Jesus got away without any breakfast.

Jesus is hungry and sees a fig tree from a distance. The tree is green and seems to be in bloom. But on closer inspection Jesus finds something else,

Vs. 13,

“And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.”

Why would Jesus expect to find figs on a tree when it wasn't the time for figs?

Mediterranean fig trees yield two kinds of figs. The figs we think of in Fig Newtons, and also a smaller early kind of fig. These 'early figs' were what Jesus was looking for—and he expected to find them because they grow on the green leaves of fig trees.

The tree was advertising with green leaves—“I have fruit!” But upon closer inspection there was no fruit to

be had. Almost always leaves meant fruit, but not this time and not with this tree.

And Jesus does something unexpected,

Vs. 14,

14 And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

We know that after the curse from Jesus, this tree would die and 'wither from the roots up.' They would see that the next day.

But before they see the dead tree they visit the gleaming temple. The temple had all visible signs of life and fruit. It was a building bustling with activity and bursting with noise.

The temple advertised—come here to meet with God! Let's see what Jesus thinks,

We move from the fig tree to the temple,

2. At The Temple (Mark 11:15-19)

When we read 'and he entered the temple' we are not going to be able to grasp the immensity of that statement. The temple complex was 35 acres. The temple itself was made of white pure marble without any imperfection.

Not only that, much of the structure was overlaid with gold. One historian said that no one could look at the temple in the sunlight—it was too bright.

So get the picture, Jesus and his disciples surmounted Mt. Olives and immediately they had to turn their heads because the sun behind them was gleaming off the temple.

It seemed to scream—“God lives here!”

But like with the fig tree Jesus came close looking for fruit and instead he found something else—

Vs. 15,

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

The part of the temple that Jesus entered is the court of the Gentiles. Later the early church would set up shop there, but today there were those buying and selling animal sacrifices and exchanging money. This was the only part of the temple that Gentiles—non-Jews—were allowed to be in.

And the whole area looked more like a county fair than the house of God. More than that,

Vs. 16,

16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

People would take a short-cut across Jerusalem by cutting through the court of Gentiles. The place that was supposed to welcome Gentiles to worship the one true God had become a part flea market and part thoroughfare.

Well Jesus cleared all of it out.

Jesus came close to the temple in full bloom and upon further inspection—like the fig tree—there was no fruit. The one place in the world that promised to take mankind to God was determined by God to be fake.

Jesus is not fooled by the fake. Not then. Not now.

After turning over the tables Jesus got everyone's attention. And his audience was interested in what he might do and say next. So, he began to teach.

Mark gives us the briefest of summaries of his teaching in verse 17,

17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

Jesus takes teaches from two OT citations to the watch crowd. Isaiah 56:7 & Jeremiah 7:9.

He says isn't my house supposed to be a house of prayer for all the nations? The point being—Isaiah said that anyone from anywhere could come and worship the true God and the Jewish leaders were saying the opposite.

The temple was meant by God to be that place not just where God was with man but also where all men and women were welcome.

But not that day.

Today, there is no such thing as a holy place. That was not the case then. We can worship Jesus anywhere as faithful followers of God. The faithful followers of God in that day had to worship at the temple.

And yet, the chief priests and temple authorities did not care if the Gentiles had no place to worship God. Jesus did.

The turning over of tables might have got the chief priests and temple authorities attention but what he said next made them want to 'destroy' him.

What did he say?

But you have made it a den of robbers.

Here is Jeremiah 7—lets see if we can understand why the chief priests and temple authorities wanted to kill him,

“Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, [10] and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? [11] Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 7:9–11

What Jeremiah said to the priests of his day—Jesus said to the priests of that day. He accuses them of being phonies.

They steal, murder, commit adultery and then come to the temple and act like everything is okay. NO!

“The Lord saw this for what it was: a monstrous desecration of holy ground.” Kent Hughes

The ground they stood on was holy ground. It was the place that God met Isaiah; it was the place God directed David. It was the place that the whole nation of Israel cried out to God on bended knee and he came down in a cloud and met the people.

That same ground had become a desecration by the scribes and chief priests of Jesus day.

Holy ground became corrupted and unholy.

And Jesus called them all out. He is not fooled by the fake.

The temple was just like the fig tree. It advertised life and vitality but it was phony. A farce. Fake. Upon closer inspection—like the fig tree—there was no fruit to be found.

The temple put on a good show but it was meaningless.

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

The crowd was astonished for two reasons. First, that Jesus called out the authorities so brashly and Second that he cared about the Gentiles.

The chief priests of the temple expected and taught that the Messiah would come and clear Jerusalem of all Gentiles and establish his throne on the earth. Instead—Messiah came and cleared the temple of all the religious phonies so the Gentiles could worship.

Jesus did not clear the temple *of* Gentiles he cleared the temple *for* the Gentiles. Jesus cared about the outcasts and the people that no one else gave a thought.

It might not seem like much but here in this action we see again in this action that Jesus cares about the lost, the wandering, the people with nowhere to go. He has come to be the strong shelter and refuge for all who run to him.

Jesus was making the room for those who knew they were lost by kicking out the religious who thought they were safe.

So very often fake religion masquerades behind a mask of self-righteousness. The essence of self-righteousness is a settled belief that you can't be wrong.

Fake religion spawns self-righteousness. Jesus is not fooled by the fake.

Jesus came to the temple—that day—to those who knew they needed help. He still offers that kind of help.

We go from the temple back to the fig tree.

3. Back at the Fig Tree (Mark 11:20-25)

Vs. 20,

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered."

The tree that seemed to say it had fruit but did not would have no more fruit forever. It was withered from the roots up.

The tree was just like the temple. Just as the tree gave the false appearance of life—the temple did too.

- The tree was green and seemingly healthy.
- The temple was gleaming and full of activity.
- The tree advertised—I have fruit but had none.
- The temple advertised—I have fruit but had none.
- The tree gave nothing to the hungry.
- The temple gave nothing to the hungry.
- The tree was a phony.
- The temple was a phony.

The tree was cursed by Jesus and withered from the roots.

The temple was cursed by Jesus and would be destroyed from the foundation up.

When Peter says, “Look at the tree that you cursed yesterday—it is dead!”

And Jesus answers them with something that seems disconnected, but is not.

Jesus introduces a new order of life that is not tied to a temple but to him.

And starting in verse 22, Jesus shows us the opposite of fake religion.

What does an authentic life look like?

It is centered on God—

Vs. 22,

“Have faith in God.

What is he saying?

Trust God and not religious activity.

He is telling the disciples to trust in God and not in the religious practices of the temple. The new order of things would focus on Jesus Christ the Son of God— and no building.

No longer would the presence of God be in a building in the midst of the people of God; rather the presence of God would be in the people of God.

In other words, the key to not being fake is trusting in God. And to trust God you must know Jesus.

Authenticity centers on God and looks foolish. Looks so foolish because Jesus tells us that when you trust God—you align yourself with the God of the impossible.

More than that, He says something that is sounds like false advertising—

Vs. 23,

²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will

come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

What is going on here?

We don't know for sure which mountain that Jesus was pointing at. We do know that the temple that sat on Mt. Moriah would soon be destroyed. The mountain that the temple sat on would be destroyed by the Romans.

More than that trusting God in Christ gives us direct access to God. The point here is not that we get anything we ask but we get access to the God who can do anything.

More than that, he can do things that seem impossible. With our God nothing is impossible. With our God even the most improbable is possible.

Preachers shy away from verses like verse 24—why? Because listen to it again,

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

We shy away from this because we can pray for things that never come to pass and people can get disillusioned with God.

One of the problem with my prayer—prayer and I wonder if this is a problem for you—that they are too

small. I pray for things like—‘a good day.’ Or pray that I would be safe.

Not bad. But not enough.

God has a bigger plan than just you and me and our fulfillment. Think about how he calls us to pray—Your kingdom come, your will be done.

I pray that my kingdom come and my will be done. It is no wonder I don't often get those prayers answered.

I wonder if our prayers are as God focused as they could be—

Here are some things that we can ask God for—

- Make me into what you want me to be no matter what it takes.
- Help me to value holiness over happiness.
- Give me the strength to overlook slights and think the best.
- Let me know you more.
- Give me the strength to be content in and through any trial.
- Grow me to be more like you.
- Let your kingdom come, not mine.

Those are things that God promises—it is easy to believe that he will answer.

Authenticity centers on God, looks foolish and keeps short accounts with others.

Vs. 25,

²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Forgive as we have been forgiven.

Jesus understands that we will have relational trouble and strife with others—but will we forgive? If we don't we smack of that fake religion.

When we don't forgive we act as if we don't need to be forgiven of many sins. A close examination of an authentic Christian shows a willingness to forgive.

One of the main signs of fake people is an unwillingness to forgive others. Authentic followers of Jesus will always forgive others. You might believe all the right things about God and yet not be his follower because you hold onto bitterness.

Let's all examine our fruit here for a moment. Are your closest relationships marked by forgiveness or contention? Do you have a forgiving disposition toward others?

More than that—if you are married do you hold onto rancorous bitterness or forgiveness?

Be warned—you might be fake. And Jesus is not fooled.

Does your life advertise life and vitality but upon closer inspection it is without fruit?

The mark of a real follower of Jesus is not perfection but authenticity and fruit. Fruit will not make you a Christian, but it shows that you are a Christian.

All authentic followers of Jesus will have fruit.

How can you tell if you have fruit?

- Do you take peace with your or strife?
- Do you love others without reserve?
- Are you patient with the weak or with people not like you?
- Do you use your words to build up or tear down?
- Do you look more like Jesus today than you did last year?
- Are you teachable?
- Do you talk about people or to people?
- Are you slow to speak and quick to listen?
- Do you think the best?

None of us are perfect, but the goal is authenticity.

Jesus is near to us today. As he comes near to you—
are you authentic, or fake?

The fake might be able to point to—

- Spiritual knowledge
- Religious experience
- Doctrinal specificity

And yet, not be real. The authentic don't just believe the right things, but they live in the right way. They have fruit. As Jesus comes close to you this morning and looks at your life—what does he see?

Others might not see who you are—but he does.
What does he see?