

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 18, Mark 11:12-12:12, Temple Cursing, Fig Tree, Tenants

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 18, Mark 11:12-12:12, Temple Cursing, Fig Tree, Tenants.

Hello, welcome back as we continue to work through the Gospel of Mark.

We just finished up the first part of chapter 11 with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And as you recall, at the very end of that, the first thing that Jesus did there as he entered into Jerusalem was he walked to the temple. But then, it's a very muted statement.

In fact, the phrases that Jesus looked around, and we discussed how the verb that is being used there, that particular verb is only used seven times in the Greek New Testament. Six of those seven is in the Gospel of Mark, and it has the idea of considering, evaluating, not just simply looking at. And that set a little bit of an ominous tone to what would happen.

And that's what we get now today as we look at verses 12 through 25. What we're going to see is this episode that's usually referred to as the cleansing of the temple, though I'm going to ask us to rethink that title a bit. And so, keep in mind, this all begins with Jesus having already entered in, considered the temple, and then returning.

Now, when we look at verses 12 through 25, we have the story of Jesus' actions in the temple sandwiched between a miracle story, a cursing of a fig tree, and some comments on prayer. Structurally, there's a very interesting interplay that happens here: this fig tree, Jerusalem temple, fig tree. One of the things I want us to trace is how those are working together.

In fact, what we're going to be seeing throughout this entire process is Jesus making statements regarding the temple and the temple leadership. And that's going to set the stage for what happens for most of this week, which is a challenge between Jesus and the religious leaders, the temple establishment, and in a lot of ways that centers around the temple. One of the main passages we're going to get to today, of course, is verse 17.

We're building towards verse 17 in chapter 11. This is where Jesus combines two Old Testament texts, Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7, in a way that really emphasizes the entire passage. In other words, there's a lot in this section to cover.

Now, interesting, most of the scholarship, of course, is done on the Jesus' actions in the temple. We're going to spend a lot of time there. But there's no small controversy over this fig tree episode, especially when you look at it, it seems to put Jesus in a very unfavorable light.

We have here a natural miracle of sorts, but one that seems to have Jesus using his power out of anger, one that seems to have Jesus as vindictive towards this tree because it didn't give fruit, even though it seemingly was out of season for this to happen. At least, that's how the text can be read. We're going to talk about that.

It's a grumpy Jesus, like what Jesus looks like when he hasn't had breakfast, and how he uses this power. It's an odd picture. What I want us to do as we work through this, as we consider the fig story, is to remember that Mark has this fig account as part of the Jerusalem temple complex account.

They're mutually interpretive in the way that we've seen Mark's structure. Indeed, I think we'll see that Jesus also intends it to be that way. Let's do this first.

Let's look at verses 12-14 here in chapter 11 and then comment on that and what's happening and what's maybe not happening and then let that be our springboard for the discussion. Verse 12, on the following day when they came from Bethany, he was hungry and seen 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. He said to it, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. His disciples heard it.

Here we have Jesus. He's hungry. He sees a fig tree in the leaf, goes to find something to eat, and is within earshot of the disciples, and that's an important point; I'm going to come back to that point; he curses the figs.

This nature miracle, this is sort of the opposite, the dark cousin of what we usually have been seeing. Usually what Jesus does is take something that is small in number and produces a great quantity. Here, he's cursed this fig tree.

He made it unable to produce. To understand what's going on here, we need a little bit of an agricultural context. From mid-August to mid-October, after the fig harvest, the fig trees and the branches would start to sprout buds.

Then, these buds develop over the winter, and then they swell into these green buds in March and April, followed shortly by leafy buds. In other words, the fig tree often presents a bud before it produces leaves. Now, once a fig tree is in leaf, one could expect to find then branches loaded with all types of these green buds because they'd be in the process of turning into leaves.

These buds will be in various states of maturation if you will. Sometimes, they haven't fully become the fig yet, but they're in some sort of process. But these buds are edible.

This usually happens in the spring, which is roughly the time period that we're talking about. These buds could be eaten. So, when Jesus goes to it, he sees green foliage and leaves, so he assumes that there would be something available to eat, namely those buds, but finds nothing.

I think this is important because this statement, because it was not the season of figs, is not some sort of defense of the poor fig tree if you will. It's not, you know, this, whoa, this fig tree is getting cursed for not producing anything to eat, but it wasn't even of its season. That's not what's happening.

But because it was not the season of figs, but yet was leafy, it indicates that it should have been in a position to produce some edible buds, even if not yet the full fruit. And I think that's a key part of the element. Jesus goes there because he sees leafy, and therefore, there should be something for him to eat there, these buds that will eventually mature into figs.

But also, he does this within the earshot of the disciples. And I think Mark tells us that because I think he wants us to understand that what Jesus is about to do is for the disciples, for the disciples' hearing. There have been certain miracles that only the disciples have been witness to, and this in a lot of ways is one of them.

This is setting the stage for what he is going to do when he moves into the temple. And what Jesus, I believe, is doing here with the fig tree, here's this fig tree that's presenting all the indications that it should have these buds that can be eaten. Yet when Jesus gets there and realizes there is none, that this cursing becomes a visual display, a parable, if you will, a prophetic picture.

In the ways that the Old Testament prophets would often have visual displays that helped accompany their message, this fig tree becomes a prophetic picture of what Jesus is going to do in the temple. You know, in fact, the prophets often use the fig tree as a symbol associated with judgment. The fig tree is associated with the people of Israel, and then in terms of judgment, you see this in Isaiah 34, you see this in Jeremiah 29, Hosea chapter 2, Hosea chapter 9, Joel 1, Micah 7, notably Jeremiah

8:13. Now, Jeremiah 8:13 is in this context of this passage of Jeremiah that we're going to come to in a second.

But in Jeremiah 8:13, as part of the judgment language that God is issuing upon Israel as a result of their activity, behavior, posture, and disobedience, including their activity in the temple, says, there will be no figs on the tree and their leaves will wither. That's a statement of judgment against Israel. And so I think what is happening is the leafy tree is a symbol, the leafy fig tree is a symbol of the temple, healthy in appearance, but bearing no true fruit.

Then, Jesus' action toward the fig tree is a way for us to understand His actions towards the temple. In other words, what I'm leaning us to consider is that Jesus doesn't cleanse the temple as much as He curses it. When He comes to the temple, the idea of calling it a cleansing is a bit of a misnomer because a cleansing has the idea of purifying, of correcting.

Here I think what we're seeing, what the fig tree asks us to consider, is not Jesus reforming or fixing, but actually cursing, declaring its activities to be over and done. Let's look at what happens actually in the temple. So they came, this is verse 15, and they came to Jerusalem, and He ended the temple, and He began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And He was teaching them, saying, 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.

The chief priests and scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy Him, for they feared Him because of all the crowd and were astonished at His teaching. I'll come back to the rest of it in a second, but I want to focus there. Notice Jesus does four particular actions here.

He expels buyers and sellers, He overturns money-changing tables, He overturns the seats of the dove sellers, and He prevents the transport of temple vessels. Again, it was they, when they came in, let me find it here, oh there it is. He entered the temple, drove out those who sold and those who bought, overturned the tables of the money changers, the seats of those who sold the pigeons, and would not allow them to carry anything through the temple, verses 15 and 16. I think it's important that we look at these four items and what's happening because it has the practical effect of shutting down the activity of the temple, at least in the location where it's occurring.

Not in terms of the entire temple operation. The temple was so vast that it wouldn't have it. But first, the idea that Jesus is simply responding to greed, and this is a

statement against the monetary abuses of the temple, is often discussed, but I think it misses the essential element of what's occurring here. I'm not saying that's not a part of it, but for example, He expels the buyers and the sellers.

Now, if it was simply those taking advantage of the system, we would have expected Him to just expel the buyers, I mean the sellers, excuse me, the sellers, but it's the buyers and the sellers. And keep in mind they're buying animals necessary for the sacrificial activity at the temple. Without the buying and selling of animals, the sacrificial cultic aspect of the temple would be impossible.

An unblemished sacrifice was what was required. And often, pilgrims coming in would not bring with them an animal. There could be a fear that whatever animal they brought with them would be blemished on the way.

And there was this security in knowing that you could get one at the temple that would, for lack of a better term, be sanctioned and approved as an unblemished sacrifice. So, to stop the buying and the selling of animals was, in a lot of ways, to put a stop momentarily to the sacrificial process. Luke, interestingly enough, makes no reference to the buyers.

Luke just references the sellers in the temple activity. And I think that's consistent with what Luke's emphasis is on, in terms of especially Jesus standing for the disenfranchised and for the oppressed. And so, I don't mean to indicate here that there are no greedy practices, but rather that I think what Mark is conveying is a picture that also includes the sellers.

He also overturned the money changers. Now, the money changers were needed. There were donations to the temple that required a temple tax.

And these money changers would provide the money necessary to pay the half-shekel tax. And this tax was required by every Jewish male annually. And it stems from an interpretation, actually, of Exodus 30, verse 16.

And what the money changers did was serve the pilgrims by providing for them the opportunity to pay the temple tax in the correct coin. Was there greed in that system? Likely. I mean, given what we know about the leadership of the time, I'd be surprised if there wasn't.

Given what we know about humans, I'd be surprised if there wasn't. But keep in mind, the money changing process itself was a needed part of the activity. He turned over those who were selling pigeons.

Pigeons were the sacrifice that the poor could afford. So here he was turning over the money changers, expelling the buyers and the sellers, and turning over the

pigeon, which would have been like if he was just advocating for the poor, then it seems interesting that he actually ends up turning over those things that they would buy. But even more critical, I believe, is this statement about how he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

It is not just certain people who carry vessels through the temple, but anyone who carries anything. So, you have this picture of where he's at. And again, I don't think we should assume he's in the entire temple activity, knows what's happening here.

I mean, he's probably just in a portion of it. And he is stopping the purchasing of sacrifices. He is stopping the temple tax.

And now he's even stopping all the activity, the people coming and going through that area and preventing them from carrying. In other words, he is, in essence, putting a prophetic stop, a symbolic stop to the activity of the temple. All of which the temple was involved in, the sacrifices, the tax, the comings, and the goings, anything that was temple activity has ended.

And I think that's what is happening here. I think he's putting a symbolic end to the temple. Now, the reason for it, then, becomes, is it, in verse 17, 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.

The first part of that statement comes from Isaiah 56:7. The second part comes from Jeremiah 7:11. So, what is he saying in the first section? Because of these two passages, he's taking these two, and he's working them together. He's saying that what he sees in the temple is against the purposes of the temple. Notice, I find it fascinating in Isaiah 56:7 that Jesus takes a very position of profound authority in what he's about to say.

If you look at Isaiah 56:7, it's the Lord's house, but here, it's my house that is coming into view. The temple is my house. It's almost as if Jesus is taking a position as owner, representative of the owner of the house.

Isaiah 56:7 also doesn't discuss sacrificial acts, this passage. If the issue was greed over sacrificial acts, then it's a pure and only; it's a very strange passage for Jesus to choose. There are plenty of passages in the Old Testament that reference sacrifice, such as the proper place of sacrifice, the wrong place of sacrifice, and the right attitude of sacrifice.

But here what Jesus says is, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. Isaiah 56, which itself has a very strong eschatological push, is looking towards deliverance. What Jesus is doing in this first statement, I think, is declaring

that the purpose of the temple was to be one of communion between God and all the people.

And it's only in Mark that you have the full statement for all the nations. It's interesting that the other Gospels have this event, but they have it my house shall be called a house of prayer. They leave off before all the nations.

Now that Mark keeps that in; I think that it continues to speak to what we've seen as important for the Gospel of Mark, this Gentile mission, and the purpose of Jesus bringing salvation to everyone. One of the criticisms, the judgments towards the temple, is that they have excluded the nations from being a part of what is happening here. Now, there's some speculation that where Jesus might have been doing this activity might have been the area that actually was designated for the Gentiles.

There was an area for the Gentiles, there was an area for women, and there was an area for Jewish men. This area, which should have been the place where the Gentiles could come and pay homage and worship and participate in the temple activities, would have been God-fearers, people who were of Gentile descent, yet affirming God. The very area that was supposed to be for their prayer had become this marketplace exchange, and so that might also have been a part of that.

But I want, my note, I want to note here, and we're going to come back to this in a little bit, is that the temple had the purpose of prayer, of locating the people of God, interacting with God. Hold on to that because we're going to come back to it. But then he combines it with the Jeremiah, but you have made it a den of robbers.

Now, that often, I think, gets construed incorrectly. Jesus is not saying specifically that you have made it a place where robbery happens. A place where robbery happens would be a store or a house.

Then the robbers do the robbery and come back to their den. Their den is not where robbery happens. Their den is their hideout.

So what Jesus is referring to here is that instead of this place being characterized as prayer, as worship, what characterizes a place is who inhabits it. Instead of this place being characterized as a group of people who truly are seeking God, it's being inhabited by people who are robbers. So, it's not, and that changes it a little bit.

It changes it from cleansing, which would have the idea of robbery is happening here, we need to stop that activity, to you've made it a crook's hideout. Who characterizes this place? Well, it's people who are robbing. When we look at the context even in Jeremiah, where in Jeremiah's speech, he's boldly threatening the temple's

destruction, Jeremiah gives his announcement in the middle of the temple, actually, when he makes this.

He's arrested for it, sentenced to die, but his life is spared. We have here in Jeremiah this rebuke that occurs. Interestingly, this rebuke that occurs against the temple includes that reference in chapter eight of Judgment, where there are no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, and the leaves are withered.

So, in Jeremiah's speech of judgment against the parable of the wicked tenants and in this whole text, there's a discussion of the fig tree. And even this term, by the way, that's used, robbers, has more of the idea of a brigand than a simple thief, the idea of a violent offender, of one who's in revolt. So I think when Jesus blends these two statements, what he is in effect doing is saying that this group pretends to be people who are worshiping, but in reality, they're more like brigands, they're more like those who are standing against the purposes of God in Jeremiah's day, which leads me to the conclusion that what Jesus is saying here and what he is doing here is a statement of judgment similar to Jeremiah, similar to the Old Testament prophets.

He's using, and the fig tree cursing is part of that understanding. It's fascinating when you look at Jeremiah 7. Jeremiah 7 actually gets picked up in the Dead Sea Scrolls as part of a passage of, they understand to be judgment language coming. Josephus refers to, references various movements where Jeremiah 7 was used during some of these time periods in anticipating the destruction of the temple.

So, the Targum in this passage, on the Jeremiah 7 passage, locates it also within these groups of people who are deceptive in their words, who are false pretenders of what God is doing. So you've got this history of locating Jeremiah 7 as a statement of judgment. I think Jesus is doing that as well.

And so then Jesus makes this statement, and verse 18, I think, affirms a recognition of what Jesus is saying about the temple. So, he's prophetically stopped its activity. He said this is not a house of prayer.

This is where thieves are gathering. In the context of Jeremiah, it would mean that judgment, the right response of God upon this temple is judgment. This would be the continuation of that story.

And I think the chief priests gather what he's saying, verse 18 because it says that 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 by his teaching. So, their response here, we now have the rejection, the further completion of the rejection of the religious leaders of Jesus to kill him, something we know they've been doing and seeking to do, but now it's the Jerusalem leaders seeking to do this. So, we look at this, and we have this picture. Then, we can go back to the story of the figs.

And when evening came, they went out of the city. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree wither away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

The idea there in verse 21 is that this is what is going to happen to the temple, that what happened to the fig tree, it wasn't producing what it should have been doing. It looked one way, but it acted differently. Jesus cursed it, said you would never again bear fruit, and said that that is what he has done to the temple in his actions, declared a curse upon it, and ceased its activity.

The return of the fig tree shows that indeed Jesus' words were true and his judgment has come to being is a foreshadowing of what then will occur to the temple. And of course, we know the temple does get destroyed, but even more than that, we get this temple coming to an end in this context of prayer. Notice verse 22, and often verse 22 through 25 almost gets treated as an afterthought, and I do not think it's an afterthought.

And Jesus answered them, have faith in God. 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. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and all will be yours.

Whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your Father, also who is in heaven, may forgive your trespasses. The reason I find this fascinating is, first of all, this mountain idea is right in this context of Mount Zion here, and so it could be even that mountain itself is being referenced, being tossed in, so maybe there's even destruction language in view there. You have, of course, Isaiah 43:5, where Zion is a mountain that has constantly resisted, and its movement might be a judgment reference.

Zechariah 4:7, the great mountain is laid low in the context of a temple. But even if it's more proverbial, talking about the significance of faith, notice the episode centers in on prayer. Whatever you ask in prayer, whenever you stand praying, so the forgiveness language, believing faith language is prayer.

There's a sense, I believe, that the temple was declared should have been a house of prayer for the nations but instead had been housed by thieves and robbers, those who were not who they should have been. Jesus declared the end of the temple but did not declare the end of the reason for the temple, which was to be a house of prayer. And now, in context with Peter's acclamation that the fig tree is no more, there is a tension of, well then, where will prayer happen? If the fig tree is the temple, and the fig tree is no more, then where is the center of faith going to be?

Where is the center of interacting with God? And Jesus implicitly places it here now in the church.

That they will be praying, that prayer will continue. That this, that whatever you ask for in faith, you know, will occur.

And I think it's just hinted at, I don't think it's just an afterthought, but I think there's an interesting assurance that prayer does continue even though the fig tree, that is the temple, will be no more. Let's continue on looking in Mark chapter 11 as we get into here verse 27. Now 27 is going to begin a series of seven conflict stories between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Stories that are very similar to chapter 2 and 3. In other words, the conflicts themselves aren't as new, but now it's with the Jerusalem leadership. Now it's with the temple and not a synagogue. And the conflicts are again going to center around the question of authority.

But now it's not merely the scribes only, but the Sanhedrin that comes into view. The Sanhedrin is the 71 leaders that are at the center of Jewish religious rule. So, let's look at the first 27 through 33.

Again, 27 through 12 begins this series of conflicts. I just want to look at 27 through 33 to set the stage here. And they came again into Jerusalem.

So, they're going into Jerusalem, they're leaving Jerusalem, they're going back into Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, he again noticed this was all happening at the temple. The chief priest, the scribes, and the elders came to him.

And they asked him, by what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them? And Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me. And they discussed it with one another.

And they are saying, if we say from heaven, he will say, why then do you not believe him? And shall we say from man? For they were afraid of the people. They all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, we do not know.

And Jesus said to them, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. We have here, this is the only time sort of outside of his trial that we get these religious leaders approaching, these groups of the Sanhedrin approaching Jesus. Now, the question that they ask is authority.

Again, this sets the stage for what Mark has been doing all along, which is presenting Jesus in the matter of his strength. And they likely think they have trapped him

because they are acknowledging he is doing this great teaching. Now they want to know by what right he is doing it, on whose authority.

It is very typical in this type of debate to have a question be responded to by a counterquestion. So what Jesus does here in asking a counter-question is not unusual or even surprising. And a skilled debater in this process would ask a counter question that would be designed to get at the heart of the matter.

So here Jesus asks a question about John. By what authority is John's baptism from heaven or from man? And now, of course, it puts the religious leaders in a very difficult position. They understand that they have three options.

One is to say nothing and admit basically defeat. The other is to answer from heaven or from man. Neither one of them works.

They can't say it's from heaven, because to say from heaven would be to affirm John and everything John was saying. And we know from the first part of chapter one of Mark that John was saying Jesus is the stronger one. Jesus is the one who is to come.

John baptized Jesus. And so, there's a strong connection between John and Jesus. And even remember the story of the beheading of John the Baptist, there was this question of how Jesus was connected with John the Baptist.

And even when Jesus was asking the disciples, who do the people say that I am? Some say that you're John the Baptist, meaning that there's a recognizing that's a strong connection. So, if they affirm John, they are implicitly affirming Jesus. But if they deny John, then that gives them a concern, not because they don't want to deny John.

Notice the reason isn't, well, we really like what John the Baptist was saying. The reason is the people liked what John was saying. The reason was the people saw John the Baptist as a prophet.

So, they don't want to say that John's authority was human-based. His baptism was simply a human activity because then they feared the crowd. Motivation is not one of how they weigh or do not weigh John the Baptist's words; it's a question of how the crowd will respond.

It's fascinating how often people in the Gospel of Mark are making decisions out of fear of others' opinions. We saw that whether it was the beheading of John the Baptist. We've seen the crowd say that about Jesus several times.

We'll see it again. We see it here with John. Even when you look at some of the disciples, they constantly bring up the concerns of others or what other people might think.

There's this constant other focus. So, of course, they take the only answer that they can, which is they say, we do not know, meaning they do not know if John's baptism was human or divine. They claim ignorance of it.

The irony is that these are the religious leaders who are the very ones who are supposed to be able to discern if something is from heaven, from God, or human, and they have to say they do not know, to which Jesus then says, well, then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things, implying that if they are not willing to say John's authority is from heaven, then Jesus is not willing to say what his authority is. And it's kind of this sense of if you don't get John, you're never going to get me. If you're not willing to see what even the crowds recognize in John, then you're not going to understand what I have to say.

And that's this response. Then notice in verse 1, this is continuing in this debate, he begins to tell them a parable. Now, this is the only significant parable outside of Mark 4. The parable is essentially the story of Israel and its interaction with Jesus, the story of the Jewish people and its interaction with Jesus told within the story of Israel, imagery, Old Testament imagery, and farming.

Before we read the parable, one thing to keep in mind is that during this time, absentee land ownership was not an unusual concept. There would often be absentee landowners who left supervisors to run the land. Absentee landowners were sometimes seen as one of the economic problems occurring here.

Also, as before we read the parable, the Old Testament imagery that comes in very strong here is Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is called the vineyard of God. I will sing a song about his vineyard for the one I love. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

He dug it up, cleared it of stones, and planted it with the chosen vines. He built a watchtower in it to cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

That's from Isaiah, where God depicts Israel as his vineyard, yet it only produces bad fruit. So, I want to look through this parable, and then we'll finish up here. So, we've got this practice of absentee land ownership within this Old Testament imagery.

And it began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower. Notice all the imagery we got from Isaiah there.

The tower, the winepress, and so forth. And leased it to tenants and went into another country, absentee land ownership. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get some fruit from the vineyard from them.

And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again, he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed.

And so, with many others, some they beat, some they killed. He still had one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying they would respect my son.

But those tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And this was the Lord's doing and is marvelous in our eyes.

Verse 12, they went away seeking to arrest him, but feared the people, for they perceived that he told the parable against them. So, they left him and went away. So, they understand the purpose of the parable.

There's this landowner who's not there. Ironically, the landowner would usually be the bad guy in these agricultural parables, and the tenant farmers would be the good guys. Here, it's switched. He sends all of these servants to see the fruit of the vineyard, and they keep killing and abusing.

And finally, he sends his son. Now again, a parable that you wouldn't expect in real life to send the son after all these servants have had difficulty. What you usually would expect at this point would be that the landowner would have sent and paid for armed men to come in and kill the tenant farmers, and he'd replace them with a new one.

But instead, the landowner sends his son, his beloved son. That's important because that is how Jesus has been referred to by God throughout the Gospel of Mark. At the baptism, at the transfiguration, the son whom I love, my beloved son.

It also picks up the image with the language of Isaac as the beloved son of Abraham. It picks up the idea of David as a beloved son of Israel, as a beloved son. Jacob as a beloved son.

All that language picks up. And he sends the son who has the authority of the vineyard. Remember, this parable was part of the question of whose authority you use to do these things. And what this parable is unpacking is the son who has come to this vineyard and has been rejecting everyone that the landowner has been sending.

The son comes with the authority of the landowner. So implicitly Jesus is answering the question. Even in parable form, he's identifying himself as the son who has come with the authority of the vineyard.

And if all this Isaiah imagery is in view, it's the authority of God who planted the vineyard with the watchtower and all of that. And so, we have this statement come, and of course, they kill the son and throw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? Well, he will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

My house was to be a house of prayer for the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers, the curse of the fig I think this is continuing that same line of thought. Now notice it's not the vineyard that's destroyed. It's the tenants that is destroyed.

The vineyard is given to others. I think that's an important element. And then there's a very interesting Psalm that gets added onto it.

Psalm 118:22 through 23. Have you not read the scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. It seems very strange.

In fact, this Psalm is one of the main Psalms of early Christianity. It is often a part of the New Testament response to the problem of the rejection, Jewish rejection, of Jesus. The parable shifts the story from agriculture to building.

So, you have a shift, but the purpose of it is to finish the story of the son. Because in the parable of the vineyard, the son is killed. And God, the landowner, does the judgment.

But what the Psalm does is indicate that the son is vindicated. This is how the son is a stone that the builders rejected. It has the idea that the son that is rejected becomes the cornerstone, becomes the keystone of the temple.

In this temple imagery, if you will, that we're still working with, this new temple. And they understand this. And this is what I think is important.

This isn't a disciple; what does this parable mean? Please explain the situation. They understand that the parable was told against them, that they are the tenants, that they are the ones who have rejected the cornerstone, have rejected the son, that

they are the ones who are abusing the vineyard. And so, what do they do? They left him and went away.

They feared the people. The decision against Jesus is now complete, but it's the setting that's the problem. Of course, we're going to eventually get to a place where the setting, the crowds, won't be the problem.

We'll pick that up and continue on this next time as we work through Mark chapter 12.

This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 18, Mark 11:12-12:12, Temple Cursing, Fig Tree, Tenants.