



1. THE DANGER OF RELIGION

MARK 11:12-14, 20-21 12 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... 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."

- **Let's be honest. At first glance, this seems very bad for Jesus.** It seems he gets angry at the fig tree, though Mark mentions nothing in anger or indignation. It seems He blames the fig tree for not having figs even though it wasn't the season for them! We may half expect the Disciples to look around weirdly at one another, then say, "Come on, Jesus. Let's maybe go take a nap and come back to the temple later."
- **Q. What's happening? A.** Middle eastern fig trees bore two kinds of fruit. As the leaves were starting to come in the Spring, before the figs came, the branches produced little *KNOPS* which were abundant & very good to eat.
- **Jesus sees that this tree has the APPEARANCE of life,** but is, in fact, decaying—there are no knops.
- **It's a living illustration.** The Tree is a perfect metaphor for those that claim to be God's people, but bear no fruit.
- **Q. So what does Jesus do? A.** He pronounces judgement on the tree. And the very next day, after he clears the temple of hallow religiosity, the tree is withered.

• Jesus is showing us exactly what the Religious people inside the temple are like. They're like trees that look healthy, but inside they are rotten to the core. And in this we see *the Danger of Religion.*

• **Now, we have to define our terms. Q.** What do I mean when I use the word *Religion*?

• **Religion is various forms of,** "I obey, therefore I am accepted. If I perform well, I am fulfilled." Religion is any set of rules or philosophy that, if obeyed or believed properly, will save you.

• **In BUDDHISM,** ceasing desires saves you. **In CONFUCIANISM,** education, self-reflection, self-cultivation, & living a moral life saves you. **In HINDUISM,** detaching from your separated ego & making an effort to live in unity with the divine saves you. **In DAOSIM,** aligning yourself with the Dao to have peace & harmony saves you. **In ISALM,** living a holy life of good deeds saves you. **In JUDAISM,** repentance, prayer, & working hard to obey the Law saves you. **In NEW AGEISM,** gaining a new perspective through which you now see that you're connected to all things as a divine oneness saves you. **In SECULARISM,** staying true to yourself & not letting anyone tell you how to live saves you. **In MANY PEOPLE'S MINDS,** simply being a good person saves you. **& AT FUNERALS,** many seem to think that merely dying saves you.

Q. Do you see how different Religion is from Christianity, which is based on the Gospel—the good news?

- **In CHRISTIANITY,** Jesus' life saves you—He lived a just & sinless life, *so we can have an identity that can't be taken away.*
- **In CHRISTIANITY,** Jesus' death saves you—He stood in our place, became sin, died for sin—*so we can be loved.*
- **In CHRISTIANITY,** Jesus resurrection saves you—He arose, triumphant over the grave—*so that all will be healed.*

1. Religion is dangerous because it promises life but delivers death (just like the tree!)

• It promises the water of life but all it can deliver is a cup full of sand. It promises a feast of fine foods and well aged wine, but turns the table and you're eaten alive. It promises fulfillment but brings destruction.

• In this sense, Religion is dangerous both *Personally* and *Socially*.

Personally = always working yet never satisfied. *Socially* = idolize/demonize. * *Religion and Irreligion are a treadmill* *

2. Religion is dangerous because it teaches you how to clean up your actions but neglect your heart (just like the tree!)

• It teaches you to clean the outside of the cup while the inside remains filthy. Jesus says, if the inside is clean then the outside will be clean as well. He's saying, "Your outer life flows from your inner life."

Now it may be easy for us to say, “You see, look how dangerous Religion is! I’m glad I’m not influenced by that—I am within the bounds of Christianity and the gospel.” **But we are not immune.**

2. SURE SIGNS OF RELIGION IN YOUR HEART

MARK 11:15-17 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.”

1. A Sure sign of Religion in your heart is more of a concern for *yourself* than for *helping others*.

- **When Jesus enters the Temple, two things seem to really upset Him:** and the first is that the Temple, especially this part of it, was to be a place where Gentiles could come and worship God.
- **He quotes Isaiah 56:7 saying,** “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”
- **But they had turned it into something more like the Stock Market floor** than a place of worship!
- **These Religious leaders, primarily, had exchanged one of chief reasons for Temple**—helping others meet and worship the true God—for helming themselves.
- **The fact that Jesus takes this so seriously**—seriously enough to overturn tables and seats and stop the whole process of the Temple—should make us pause and look inward.

Q. Are *YOU* concerned for the welfare of others or are you just busy with a concern for yourself & those like you?

Q. And we, *AS A CHURCH*, are we concerned with ourselves mostly or are we looking also outward to others?

- **Religion causes us to look inward**—how am I doing, are my needs being met. But the gospel so frees us from that. It causes us to look up to Jesus & out to others. Because ultimately I’m safe & secure in Christ, I can be freed from concerning myself with myself—what do others need, how can I love others, how can I serve?

Q. Are you infected with Religion? **A.** Only the Gospel can make the tree healthy, selfless, & life-giving.

2. Another sure sign of Religion in your heart is more of a concern for *business* than *mission*.

- **Two of the main things that happened in the Temple**, especially at this time of the Passover festival, was 1) paying the Temple tax (a kind of offering to support the work there), and 2) sacrifices made for sin.
- **The Temple tax had to be paid with a specific coin**, & you would have to exchange your foreign currency for it. The sad thing is that these money changers would charge high fees for the exchange, ripping people off.
- **And if you were poor, and couldn’t afford a lamb for a sin-sacrifice**, you were permitted to buy a pigeon. And again, these Sellers of Pigeons sold them at roughly a 400% mark up. This was a lucrative business, ran by the Chief Priest. The Jewish Historian Josephus tells us that 255k animals were sacrificed in one Passover week.
- **So, when Jesus sees what’s going on he quotes Jer 7**, saying you’ve turned the Temple into a “den of robbers.”
- **Again, do you see how Religion destroys?** They were more concerned with Business and Money than they were for reaching people! They were fleecing the sheep to make the Shepherds rich.

Q. What about you? Are you more concerned with saving money or making money than reaching people?

Q. And we, *AS A CHURCH*, are we concerned with Business than Making Disciples? Space more than hearts?

And look how the Religious leaders respond to Jesus.

MK 11:18-19 18 And the chief priests & the scribes heard it & 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.

- **You may be shocked with them wanting to go so far as to kill him**, but there’s is at least a rational decision.
- Jesus threatens the very things they look to for security and identity and satisfaction.
- **And He does the exact same thing to us.** Jesus looks at all the things you build your identity on, all the these you cling to for happiness, & says, “Those are worthless to give you what you need & they actually bring death.”

And when He does that, you have two choices: Kill Him or Crown Him. But what you can’t do, with any integrity is simply admire Him or keep Him on the fringe of your life. **Kill Him or Crown Him.**