

That One Time Indignation Brought Righteousness
Live Like You Were Dying: Gospel of Mark Chapters 11-16: #2
Mark 11:12-25

Indignation. It can come upon us at any moment. And we have a host of metaphoric idioms to express it. That team makes me so mad that I could chew up nails and spit out a barbed wire fence. This redlight right here makes me fit to be tied. The price of this oil change really sticks in my craw like hair on a biscuit. If you have a hard time believing that indignation can come upon you at any moment, then go to Sam's Club after church and spend 437 hours waiting for a parking space only to witness someone in a Toyota Prius with a bumper sticker that says "Love and Peace" cut in front of you and take it. You'll believe me then.

Indignancy rides into our life on a foal when we and/or others we love experience a wrong, unfair treatment, disrespect, or all of the above. As a result, we "see red" and "burn with a low blue flame." But, if you search the Passion Narratives in the Gospels, you will not find one single solitary example of unfair treatment or disrespect producing indignancy in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Judas betrays Jesus and leads the arresting officers straight to Him, Jesus tells Peter to put down his sword. When the crowds say "Crucify," the Lamb of God is silent before His shearers. When He's called a "blasphemer," he offers no defense. When He's smitten on one cheek by the fists of the priests of the Sanhedrin, he offers them the other one along with the rest of His body at the cross. But what you will find in the narratives of Passion Week is one example of Jesus becoming indignant for the righteous reasons. That's why we call this event the Cleansing of the Temple.

The Bible has a lot to say to us about our anger and indignation. Paul tells us that we have a right to our anger, but we don't have a right to sin in it. Neither do we have the right to let the sun go down before we've dealt with it (Ephesians 4:26). James tells us that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20). But I caution you, believer in the Lord Jesus, from using Jesus' temple cleansing to justify your anger by labeling it as righteous. Here's why: You are not Jesus. Neither am I. He is so very different from us. We become indignant when we get insulted and a whole host of other reasons. But Jesus became angry for very different reasons. And unlike our anger, His produced righteous. It's the only time in human history anger produced righteousness. Today, we learn how it did and what we can learn from it. Jesus anger had (1) a proper motive; (2) a proper purpose; (3) a proper intention; and (4) a proper lesson. We see it in Mark 11:12-25, when Jesus cleanses the temple.

12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. 15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and 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,¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'¹⁷? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" 18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. 19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples¹⁹ went out of the city. 20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" 22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "Truly²³ I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

1. A Proper Motive (12-14)

- **Hangry:** (1) We have a term we came up with in our household: Hangry. (2) It's never produced righteous either, only conflict. (3) But there was a time in history when hunger and a fig tree prompted anger that produced righteous. Mark tells us about it.
- **What Prompted Our Lord's Wrath:** (1) The hunger of the Lord in v12 and the inspection of the fig tree in leaf is Mark's way of beginning a passage about the Lord's indignation. It's a very important contrast. (2) The hunger of the Lord is a reference to Jesus' humanity. He's fully God yet also fully man. He got hungry just like you and I get hungry. As a result, he went to the fig tree. (3) Fig trees and leaves are very important in the Bible. (a) They provided a covering of grace after the fall – After Adam and Eve sinned, God covered them with fig leaves. (b) They were a symbol of the blessings God had given them – In the Books of Kings, prosperity in the land was described as "every man sitting under his own fig tree." (c) They were also a symbol of spiritual devotion and righteousness – Jesus called Nathaniel after seeing him sitting under a fig tree studying and praying.
- **So, for the Lord to Curse the Fig Tree, It Represented Something Important Directly Tied to Jesus' Hunger:** (1) The Fig Trees were symbols of Israel. They were supposed to provide a message of grace and mercy to the world, but they disobeyed. (2) They were supposed to be a symbol of the goodness of the covenant relationship that brings blessings to the world. But they were no longer a blessing. (3) They were supposed to be a symbol of a righteous nation producing righteousness. But instead, they left the world hungry. (4) As a result, Jesus curses the fig tree.
- **How the Lord's Anger Produced Righteous and What We Can Learn from It:** (1) Israel didn't do what God put them on this earth to do. He called them to be a kingdom of priests and holy nation. They were not. That made Jesus mad. As a result, he did what Israel did not. He died on a cross so that we, his people, can now, because of the cross and resurrection, be that kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (2) Our anger doesn't produce righteous. But Jesus' did. As a result, our responsibility is now to be what he called Israel to be. And we shall because the righteousness of Christ now makes it possible.

2. A Proper Purpose (15-17)

- **In the Name of God/Jesus:** (1) In church vernacular, we have a lot of words in our holy vocabulary that can be confusing to those not familiar with church, words like “beloved,” “fellowship,” and “agape.” (2) But there is a phrase we use often that I wish we would pause at times and think about why we use it. It’s the phrase: “in Jesus’ name.” We use it in prayer, as well we should. (3) But there is a danger in voicing that phrase to others in a way that disguises something that you really want under the cloak of the name of God/Jesus. (4) Lifting up the name of the Lord for your own purpose is the main reason for the cleansing of the temple. Those doing so were blocking people from God, not leading them to Him.
- **Where the Cleansing Occurred:** (1) Mark gives us an important geographical marker for understanding the temple cleansing in v15: the temple courts. (2) The temple courts were the only place that Gentiles could go. That was as close as they could get to the Holiness of the God of Israel. And they came from miles around to do it, just for a brief glimpse of glory. The Ethiopian Eunuch was such an example. And the events that unfold in these verses are why he leaves confused, and the Holy Spirit sends Philip to share the good news with him in Acts 8.
- **What was Happening:** (1) Instead of allowing people – all people – to approach the throne of grace in their time of need, Israel had decided to turn it into a cash first business. Thereby, blocking people from accessing. (2) But the people buying what they were selling are also included in the cleansing. They tried to “purchase” the favor of God when it could only be received by grace through faith alone.
- **What Should have Happened There Instead:** (1) Jesus tells us “My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations.” Consequently, in light of the fact that it had become a den of robbers, Jesus did something about it with righteous indignation.
- **How the Lord’s Anger Produced Righteousness and What We Can Learn from It:** (1) The moment Jesus started overturning tables, his fate in the minds of those who made the temple business go way sealed. They had to do away with him. But Jesus cleansed the temple so that after his death and resurrection our temple – our body – could be cleansed by grace through faith alone. And that’s an opportunity available to anyone on the planet, for “my house shall be called a house of prayer.” (2) We are not qualified to overturn tables because we are not Jesus. But we can be can and should be concerned when we see “Christians” blocking people from access by exploiting those who know they need a Savior. And the love we have for Jesus in light of our temple cleansing, compels us to want to introduce people to Jesus, not block them.

3. A Proper Intention (18)

- **Newton’s Law:** (1) I don’t remember much from my high school science classes. (2) But I’ve managed to retain two lessons all these years later: (a) dihydrogen monoxide is a fancy way of saying water that will make you seem brighter than you really are. (b) Sir Isaac Newton’s Third Law: For every action there is an equal and opposite reason. (3) The righteous indignation of Jesus at the temple on a Monday set the wheels in motion for the unrighteous indignation needed for Jesus to go to the cross of Calvary on a Friday.
- **Who Wanted to Kill Jesus as a Result of the Temple Cleansing:** (1) It isn’t the crowds. To this point, Jesus was already popular with the crowds. Now because he has allowed them access to the temple courts, he will be even more so. (2) Instead, it was the chief priests and teachers of the law. Why? Because they had the most to lose, that’s why. Jesus had turned their system that they developed on its head and dismantled it. And the crowds knew it.
- **Why They Wanted to Kill Jesus:** (a) They feared Him. They should have feared Him after this. But fear can inspire us to change our ways or do even more dastardly things. That’s important because these individuals were supposed to model the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Instead, they wanted to destroy any wisdom that could have gained from Jesus. (b) The crowds were amazed at His teaching – Jesus was leading the crowds away from what the chief priests and teachers of the Law said about God, forgiveness, and mercy and straight to what God himself says about it. The voice of the paragon was leading their lambs away and straight to Himself. They would have none of it.
- **How the Lord’s Anger Produced Righteousness and What We Can Learn from It:** (1) Jesus knew the temple cleansing would inspire hostility to the point of a murderous plot in the hearts of the chief priests and teachers of the law. (2) And that is exactly what had to happen. For without it, the cross would not have entered into the equation. Jesus intended to go to the cross and he intended to reveal wickedness to do it. (3) But what the chief priests meant for evil; God meant for good. Oh, the blood of Jesus. It washes white as snow.

4. A Proper Lesson (19-25)

- **The Lesson in the Holes:** (1) Inside my home, you won’t find many holes in the walls. But outside in my garage is a different story. (2) There are holes from the lawn mower that I had no intention of getting there. There are holes from flying saw debris that made its way off of the blade and right into the wall. I had no intention of getting those there either. Then there are holes that I had every intention of getting there. Because I put them there when I measured something wrong, and the measuring tape went flying out of my hand. (3) And there’s a lesson in every one of them.
- **A Lesson Unexpected:** When you are reading this after the cleansing of the temple, you immediately start to wonder: “this doesn’t make sense. Why is Jesus now talking about faith and prayer and moving mountains and forgiving? And what in the world do those have to do with cursing a fig tree and cleansing the temple?”
- **But an Important Lesson:** If we go to a dead temple looking for spiritual fruit, we’re going to be disappointed, and we are going to leave hungry. There has to be another way and another tree from which we can eat. And that tree is faith. The faith tree never withers: *“²³ Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.*
- **How the Lord’s Anger Produced Righteousness and What We Can Learn from It:** (1) The cleansing of the temple led to the murderous plot. The murderous plot led to the betrayal. The betrayal led to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion. And the crucifixion led to the resurrection. (2) Now it’s possible by faith – the only tree that bears fruit - to tell the mountain to move and it will. And it’s only possible because of Jesus, whose anger produced our righteousness. Praise be to God.