

“Wait, what?” is actually a very effective way of asking for clarification.
“Wait what?” is at the root of understanding.

The question we’ve asked, is how often do we miss out on understanding who Jesus is, why he came, or what he means to us because we don’t slow down long enough to ask the questions that lead to a deeper understanding?

Bible reading becomes a task or transaction on a to do list- not part of a living and active relationship with a God who wants to speak to us and reveal himself to us here and now.

The Gospel of Mark, which we’ve been skipping through, certainly doesn’t help the habit. It’s the fast break gospel, constant action, jumping from one instance to the next. The word “immediately” is used 41 times in 16 chapters.

And yet another reason we get caught skimming the Gospels is we often already know what happens. Spoiler alert: Jesus goes to a cross. Spoiler alert: Jesus doesn’t stay dead.

We joked last week about spoilers. We hate them and get worked up about them because a movie’s plot twist and the accompanying surprise is a unique, one time event. Once you know how something plays out it changes for you forever.

“Bruce Willis was dead the whole time”

We joked about this spoiler and the Sixth Sense last weekend. The movie that put the director **M Night Shyamalan** on the map.

His lowest point by nearly all measures?

The Happening, where people are inexplicably committing suicide and people begin suspecting that plants are releasing pheromones into the air that are causing the behavior...

Mark Wahlberg vid talking to a plant...

Andy Samburg playing Mark Wahlberg and talking to animals...

MARK 11:12-25 - FIG LEAVES, FAST STARTS, and FALSE ADVERTISING.

Jesus erupts in an outburst of anger directly at the plant.

One author called it *“a gross injustice on a tree which was guilty of no wrong and had but performed its natural function.”*

Isn’t this a case of Jesus wasting of miraculous power because he’s hangry?

Jesus’ last miracle in Mark before he goes to the cross is one that brings death, not life.

Which doesn’t seem to fit. Combined with the context it’s a little perplexing.

In regards to the context and content of scripture:

GENESIS –

Who speaks to trees? *The one who spoke them into existence.*

God created a world of trees, a Garden of Eden full of them, with ONE that Adam and Eve weren’t to partake in.

Spoiler alert – they eat its fruit.

Knowing that came with consequences, they hide from God.

One of the resulting consequences is that for the first time in their nakedness, they felt shame.

Their strategy?

Sewing **fig leaves** together to make loin cloths.

Fig leaves are the largest leaves found in Canaan. Perhaps because of their placement, the fig tree would later become a symbol of fertility.

We see in Genesis that Abraham and Sarah were promised fertility, even in their old age, becoming the lineage that would produce the nation that would provide God with his people:

ISRAEL

Perhaps because of the fig tree's symbol for fertility and God's promise through Abraham, Israel gets likened to a fig tree again and again.

Anyone familiar with OT scripture would know several passages liken Israel to a fig tree.

Anyone familiar with the OT would have known that Israel didn't yield fruit as God's covenant people, and they were sent into exile...

The fig tree fails.

For us its perplexing, but the cursing of the fig tree would have been a light bulb moment for those witnessing it as Jesus reenacted Israel's history with this tree.

But it's more than a historic statement.

It's also a prophetic statement about the present.

Our present and all God's people throughout time.

Including Jesus' present and that temple.

THE TEMPLE

Just as the healing of the blind man last week was sandwiched by commentary on the disciples and their spiritual blindness and inability to understand.

It isn't meant for interpretation in isolation.

In between the fig tree accounts Jesus seemingly goes nuts in the temple.

The crowd is "amazed" but the Greek doesn't speak of the kind of amazement that results in applause, but stupefied amazement. They too were asked, "wait, what just happened?"

This wasn't a simple display of protest.

It was a prophetic announcement of divine judgment.

Jesus was a prophet.

Prophets don't just make announcements – they engage in prophetic action to communicate.

The fig tree, like his actions in the temple, was a prophetic declaration.

FIG TREES

If Jesus could predict when and where the disciples could find the colt that could carry him into Jerusalem, wouldn't he also know from afar whether this tree had figs or not?

If Jesus could feed 5000, why couldn't he do something to solve his own hunger here?

The word Mark uses for season - **Kairos**– is not the typical botanical term for harvest season but the religious term Jesus used to signify the present coming of the Kingdom of God.

We need to dive beyond the surface and into the prophetic symbolism:

Hosea 9:10

*When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert;
when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing **the early fruit on the fig tree.***

Here Israel isn't just compared to the fig tree, it's taken a step further. They're the early fig.

Micah 7:1

*I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard;
there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of **the early figs that I crave.***

Why did God desire the early figs?

Any agrarian Israelite knew that the first fruits belonged to God.

Fruit comes first. THEN the leaves.

The leaves are produced as shade for the figs.

Where there are leaves there should be figs.

Leaves are an advertisement for figs.

FAST STARTS

This tree catches Jesus' eye because it's an early bloomer.

Its early foliage signals that it should have early figs.

A great start doesn't guarantee a happy ending.

Parable of the four soils – three out of four receive the seed and it shoots up with quick growth. No matter how quick the initial growth, a crop without a harvest of fruit is an utter disaster.

Leaves aren't the goal. Fruit is.

Fruit from a genuine relationship with God that produces a harvest of righteousness.

Fruit from co-existing with the Holy Spirit and walking in the fruits of the spirit.

FALSE ADVERTISING.

The tree was writing a check it couldn't cash.

All expectation, no satisfaction.

All leaves, no fruit.

Red Bull was sued for not actually giving people wings- (duh)- and they had to shell out \$13 million in court, and they offered \$10 refunds to anyone who had ever drank their product.

Such deceptive conduct and practices mean that [Red Bull's] advertising and marketing is not just 'puffery,' but is instead deceptive and fraudulent and is therefore actionable.

Jesus saw this fig tree's false advertising as puffery. Fraudulent and actionable puffery at that. The same way companies are judged, this tree is judged.

The fig tree shows that Jesus isn't just trying to reform the temple, he's announcing its disqualification and judgment. It had given the impression that it was a place where God was worshipped and honored and obeyed, but was false advertising.

“Den of robbers” – Jesus isn't mad about the money in the temple.

Look at the context of the verse in Jeremiah that he's quoting:

The den isn't the place of robbery, it's the hideout the robbers retreat after committing their crimes.

It is where the religious thought they could hide safely in forgiveness and fellowship with God regardless of how they acted.

God hates hypocrisy.

This treatment of the tree was a commentary on hollow religiosity.

The temple had become just as much a place of **hiding** than **holiness**.

I'd tell you tonight: the Church can be just as much a place of hiding as it is a place of holiness. There are few places where you can hide from God as effectively as in a Church.

We grab the fig leaf and hide behind ritual.

Like Adam and Eve hiding behind the fig leaves in the Garden,

We hide behind the fig leaves of religious activity.

You hide. But you never heal.

You can be in the House of God and be just as lost as the Prodigal Son.

The older son in the parable wasn't lost in spite of his goodness. He was lost because of it.

Ironically it was his self-righteousness is what kept him from the father.

Sure he was with the father... he served the father... but not out of love.

When you hide behind religious routines you do it out of low grade fear, not joy...

It was a means to an end. If I'm good enough God has to bless me and not condemn me...

*The older brother shows us that **activity** for God by itself or **proximity** to him is not the same as knowing him through relationship.*

You can remain hidden right in the house of God.

Activity for God or proximity to him isn't what saves – Jesus is.

We see Jesus' prophetic behavior in the temple was another shot directed at the religious that got him killed by them.

The Pharisees lives lived out in the temple, like the older son's life lived in the Father's house, would have looked "in leaf." But it was all activity and no fruit.

Our lives can look "in leaf." We may even envy the person with the nice leaves who looks to have it all together. The supermom, the perennial winner, the perfect family, the Christian with the full schedule of serving and ministry.

They look good from a distance, but upon closer examination some have no fruit.

Fun random fact:

Fig leaves are notoriously itchy.

They don't make great clothing. Certainly not loin cloths.

Nor a good mask.

Another fun random fact:

The fig tree is the only tree that Jesus curses in the Bible.

What happened to the fig tree is what happened to the veil ... entirely toppled, top to bottom.

Jesus became a curse for us so that we can come out of hiding.

It's OK to not be OK.

God doesn't want us to stay that way.

In the NT Paul would ask the church in Corinth: **"Don't you know YOU are a temple?"**

The fig tree was a direct parallel to the temple.

All activity. No fruit.

Is your temple- your life- bearing fruit?

The mandate for fruit has increased, not decreased! *John 4:36, 15:2-16, Romans 1:13, 6:21, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 1:11, 4:17, Hebrews 12:11, James 3:17*

Each of those verses hits on the fruit Jesus wants to see in our lives.

But Jesus launches from his treatment of the fruitless fig tree into a commentary on prayer.

It ties directly into what he shouted in the Temple.

It was meant to be a House of Prayer.

And not just that.

House of Prayer for ***all nations***...

Our faith is called to be inclusive.

Psalm 67

Verse 1 - May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—

Verse 2 - So that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

The maturity and fruit God desires from us is that we'd graduate from only living verse 1 to living out the fruit of verse 2.

Our nation needs the second half.

Is there practical steps that need to be taken in our nation that are worth debating? Sure.

But we aren't the ultimate solution. Nor is the work of our hands.

We're systemic participants.

We can't medicate man to perfection again

We can't legislate peace in our hearts

We can't educate sin from our souls

It's been there from the start

Our world needs what we have... not hot takes and personal wisdom... but Jesus.

May we bear the fruit of reaching the broken.