

Mark 11

by W.F. Anderson

In Mark 11, W.F. Anderson explores Jesus' cleansing of the temple, emphasizing the need for genuine worship and the heart of God's law over mere external practices.

Duration: 42:56

Scripture: Jeremiah 7:11, Matthew 6:33, Mark 11:11, Mark 11:15

Topics: "Scripture Inspiration", "Moral Standards"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the nature of Scripture and the question of its verency or inerrancy. He recommends a clear and simple exposition of the inspiration of Scripture by Rene Posh as a valuable resource for understanding this topic. The preacher then moves on to discuss Mark's Gospel, emphasizing the importance of living out the moral standards of God rather than just performing religious rituals. He highlights how Jesus taught and met people in various settings, including peasant homes, fields, and even a stable, showing that God can be encountered outside of traditional religious spaces. The preacher encourages the church to be a place where people can meet God and where believers can impact others to encounter God as well.

Transcript

I told him I'd have to pray about that. Now here are three good books. I'm sure many of you have already read Charlie Coulson's story, Born Again.

If you haven't, you'll have to read it. This is a whole lot better than the picture. Get the book, The Work of the Grace of God in This Man's Life.

How many of you have read any of the works of Anne Kimball? Oh yes, you must get her books. First book of hers I read, I didn't believe it. That this girl isn't for real.

Can't be. And then I ran into two professors from the college where she was Dean of Women. Is that girl reading for real? Is that the way she really lives? Absolutely.

That's exactly the way she lives. Now this is the only copy back there, so whoever gets it has it. But I'm sure the bookstore would be perfectly willing to order others.

But she has two or three books. Get them. The most debated question within evangelical circles today is the nature of Scripture.

The whole question of errancy or inerrancy, and here by René Pasch, is one of the clearest, and by simple I do not mean unlearned, I mean the style of writing, the way things are expressed, one of the clearest, simplest expositions of the inspiration of Scripture by René Pasch. This is something we ought to be familiar with. You can pass it on to young people who will be facing this question, even going to Christian colleges, they're going to face this question.

Here is good material. The inspiration and authority of Scripture. Alright? Now, Mark's Gospel tonight, chapter 11.

We're just skipping through Mark's Gospel, not really getting the sweep of it. The advantage of doing that is that I can pick and choose what I want to. But Mark chapter 11.

And we'll begin reading at verse, we'll just read verse 11 and then skip over to verse 15. Verse 11 gives us evening of Palm Sunday. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem and into the temple, and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the evening was coming, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

Verse 15. And they come to Jerusalem. This is the next morning.

This will be Monday of Passion Week. They come to Jerusalem, and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out those that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers in the seats of those that sold doves, and would not allow that any man should carry any vessel from the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? But ye have made it a den of thieves.

And the scribes and the chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him. For they feared him, because all the people were astonished at his doctrine. And when evening was fully come, he went out of the city.

If I were to ask you tonight who were the people in our Lord's life who gave him the most trouble, you would probably have no difficulty in answering it, would you? They were the scribes, the chief priests, the Pharisees. And if I were to ask you who those people were, you again would be aware that they were the religious leaders, the most respected people in the community of Israel in the first century. And if we were to think about it a little more, we would come to the astonishing realization that this was precisely the group of people who knew their Bible best.

And the people who knew the Word of God best were the chief opponents of our Lord Jesus. To know the content of the Bible does not mean that I know God. Paul tells Timothy that the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

And I can know the Scriptures without knowing Christ. And as we have already seen with the disciples, I can know the content of Scripture without really seeing its significance. The religious leaders were like that.

They knew the Bible, but they never really saw its significance, and they never really grasped its message. I suppose the same thing is possible with us. It's possible to know the content of the New Testament, to be thoroughly familiar with it, and yet to miss its message.

Never really to see what God is saying. When you look at someone's religious system, one of the things you look for is, what is he against? What does he count to be sin? Now, I shouldn't have said, what is he

against, because there are a lot of Christians, and I know what they're against. I'm not sure what they're for, but I know what they're against.

But in any given religious system, what are the great sins? And when you look at the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees, and you discover the problems they had with our Lord Jesus, you discover what were the important sins in their thinking. And when you think of their opposition to the Lord Jesus, it centers around certain things. It centers around, one, the kind of people he was friendly with.

Do you remember how often they were astonished that he ate with publicans and sinners? One occasion they came to a disciple, how is it your master eats with publicans? How can he do that? And they thought it was a terrible shame for him to associate with such people. The second problem they had with him was he ignored the externals of their religion. Now, he didn't ignore the externals of God's revelation, but he did ignore the externals of their religion.

And the third problem they had with him was the way he used the Sabbath day, or rather, in their thinking, misused the Sabbath day. And those were three of the great problems they had with Jesus. The people he associated with, the fact that he ignored the externals of their religion, and what he did on the Sabbath day, those were the important things to him.

You must keep with the right people, our kind of people. Those are the people you have to associate with, and once you get outside our kind of people, you come under a stigma, and you really come under the disapproval of God. And to ignore the externals of our religion, that is to blaspheme God.

And to misuse the Sabbath day is the quickest way to get hammered. And those were the important things to these religious leaders. So you learn something about people when you see what they count as sins.

And when you see what they counted as sins, and then you listen to what our Lord says about them, you discover that not one of those things is important to God. And everything they counted important was minor in the thinking of God. It's bad enough to find fault with the Lord.

It's a whole lot worse when the Lord finds fault with us. And his constant trouble was with the religious leaders. People.

The right kind of people. His answer to that was he was a doctor. A doctor treats sick people.

The externals of religion? Oh, his answer to that was what's inside the heart is what determines one's relationship to God. And you could wear the right kind of clothes and wash your hands in the right way and tithe the herbs in your garden. You could do all that.

And that's fine. That's fine. But that isn't enough.

Those are the incidentals. Those are out on the periphery of things. Do you remember what seemed to be hard words he said to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount? Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of hell.

Now he is not talking about judicial righteousness, justification, imputation of righteousness. He's talking about the way we live. And if you know anything about the rabbinic standard which Pharisees tried to follow, and you think Jesus is saying you've got to do more than that, the whole thing is hopeless.

But when he is talking about a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, what he is telling me is not that the scribes and Pharisees were too righteous. What he is saying is they're not righteous enough. It's the kind of practical righteousness.

And no matter how severe their standards may seem, the fact is their standards were too easy. Anybody can put on the right kind of clothes. Anybody can wash his hands in a certain way.

That's a mechanical thing. Anybody can stand out and pray at certain hours on the street corner. That's a mechanical thing.

You just repeat prayers. And all their prayers were repeated. They were written out.

The Jews had all their prayers written out. I'm not talking about the godly Jews now whose hearts cried out to God. But all a man had to do was repeat these prayers three times a day where everybody could see him.

Sure, it restricted your life. But man, it was easy. You didn't have to have any heart for God at all to do those things.

Anybody could go out in his garden and count ten stalks of celery and yank one up and set that aside for God's offering. All you have to do is be able to add up to ten and know the difference between one and ten. That's all you have to do.

And our Lord is saying their righteousness is too easy. It's to love your neighbor as yourself. It's to be the good Samaritan when it's easy to pass by on the other side.

It's to sit down with the woman of Samaria when you know all your countrymen will despise you for it. It's to bring one's life into line with the moral standards of God. And you find that all through the Old Testament.

The people of Israel constantly slid into the idea that as long as we perform the externals of our religion, as long as we bring the right sacrifice at the right time, this is what God really wants. And prophet after prophet has to come to Israel and say, no, that isn't what God wants. I hate those sacrifices.

I hate your solemn assembly, God says. Why? Because they were divorced from the Ten Commandments. And God says, when I brought you out of Israel, what did I give you first? Did I give you the order of the tabernacle and the sacrifices and the priesthood? What did I give you first? First thing I gave you was the Ten Commandments.

What's the second thing I gave you? The civil law that regulated your life with each other. Then came the worship. But anybody can bring a sacrifice.

That's the easy part. And their tendency was to substitute that for love of God and love of neighbor. And this is what our Lord is saying to these people over and over again.

That they had missed the really important issues in life. Where did you find God in these Gospels? You found Him among the sinners. That's where you found Him.

Isn't that where our Lord was? Don't we believe that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh? Where did you find God? In Palestine in the first century. In the Temple? In the ritual? Where did you find Him?

You found Him among sinners. That's where you found Him.

And the Sabbath day. Oh, how angry they became when He healed on the Sabbath day. His response was, that's the right use of the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath was made for man. For his good. So the purpose of the Sabbath is to do good to man.

And the right use of the Sabbath is to use it to do good to people. And it seems to me He deliberately healed on the Sabbath day, not to irk the Pharisees, but because that's the right way to use the Sabbath. It was given by God for the good of people.

And that's how He used it. And so He healed people, deliberately healed people on the Sabbath day. That's the right way to use the Sabbath day.

And wouldn't you see how far estranged they were from the truth of God in our Lord's teaching? You begin to realize they had everything upside down. Their priorities were all wrong. They didn't really see what God had said in the Old Testament.

And I discovered it's possible for me to do the same thing. To know my New Testament and not really see what God is saying, where His priorities are. And I could be just as much a Pharisee in the Epistles as they were in the Gospels.

And when you hear what our Lord has to say to them, you discover what His priorities are. And this is one of those incidents that do that. It occurs on Monday of Passion Week.

Our Lord entered the city of Jerusalem on Sunday of Passion Week. We call it Palm Sunday. And what He did on Palm Sunday was a total reversal of the whole course of His ministry in the Gospel of Mark.

He has avoided Judea in the Gospel of Mark. He has avoided Jerusalem. He has avoided publicity.

When trouble arose, He slipped out of the country to let it quiet down. But now He is deliberately going into the city of Jerusalem, presenting Himself in Old Testament terms they would recognize. Behold, your King comes unto you, meek and lowly and riding upon an ass.

Presenting Himself in terms they would recognize as the Messiah. It's something He has avoided up until now. And it seems what our Lord is doing is forcing the issue, and the religious leaders will now have to take an action either to accept Him as the Messiah or to reject Him.

But He is forcing the issue when He comes into Jerusalem that way. And in chapters 11 and 12, we see what the response was. And I want to look at this particular incident in chapter 11.

Mark is the only one who tells us that on Palm Sunday, in the evening, He went into the temple, looked all around Him, and then went out to Bethany and spent the night, and then came in on Monday and cleansed the temple. Everything that was going on on Monday was going on Sunday night when He went in there. And you know the whole course of things.

There were three courts in that temple in Jerusalem. There was the court of the Jewish men, and there was the court of the women further out. Of course, there was the court of the priests.

They were the only ones who would go into ministering to the temple. But the court of the Jewish men was the closest to that of the court of the priests. And then the court of the Jewish women.

And then on the outside was the court of the Gentiles. And no Gentile could go beyond that court designated for the Gentile, though in pain of death. Anybody who went beyond that low wall that separated those two courts was subject to execution.

But now, when you came to the temple, you had to bring an offering. And that offering had to be inspected by the priest, that is, without spot or blemish. And so it developed that the priest rejected any animal you would bring, but very conveniently had an animal for sale that would be accessible.

And so the priestly family had control not only of the worship in the temple, but of the sale of the animals, doves, sheep, goats, oxen, that could be offered for sacrifice. Further, if you were to offer money, put it into the treasury, it could only be Jewish coinage. But Roman coinage circulated throughout the empire.

Too bad. If you come from other countries and all you have is Roman coinage, you cannot offer that in the temple. You can only offer Jewish coinage.

But all I have is Roman coinage. Well, that's all right. We just happen to have a table here where you can exchange Roman money for Jewish money at a price, of course.

And they had control of that. Now all this was located out in the court of the Gentiles. And when you came into that court of the Gentiles, here were all these animals, the money-changing table, and it was like a county fair.

And the buying and selling of the animals, the changing of money, all this was going on out here. Now Her Lord saw all that on Sunday nights. And he went out to Bethany and spent the night, and then came into the temple the next day and cleansed the temple.

Now, I cannot help but see anger in what he did. In John's account, when he cleansed the temple at the beginning of his ministry, there's something that really puts a chill in my heart as I read it. And that's to see him, in John's account, taking these cords and deliberately weaving them into a whip that calculated deliberate action on his part as he prepared to go in there and drive those animals out and turn the money-changer's table over and get those people out of there.

And he swept in there in fury. It's not a polite action to turn somebody's table over and send those coins scattering all over that temple floor. But that's what he did.

It's not a quiet action to go in there and drive the oxen out and the sheep. That's not a quiet action. And he didn't politely say, Would you kindly remove these doves? He was angry.

And in his anger, he cleansed that temple. And it may be hard for us to think of our Lord as being angry, but there are many times in the Gospels when very strong words are used of his emotion of anger. He is not the pale Galilean.

Don't you believe it for a moment. He was one vigorous man. One of the things we have problems with is anger, isn't it? Something I learned about his handling of anger is it was very deliberate and not impulsive.

He was just as angry when he saw all that Sunday night as he was Monday morning. But when he expressed that anger, it was the next day and it was very deliberate. It was not impulsive.

He didn't blow his stack. He never lost control. His anger impelled him to do what had to be done.

And he did it thoughtfully, deliberately. The problem we have with our anger is that it is impulsive and thoughtless. We just strike out.

We let everything go. That tells me something about God's anger in judgment. It's very deliberate.

It's not impulsive. And it's carefully thought out. Of course, that's the way we should handle our anger, but that's the way he handled his.

But when he cleansed that temple, he had something to say to these people. When he threw all this out, all these animals out, overturned the table of the money changers, and the seats of those that sold doves. You know, he didn't release the birds because they'd never get them back.

They'd catch cows and sheep and the rest of it, but you can't catch the birds. So he never uncaged the birds, however they had them trapped. But he did kick over the seats of those that were selling them.

In another gospel, he says, Get these things out of here. What is he saying to them? He taught, and he quotes from two Old Testament passages, one from Isaiah and one from Jeremiah. Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer.

The most universal book in the Old Testament is the book of Isaiah. Isaiah has a vision of God's salvation going to the whole world. No wonder it's called the fifth gospel.

And it's Isaiah who talks about the temple not being reserved for Israel, but being a place where people of every nation could come and pray to God. And that tells me two things about our Lord's view of a place of worship. One, its primary purpose is access to God, where people can meet God.

That's its primary thrust. And one might think the primary purpose of the temple is the place where sacrifice is offered. No, our Lord says, it's a place of prayer where people can meet God.

And the second thing it tells me about that temple, it was never meant just for the people of Israel. The man in the book of Acts who saw that was Stephen. And when you read Stephen's apology in chapter 7, you discover why they killed him.

Stephen was the only, I shouldn't say the only one, but one of the few in the Christian church at that time who saw the implications of the gospel of Jesus' grace. And in light of that, he went back into the Old Testament, and he showed those people God has never done His most important work in the land of Palestine. And the greatest revelations of God did not occur in the temple.

He saw the implications of the universal heart of God. And our Lord said, no, no, no, the doors of this house must be thrown open to all people. God's heart yearns for the world.

And He chose the people of Israel not as an end, but as a means. And He has chosen us for the same reason. Not as an end in ourselves, but as a means.

And when we come together, our gatherings should be such that people meet God. My house, He said, shall be called the house of prayer for all nations. That was God's intent.

That's God's intent for us. And what Paul wanted for the Corinthians when the Corinthian church came together was an unbeliever to come in and fall down and acknowledge that God is among you of the truth. Our gatherings ought to be the places where people meet God.

But you see, it's easier, as it was for these religious leaders, to put the emphasis on the ritual. But we are doing precisely what God said we should do. And they were still doing that when our Lord turned on His heel and said, your house is left unto you desolate.

And it's easier to put the emphasis on the ritual. That's the easy way out. And the Pharisees took the easy way out.

And our Lord would have none of it. Is it possible for us to do the same thing? So we have the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day. And one of our favorite expressions is, we do it in our Lord's own appointed way.

So what? So what? Isn't it possible for Him to turn on His heel and say, your house is left unto you desolate? The point is, do we meet God? When we come together, do people meet God? Now here's one other thing to say to them. Quoting from the 7th chapter of Jeremiah. You have made it a den of thieves.

Terrible words. And when you go back to the 7th chapter of Jeremiah, you discover what was going on. The religious leaders of that day, and the people who followed them, were living totally immoral lives.

They were the ones who brought the judgment of God down on the city of Jerusalem. And Jeremiah could tell them, there will be absolutely no escape. There is no way this city can escape Nebuchadnezzar's destruction.

No way. God has doomed it. And you people are to blame.

What were they doing? Living totally immoral lives, oppressing their neighbors, getting rich at other people's expense, and then coming to the temple with their sacrifices and saying, it's the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. And expecting, because it was the temple of the Lord, God would never let Nebuchadnezzar destroy it. And we are safe as long as we keep up the rituals.

You know what that is? That's paganism. That's not Judaism, that's paganism. It's paganism that says as long as you offer your sacrifices to your deity, he'll be happy with you.

He doesn't care how you live, as long as you feed him. That's paganism. That's neither Judaism nor Christianity.

But that's what Judaism had come to. And Jeremiah said to the people of Israel, you've made it a den of thieves. Now what in the world is a den of thieves? It's not a place where thieves congregate to plot what they're going to do.

You remember the road to Jericho? Down through that mountain pass, that tremendous drop, mountains honeycombed with caves. As late as the 1930s, warnings were posted to travelers, they should not travel that road alone, because of the brigands up in the hills. Throw roadblocks across, stop your car, rob you, may kill you.

They were warned not to travel alone. Why was that a favorite target? It's not only the winding nature of the road, but it's all those dens and caves up in the hills. Once they struck you, they fled up into those hills,

you could never find them.

Those were the dens of thieves. That's where they escaped for safety, after they had committed their crime. Our Lord said, as Jeremiah said before him, this is what Israel had done with the temple.

They had made it a den of thieves. They could go out and rob and kill and steal and bear false witness, do everything the Ten Commandments said not to do, and then think, because they came to the temple with their sacrifice, they were safe. It was the place where thieves hid from the judgment of God.

And those are the terrible, terrible words that our Lord uses of the people of his day. You've made it a den of thieves. He could say of religious leaders that when you do make a convert, you're making twofold more a child of hell than yourself.

You not only refuse to go into the kingdom, you shut the door against those who would go in. Terrible words. And yet they felt because they were following the ritual, they were safe.

God has never said that. God has never put the emphasis on the ritual, not even in the Old Testament where the ritual was so minutely spelled out. God has never put the emphasis on the ritual.

He has always put the emphasis on the state of heart before God. Always. And if you were to ask me what do I consider a New Testament church to be, the easy answer to that is the form.

That's the easy answer. Any group of people can set up the form. That's easy.

If you were to ask me what I think a New Testament church ought to be, I go to the book of Acts. And I see churches filled with light and fire. I see churches where the word of God multiplied and grew.

And I see churches where great numbers were added to the Lord. And I see churches where people were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. Now those are New Testament churches.

To follow the ritual is simple. That's easy. That's the easy way out.

To have the light, the heart of the New Testament is what God's after. So where did you find the Lord Jesus during those years? Yes, he taught in the temple. Out there in Solomon's port were great numbers congregated to hear their favorite teachers.

He taught there. Where did people meet God? In the gospel. Oh, in rude peasant homes where he went.

Out in fields where he taught. At a tax collector's station. In a boat.

And first of all, in a stable. This is where people met God. Out among the people.

God walked among the people. And people who were excluded from the religious ritual found God in the Lord Jesus. Oh, to be a church like that.

To be a church where people meet God. To be a church where people circulate among others. And other people meet God because of us.

Oh, listen brothers and sisters. The important thing is not to convince other people we are right. They couldn't care less whether we're right or not.

But that through us other people meet God. That's the only thing that counts. My house, Jesus said, shall be called the house of prayer for all nations.

Let's pray. We pray, our Father, that through the way we live and what we are able to share.

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