WEEK FIVE

MARK 11-13

DAY ONE

Growth without fruit is a sign of decay.
— Timothy Keller

As we near the end of Mark's gospel, we will begin to encounter some strange situations and confusing words from Jesus. One seemingly out-of-character situation in today's reading surrounds Jesus' interaction with a fig tree. Jesus is hungry and walks up to this tree to discover that there is no fruit. And yet, the text says that "it was not the season for figs" (Mark 11:13). He then issues a curse over the tree, and it dies.

Why would Jesus be so upset about this fruitless tree when it wasn't even supposed to produce figs during that time of year?

In his book Jesus the King, Timothy Keller explains that, while there would not have been fully developed fruit during this stage of the growing season, the tree should have produced small buds that were good to eat. If a tree wasn't producing these buds, it was a bad sign. Although the tree looked healthy on the outside, it was beginning to die on the inside.

Tucked between Jesus' two interactions with this tree is a fairly well-known story of Jesus clearing out the Jewish temple, a place where all of the Jewish leaders gathered. From what we have learned about the Pharisees, scribes, and teachers of the law throughout our study of Mark, the cursing of the fig tree makes much more sense. An externally green tree that was decaying from the inside out is the heart attitude that Jesus repeatedly condemns throughout the gospels.

Jesus is running out of time and the hearts of the Jewish leaders are becoming harder than ever. A time is coming where Jesus will no longer stand for their hollow religion — the way they have misrepresented God and excluded person after person from accessing his presence. As the story continues, we will find that the religious leaders will soon be held accountable for their actions and there will be immense consequences to bear.

READ
Mark 11

Mark 11
Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King
11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his
disciples, [2] saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one
has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. [3] If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send
it back here shortly.'"

[4] They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, [5] some people standing there asked,
"What are you doing, untying that colt?" [6] They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. [7] When they
brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. [8] Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others
spread branches they had cut in the fields. [9] Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

[10] "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

[11] Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he
went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree and Clears the Temple Courts
[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'? 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 disciples 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] "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. [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."

The Authority of Jesus Questioned
[27] They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. [28] "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

[29] Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. [30] John's baptism — was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!"

[31] They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' [32] But if we say, 'Of human origin' ..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

[33] So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

REFLECT

1 Who is someone I know whose life has reflected a strong relationship with Jesus? What do they do that show this?

2 Have I ever encountered someone who was really involved in church activities, but didn't seem to be growing to become more like Jesus? What is it like to interact with this type of person?

3 How am I different as a result of knowing Jesus? Examples: Am I becoming less angry, anxious, selfish, or more forgiving?

RESPOND

Becoming the type of person who reflects the love and grace of Jesus in our lives begins not with trying harder, but in being with Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus says, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The more we are with Jesus, the more he transforms us to be like him.

Spend some time today giving God your undivided attention. Below is an excerpt from the Heidelberg Confession of Faith — written in 1563! Slowly read this confession a few times, underlining sections or circling words that stand out to you.

I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

PRAY

Looking back on the confession we read today, spend some time thanking God for what he has done for you. Ask that God would transform your character to become more and more like Jesus each day.

DAY TWO

Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone.
— Andy Stanley

From a young age, most children are taught the Golden Rule — "treat others the way that you want to be treated." And while many of us remember the details of the laminated Golden Rule posters from our elementary school classrooms, very few of us were taught that these were the words of Jesus.

The Golden Rule that most of us have etched into our brains is recorded in Matthew 7:12. However, Jesus rephrases them in his conversation with one of the scribes in today's reading as they discuss which of God's commands are the most important.

In the ancient world, scribes would have been very familiar with the Old Testament, likely having large portions of it memorized. There are over 600 commands of God recorded in these pages, and this man is approaching Jesus to ask which of the hundreds of commands are most important to God. Jesus declares that every law that God has ever given his people can be summed up in two simple statements: (1) love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and (2) love your neighbor as yourself.

The self-love Jesus describes here encompasses much more than experiencing positive feelings toward ourselves — it is about how we respond to our needs, wants, and desires. Most of the time, it doesn't require much thought for us to focus on our own physical needs — when we are hungry, when we feel tired, thirsty, and so on. Beyond merely the physical aspects of life, we also seek out opportunities to fulfill our hopes and dreams, to find people to live our lives alongside, and to obtain a sense of significance and purpose.

When we think of it this way, Jesus' words here are striking. What if we responded to the hunger and thirst of people a continent away the way we respond to our own? What if we experienced the loneliness, injustice, and hopelessness of others as if it were happening to us? What if we pursued the goals and celebrated the successes of our friends and co-workers with the same excitement we would feel if we had achieved the same?

The beautiful thing about Jesus is that he never asks us to do what he has not done himself. In fact, he does even more. On the cross, Jesus became the neighbor we never could by rescuing us from our sin and making a way for us to enjoy the same relationship with God that he experienced himself. When we experience this love, it changes the way that we see people — empowering us to love as we have been loved.

Read
Mark 12

Mark 12
The Parable of the Tenants
12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the
winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 2 At harvest
time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him
and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him
shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

6 "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

7 "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 So they took
him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

9 "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven't
you read this passage of Scripture:

"'The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
11 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"
12 Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken
the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar
13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. 14 They came to him and said,

"Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? [15] Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." [16] They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"
"Caesar's," they replied.

[17] Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

And they were amazed at him.

Marriage at the Resurrection
[18] Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. [19] "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. [20] Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. [21] The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. [22] In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. [23] At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

[24] Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? [25] When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. [26] Now about the dead rising — have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? [27] He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

The Greatest Commandment
[28] One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

[29] "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' [31] The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

[32] "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. [33] To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

[34] When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.
Whose Son Is the Messiah?
[35] While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? [36] David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

"'The Lord said to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.'"
[37] David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Warning Against the Teachers of the Law
[38] As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, [39] and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. [40] They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

The Widow's Offering
[41] Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. [42] But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

[43] Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on."

REFLECT

1 Which is easier or more comfortable for me — to be served or to serve?

2 When have I experienced being loved by someone as they loved themselves?

RESPOND

Over the next week — 3-4 times — ask your spouse, a friend, or a co-worker, "What can I do for you today?" Then do it.

PRAY

Spend some time today thanking Jesus for his love for you and ask God to give you the ability to consider the needs of others in your life to be as important as your own.

DAY THREE

It requires heroic courage to trust in the love of God no matter what happens to us.
— Brennan Manning

The section of the Bible we are going to read today is hard. Parts of it are confusing and difficult to understand and others are scary and intense. We are going to dive into some of these aspects of Mark 13 in our A Deeper Look section this week. For today, we are going to continue to focus our attention upon Jesus and what he is trying to communicate to us in this passage.

Essentially, Jesus is painting a picture of what the world will soon look like without him — and it's not pretty: wars, natural disasters, conflict within families, people being persecuted and even losing their lives for their faith, and self-absorbed leaders rising up to declare that they have all of the answers to the universe's problems.

The world Jesus describes is the one we all live in today — one filled with brokenness and without the physical presence of Jesus.

When we become a Christian, we don't receive a free pass from suffering, difficulty, and pain. In fact, Jesus is telling his disciples in this passage that these things will be a part of life for all of us.

Regardless of what we will come up against, the words of Jesus call us to be alert and to persevere. While we don't need to be looking for a disaster around every corner, we are called to stick it out through the unexpected challenges we face, living with an awareness that there is a bigger, eternal reality beyond the one we experience today — and to be ready for the day when Jesus returns and that good and perfect reality will intersect with ours forever.

READ

Mark 13

Mark 13
The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times
13 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

5 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong — let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now — and never to be equaled again.

20 "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has

shortened them. [21] At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. [22] For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. [23] So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

[24] "But in those days, following that distress,
"'the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
[25] the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

[26] "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. [27] And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

[28] "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. [29] Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. [30] Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. [31] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown
[32] "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. [33] Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. [34] It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

[35] "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. [36] If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. [37] What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

REFLECT

1 What parts of this chapter were confusing or difficult to understand?

2 When I think about the world coming to an end, how do I feel? Worried, anxious, confused, peaceful, hopeful?

3 What would I do differently in my life if I lived with the awareness that Jesus could return any day?

RESPOND
Today, let's paraphrase these words of Jesus from John 16:33 into a prayer: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Your prayer could look something like this: *God, I thank you today that — because of Jesus — I can have peace no matter what is to come. Help me to experience that peace today and to rest in the truth that you have already overcome the world. Amen.*

PRAY
Spend some additional time in prayer today, asking God to strengthen, protect, and provide peace to those who are enduring difficult circumstances today: war, natural disasters, religious persecution, etc. Do a little research if necessary.

A DEEPER LOOK
THE END TIMES

"... the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."
— Mark 13:13

Mark 13 stands out as a chapter that is set apart from the rest of the gospel as a whole. While it still fits into the order of events in the story, it contains a lot of confusing images and language — references to things like "the abomination of desolation," the "tribulation," and "false messiahs," violence, and natural disasters. At the end of all of this, he encourages his disciples that he will come for them, so they should stay on their guard and watch. How do we make sense of all of this?

Many Bible scholars agree that Jesus is describing two distinctly different events in Mark 13 — (1) the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD, and (2) the end of the world (commonly referred to as end times).

Bible commentator Donald English provides the following outline for Mark 13:

13:1-4 Warning about the temple
Jesus warns the disciples that the temple (the most holy site) in Jerusalem will be destroyed.

13:5-13 The continuing experience of hardship by the disciples
Jesus prepares the disciples for the difficulties they will face following his death.

13:14-23 The destruction of Jerusalem
Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem which occurs in 70 AD.

13:24-27 The end of all things
Jesus describes what believers can expect to experience when the world as we know it comes to an end.

13:28-37 Watchfulness during the entire "end time" (from now onward)

Jesus' words still encourage us today not to consume ourselves with worry about dates, times, and seeing signs of the apocalypse everywhere.

While the images described in this chapter are frightening and filled with unknowns, Jesus provides us with hope — the promise of restoration. Yes, there will be a day when the world comes to an end, but this end will make a way for God to renew and restore the earth and all who follow him to the beauty, peace, and wholeness he intended when he created it and all of us.

MESSAGE NOTES (NOVEMBER 11/12):