



ENCOUNTER

Towards Access
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Discussion Notes
The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

We are making a transition on our journey through the Gospel of Mark. While the first half of Mark centers on Identity - Who Jesus Is, the second half is about His Purpose. Jesus' ultimate purpose is to give His life on the cross. We are getting up close and personal with the life of Christ on this path that has the potential to change our lives. God is offering us hope, change and life. Remember, the closer we get to Him, the more our lives will change.

SCRIPTURE¹

Mark 2:17 It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Mark 11:12-14 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 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. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

Mark 11:15-18 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, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?' (Isaiah 56:7) But you have made it a 'den of robbers.'" 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.

OBSERVATION

The scripture this week is about Jesus' clearing the temple in Jerusalem as money changers were defrauding those who were buying animals for sacrifice. This was Passover week and people came from all over the ancient world with coins of many different countries. They were required to exchange their coins for temple coins and, in the process, were being cheated in the rate of exchange by the money changers. I had always believed that Jesus was showing righteous anger because His Father's house was being used for commerce, but there was another reason for His anger. Jesus was clearing away all of the barriers to the temple for everyone including the Gentiles. With Jesus, the restricted area called the Holy of Holies, was now open to everyone, not just the High priest once per year.

Question: What tables is Jesus turning over in your life? In our life as a church?

APPLICATION

Christ is available to everyone everywhere or He isn't for anyone anywhere. Jesus used different adjectives to describe people and so do we. We tend to differentiate between those who are our people and those who are not. The adjectives we use are Democrats, Republicans; rich, uneducated, athletes, couch potatoes; blue collar or intellectual; golfers, bike riders, or football players. But Jesus was challenging the adjectives that were being placed in front of people that would limit their access to God. He was saying, "Everyone can now go directly to God!" You see, those with access had set up numerous barriers of access for all those who arrived at the temple, but what absolutely shocked them was that He was overturning obstacles and opening access into the presence of God for everyone. This is so powerful

¹ All scripture is NIV unless otherwise noted.



because, as Jesus was overturning those tables in the Court of the Gentiles, He was flipping over those obstructions just steps from the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place where Jews believed God's presence dwelt. He was saying that what God wants more than anything else is for everyone to be connected with Him. So Jesus narrowed it all down to just two adjectives: the disconnected and the connected. He said "whomever you label with your adjectives, they are the ones to whom I am available!"

Question: Who are the disconnected you can identify that need you to reach out to them with the Gospel of Jesus? What do you specifically plan to do?

If we are His body and if we are the reflection of Him to the world, then we need to see people the way Jesus sees them and we need to feel about them the way God does. Our adjectives should simply be HIS adjectives: people are seemingly connected or disconnected, struggling to be reconnected to the heavenly Father. As much as Jesus loves us, His primary concern is the disconnected ones. That is why He spent so much time among the irreligious: the ones who were lost and far from God. And we are His body and what is true for Him should be true for us.

Question: In what ways do you reflect Jesus to those around you?

But we are more comfortable among, and the church's gravitational pull is toward, the connected. We have barriers that come in different forms, but are barriers nonetheless. Barriers of Exclusion: we decide who we like and who we don't like; Barriers of Expectations: political beliefs for example; Barriers of the Extracurricular: church activities and actions. When we don't like people who don't see the world as we do, God says we have joined the ranks of the Pharisees.

Question: What barriers have you built that filter out people who are seeking God?

At the core of who we are as a church, and the filter through which we do everything, must be come as you are, because barriers to belonging will quickly become barriers to believing. What is true of Jesus personally should be true of us collectively. People who were nothing like Jesus actually liked Him! They were drawn to Him and moved by His life. They were challenged by His teaching, His priorities, and the perspective He brought. They were compelled by what He had to say about God. This was despite the fact that they didn't always understand Him or believe everything He said. Just as Jesus drew people to Him in crowds as He spoke about His Father, we have the same message and, through the Holy Spirit, can have the same impact. Believers should be the most likeable people in the community whether people agree with us or believe with us, or not.

Question: What are your spiritual gifts? How are you using them? (1 Corinthians 12:8-11)

Question: What do you do on Sunday morning that says to those around you, "You are welcome here just as you are?"

The parable of the fig tree was Jesus saying that Israel had become spiritually barren before the Lord. They had the form of religion but not the reality. They knew the right words to say, but their hearts were far from God. They were not reflecting Him. Jesus is denouncing not only Israel, but unfruitful Christians as well. A tree or a community that is not bearing fruit is worthless and God is a fruit inspector. He expects those who have a relationship with Him to bear much spiritual fruit.

Question: What does the parable of a fig tree have to do with how you are living your life?

Question: What fruits of the Spirit do you demonstrate in your everyday life? (Galatians 5:22)

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to identify the barriers we have built that have kept the disconnected ones from finding You. Open our hearts and tear down our judgments toward others as we become the body of Christ on earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.