

GBC Discipleship RESOURCE



In Three Days

Week 01 | **Jesus Condemns Fruitlessness (Mark 11:12-20)**

*For a brief overview of why (and how) to engage in each of these practices, you can read the **Guideline For Growing** on our website.*

<https://www.gymeabaptist.org.au/growing/pages/guideline-for-growing>

What is a Discipleship Menu?

A discipleship menu is a selection of discipleship activities to engage in to continue the conversation that begins on Sunday throughout the week. The aim is to extend our interaction as a community of faith around activities that help us follow Jesus every single day. The activities vary from week to week (though there are some standard activities) and you are encouraged to do as many as you find helpful (like a menu; you don't need to eat everything on it!). Do them on your own (God and you), with a couple of friends (you and a few), or in a Life Group (you and a crew). The important thing is to do a few!

GBC Sermon Podcast and The Big 3

Podcast

Don't forget you can review this week's sermon on the GBC Sermon Podcast. The sermon is usually uploaded by Monday afternoon. You can also listen in to the GBC Big Three podcast; a weekly podcast where Matt, Jess, and Marc sit down and continue the conversation by engaging in three big questions raised by the congregation about the sermon. The GBC Big Three comes out on Wednesdays.

Overview

Our theme for Easter this year – In three days – takes up the words of Jesus in John 2:19, that he would “destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”. This claim to replace the temple with himself was taken very seriously by his enemies and is one of the only specific charges that Mark records from Jesus trial (14:59). This invites us to consider Jesus death and resurrection through the lens, so to speak, of the temple.

In our text this week Jesus curses a fig tree for not bearing fruit. The fact that it was not the season for figs indicates that this action may have a symbolic meaning and this is borne out by what happens next. In Mark's gospel account he regularly uses what is called a literary sandwich in which he interrupts a story with another that holds the interpretive key. In this case, the fruitless fig tree – covered in green leaves, but without fruit – is a symbol of the temple – an amazing architectural achievement but ultimately fruitless.

Fruitlessness is a key theme in Mark's gospel as we see in the parable of the soils (Mark 4). It is critical that we understand fruitlessness as a failure to achieve the desired result. The two passages that Jesus cites – Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 – point to the true purpose of the temple; to serve as a symbol of the relationship between God and his people and the invitation to enter into that relationship.

Jesus condemns the fruitlessness of the temple and of us. This is the bad news of Easter. We too can look promising – in full leaf so to speak – but without fruit. Jesus condemns this but, in his declaration that he will replace that which makes us fruitless he promises to bring about fruit in our lives as we remain in him (John 15).

Passages to Read

We believe that the Word of God is living and active and that reading and reflecting on it is one way we encounter God. As you read, we encourage people to ask a set of simple questions: What stands out to you? What questions do you have? What is the invitation of God to you? Who can you tell?

This week there are a few different reading paths you can choose between. The first is to read the account of Jesus' final week over the course of this week: Matthew 21-28; Mark 11-16; Luke 19:28-24:53; or John 13-21. If these stories are familiar to you, you may want to read them in a different translation or paraphrase and/or read them aloud. This will heighten the attention you pay and may reveal new things. I'd also encourage you to read what's there. In other words, pay attention to what is actually described and said, and don't fill-in-the-blanks with all the other things you know about the story. Put simply, try to read it for the first time.

The other reading path you may want to choose is to reflect on the specific passages that were raised in this week's sermon.

- Mark 11:12-21
- Isaiah 56:3-8
- Jeremiah 7:1-19
- John 15:1-8
- Mark 4:1-20

Questions to Reflect on

These questions can be used as the basis of a small group discussion or as journal questions. As with the rest of this menu, use the questions that are most useful for you or your crew.

1. Something (or someone) that is fruitful is something (or someone) that achieves the desired result (e.g., a fruitful search is a search where what is sought is found; a fruitful holiday is one where rest and refreshment are achieved). When have you done something that you would describe as fruitful? What was the desired result? What did you do to make sure your endeavour was fruitful?
2. What is the desired result of your life? What are you doing to make sure you are fruitful?
3. In the parable of the soils (Mark 4) there are three soils that are described as unfruitful; the path, the shallow soil, and the weed-strewn soil. Each of them pose obstacles to fruitfulness. What are other obstacles to fruitfulness in our lives.
4. Jesus condemns fruitlessness in us. This is the bad news of Easter. The good news (and it is so very good news) is that he promises to make us fruitful if we will remain in him (John 15). How do we remain in Jesus?
5. How can we 'measure' fruitfulness in our lives as followers of Jesus?

Confession & Self-Examination

Adele Calhoun expresses the desire of confession and self-examination as the desire "to surrender my weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire and embrace practices that lead to transformation." (101). Confession is not about listing our failures for the sake of listing our failures. She says, "This is not the same thing as a neurotic shame-inducing inventory. Instead it is a way of opening myself to God within the safety of divine love so I can authentically seek transformation."

(Ibid). This week, let me encourage you to consider the areas of your life that are fruitless (or less fruitful).

Practices include:

- admitting to God our natural desire to rationalise, deny, blame, and self-obsess;
- examine the 'sin-network' in our lives; and
- confessing our sins after careful examination of our lives.

The basis of Christian confession is the grace and love of God towards us. We can confess what God already knows about us and what he has already forgiven in Christ. We are not uncovering things that were hidden to the eyes of God or that have driven him away from us. We are meeting with God and bringing to light those areas where we need – and desire – his transforming love.

A Prayer to Pray

Focus your prayers this week (at least in part) on the theme of fruitfulness. Ask the Holy Spirit to indicate those areas of your life where there is fruit, areas which need pruning, and areas where fruitfulness is lacking. Pray for clarity and next steps that you can take to remain in Jesus!

Attend a Tenebrae Service

You are, of course, invited to all of our Easter services! There is, however, one service in particular that you might find especially meaningful this Easter.

On Thursday evening we are holding our Tenebrae service or Service of Shadows. If you have never been you may want to consider attending (either onsite or online). The service includes readings (from Matthew's gospel) of the events the night Jesus was betrayed, condemned, and crucified. After each reading, there is a period of silence and then a candle is extinguished to represent the deepening darkness surrounding our Lord. At the conclusion of

the service people are encouraged to leave in silence. The service at GBC begins at 7:30.