

**Illus:** Last week Pastor Keith shared a story from his wedding day, and I thought that this morning I might begin by sharing one of my own, a story that goes back to a few months before Naomi and I were married.

I was living in Calgary at the time, and Naomi was here on the North Shore. The geographical distance between us made for some challenges, particularly after we were engaged. There are so many details surrounding a wedding, and the vast majority of them were left to Naomi because I was unable to help from a distance.

Even our premarital mentoring was a challenge. But we had arranged for me to fly in for a weekend, setting aside Friday night and all day Saturday to work through any number of potential challenges in our relationship. Well...the weekend came and we had a wonderful time with our mentor couple; they had been married for a few decades and had a lot of wisdom to offer us.

At one point in our conversation, the dialogue turned to the subject of expectations in marriage. At one point, the mentor couple turned to us and asked, *what expectations do you have of one another in marriage?* It was a great question. An important question. A foundational question. But it was completely wasted on me. I was so young, so in love, so naive, that when the question was asked, my response was: *I don't really have any expectations. I just love you unconditionally!* Three weeks into marriage, my list of expectations was a mile long.

Expectations. We've all got them; expectations shape our lives.

And the force that expectations exert is not unidirectional; our expectations exert pressure on the people around us, and their expectations exert pressure on us. Some of us are strangling, or being strangled, by expectations. A parent, a friend, a spouse, a pastor...are you drowning under the expectations of others? And are you in turn, keeping people under with all that you expect?

Our expectations say a lot about what we think we need, or deserve, or about the way we want the world to be. And for most of us, our expectations border on the sacred. What I mean is that we see our expectations as holy things to be honoured and lived out by everyone around us.

The question is, *what happens when our expectations are shattered by someone close to us?* Often, shattered expectations result in a shattered relationship. Now a shattered relationship can be rebuilt, I mean...anything is possible with God, but it will need to be rebuilt on the foundation of shared expectations.

So far I've been talking exclusively about the human dimension of relationships, but don't our expectations tend to extend beyond you and me? *Are we even aware of the many expectations we have of God?*

I think a part of the reason why so many people reject God, or push Him to the margins of life is because we cannot control Him. Try as we might, God will not be contained by our expectations; He exceeds some and shatters others. And Jesus is the perfect example.

**Illus:** Throughout history, all over the world, people have painted, carved, and sculpted images of Jesus; there are too many to count.

And often these images say more about us, than they do about Him. Jesus has been portrayed as blond-haired, blue-eyed Westerner, as an African, as a 15th century European.

My first Bible was filled with pictures of Jesus: Jesus surrounded by children, Jesus holding cute cuddly sheep, Jesus healing people, Jesus hanging on a cross, etc. Most of these images portray a nice Jesus, a gentle Jesus...the kind of person that could hold something fragile, but was maybe a little fragile Himself?? The kind of guy you would invite to a tea party, but not the kind of guy you'd want on your football team.

We know what to do with a loving Jesus, a healing Jesus, a forgiving Jesus, but what do we do with an angry Jesus? Mark 11 presents to us a Jesus who curses innocent fig trees, who kicks over tables, who drives people out of the temple. The question is: *what do we do with this Jesus?* I'd suggest we pay attention to Him, to what He's saying, to what He's doing, and to the *WHY* behind it all.

Friends, this morning, my hope is that Jesus will shatter our expectations. Instead of trying to conform Jesus to our expectations, may He shape us. It's time to wave the white towel of surrender.

Throughout His ministry, expectations swirled around Jesus. And as He approached Jerusalem for the final time, everything came to a head. Two weeks ago Pastor Dave walked us through Jesus' last healing, last week Pastor Keith talked about Jesus' Last Supper, and in our text this morning, Mark recounts Jesus' last miracle, and His last tirade. Let's read what happened.

*1 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?' tell him, '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!" 11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.*

*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 area 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.*

**Illus:** impending death has a way of bringing clarity and focus. As a son I saw it firsthand in my mom, and as a pastor, I've seen it in the lives of congregants; the same can be said for Jesus. Jesus had one week to live. One week before the cross. If you had one week to live, where would you go? What would you do?

Jesus went to Jerusalem. Not a surprise really...Jerusalem, and more specifically the Temple was the epicentre of Israel's life. It was the place where God dwelled, not literally, obviously; God cannot be contained by a building. But symbolically, the Temple was the place where heaven and earth met...the place where Israel came to meet with God. There they worshipped, prayed, and offered sacrifice for sins.

Jesus had one week to live and there's only one thing on His mind: *I've got to get to Jerusalem.* And so Jesus began His final journey. But you may have noticed something different about His entry into Jerusalem; Jesus intentionally does something that will attract attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:24-25.

If you know anything about Jesus, you'll know that attracting attention wasn't His style. Now don't get me wrong, everywhere Jesus went He attracted attention, but He never sought attention; do you see the difference?

He would heal people and then tell them to keep it on the down-low; but they never did. Jesus would come across people afflicted by evil spirits, and these spirits always knew who He was: *I know who you are--the Holy One of God! Have you come to destroy us?*<sup>1</sup> **As a matter of fact I have...**and Jesus would give them an order like: **Be Quiet, and come out of this man!** And even as Jesus revealed His identity to His disciples, He told them to keep it quiet.

Why all the secrecy? Jesus knew what lies within the human heart: false expectations, the desire to be great, the desire to avoid pain and difficulty. He didn't want people to misunderstand who He was and why He came and hence the gag order. But with one week to go, Jesus changes His approach.

He wants people to know He's coming, He wants to make some noise, He wants to make a statement that will send shock-waves. So what was His plan? He sent a couple disciples to fetch Him a donkey, and He rode it into Jerusalem? *Are you kidding me? That was His grand statement?*

**illus:** It's a moment that's lost on us, it's one of those "you had to be there" moments. It's like going to Rogers Arena to watch a Canucks game and seeing 18,000 fans waving a white towel. It's fun, right?

We're just cheering, right? Wrong. If you don't know what happened on April 29th, 1982, then you're missing the point.

On that night, the improbable Vancouver Canucks were in a dogfight with the mighty Chicago Blackhawks; it was game 2 of the Conference Finals. And the referees were killing us, they called 4 consecutive penalties on the Canucks. And with the game slipping away, our coach, Roger Nielsen, in an act of total frustration, grabbed a white towel, lifted it up on a hockey stick and began to wave it: *I give up, I give in, you win.*

His mock surrender became an act of defiance that has defined Canuck fans ever since...and some of you thought you were just waving a white towel.

Most good Jews knew the Scriptures inside and out; their entire world revolved around the Scriptures. We go to school and read Green Eggs and Ham; they went to school and cut their teeth on Torah (the O.T). We go to school and learn about history; they went to school to learn about God's history with Israel.

We go to school to learn about numbers: addition, subtraction, and multiplication. They went to school and learned about numbers too...like the number 1: *there is One God*. Or the number 7: on the 7th day all of Israel took a break, they stopped working, it was a sabbath, a day of rest, a weekly reminder that they didn't make the world go round, God did, and they could trust Him.

They knew the Scriptures inside and out. So when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, they're not thinking "*Is that the best you could find?*," they're thinking Zechariah 9:9. "*Rejoice greatly,*

*Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*"

How's that for a statement? Jesus knew who He was and it was time to let all of Israel know; the King was coming to town. The people lining the roads picked up on what was unspoken and they began to shout the words of Psalm 118:25-26: **Hosanna**, or, **Save Us**. *May your kingdom be like that of King David's: all our enemies beaten back, wealth and prosperity abounding, peace at every side.*

**Expectations.** Jesus was used to them, but He didn't conform to them: not during His ministry, not that day on the edge of Jerusalem, and not now. You see, here's the thing: the people Israel wanted dead (the Romans), were the very people God came to save. Jesus came to destroy the enemy Israel couldn't see: sin, death, and the devil himself. We've all heard the phrase, "we only see what we want to see"...that's what our expectations can do to us at times; they keep us from seeing what is real, what is right in front of our faces.

Well...Jesus gets to Jerusalem with a little bit of fanfare and makes a beeline for the Temple. In vs. 11 our English translation tells us that Jesus "looked around," but if the original Greek language is a little more nuanced...it might be more accurate to say that Jesus went to inspect the Temple. But because it was late, Jesus didn't stay long; He went back to Bethany and likely spent the night with good friends: Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

The next day, on the way back into Jerusalem, Jesus' stomach began to rumble; He was hungry. But off in the distance He saw a fig tree full of leaves; perfect timing! Actually, as Mark tells us, it wasn't

perfect timing because it wasn't the time of year for figs. When Jesus saw that the tree had no fruit, He performs His last miracle: He spoke a word of curse over the tree and by the next day it had withered and died.

What's the deal? Only one week to live and Jesus is wasting His emotional energy over a fig tree? Was He a bit of bear when He got hungry? Was Jesus stressed out?

Now before we start feeling sorry for that poor fig tree, or start tweeting about how Jesus didn't care about the environment, we need to pause for a moment and think. The Gospel writer, Mark, was no dummy. His Gospel account is the shortest and the least descriptive; Mark doesn't waste His words. So why this pointless story? Why here? Why now? As we will see, there is a point to Jesus' action; like His riding on a donkey, there is more going on than meets the eye. What happens to the fig tree is connected to what is about to happen in the Temple.

When Jesus arrived at the Temple, He didn't introduce Himself to the Chief Priest, He didn't begin to pray, He didn't offer a sacrifice, He didn't preach a sermon. He began to drive people out. That's right...Jesus began to drive people out. Imagine one of our ushers getting up in the middle of this service and start shoving you out the door (don't get any ideas Reid).

Jesus walked up to the people who were collecting the temple tax and He flung their money on the ground and turned over their tables. He went up to the vendors selling doves and upended their tables too...maybe He opened a cage or two in the process. I'm sure Jesus got an instant reaction: *You're going pay for those doves buddy! Who*

*do you think you are?! And imagine the disciples...horrified, embarrassed, frozen to the spot: what is He doing?*

What was Jesus doing? What did He see that enraged Him so? This is a sure-fire way to get yourself killed...walk into the most important and holy building in all of Israel and start making trouble.

If you have your Bible open, take a look and see if there is a subheading right before vs. 12; it might say something like "*Jesus Clears the Temple*," or, "*Jesus Cleanses The Temple*". As I've said before, sub titles in Bibles are a pet peeve of mine...they aren't a part of the original text and they often do more harm than good...

Is Jesus cleansing the Temple? Is He trying to clean it up? Reform the Temple practices? Bump up the customer approval from a 7 to an 8.5?

What do you think happened 5 minutes after Jesus left the Temple? The money changers had their tables turned right side up, with their neat stacks of money lined up just so. Those selling doves got their cages in order and once more starting yelling: *Get your doves here! Live, white Doves!*

If Jesus was really trying to reform things, His little dust up amounted to a colossal failure. A minor disruption and then business as usual. Why was Jesus so angry? What did He hope to accomplish? We find our answer in Jesus' **Temple Tirade**. Jesus gives us a mixed citation, the first part from Isaiah 56:7, and the second part from Jeremiah 7:11.

“*My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations*”? *But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’*”

The Isaiah quote reveals the heart of God. He loves the nations: every tribe, every tongue, every people group, every person; God loves them all. “My house will be called a house of prayer for” *who*? For **all nations**. God didn’t choose Israel because they were His favourite, He chose them to represent Him to the nations. He called Israel to be a kingdom of priests<sup>2</sup>, ministering to Him, and mediating His blessing to the world around them.

One week to live and Jesus descends upon Jerusalem, He makes His way to inspect the Temple, the house of prayer for all nations, and what does He find? He finds a Temple that is out of step with the heart of God, a Temple that is systematically turning the nations aside.

What I’ve got on the screen is a scale model of the Temple. And what looks like a wide open courtyard is an area referred to as the Court of the Gentiles. This is the sanctuary for the nations: this is their place to seek God, to draw near, to pray, to worship. Now imagine this sanctuary over-run with bankers haggling over exchange rates, vendors hawking their wares, birds calling, sheep bleating, people walking their animals right through the middle of your worship space.

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 19:6.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Garland, *NIV Application Series: Mark*, 439.

How likely are you to stay and seek God, when the people running the show are running you over, and pushing you out? *Maybe I should just go somewhere else. Maybe this Temple isn’t for me. Maybe Israel’s God isn’t for me.* And when Jesus see this, He went ballistic. He began to flip the tables over, and shove the offenders out...*Make way! Make way for the nations! Don’t hinder them...let them come in. For God’s sake let them come in.*

Jesus goes on to say, *You have made this Temple a “den of robbers”*. Non-biblical sources tell us that the money changers were little more than extortionist trying to turn a handsome profit. But this isn’t what Jesus was referring to. Look at Jesus’ words again: a *“den of robbers”*.

One scholar writes, “The den is the place where robbers retreat after having committed their crimes. It is their hideout, a place of security and refuge”.<sup>3</sup> Act however we want and then go to the Temple...it doesn’t matter how we live, we’ve got God on our side. Jesus looked around and He saw a robbers den, not a house of worship.

**Back to the fig tree:** The barrenness of the fig tree mirrors the barrenness of the temple. Each looks good, from a distance: a tree full of green leaves and Temple filled with worship. But as Jesus inspected both, He found them wanting and pronounced judgement. Jesus didn’t go to the Temple to reform it, He went to speak a word

of judgement. The scholar, David Garland, writes, “Time can run out for fruitless trees and prayerless temples.”<sup>4</sup>

Israel didn’t live out her calling. Over and over again God describes Himself as the One who gathers the outcasts: the poor, the broken, the blind, the lame, and the nations.

*Hosanna! Yahweh, please come and save us! Save us, and not them, heal us and not them, transform us and not them.* Israel’s **invite** list was a lot shorter than their **non-vite** list. Israel wanted a country-club; Jesus came to establish a rescue mission a few steps away from hell.

One week to live and Jesus headed to Jerusalem. He was a king, Garland writes, “who will be crowned with thorns, enthroned on a cross, and hailed as the chief of fools.”<sup>5</sup> As Jesus pronounced judgement on the people (and the Temple), He sealed His own fate; Jesus would bear the weight of the judgement...within the week, He would die on a cross to bring life to the world.

**Application:** I began this sermon asking the question, “*what do we do with an angry Jesus?*” And I suggested that we pay attention to what He’s saying, to what He’s doing, and to the *WHY* behind it all. It’s time to get practical here.

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<sup>4</sup> Garland, 440.

<sup>5</sup> Garland, 430.

<sup>6</sup> Source unknown.

Why does our church exist? For God? Yes, of course. To know Him, love Him, praise Him? Yes, yes, and yes. But there is more. Jesus said, *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.*

I once heard someone say, “It’s not that the church of God has a mission in the world, but the God of mission has a church in the world.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus didn’t pronounce judgment over the Temple and then turn around and create a different kind of country-club called the church. Jesus came to establish a rescue mission a few steps away from hell. If time can run out for fruitless trees and prayerless temples, time can run out for fruitless churches.

I don’t sense we’re in danger of that, but I do sense the Father calling us into His mission, to live with our arms open wide and so reflect the love He has so generously poured out on us. Who have we pushed to the margins, who have we counted as “out” that Jesus wants us to invite in?

If you’re here this morning and when it comes to God, you feel like you’re on the outside looking in, hear this: you don’t need to be an outsider, you’re welcome in God’s family. He died for you. His mercy is wide enough, deep enough, long enough, high enough to include you. You don’t need to get fixed up, cleaned up, holied up before you turn to Him, it’s not about that. He loves you, died for you, can transform you, and give you new life.

Friends, this is the good news; and we are His witnesses.

**Benediction:** 1 Peter 2:9, and 12 says, “**9** *you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.* **12** *Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God [on the day He visits us].*”