

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME THREE

STUDY THREE

Seeing Another Side of Jesus

Mark 11:12–33

A common misconception of Jesus is that He was only meek and mild. Nothing could be further from the truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OUR hearts beat faster and our palms sweat when we sense the need to stand up for what is right—and if we must stand alone, the symptoms intensify. When the moment comes to speak God’s truth, intimidation glues us to our seats, and the fear of backlash zips up our mouths.

Jesus understands His disciples’ weaknesses. That’s why He invites us to abide in Him, because He knows that “apart from [Him we] can do nothing” (John 15:5). He promised us *real power*—the Holy Spirit—to help us stand for Him and boldly proclaim His good news to the world, just as His first disciples did (Acts 1:8).

Intimidation never glued Jesus to His seat, even in Jerusalem, where standing up for what was right would cost Him His life. Jesus described Himself as “meek” (Matthew 11:29 KJV); however, to be meek does not mean to be weak. The Greek term *praus*, which translates to the English word *meek*, means “strength under control.”

In Mark’s gospel, we’ve seen Jesus exhibiting strength under control—through His wilderness temptation, His baptism, His miracles, and His bold teaching against religious hypocrites. Now, during Jesus’ final week of His earthly ministry, we’ll witness the ultimate displays of strength under control, culminating with His death on the cross for our sins.

Toward weary souls seeking refuge in Him, He was “humble and gentle at heart” (Matthew 11:29). But, as we’ll see in the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, He was lionhearted toward those who profaned His Father’s house and exploited innocent worshipers. As you enter this scene, invite the Holy Spirit to imbue your soul with the courage of Jesus as you hear Him speak the truth—with *no fear of backlash*.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Remember, Jesus is near to you through His Spirit. Recognize your tendencies to do things in your own strength. Ask God to fortify you with His might and thank Him for His inexhaustible supply of power as you turn to the Scriptures.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus had just entered Jerusalem as Israel's righteous King, "humble, riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). He looked around the temple, and then "he returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples" (Mark 11:11).

The next day, Jesus returned to the temple to perform His first task as Israel's righteous King—to clean up the corruption at the temple. *Jesus was fearless and determined.* With a whip in His hand and in a whirlwind of wrath, Jesus drove out the money-grubbing merchants at the temple who were like wolves preying on God's sheep who had come to worship.



Observation: The Fig Tree, the Temple, and Prayer

Observation lays a solid foundation on which we build our interpretation.¹ Begin by reading [Mark 11:12–33](#) slowly and thoughtfully. Look for Mark's time references, such as "The next morning" (Mark 11:12). What others do you observe?

Notice the interplay of events that Mark groups in a "sandwich" structure.

- A. Jesus curses the fig tree (11:12–14).
- B. Jesus cleanses the temple (11:15–19).
- A. Jesus passes by the withered fig tree (11:20).

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Also, notice the interplay of themes regarding Jesus' authority and prayer.

- A. Jesus displays His authority by restoring the temple as a “house of prayer” (Mark 11:15–17).
- B. Jesus teaches His disciples a lesson on prayer (11:22–25).
- A. Jesus proves His authority to the religious leaders (11:27–33).

Now let's examine the passage in detail by grouping together the related events.

Sudden Cursing of the Fig Tree—Mark 11:12–14, 20–21

Read again [Mark 11:12–14, 20–21](#). As Jesus was leaving the village of Bethany, what happened and what did He notice? What did Jesus say to the fig tree? What details stand out in 11:20?

Angry Cleansing of the Temple—Mark 11:15–19, 27–33

Reread [Mark 11:15–19, 27–33](#). Picture the chaotic scene as Jesus chased away the merchants, who cheated pilgrims by overcharging for “priest-certified” sacrificial animals, and the money changers, who milked foreign visitors with their exorbitant exchange rates. Tables crashed, coins clattered, doves flapped in their cages, sheep scattered in all directions! All this took place in the Court of the Gentiles—the designated area for God-fearing non-Jews to worship and pray.

To see diagrams of the temple and its courtyards, consult the article “[What Did the Temple Look Like in Jesus' Time?](#)” at thegospelcoalition.org. What do you notice about the size and dimensions of the temple and its courtyards?

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Why did Jesus forbid merchandising? How did the chief priests and scribes react? How did the people respond?

How insulting, this monstrous desecration of holy ground! How dare you merchandise things in this place set apart for prayer! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The next day, what question did the religious leaders ask Jesus in Mark 11:27–28? What was Jesus' reply? What did their response in 11:31–33 reveal about their hearts?

Strong Teaching on Prayer—Mark 11:22–25

Read [Mark 11:22–25](#). Now that Jesus has restored the temple as a house of prayer, the emphasis shifts from a building to a person, from the temple to Jesus—the true temple where humanity meets God. What did Jesus teach His disciples about prayer in 11:22–25?

And now Jesus talks to them about prayer. Prayer of faith. Prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Jesus Speaks the Truth

In Mark 11:17, Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 about the temple being a “house of prayer for all nations.” What is the significance of this phrase and Jesus’ teaching on prayer in Mark 11:22–25 for Mark’s mostly gentile readers in Rome?

He says to them, “No longer will you pray through the temple or the power of the holiest of all. You will come to God directly, and your prayer will be uttered in this way.” And He tells them about strength in prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The fig tree was all leaves and no fruit. Similarly, Israel’s spiritual leaders were all religion and no faith. Consequently, when spiritually starving people came to the temple to feed their souls, they went away hungry.

Jesus didn’t curse the fig tree because He wanted breakfast. He cursed it as a symbol of judgment against Israel. What comparisons do you see between Jesus’ cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple? Consult Pastor Chuck’s commentary [Insights on Mark](#), or, for an online source, consult [Constable’s Notes](#) at netbible.org.

If you were a student of the Old Testament, as these disciples were, you would remember passages like Jeremiah 8 and 29, Hosea 9, Joel 1, Micah 7—all of which speak of the fig tree symbolizing the nation of Israel. And the withering of the fig tree is the withering of the nation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The religious leaders thought they could outsmart Jesus (Mark 11:27–33). How did Jesus demonstrate His superiority to these men and His courage to stand on the truth?

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I admire Him. He is so unintimidated even though He is dealing with corrupt leaders. They may be powerful and they may have His life in their hands—humanly speaking, but He’s not afraid of them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Standing on God’s Word

Compare Jesus’ teaching on prayer in this passage with [Matthew 6:9–15; 7:7–11](#); [James 1:6–7](#); and [1 John 5:14–15](#). Why can we be confident that God will grant our petitions that are in His will?

What does Paul call the church in [1 Timothy 3:14–15](#) and believers in [1 Corinthians 3:16–17](#)? What does Peter teach in [1 Peter 2:4–6](#)?

Being strong is not the same thing as being arrogant. That’s not Jesus. Standing strong for what is right and good is having courage, the courage of one’s own convictions. Why? Because tolerance has its limits. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Stand Strong!

Often, we’re afraid to stand strong for what is right or good because we do not want our strength to be perceived as pride or a lack of tolerance. However, *being strong is not the same as being arrogant*. In what area of your life do you sense the Holy Spirit urging you to display the courage of Christ? On what biblical principles will you stand to take your next step?

My urgent exhortation is that you stand up for what you believe. Stand firm. Stand strong. Jesus is a great model. I don’t care if everybody else in the outfit believes otherwise. When you know the truth, stand for the truth. Don’t give in. Don’t let it go. Please! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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We'll face opposition when we stand for the truth. And *confronting religious corruption is no less dangerous than confronting political corruption*. Think of Martin Luther, who had the courage to confront the Roman Catholic Church. How can you help your local community of faith become a pillar of truth?

I urge you to keep thinking straight about the church. Watch for corruption. It is to be a house of meaningful meditation, dialogue, and fellowship with other believers. The church is a gathering of human beings who are in love with Christ and are willing to go to the wall for Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The religious leaders shut their eyes to the truth Jesus plainly set before them. However, *refusing to face the truth does not shield you from exposure by the truth*. How has responding to God's Word transformed your spiritual walk? What biblical truths do you find yourself struggling to accept in this moment? Remember that His Spirit is there with you to imbue your soul with the strength to obey.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word. Infuse my soul with the courage of Christ. Help me be bold and winsome. May my life be marked by grace, truth, and conviction. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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