May 2020  Home Group Questions:

Mark 11:12-25 The Fig Tree and the Temple
This account has been structured as a sandwich with the cursing of the fig tree either side of the incident in the temple. This is to ensure that we get the point; that Jesus is in fact, cursing the institution of the Temple.
The Fig Tree then, illustrates what is wrong at the Temple. There’s plenty of outward signs of life... but there’s no fruit.
In the verses 22-25, Jesus responds to the amazement of the disciples over the rapid withering of the tree. He teaches an important lesson about faith when we come to God in prayer.
It seems that what connects this to what precedes it is that the temple is no longer necessary – access to God is now by faith in Jesus and forgiveness is found in His sacrifice rather than the lambs of the sacrificial system.

Summary: Beware empty, religious activity that does not bear genuine gospel fruit. Anything that does not fix our eyes on Jesus is barren and worthless religion.

Q It has often been said that “true Christianity is about relationship, not religion”. How does this incident demonstrate the truth in that statement?

Q What do we mean by “religion”? Is it always a bad thing? (cf James 1:26-27)

Q Why are people so attracted to empty, religious activity?

Q Read v24. Does this verse mean that God will always give us everything that we ask for? (take a look at James 4:2-4)

Q Read v25. What condition does Jesus put on His Father forgiving our sins? What does this mean?

Mark 11:27-33 Has Jesus got the right?
Jesus returns to the temple the day after clearing it and he is challenged by a delegation from the Sanhedrin who want Him to explain why He thinks He has the authority to do these things.
They are clearly hoping that they can get a charge of blasphemy to stick, since Jesus would have to profess to have God’s authority to do what He is doing...
But Jesus answers the question and avoids their trap at the same time.
If they agree that John was a prophet, then they should agree with what John said about Jesus!
This whole incident reveals how much the Jewish leaders hate Jesus and fear the people.

Summary: Jesus has God’s authority in all that He says and does.

Q Why do you think these religious leaders couldn’t bring themselves to submit to the authority of Jesus?

Q In what ways might they be similar to those who reject Jesus today?

Q Look up Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. In what way is Jesus’s authority delegated to us? What implications should this have in our lives?
Mark 12:1-12 Great Expectations
After the first attack from the Sanhedrin delegation who refuse to recognise the authority of Jesus, He tells this parable.
It is a parable that tells the history of Israel and the failure of its leaders to produce the fruit of covenant faithfulness in the nation. Instead, they have always failed to recognise the authority of God, they have always abused God’s messengers and they have always ruled the nation to satisfy their own selfish ends.
This current generation of leaders have added to this the sin of rejecting the Son! And for this sin there will be a most severe judgement.

Summary: Jesus has the absolute right to require fruit from His people and from the world that He owns.
We are all merely tenants, and yet the inclination of the human heart is always to reject God and please ourselves... bringing His judgement.

Q Remind yourself of the plot of this parable. What do each of the elements represent? (The Man, The Vineyard, The Farmers, The Servants, The Son)

Q How would you explain the meaning of the story? And why do you think Jesus’ audience don’t really understand it until right at the end?

Q This is clearly a story about judgement on the leaders of Israel. But in what ways might it apply in principle to us all, even today?

Q How does the Landlord feel about the actual vineyard itself? If this is a picture of God’s people, what do you think it says to us today?

Mark 12:13-17 Give what you owe
This is the first of 3 questions asked by groups from the Sanhedrin to try and trap Jesus in His words.
The Pharisees bring along with them the political Herodians to ask a question about tax – should the Jews pay Caesar of not?
If Jesus says “Yes” then the Pharisees will discredit Him as a possible Messiah. But if He says “No” then the Herodians will bring the power of Rome down on Him for treason!
Jesus examines a Roman coin and then answers, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Summary: We are to give what’s due to the powers that govern this world, but more importantly, we are to give God what He is due as our creator.

Q Why was an alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians to unusual? Why do you think they were willing to lay aside their differences in this instance?

Q How do we "Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” today? Is it ever ok to rebel against our government?

Q What does it mean to “give to God what is God's”?