

MARK 11:1-26 – JESUS RECEIVES A HERO'S WELCOME

We have finally arrived to Passion Week, also known by many Christians as Holy Week – this time that happens between His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday. One week apart and a lot happens. All four Gospels provide us with detailed accounts of this important week. Of course, the cheers that Jesus gets when He receives a hero's welcome into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday will, in just five days, turn to jeers. All those things that Jesus told His disciples that were going to happen (on three different occasions), ARE going to happen, as we will see. This one week in Jesus's life is so significant to our faith that more than one-third of the Gospel of Mark covers it. Thirty-six percent of Mark's Gospel covers this one week.

So, here is the setting. Large crowds are flooding into Jerusalem. A city that normally has a population (at Jesus's time here) of around 70,000 people swells to hundreds of thousands. Q1, what is the big event that is drawing such large crowds to Jerusalem? The Passover. That is the biggest feast time for the Jews. You know, we are getting ready to celebrate Memorial Day here in America. In the book of Exodus, they had a "memorial day." That was the Passover. It was a reminder. It started when God told the Israelite captives, "This day will become a memorial for you..." (Exodus 12:14). So, the annual observance of the Passover is a reminder of something. They pause this one time a year to remember how the blood of a sacrificial lamb was placed on the doorposts of all Israelite houses in Egypt. When the Lord saw the blood, He "passed over" that house. The plague of death that struck the entire land of Egypt spared the Israelites. The result led to the Exodus, the deliverance of the Israelite people from Egyptian oppression. The Passover, then, celebrates God's mercy in saving the Israelites from death. And it also celebrates God's grace in leading them out of Egypt, from their bondage in Egypt, to a better place, to the Promised Land eventually. So that is what the Passover was all about.

So, Jerusalem is beginning to fill with Jewish pilgrims from all over the civilized world. People busily gather up supplies for their Passover celebration. When we left off last time, we saw Jesus and His twelve disciples making their way up the steep road leading to Jerusalem. Let's pick it up in Mark Chapter 11...

READ Mark 11:1-3.

Q2, why are the disciples going to such trouble to acquire a donkey's colt? It is true that Jesus told them to. Why did Jesus tell them to? Does He need it to ride on because He is tired of walking? No. The reason is, and we find this out actually in Matthew's account, is to fulfill a prophecy from Zechariah (a Messianic prophecy). And here is that prophecy...

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king [referring to the Messiah] is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

So here, Jesus is fulfilling a 500-year-old prophecy.

By the way, how is it that, when Jesus is giving all these instructions to His disciples, He knows all of the things that are going to happen? How does He know all that? Because He is the Son of God. He has divine foreknowledge. He can see all that. Nothing takes Jesus by surprise.

Q3 is answered in v 3 here. What were the disciples to tell anyone objecting to them taking the donkey's colt? "Just get over it!" No. They were to say "the Lord needs it" and "He will return it immediately." He is not just going to keep it. Well, look what happens next...

READ Mark 11:4-6

It all happens just like Jesus said it would. Q4, true or false? Nobody questioned the disciples when they untied the colt. That is false. Some people DO ask the disciples in v 5, "What are you doing untying the colt?" And the disciples give them the answer that Jesus told them to give.

READ Mark 11:7

The disciples help Jesus get ready for His grand entrance into Jerusalem. They use their cloaks, their outer garments, as a saddle and Jesus becomes the first person to sit on this particular donkey. He then rides it down the Mount of Olives.

READ Mark 11:8-10

So, here is Jesus. As He descends the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem the crowd gets word that He is coming. Q5, what did the people put in the road? They spread their coats, their cloaks on the road. Some cut branches from the many palm trees (this is why we celebrate "Palm Sunday").

[Someone in the class asked me "why is this important?"] Hey, it is in the Bible for a reason, right? Do you ever think about "why is this in the Bible?" It is a hero's welcome, right? It is the way they would welcome a king. What is more significant is what they said – "Hosanna in the highest!" That is the answer to Q6. In other words, "Give us salvation now!" "Save us Jesus!" "Deliver us!" They were expecting Jesus to be the Messiah king that was going to deliver them from the Romans. Their words are borrowed from The Hallel (for us that is Psalm 118). It is clear that the people who are lining the roadway view Jesus as their Messiah king. As Jesus enters Jerusalem there is this excitement fills the air.

Q7 was intended to make you think. It is an open-ended question. I wanted to hear what [the class] had to say. Previously in our study of Mark, Jesus had prevented the demons and people he had healed from saying anything about Him being the Messiah. So, why doesn't Jesus silence this crowd here who is hailing Him as their Messiah? What has changed that now He is allowing it? What is different now than it was earlier in Mark? Something is being fulfilled, right? This whole study has been called "Messiah's Mysterious Mission." It has been a mystery up to this point to the people. But now Jesus is about to fulfill that mission, isn't He? That mission is on the verge of being accomplished. The time has

come, then, for Jesus to reveal who He is – the Son of David, the long-awaited Messiah. So, now it is OK for the people to acknowledge this. Now it is the right time. The scriptures are about to be fulfilled.

The people are excited to see Jesus and give Him this hero's welcome. But not everyone in Jerusalem is thrilled to see Jesus. We know from the other Gospel accounts that the Jewish religious leaders don't like the peoples' adoring reception of Jesus one bit. They tell Jesus to rebuke His followers. And Jesus replies, "I tell you, if these were silent [speaking of the people], the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). The chief priests become indignant when they hear children mimicking their parents and yelling out in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David." They ask Jesus, "Do You hear what those children are saying?" Jesus responds by quoting from Psalm 8: "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise" (Matthew 21:16). And then from John's account we know that the Pharisees become frustrated and they meet to discuss the Jesus problem. "What are we going to do about this guy?" Their greatest fears have come true. The people are following, their clamoring for Jesus. They are following after Jesus. So, there is a lot happening behind the scenes as Jesus arrives.

Mark's account, however, does not record any of that. All it says is v 11, one verse: "He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple..." There you have the answer to Q8.

READ Mark 11:11

That is all Mark says. So, it is really good when you study the Gospels to look at them side by side.

After a long day Jesus and His disciples head back up the Mount of Olives to Bethany. Why Bethany? Who lived there? Who lived in Bethany that Jesus was friends with and that the disciples would often visit? Do you remember somebody named Mary and Martha and Lazarus? Do you remember them? It was a well-to-do family and, apparently, they had a

large house in Bethany and Jesus and His disciples frequently stayed there as they traveled through. So that is where they were staying.

Now where is Bethany? If you go up the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem, it is the first town you come to. So, it is close by, within a mile or two (of Jerusalem).

READ Mark 11:12-14

So, here is Jesus the next morning. He is hungry (I guess He had not had breakfast) and He goes to pick some figs off a tree by the road. And then Matthew's account of the same event says, "And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, He went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And He said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once" (Matthew 21:19).

Mark records the fig tree's demise like this – if you jump ahead to v 20, which happens the next day...

READ Mark 11:20-22

Jesus pronounces a curse on the tree in Matthew's account and that same day it begins to immediately show signs that it is dying. And then, 24 hours later it has completely withered away to its roots. If you have ever seen a tree die, it takes a while. This happened overnight. They pass by and then Peter remembers what happened (how Jesus cursed this fig tree the day before) and it prompts him to say something to Jesus.

So, Q9, why does Jesus pronounce a curse on this fig tree? What does the scripture say? Is Jesus angry that the fig tree has not produced any figs? Well, I think the answer is NO because Mark states back in v 13 (that we just read) that figs were not in season. And Jesus knows this. He is from the area. So, I don't believe Jesus has anything against this tree personally. I do not think He is mad about it. Cursing the tree did not fulfill any scripture, not that we know of. Matthew is the one who says, "This was done to fulfill [scripture]." He does not say anything about that. And Jesus had already demonstrated several times His power over nature. So,

there must have been some other reason why Jesus cursed this tree that Mark does not mention. And for that matter, neither do the other Gospel writers.

Every commentary I read suggested that the cursing of this particular fig tree was done as an object lesson. Now, I like the way Jerry Vines explains it in his commentary:

"Jesus was trying to teach a lesson. He was describing what He saw in His people, the children of Israel. In the scriptures the fig tree many times is a symbol for the nation of Israel. When Jesus came to the nation of Israel, He saw all the leaves of their outward religion. They had a magnificent temple, and people from all over the world came there to worship God. They had elaborate ceremonies and all kinds of sacrifices and offerings. They had every evidence of a vital relationship with God. Yet when Jesus came, He found no fruit. They had become so judgmental, so sectarian in their outlook, that they were of no benefit to the nations around them.

So, Jesus in cursing the fig tree was examining the nation. Basically, He was pronouncing His judgment on Israel. And in scarcely 35 years the Romans would conquer the city of Jerusalem. Not one stone would be left on another. [This fig tree] is a picture of the barrenness of religion."

The common interpretation of this is that it is a parable of judgment by Jesus on the temple, on Judaism and on the nation of Israel – it is a judgment for unbelief and, specifically, for their rejection of Him as Messiah.

[One person in class commented that the one fig tree out there by itself represents the nation of Israel and that the fig tree full of leaves is a sign that it is not going to bear fruit].

Jesus has a heavy heart as He makes His way back down to Jerusalem. He has a deep burden for the people of Israel. Luke tells us that Jesus weeps over Jerusalem – "And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it" (Luke 19:41). God's covenant nation Israel has adopted a

hollow form of religion. Their religious leaders have rejected Jesus as the Messiah and they are influencing the people to turn away from Him. So, this is Jesus's mindset as we come to v 15.

READ Mark 11:15

Jesus sees the vendors and the money-changers operating in the temple complex and He immediately takes action. Here we see Jesus's righteous indignation on full display. Q10, what did Jesus do in the temple complex? He drove out merchants who were buying and selling. Why did He do this? Because that is not what the temple is for, is it? The temple is a sacred place intended to be a house of worship. It is where people come to meet God and learn more about Him. It is a place where people come to pray. But instead, Jesus finds it more like a marketplace filled with commercial vendors.

READ Mark 11:16

Q11, what or who would Jesus not allow in the temple area? Merchandise. That is in the context of verse 15. That is what He is putting an end to.

Mark says that Jesus began "teaching." You can just hear the passion in Jesus's voice as He speaks...

READ Mark 11:17

Now, does this sound like a familiar story to you? This exact same thing had happened in the same place (here in the temple in Jerusalem) three years earlier at the beginning of Jesus's ministry. John is the only Gospel writer that records it:

"In the temple area Jesus saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; He also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going

over to the people who sold doves, He told them, 'Get these things out of here. Stop turning My Father's house into a marketplace!'" (John 2:14-16).

That happened early in His ministry. And now we come to Mark Chapter 11 and here at the end of His ministry the same thing happens. No whip this time. But basically, the same thing – He drives them all out. He tells them, "You should not be doing this. It is not what this place is for." So, history repeats itself.

Q12, true or false? The religious leaders appreciated Jesus's efforts to "clean up" the temple. False. As you might expect, the religious leaders are not very happy with Jesus. Look at verse 18...

READ Mark 11:18

Things are beginning to heat up. This is only Day Two. Getting rid of Jesus is becoming a top priority of the chief priests. Over the next couple of days, all four Gospels record Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders going at it head-to-head. They challenge Jesus's authority. They try to trap Him into saying something that might discredit Him in front of the people. But Jesus does not take their bait. Instead, He exposes their hypocrisy. He does this, not through heavy-handed sermons, but in very affective parables. We are going to see all this as we continue through Mark.

READ Mark 11:19

Jesus and His disciples walk back up the Mount of Olives to Bethany for the night. The next morning is when Peter makes the comment about the fig tree (the verses we read earlier). They are standing out in front of this barren fig tree and Jesus uses that as a teaching moment for the disciples.

READ Mark 11:22-26

You will notice that v 26 is in brackets and the reason why is because it was added by a scribe later for emphasis. It does not appear in the earlier manuscripts. It actually comes from Matthew 6:15, part of the Sermon on the Mount.

He is standing there next to this withered up fig tree and Jesus chooses to teach His disciples about prayer. But why right now, at this moment in time? Well, here is the reason – things are about to change drastically for the disciples. We know what is getting ready to happen. A few days from now Jesus will be taken away from them physically. I want you to think about something. Jesus has been the disciple's main source for spiritual insight, for direction and He has met their physical needs from time to time. The divine Son of God that they have followed and have leaned on, is about to be taken away from them. Just look at their life over the last three years. They have literally walked alongside Jesus on a daily basis. They have heard His wisdom. They have seen His power on display. Can you imagine spending three years with Jesus, what that must have been like, and seen all that and heard all that? They have had this intimate personal relationship with Jesus. Whatever they needed, all they had to do was go directly to Jesus. If they had any questions, if they had any concerns, they ask Jesus about it and He would give them an answer. That connection is about to change.

So, let's talk about what Jesus is saying in these verses about prayer.

First of all, when you pray you must trust God. V 22, "Have faith in God." And then Matthew adds, "Have faith in God and don't doubt" (Matthew 21:21). Then Jesus uses a figure of speech. He uses hyperbole. And this is something Jesus uses a lot. He uses this figure of speech about throwing this mountain into the sea. It is all to drive home a point about not doubting God.

Q13 asks, what mountain was Jesus referring to? The truth is, we don't know for sure. He just says "this mountain." He could have been referring to any one of those listed – the Mount of Olives or the Temple Mount or no particular mountain at all. It doesn't really matter. Jesus is just driving home a spiritual point about trusting God completely.

What do you place your faith in (or who)? Well, it had better be the goodness and power of GOD. It is not about HOW MUCH faith you have (or

I have), but in WHOM we place our faith. The truth is that NONE of us has perfect faith, do we? I don't. I will bet you don't either. The disciples didn't have perfect faith. We have read the Gospels. We know that. But we all have a perfect GOD. John MacArthur said, "Even a small amount of struggling faith can draw down the power of God in the life of a believer." And he is right.

In v 24 Jesus says, "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Let me clarify something. This is NOT a blank check that has been made out to us and signed by God. If you read Jesus's teachings about prayer in other places, such as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), we are told to ask according to the Father's will. And then James 4:3, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." So, our requests must be aligned with God's will, yes, and we must have the proper motives when we pray. So, don't just read scriptures in a vacuum.

Q14, True or false? You will receive whatever you ask for if your faith is strong enough. Well, in light of what Jesus teaches it is NOT a matter of how much faith you have, is it?

This is the way our prayers should be: "God, this is what I want (or this is what we want), but ultimately, God, YOUR WILL be done!" He may not want to spare that person's life. I don't know. But you pray and be honest about what you want.

In v 25 we are reminded that our forgiveness of others and for that matter, our forgiveness of ourselves directly impacts our prayer life. It affects our relationship with God. There are sins in my life that I need to deal with on a regular basis. Psalm 66:18 (KJV) says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The New Living Translation of that verse says, "If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."

So, here in Mark Chapter 11 we have some great instructions from our Lord to His disciples (and to us) about prayer. If you have an ineffective prayer life, what Jesus teaches here may explain why.

Now you are ready for Q15. What is the ONE thing listed that is NOT a key components of an effective prayer life? Let me give you a hint. I am reminded of what Jesus said in Matthew 17 – “If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move” (Matthew 17:20 NLT). The important thing is that we have faith (small or great) in the right Person. So, the answer is: we don’t need to have great faith. You do not need to have great faith. Faith as small as a mustard seed is OK as long as your faith is in the right Person.

[We had good class discussion about prayer]

Do you remember those religious leaders? They are waiting for Jesus in Jerusalem. This is where we will pick it up next time. They are sitting and waiting for Jesus. They know He is going to be coming into the temple. V 27 says, “And they came again to Jerusalem [speaking of Jesus and the disciples]. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, and they said to Him...” Right off the bat there is this confrontation with Jesus and we are going to pick it up here next time.