

The Gospel of *Mark*

The Servant Leadership of Jesus

The Servant's Ministry in Jerusalem (11 – 16)

Public Teaching and Controversy: *Jesus Clears the Temple* (11:12-19)

11:12-14 As He and the disciples headed from Bethany ^{v.11} over to Jerusalem, "Jesus was hungry". They came to a fig tree with plentiful leaves, but no fruit. Jesus cursed the tree by proclaiming "to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' ". The tree "immediately" withered ^{Matthew 21:19}.

This incident occurred early Monday morning ^{Matthew 21:18}, the week of Jesus' sacrificial death.

In the Middle East, a fig tree produces leaves in early spring (March or April), and ordinarily bears fruit in June and in August, with an occasional third harvest in December. Therefore, because the probable time frame was April, this tree would not normally be bearing figs yet. However, perhaps this event was foreshadowed by a Jesus' parable months earlier ^{Luke 16:6-9}.

15-17 Upon His arrival at the temple, Jesus 'drove out' the merchants of the 'officially-blessed' sacrificial animals, "overturned" tables of the "money changers" and He would "not allow" people to pass through the temple property with (non-temple related) "merchandise". Jesus quoted two OT passages ^{Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11} when OT prophets spoke of temple defilement by the Jewish leaders.

The cleansing took place in the large court of the Gentiles, outside the Jewish temple courts. It was easier for the people to buy sacrificial animals there (the poor ^{Luke 2:24} used doves for their sacrifices ^{Leviticus 14:21-22}), rather than bringing them from far away. The money changers exchanged Greek & Roman coins for Jewish coins, which were required for temple offerings. However, in both instances, the temple religious leaders were making excessive profits.

Jesus also stopped people from using the temple grounds as a shortcut to move goods from one part of Jerusalem to another, because this showed irreverence for the temple and for God.

The expanded passage in Isaiah ^{Isaiah 56:4-8} makes it clear that the temple was not only a place for the Jews to show reverence for God, but for all people who had a genuine desire to worship God. Jesus used the Jeremiah passage ^{Jeremiah 7:11} to indicate that the Jewish leaders were not only misusing the Court of the Gentiles by not allowing the worship of anyone with a

true desire to pray (etc), they used the area for their greedy endeavors (selling sacrifices and money changing). Jesus made the point that the Jewish religious leaders were “robbers”, using the temple as their “den” (hiding place) – similar to robbers of the time hiding in caves.

Despite Jesus having cleansed the temple 3 years earlier ^{John 2:14-16}, the temple became even more corrupt. So, Jesus was compelled (as part of His divine mission) to make another clear testimony about God’s holiness and His judgement against spiritual desecration/false religion. The quotes from Isaiah and Jeremiah proved that Jesus’ actions were defensible/appropriate.

18-19 Jesus’ actions and statements had positive effects on the people ^{Matthew 21:14-16}, so the Jewish leaders set their minds to intensify their efforts to kill Him ^{Mark 3:6}, because they were afraid ^{Luke 20:19}.

Jesus spent a great deal of time in Bethany during the Passion Week ^{Mark 11:11, 14:3, John 12:1-3}.

Public Teaching and Controversy: *The Withered Fig Tree* (11:20-26)

20-21 The next morning (Tuesday), Jesus and the disciples left Bethany. They walked by the same fig tree as the day before ^{v.13}, and Peter pointed out the tree Jesus cursed was withered and dying.

The fig tree was a frequent OT symbol for Israel ^{Jeremiah 8:13, Micah 7:1-6}. Jesus made the point that He produced the tree (Israel), but He desired there to be fruit (righteous works) on that tree ^{v.12}. However, there was no fruit, which was inexcusable – no matter what seemingly good excuses there were. So, Jesus took the life of the tree He created, from the roots up. These were images of the spiritual fruitlessness of Israel, resulting from the spiritually dead foundation of the Jewish religious leaders and their misdirected (blind) leadership ^{Matthew 23}.

22-25 Jesus started teaching His disciples with a mild rebuke to Peter (and them all) for their surprise at the “withered” fig tree, indicating a lack of faith in Jesus’ words to the tree the previous day ^{v.14}. His main point was: a genuine believer will have no doubts that Jesus can do anything ^{Matthew 19:26}, and praying with that perspective is very important. Jesus then pointed out that another key aspect of a great prayer life is for a believer to make sure there are no unresolved forgiveness issues in his or her life, because these would hinder the communication of their prayer to God ^{Matthew 18:21-35}.

Jesus used a common metaphor of that day: The “rooter up of mountains” referred to a great rabbi or spiritual leader who could solve difficult problems and seemingly do the impossible.

Standing was the traditional posture for Jewish prayer ^{1 Samuel 1:24-26, Luke 18:10-13}

No one verse yields a complete perspective on presenting prayer in a Godly, Biblical manner. Jesus stated: “**ask and it will be given**,” ^{Matthew 7:7-8}, then adds here: “**ask [and] believe**,” ^{v.24}, and He also said: “**ask anything in my name**,” ^{John 14:13-14}. In addition, James later gave two additional aspects: “you do not have, because you do not ask” ^{James 4:2} and “when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives” ^{James 4:3}, and finally, John brought out the ultimate criteria of guaranteed prayer results: “if we ask anything according to [God’s] will” (and nothing, like unresolved sins, gets in the way), “whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him” ^{1 John 5:14-15}. However, Jesus taught believers that since they could not always know if they were praying in God’s will or their own, they should always add the following phrase to the end of their prayers: “**Yet not my will, but yours be done.**” ^{Luke 22:42}

26 This verse is left out of the NIV, because it appears in only some of the manuscripts:

“But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your sins.” ^{Matthew 6:15}

Public Teaching and Controversy: *The Authority of Jesus Questioned* (11:27-33)

27-33 Jesus went to the temple again, where the chief priests, scribes and elders asked Him where the authority for His ministry came from. Jesus agreed to answer, if they would tell Him where John the Baptist gained his authority to baptize people: “*...from heaven, or from men?*” ^{v.30}. The Jewish leaders knew they would be trapped no matter which way they responded, so they simply said: “*We don’t know.*”, and because they would not answer, Jesus would not answer their question.

The Jewish leaders demanded to know what gave Jesus the right to do what He was doing. This question was probably in response to His cleansing of the temple ^{v.12-18}, but probably was inclusive of all of His ministry actions (healings, exorcisms, granting forgiveness, etc). By replying to their question with a question, Jesus put the Jewish leaders on the defensive. His inquiry into their evaluation of John the Baptist’s ministry was designed (1) to force them to carry out their roles as the religious guides to the people, (2) to point out the hypocrisy in their question to Him and (3) to reveal the heavenly principle that God will not teach a new truth to anyone who has rejected truths they have previously had revealed to them.

Public Teaching and Controversy: *The Parable of the Tenants* (12:1-12)

12:1-9 Jesus chose to tell the chief priests, scribes and elders a parable that related to His recent teachings about the fruitlessness of Israel. He told about a man who built a fully-functional vineyard, and rented it to farmers, with at least part of the rent agreement including a portion of the fruit crop. At "harvest time", the man sent many servants back to collect some of the fruit, but they were all beaten or killed. When there was no one else to send, the man sent his son, but the farmers decided to kill him also, thinking that with the heir dead, they would then gain ownership of the vineyard. However, Jesus said the owner would "*kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.*"^{v.9}

In addition to fig trees, vines^{Psalm 80:7-16} and vineyards^{Isaiah 5:1-7} are also symbolic of Israel. Those were times of unfruitfulness, but in the future, Israel will be a fruitful vineyard^{Isaiah 27:2-3}. The other symbols in this parable: the vineyard owner is God the Father, the tenants are the Jewish leaders, the servants are the OT prophets and the son is Jesus Christ^{Hebrews 1:1-3}.

In Matthew's account, the Jewish leaders actually pronounced their own judgment^{Matthew 21:41}.

This parable is seen as a prophetic view of the destruction of Jerusalem and Israel in 70 A.D. The people God turned over the inheritance to are Christ's church (His Body)^{Ephesians 5:23}.

The "man" would not of sent a servant for his share of the fruit until the fifth year, because according to the Law of Moses, the fruit of the first 3 years was considered to be "forbidden" and the fruit of the 4th year was "holy, an offering of praise to the Lord".^{Leviticus 19:23-25}

10-12 Jesus then quoted from the Psalms^{Psalm 118:22-23}. Knowing Jesus had spoken critically of them, the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Him at that time, but they were "afraid of the crowd"^{Mark 11:18}.

A stone or rock is often an idiom for the Messiah (Christ)^{Daniel 2:34, Zechariah 4:7, Romans 9:32-33}.

Continuing His parable, Jesus switched from a vineyard to a building as a kingdom symbol. In a stone building, picking the correct stone for the cornerstone is crucial for the stability of entire structure. However, the builders (Jewish leaders) rejected the 'just right' stone: Jesus, but God made the resurrected Jesus the cornerstone anyway^{Psalm 118:22-23, Acts 4:8-12, 1 Peter 2:6-8}.

Jesus spoke in parables to teach believers eternal truths, but in His mercy, He hid the truth from outsiders (defiant non-believers)^{Mark 4:11-12}. Since Jesus treated the Jewish leaders as outsiders, they didn't fully understand the parable, but recognized Jesus was insulting them.