

Mark 11:1-14
January 28, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What was the last thing that you or someone you observed got really mad about, and why?
[Let people engage]

Transition: In today's passage, Jesus has now come to Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry for his fateful last week of His life and mission on Earth. We are going to see several accounts in today's chapter, one of which is Jesus getting angry over the money changers in the Temple. Many of us picture Jesus as gentle and meek; however, we are going to see His righteous anger appear. The Jewish Temple was supposed to be a place where people make sacrifices and offer their prayers to God. Instead, there was buying/selling going on! Let's read the text.

BOOK:

The Triumphal Entry

11 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!" (Psalm 118:25, 26)

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.

Jesus Clears the Temple

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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We do not earn God's blessing by forgiving one another. Our forgiving spirit is one evidence that our hearts are right with God and that we want to obey His will, and this makes it possible for the Father to hear us and to answer prayer (Ps. 66:18). Faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). If I have faith in God, I will also have love for my brother.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 148-150). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Mark 11:1–11:33

Jerusalem at Passover season was the delight of the Jews and the despair of the Romans. Thousands of devout Jews from all over the world arrived in the Holy City, their hearts filled with excitement and nationalistic fervor. The population of Jerusalem more than tripled during the feast, making it necessary for the Roman military units to be on special alert. They lived with the possibility that some enthusiastic Jewish Zealot might try to kill a Roman official or incite a riot, and there was always potential for disputes among the various Jewish religious groups.

Into this situation came God's Servant with less than a week remaining before He would be crucified outside the city walls. In this section, we see God's Servant ministering in three different official roles.

The Servant-King (Mark 11:1–11)

On the road Jesus took, a traveler would arrive first at Bethany and then come to Bethphage, about two miles from Jerusalem. The elevation at this point is about 2,600 feet, and from it you have a breathtaking view of the Holy City. The Lord was about to do something He had never done before, something He had repeatedly cautioned others not to do for Him: He was going to permit His followers to give a public demonstration in His honor.

Jesus sent two of His disciples to Bethphage to get the colt that He needed for the event. Most people today think of a donkey as nothing but a humble beast of burden, but in that day, it was looked on as an animal fit for a king to use (1 Kings 1:33). Our Lord needed this beast so that He might fulfill the messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9. Mark does not quote this verse or refer to it because he was writing primarily for Gentile readers.

In fulfilling this prophecy, Jesus accomplished two purposes: (1) He declared Himself to be Israel's King and Messiah; and (2) He deliberately challenged the religious leaders. This set in motion the official plot that led to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The Jewish leaders had decided not to arrest Him during the feast, but God had determined otherwise. The Lamb of God must die at Passover.

Many patriotic Jews from the crowd of pilgrims eagerly joined the procession that proclaimed Jesus as the King, the Son of David come in the name of the Lord. The visitors from Galilee were most prominent in the procession, along with the people who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 12:12–18). You sometimes hear it said that the same people who cried "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday ended up crying "Crucify Him!" on Good Friday, but this is not true. The crowd that wanted Him crucified came predominantly from Judea and Jerusalem, whereas the Galilean Jews were sympathetic with Jesus and His ministry.

When welcoming a king, it was customary for people to lay their outer garments on the road, and then add festal branches (2 Kings 9:13). The shout "Hosanna!" means "Save now!" and comes from Psalm 118:25–26. Of course, Jesus knew that the people were quoting from a messianic psalm (relate Ps. 118:22–23 with Matt. 21:42–44 and Acts 4:11), but He allowed them to go right ahead and shout. He was openly affirming His kingship as the Son of David.

What were the Romans thinking as they watched this festive demonstration? After all, the Romans were experts at parades and official public events. We call this event "the Triumphal Entry," but no Roman would have used that term. An official "Roman Triumph" was indeed something to behold! When a Roman general came back to Rome after a complete conquest of an enemy, he was welcomed home with an elaborate official parade. In the parade he would exhibit his trophies of war and the illustrious prisoners he had captured. The victorious general rode in a golden chariot, priests burned incense in his honor, and the people shouted his name and praised him. The procession ended at the arena where the people were entertained by watching the captives fight with the wild beasts. That was a "Roman Triumph."

Our Lord's "triumphal entry" was nothing like that, but it was a triumph just the same. He was God's anointed King and Saviour, but His conquest would be spiritual and not military. A Roman general had to kill at least 5,000 enemy soldiers to merit a Triumph; but in a few weeks, the Gospel would "conquer" some 5,000 Jews and transform their lives (Acts 4:4). Christ's "triumph" would be the victory of love over hatred, truth over error, and life over death.

After looking into the temple area, where He would return the next day, Jesus left the city and spent the night in Bethany, where it was safer and quieter. No doubt He spent time in prayer with His disciples, seeking to prepare them for the difficult week that lay ahead.

The Servant-Judge (Mark 11:12–26)

Our Lord's condemning of the tree and cleansing of the temple were both symbolic acts that illustrated the sad spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. In spite of its many privileges and opportunities, Israel was outwardly fruitless (the tree) and inwardly corrupt (the temple). It was unusual for Jesus to act in judgment (John 3:17), yet there comes a time when this is the only thing God can do (John 12:35–41).

Cursing the fig tree (vv. 12–14, 20–26). The fig tree produces leaves in March or April and then starts to bear fruit in June, with another crop in August and possibly a third crop in December. The presence of leaves could mean the presence of fruit, even though that fruit was “left over” from the previous season. It is significant that in this instance Jesus did not have special knowledge to guide Him; He had to go to the tree and examine things for Himself.

If He had power to kill the tree, why didn't He use that power to restore the tree and make it produce fruit? Apart from the drowning of the pigs (Mark 5:13), this is the only instance of our Lord using His miraculous power to destroy something in nature. He did it because He wanted to teach us two important lessons.

First, there is a lesson on *failure*: Israel had failed to be fruitful for God. In the Old Testament, the fig tree is associated with the nation of Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hosea 9:10; Nahum 3:12). Like the fig tree our Lord cursed, Israel had “nothing but leaves.” Note that the tree dried up “from the roots” (Mark 11:20). Three years before, John the Baptist had put the ax to the roots of the tree (Matt. 3:10), but the religious leaders would not heed his message. Whenever an individual or a group “dries up” spiritually, it is usually from the roots.

The disciples would probably connect this miracle with the parable which Jesus gave some months before (Luke 13:1–9), and they would see in the miracle a vivid picture of God's judgment on Israel. They might also recall Micah 7:1–6 where the prophet declares that God is seeking “the first ripe fruit” from His people. Christ is still seeking fruit from His people, and for us to be fruitless is sin (John 15:16). We must carefully cultivate our spiritual roots and not settle for “leaves.”

Jesus also used this miracle to teach us a lesson on *faith*. The next morning, when the disciples noticed the dead tree, Jesus said, “Have faith in God,” meaning, “Constantly be trusting God; live in an attitude of dependence on Him.” In Jewish imagery, a mountain signifies something strong and immovable, a problem that stands in the way (Zech. 4:7). We can move these mountains only by trusting God.

Of course, this is not the only lesson Jesus ever gave on prayer; and we must be careful not to isolate it from the rest of Scripture. Prayer must be in the will of God (1 John 5:14–15), and the one praying must be abiding in the love of God (John 15:7–14). Prayer is not an emergency measure that we turn to when we have a problem. Real prayer is a part of our constant communion with God and worship of God.

Nor should we interpret Mark 11:24 to mean, “If you pray hard enough and *really believe*, God is obligated to answer your prayers, no matter what you ask.” That kind of faith is not faith in God; rather, it is nothing but faith in faith, or faith in feelings. True faith in God is based on His Word (John 15:7; Rom. 10:17), and His Word reveals His will to us. It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth.

True prayer involves forgiveness as well as faith. I must be in fellowship with both my Father in heaven and my brethren on earth if God is to answer my prayers (see Matt. 5:21–26; 6:14–15; 18:15–35). The first word in “The Lord's Prayer” is *our*—“*Our* Father which art in heaven” and not “My Father which art in heaven.” Though Christians may pray in private, no

Christian ever prays alone; for all of God's people are part of a worldwide family that unites to seek God's blessing (Eph. 3:14–15). Prayer draws us together.

We do not earn God's blessing by forgiving one another. Our forgiving spirit is one evidence that our hearts are right with God and that we want to obey His will, and this makes it possible for the Father to hear us and to answer prayer (Ps. 66:18). Faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). If I have faith in God, I will also have love for my brother.

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 155-157) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

A. *Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (11:1–11) (Matt. 21:1–11; Luke 19:28–44; John 12:12–19)*

Mark's account of this event exhibits vivid detail but is somewhat restrained in proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah (cf. comments on Mark 1:43–44; 8:30–31). Only later (probably after Jesus' resurrection) did His disciples fully understand.

11:1a. Less than a mile southeast of **Jerusalem** was the village of **Bethphage** (lit., “house of unripe figs”) and about two miles out was **Bethany** (lit., “house of dates or figs”) on the eastern side of **the Mount of Olives**, a high ridge about two miles long known for its many olive trees. In Bethany, the last stopping place on the desolate and unsafe road from Jerusalem to Jericho (cf. 10:46), was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1), which generally served as Jesus' abode when He was in Judea (cf. Mark 11:11). Bethany was also the home of Simon the Leper (14:3–9).

11:1–3. **Jesus sent two ... disciples** (cf. 14:13) into **the village ahead of** (*katenanti*, “opposite,” perhaps across the Mount of Olives from Bethany) them, presumably Bethphage, to find immediately (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) on entry, an unbroken **colt** of a donkey. They were to **untie it and bring it** to Jesus. Matthew included mention of the mother with her colt (see comments on Matt. 21:2).

If anyone challenged them they were to say, **The Lord needs it and will send it back here** (to the village) **shortly** (*euthys*, “without delay”; cf. Mark 1:10). It is generally assumed that Jesus here referred to Himself by the title “Lord” (*kyrios*; cf. 5:19) not to the colt's owner.

11:4–6. Mark recorded the disciples' carrying out Jesus' instructions (cf. vv. 2–3), demonstrating the detailed accuracy of His prediction. This highlighted the **untying** of the **colt**, which **Jesus** may have intended as a messianic sign (cf. Gen. 49:8–12).

Had Jesus made prearranged plans with the colt's owner, or did this event reflect His supernatural knowledge? A later parallel situation (cf. Mark 14:13–16) may support the first view, but the large amount of detail Mark included on securing the colt (11:2–6) convincingly favors the second view. Even so, the colt's owner probably had had previous contact with Jesus.

The amount of detail Mark recorded here implies an eyewitness report; possibly Peter was one of the two disciples sent on this errand (cf. *Introduction*).

11:7–8. The disciples put **their** outer **cloaks** on **the colt** as a makeshift saddle. **Jesus** mounted the previously unriden colt and began His ride into Jerusalem. **Many people** entered into the excitement of the moment and spontaneously paid Him tribute by spreading **their** outer **cloaks** before Him **on the** dusty **road** (cf. 2 Kings 9:12–13). **Others spread** green **branches** (*stibadas*, “leaves or leafy branches”) **cut** from surrounding **fields**. Palm branches are mentioned in John 12:13.

11:9–10. The chiasmic (*a-b-b'-a'*) arrangement of these verses suggests antiphonal chanting by two groups—**those who went ahead of Jesus and those who followed Him**. They chanted Psalm 118:25–26. At the annual Passover festival (cf. Mark 14:1), the Jews chanted the six “ascent” psalms (Pss. 113–118) to express thanksgiving, praise, and petitions to God.

Hosanna, a transliteration of the Greek word which is itself a transliteration of the Hebrew *hōšî ‘âh nâ’*, originally was a prayer addressed to God, meaning “O save us now” (cf. Ps. 118:25a). Later it came to be used as a shout of praise (like “Hallelujah!”) and then as an enthusiastic welcome to pilgrims or to a famous Rabbi. **Hosanna in the highest**, in highest places, likely means “Save us, O God, who lives in heaven.” Its use here probably reflects a mixture of all these elements due to the nature of the crowd.

The acclamation, **Blessed** (lit., “May ... be blessed”) calls for God’s gracious power to attend someone or to effect something. **He who comes in the name of the Lord** (as God’s representative and with His authority) originally referred to a pilgrim coming to the festival. Though these words are not a messianic title, this crowd of pilgrims applied them to Jesus, perhaps with messianic overtones (cf. Gen. 49:10; Matt. 3:11) but they stopped short of identifying Jesus as the Messiah.

The coming kingdom (cf. comments on Mark 1:15) in association with **David** reflected the peoples’ messianic hope for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; Amos 9:11–12). But their enthusiasm was for a ruling Messiah and a political kingdom, not realizing and not accepting the fact that the One peaceably riding on the colt was their Messiah (cf. Zech. 9:9), the suffering Messiah whose kingdom stood near because of His presence with them. For most people, then, this moment of jubilation was simply part of the traditional Passover celebration—it did not alarm the Roman authorities or initiate a call for Jesus’ arrest by the Jewish rulers.

11:11. After entering **Jerusalem Jesus ... went to the temple** (*hieron*, “the temple precincts”; cf. vv. 15, 27), not the central sanctuary (*naos*; cf. 14:58; 15:29, 38). **He** carefully surveyed the premises to see if they were being used as God intended. This led to His action the next day (cf. 11:15–17). **Since it was** near sunset when the city gates were closed, Jesus **went out to Bethany** (cf. v. 1a) **with the Twelve** for the night.

B. Jesus’ prophetic signs of God’s judgment on Israel (11:12–26)

This section has a “sandwich” structure (cf. 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–31). The account of Jesus’ judgment on the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–26) is divided by the account of His cleansing the temple precincts (vv. 15–19). This structure suggests that each episode helps explain the other. Like the fig tree, Israel flourished with the “leaves” of ritual religion but lacked the “fruit” of righteousness God demanded. Both episodes signify God’s impending judgment on Israel for religious hypocrisy (cf. comments on 7:6). Matthew telescoped the incidents into two separate, successive accounts without the precise time intervals Mark noted (Matt. 21:12–17, 18–22).

1. JESUS’ JUDGMENT ON THE UNPRODUCTIVE FIG TREE (11:12–14) (Matt. 21:18–19).

11:12–13. **Next day**, early Monday morning, after **leaving Bethany** for Jerusalem (cf. v. 1a) **Jesus was** (lit., “became”) **hungry**. From a **distance** Jesus saw a wayside **fig tree in leaf**, with full green foliage, and **went to see if it had any fruit**. But it had **nothing but leaves**. Mark explained that **it was not the season for figs**.

The time of year was Passover (cf. 14:1), the middle of the month of Nisan (April). In Palestine fig trees produced crops of small edible buds in March followed by the appearance of large green leaves in early April. This early green “fruit” (buds) was common food for local peasants. (An absence of these buds despite the tree’s green foliage promising their presence indicated it would bear no fruit that year.) Eventually these buds dropped off when the normal crop of figs formed and ripened in late May and June, the fig season. Thus it was reasonable for Jesus shortly before Passover (mid-April) to expect to find something edible on that fig tree even though it was not the season for figs.

11:14. Jesus’ strong denunciation of the tree, which Peter later regarded as a curse (v. 21), was a dramatic prophetic sign of God’s impending judgment on Israel, not an angry reaction because Jesus was hungry and found no food. The promising but unproductive fig tree symbolized Israel’s spiritual barrenness despite divine favor and the impressive outward appearance of their religion (cf. Jer. 8:13; Hosea 9:10, 16; Micah 7:1). This is aptly illustrated in Mark 11:27–12:40.

Church, C.L. (1998). Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 439). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

THE SERVANT MESSIAH (11:1–33)

Jesus entered Jerusalem as one coming in the name, that is, the authority, of the Lord with a God-given mission of salvation (“Hosanna” means *save now*). By riding a colt, Jesus laid claim to His own brand of messiahship—not conquering hero but humble servant (see Zech. 9:9).

The cursing of the fig tree was a prophetic act meant to illustrate God’s judgment upon the temple, which had proved unfruitful by not realizing its mission as a place of prayer for all people. What is necessary for experiencing God is not the temple (see 13:1–2) but “faith in God.” Indeed, faith makes the temple obsolete. The one who believes can cast the temple mount into the sea (contrast 1 Kgs. 8:29–30). Forgiveness of sins is not experienced in temple sacrifice but in sharing God’s willingness to forgive. The “forgiveness requirement” warns believers not to turn their prayer time into a robbers’ retreat.

Understandably, the religious leaders questioned Jesus’ authority because cleansing the temple was the responsibility of the Messiah or the end-time prophet (Mal. 3:1–5; Zech. 14:20–21). Leaders had earlier questioned Jesus’ authority to announce God’s forgiveness (2:1–12), celebrate God’s new work (2:18–22), and do good on the Sabbath (3:1–6). Jesus’ question suggests that His authority was God given.

Leavell, L.P. (1972). Mark. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (p. 627). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

On to Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–26)

The passage—Jesus began the last phase of his public ministry from Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem. The coming of the King (11:1–11) was marked by careful preparation. Though he was King Messiah, he was not the warrior type. He came in fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. A conquering king would enter a defeated city *after* the battle. Jesus entered Jerusalem *before* the battle. A warrior king would ride upon a white horse, with the

bound prisoners following him. Jesus came on a donkey, symbolic of peace, not to imprison but to liberate.

Like all Jews, past and present, Jesus loved Jerusalem. He afforded them one more opportunity to acknowledge him and to be saved. Also, his ministry had reached the point where he now was ready to face the leaders of Judaism on their own home grounds.

Returning to Jerusalem the next day, Jesus pronounced an awesome judgment upon barrenness (11:12–14). In all likelihood, the leafy tree without fruit was representative of the sham and emptiness of the religious practices in Jerusalem. Just so, the judgment of God was to come upon those practitioners of religion who were being weighed and found wanting.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 11. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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