

SESSION NINE

The Presentation of Jesus: *The Importance of Faith (Mark 11:1-25)*

"I believe that a great number of people are going to die and go to hell because they're counting on their religiosity in the church instead of their relationship with Jesus to get them to heaven. They give lip service to repentance and faith, but they've never been born again." ~ Adrian Rogers

I. Overview

This last week of Jesus' life becomes the final confrontation. Jesus prepared His disciples for their arrival in Jerusalem. The triumphal entry, the cleansing of the Temple, and the cursing of the fig tree demonstrates that judgment looms upon Israel for rejecting her Davidic king. The basis for this inditement is that God does not seek religiosity, but faith, especially expressed in the context of believing prayer.

II. The Content

A. The Triumphal Entry: *The Presentation of Israel's King* (11:1-11)

vv. 1-2 - The Gospels of Matthew and John quote Zechariah 9:9 as the backdrop to this event. The reference to the colt "never been ridden" speaks of an unused animal reserved for religious purposes (cf. Num 19:2; Deut 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7).

vv. 3-6 Jesus was exercising the right of a king, or even sometimes a rabbi, in his requisition for an animal. His knowledge of the location along with the details surrounding the colt demonstrate Jesus' omniscience. In addition, Jesus' ability to ride this untrained colt through the cheering crowds displays Jesus' authority over the creature.

vv. 7-8 - Clothes laid on the road as a "rug" was an act reserved for royalty (cf. 2 Kgs 9:13).

vv. 9-10 - The words of the crowd echo Psalm 118:25-26. This psalm was customarily sung by pilgrims making their way to the Jewish Temple. This Old Testament backdrop accentuates the importance of the crowd's praises. Jesus is hailed as the promised Son of David, the king of the promised Kingdom.

v. 11 - This verse provides a sad commentary on the religious leaders. Instead of receiving Jesus in the Temple precincts, He was ignored.

B. The Cursing of the Fig Tree: *The Failure of Israel's Leadership* (11:12-14)

Unlike Jesus' other miracles over nature, this scene depicts a purely destructive act, which does not appear to achieve any useful purpose. However, Jesus' actions are far from meaningless. Sandwiched between the two temple scenes, this curse ". . . is a symbolic declaration of the power of Jesus' word and the importance of faith . . . that word acts against

a symbol of the nation, a fig tree, picturing a judgment to come in the confrontation that lies ahead . . .” (Bock, *Jesus*, 320).

“Early figs” that develop from green knobs, appear in early spring before the leaves. While unusual, the presence of large unripened, but edible figs can be found when leaves are present. This barrenness of the fig tree recalls Israel’s failure to produce appropriate fruit for God (e.g., Jer 8:13; Mic 1:7), and it also infers God’s judgment (cf. Jer 7:20; Hos 9:16).

“The fig tree, a full leaf but devoid of fruit, symbolizes the temple, while the temple, busy with religious activities but devoid of spiritual fruit, stands in danger of judgment.” (Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 154).

C. The Cleansing of the Temple: *The Corruption of Israel’s Worship* (11:15-19)

vv. 15-17 - Jesus’ ultimate rejection resides in the location. The temple courts were not designed for business. The scene recalls Zechariah 14:20-21 (Note that the term for “Canaanite” can also be translated “merchant” or “trader”).

Furthermore, the Court of the Gentiles was the location of economic activity—the only location Gentiles had access to worship the Lord. The quotation from Isaiah 56:7 highlights this point (also, cf. 1 Kgs 8:41-43).

The final Old Testament reference extremely relevant to the context of this scene is Jeremiah 7:1-14. Here God pronounces judgment on Jerusalem and the Temple, which they as a nation have trusted will be destroyed. Jeremiah allows for the possibility of repentance and restoration (Jer 7:5-6), but similar to their forefathers, the religious rulers failed to heed God’s warning.

D. The Withered Fig Tree: *The Call for a Right Relationship with Israel’s King* (11:20-25)

vv. 20-21 - What was once a leafy plant is now withered from the roots. Far from coincidental, Jesus dramatically displays His power.

vv. 22-23 - Just as powerful as the withering of the tree is the throwing of a mountain into the sea. The condition for achieving this impossible feat is stated both negatively and positively. As aptly noted by one commentator, “Not merely the belief that God can or will do the impossible, faith here as elsewhere in Mark represents more than an attitude or state of mind. It means taking a risk with one’s total person . . . Jesus calls for an absolute, unconditional commitment to or trust in God.” (*Mark*, 190).

v. 24 - The Temple, which was called the “house of prayer for all the Gentiles”, was no longer the locus for prayer or faith.

v. 25 - Similar to the Lord's prayer, an effective prayer life will be hindered by an unwillingness to forgive (cf. Matt 6:14-15). Forgiveness from the Lord calls for individuals to forgive others (e.g., 1 Pet 3:7).

III. The Intersect

- A. True Christianity is based upon a relationship, not a religion. Religiosity results in exalting self and embracing a form of idolatry.

Galatians 2:15-16 -

- B. Prayer is not an endeavor to change God's will, but rather, it is an endeavor to conform our lives to His will.

Jude 18-21 —

- C. Believers should pray expectantly; with faith and without discouragement.

Philippians 1:18-19 -

"I had rather stand against the cannons of the wicked than against the prayers of the righteous." ~ Thomas Lye