

The Gospel of Mark

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Chapter Eleven

Mark 11:1-3

*As they *approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He *sent two of His disciples, (2) and *said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. (3) "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here."*

The location of Bethphage (“the house of figs”) is not precisely known but it is near Bethany, which was about two miles from Jerusalem as stated by John: “*Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off*” (John 11:18). The Mount of Olives is directly east of Jerusalem and is at an altitude of about 2600 feet that affords a magnificent view of the city and the temple mount. Mark does not identify the two disciples sent to find the colt for Jesus. The word that is translated “colt” is “*polos*” and can mean the young of any animal. However here and elsewhere it means the colt of a donkey:

- Matt 21:2 *saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me.*
- John 12:15 *"FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT."*
- Zec 9:9 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

The Zechariah prophecy has been used historically to show that the promised Messiah would be mounted on the young of a donkey. Jesus further specified that the colt would not have been ridden by anyone else. Jesus then told them that if anyone asks what you are doing when you are untying the colt, tell them that the Lord has need of it and they will send it here.

Mark 11:4-7

*They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they *untied it. (5) Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" (6) They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. (7) They *brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it.*

The two disciples did as Jesus requested and indeed some bystanders did ask them what they were doing. They simply told them what Jesus had told them to say and they let the disciples take the colt. Matthew reports that the disciples brought back the donkey and the colt: “*The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.*” (Matt 21:6-7) Luke reports that the disciples sat Jesus on the colt: “*They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it.*” (Luke 19:35) Jesus was well known in the area so nobody questioned His need for the colt.

Mark 11:8-11

And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. (9) Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; (10) Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!" (11) Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.

This would have been quite a scene as many people put their cloaks on the road before Jesus as well as spreading branches on the road as recorded by Matthew and Luke:

- Luke 19:36-38 *He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. (37) As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, (38) shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*
- Matt 21:8-9 *Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. (9) The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!"*
- John 12:12-16 On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (13) took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel." (14) Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, (15) "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT." (16) These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

This was a spontaneous celebration. Only John states that the crowd brought branches of the palm trees for they would have had to be brought there from Jericho since they are not native to Jerusalem. Placing their garments before Him is an act of royal homage: *"Then they hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, "Jehu is king!"* (2 Kings 9:13).

Hosanna literally means "save now" although it had become simply a praise statement. The large cap in verse 9 is a literal quotation from: *"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD."* (Psa 118:26) Verse 10 shows that the crowd thought this entrance of Jesus represented the coming kingdom promised to a descendant of David and the praise of Hosanna is for that kingdom and not for Jesus. The Greek word translated "temple" is *hieron* and means the temple area and not the building. Jesus then gave an examination of the temple area and left without proclaiming any result of His examination.

Mark 11:12-14

On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. (13) Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and

when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. (14) He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

This is a difficult occurrence to understand and Luke does not report it. Luke does report a parable concerning the fig tree:

Luke 13:6-9 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. (7) "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' (8) "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; (9) and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Mark explains that the fig tree was not in its time of fruit bearing. Fig trees in Jerusalem leaf out in March or April but do not produce figs until June. Since it was not the time for the trees to bear fruit, certainly Jesus would not have expected to find figs there. We will read in verse 20 that the disciples see the withered fig tree on their return to Jerusalem from Bethany. They see that it had become withered from the roots and so would never recover to life.

To better understand what happened we need to read this event in terms of the entire story as Jesus will come back to the temple to cleanse it. We tend to think that Jesus came to this fig tree expecting to have figs to eat since Mark tells us that He became hungry. But Mark also tells us that Jesus knew that any figs there would not be ready to eat. Having tended to fig trees a long time, I know that before the leaves become so noticeable the little figs appear if there will be those to eat later. Since Jesus saw no "baby" figs, He knew that there would not be eatable figs later. He was then cursing it for He knew that it would not produce figs and so was useless. God created trees to produce seed of their kind (Gen 1:11). God also produced His people from those He chose and they were to produce fruit that would lead to the Kingdom of God on earth. The parable in Luke clearly states that if it does not bear fruit then it is to be destroyed. The sacrifices in the temple were not bearing fruit for God and so it would be judged by Jesus similarly to the fig tree. The fig tree is representative of Israel:

- *Hos 9:10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season. But they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame, And they became as detestable as that which they loved.*
- *Nah 3:12 All your fortifications are fig trees with ripe fruit-- When shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth.*

The nation does not show results of faith and will have the KOG taken away from them.

Mark 11:15-16

*Then they *came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; (16) and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple.*

The cleansing of the temple is declared in all three of the synoptic gospels at the end of the ministry of Jesus. John shows the event at the beginning of His ministry:

John 2:14-16 *"And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. (15) And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; (16) and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business.'"*

Some commentators doubt that there were two cleansings by Jesus but such is not improbable. The two would have been separated by two Passovers with Jesus showing His judgment of the use of the temple twice. The first time, as recorded by John, would have been unexpected by the Pharisees and perhaps more easily dismissed since He had not yet established Himself with the crowds. But after becoming known throughout the region as a healer of illnesses and demon possessions, He could not be ignored and the Pharisees would have had their anger toward Him explode. Jesus was interfering with their privileges and their authority and He had to be properly taken care of before the crowds became too excited.

The cleansing of the temple is in fulfillment of:

Mal 3:1-3 *"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. (2) "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. (3) "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.*

When Jesus entered the temple His senses would have been assaulted by the smell of the animals and the noise around the tables of the people exchanging money. The people would have come to Jerusalem with coins from their areas that had to be changed into the currency of the temple for the temple taxes had to be paid with that currency. The moneychangers charged huge premiums for this money exchange and Jesus was infuriated by this process that had been approved by the high priest. John states that Jesus used a whip to drive the people out of the temple. Verse 16 is only recorded by Mark and it is probably inserted because people used the court as a shortcut between the city and the Mount of Olives that was forbidden.

Mark 11:17-19

And He began to teach and say to them, 'Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.' (18) The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

Jesus first quotes from Isaiah and then from Jeremiah as bolded below:

- Isa 56:7 *Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For **My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.**"*
- Jer 7:11 *"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a **den of robbers** in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the LORD.*

The Isaiah quote states that God intended His house to be a place where Gentiles and Jews could worship together. The Court of Gentiles was thus intended for worship by the Gentiles but the Jews had converted it into a smelly, noisy, public market place where people were cheated by the monetary conversion process. The Jeremiah quotation states that God's house had been converted into a robbers' den rather than a place of prayer. The spiritual significance of the cleansing of the temple by Jesus is that He was returning it to its intended purpose of universal worship. The primary readers of the work of Mark were a Gentile audience so they would have especially appreciated this significance. The Pharisees had already decided to rid themselves of Jesus (Mark 3:6 *"The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."*) and now the chief priests and teachers of the law decided to join them in this effort. However they were afraid of the support of the people for Jesus and so were not willing to be openly against Him.

Mark 11:19-24

*When evening came, they would go out of the city. (20) As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. (21) Being reminded, Peter *said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." (22) And Jesus *answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. (23) "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. (24) "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.*

It seemed to be their practice to leave Jerusalem to spend the night in Bethany and so they again do that, perhaps because they sensed the danger in the city. When returning to the city the next morning they noticed that the fig tree was totally destroyed and Peter questioned Jesus about it. Jesus did not directly reply to this question but told Peter to have faith in God. Because the Jews did not demonstrate any faith in God, the temple would be destroyed similarly to the destruction of the fig tree. Jesus told Peter to then not act as the Jewish leaders but to function in the faith of God. Jesus then gives a lesson on prayer in that one must pray in faith of God rather than just in the human desires. Of course Jesus is speaking figuratively with a mountain being the symbol for any great difficulty:

Zech 4:6-7 "Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. (7) 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

The greatest difficulties in life can only be properly treated by prayer that is done in faith (James 1:6 *"But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind."*). Jesus made the same point previously when the disciples were not able to remove a demon from the boy (Mark 9:14-29). The only way we can know for sure that what we ask for in prayer will happen is if the prayer is totally in the will of God. But often there is no way for us to know that such is totally in God's will. We pray for someone to get well but we do not know what the plan of God is for that person and for the meaning of life and death of that person. I look at job opportunities and perhaps one looks like it fits in the plan of God but there is no way for me to know all the implications of my having that job or some other job. Our lack of God's perspective surely limits our praying and that is why we either add

at the end of a prayer or put at the beginning of the prayer the phrase: "Thy will be done". As long as we are totally committed to fitting in with the will of God regardless of the earthly consequences then we can have peace regardless of the answer to the prayer. The Jewish leaders had plenty of OT teachings to know that what they were doing in the temple was not according to the will of God. God gave them many opportunities to repent but they refused so God would totally physically remove the temple in 70 A.D.

Mark 11:25-26

"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. (26) ["But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."]

Jesus then gives them the two requirements for effective prayer: faith and forgiveness. The forgiveness and faith requirements are repeated in other verses:

- Matt 6:13-15 *'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]' (14) "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*
- Matt 7:7 *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*
- Matt 17:20-21 *And He *said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. (21) ["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]*
- Matt 18:18-19 *"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (19) "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.*
- Luke 17:6 *And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.*

Mark 11:26 is not included in the oldest manuscripts but is matched by Matt 6:15 that is in the oldest manuscripts so the addition is worthy of inclusion. The point is that if we do not have a spirit of willingness to forgive others then we have not been born again and so our sins will not have been forgiven.

Mark 11:27-33

*They *came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders *came to Him, (28) and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?" (29) And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. (30) "Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." (31) They began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' (32) "But shall we say, 'From men'?"--they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. (33) Answering Jesus, they *said, "We do not know." And Jesus *said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

The chief priests, scribes, and the elders form the Sanhedrin. Thus the Jewish leaders are now coming at Jesus in full force. The cleansing of the temple was sort of a “last straw” to them and when combined with all the other works of Jesus make Him their main enemy and they would have immediately arrested Him if they did not fear the reaction of the crowds. Thus they came to Him with a question hoping to trap Him into making an answer that would set the crowd against Him. They asked Jesus for the source of His authority but Jesus replied by asking them a question concerning the authority of John the Baptist to perform baptisms. This question from Jesus put them into a quandary. If they replied that the authority of John was from heaven they would have been forced to accept his baptisms. If they reply that the authority was from men then they will be in violation of the standard understanding that John was a real prophet. John had clearly specified the divine source of the authority of Jesus at His baptism so if they accept the heavenly authority of John then they had to also accept the divine authority of Jesus and admit that His cleansing of the temple was according to the will of God.

They could not answer His question so they pleaded ignorance. Jesus replied that He also would not answer their question although He really had with His question. Thus the Jews had to wait a bit longer for their revenge on Jesus.