

The Lord Comes to His Temple (11:1-26)

I. JESUS' ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

A. Overview

Jesus makes his first and only visit to Jerusalem recounted in Mark's gospel. Jesus, of course, had visited Jerusalem various times before, but this time was different – it was prophetic and the fulfillment of prophecy.

Previously he had not wanted to be recognized as the Messiah; he avoided the enthusiasm of the crowd;

- But now he **accepts their acclaim** and even implies that it is justified, by entering the city in the style of a Messiah-King.

Jesus arrives in the Holy City amid thousands of Pilgrims coming to celebrate the annual feast of Passover (CCC 583).

- It is this Old Testament feast that Jesus transforms at the last supper, and through his death on the cross.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marks the beginning of Passion Week, the final days of his life in which he will fulfill his destiny as the suffering and glorified Messiah.

If there was any moment of **earthly glory** for Jesus, this was it. The people of Jerusalem were more than just curious to see in person this prophet they had heard so much about.

They were ready to pay homage, to proclaim him the long-awaited Messiah.

- The Prophet Zechariah had prophesied that **Israel's king** would enter Jerusalem "**triumphant and victorious . . . humble and riding on an ass** (Zechariah 9:9).

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.**

For this moment, at least, the people recognize their true king, though his outward appearance did not in any way resemble royalty.

Read: Mark 11:1-11

[1] And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Beth'phage and Bethany, at 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, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it.

[3] If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"

[4] And they went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it.

[5] And those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"

[6] And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go.

[7] And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it.

[8] And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.

[9] And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

[10] Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"

[11] And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple; and

when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

B. Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives was a mountain directly east of Jerusalem, its western slope faces the temple mount. Bethany was on its eastern slope and Bethphage lay within the precincts of Jerusalem.

Bethany was the last pilgrim station before Jerusalem. The “village opposite” is probably Bethpage.

“Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat . . .”

Was Jesus’ knowledge about the colt a “word of knowledge?”

C. And They Brought the Colt to Jesus

Why did Jesus choose to enter Jerusalem riding on a colt, when most Pilgrims would enter the city on foot?

It was a ***prophetic*** gesture, fulfilling the messianic prophecy of Zechariah: ***Lo, your king comes to you . . . humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.***

- The colt also symbolizes humility.

Jesus, the Messiah-King, comes to Jerusalem as a peaceful king, not mounted on a “war horse” like a warrior-king ready to lead a rebellion against Rome.

D. Jesus’ Triumphal Entry

Caught up in the excitement of the festival and the presence of the prophet and miracle-worker, Jesus, the crowds spontaneously cast their garments before him in a gesture of homage as before a newly crowned king.

Yet, Jesus knows that he enters Jerusalem at the risk of his life!

E. Hosanna!

Jesus is hailed with the salutation ***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,”*** (psalm 118: 25-26) - one of the Hallel psalms sung during the feast of Passover.

(Jesus and the Apostles were singing the Hallel psalms (113-118) as they processed from the Upper Room to Gethsemane).

The people, by shouting ***“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our Father David that is coming!”*** are proclaiming Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Hosanna is a Hebrew word that originally meant “Save us!” Later it became a shout of joy or praise much like “hallelujah!”

F. The Bible and the Liturgy

Many Biblical phrases have become part of the Eucharistic liturgy.

“Hosanna in the highest!” and “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” are joined with the angelic chorus “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty” (Rev. 8; see Isa 6:3) as the people’s acclamation introducing the Eucharistic prayer (G of M – MH, p223).

Just as the Passover pilgrims greeted their Messiah-King on his entry into Jerusalem, so do we greet him at the beginning of each Eucharistic Liturgy.

G. Messenger of the Covenant

“And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple.”

It has been a long day since leaving Jericho. Jesus goes to inspect the temple as the **messenger of the covenant** foretold by Malachi (3:1-2), but he will not carry out the purification promised there until the following day.

[1] "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; 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;**

Fig Tree and Temple (11:12-21)

I. JESUS CURSES THE FIG TREE (11:12-14)

Read: Mark 11:12-14

[12] On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

[13] And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

[14] And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

A. The Fruitless Fig Tree

Fig trees were common in Palestine, and figs a favorite fruit. Fig trees leafed out in early April, so the sight of **a fig tree in leaf** at Passover was normal.

What is strange is that Jesus **went over to see if he could find anything on it**, for figs do not become ripe or edible before June or later and every Palestinian knew that. But He finds the fig tree fruitless.

- In Mark, fruitfulness is an image for responding to Jesus in faith.

- A fig tree is a traditional symbol of Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10).
- The Old Testament prophets used both the vineyard and fig tree as symbols of Israel, called to fruitfulness by her Lord.
- The destruction of the fig tree is a frequent symbol of judgment (see Isa 34:4; Hos 2:2; 9:10, etc).

The tree's lack of figs while still retaining leaves symbolizes the nation falling short of its calling. The lack of fruit signifies an absence of faith, prayer, and repentance.

B. The Curse

"May no one ever eat fruit from you again."

When Jesus curses it, the withering and death of the tree become a visible prophecy of the doom that awaits Jerusalem for murdering the Messiah.

Jesus' action is thus a prophecy in symbol, like the symbolic actions of the OT prophets. The cursing of the fig tree is a prophetic signal that Israel's temple worship and sacrifices, with all their earthly splendor, is drawing to an end.

The fig tree as a fig tree may have an excuse for barrenness – it's not the season for figs. But the fig tree as Jerusalem has no excuse.

- God's people must always be ready for his visitation.

II. JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

Read: Mark 11:15-19

[15] And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons;

[16] and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through

the temple.

[17] And he taught, and said 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 den of robbers."

[18] And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching.

[19] And when evening came they went out of the city.

C. The Next Day

When Jesus went to the temple the previous evening to look around (11:11), he apparently didn't like what he saw. He took no action then, for temple activities were shutting down for the night.

Now, the next morning, Jesus enters the temple area again and, taking vehement action, begins to **drive out those selling and buying** in the Temple.

D. Corruption in the Temple

Commercial activity connected with the temple was necessary, since Pilgrims had to purchase the unblemished animals or birds that they would offer in sacrifice.

However, there were several markets for sacrificial animals on the Mount of Olives, outside the Temple. But the temple authorities' had allowed *trading* within the temple precincts, in the vast court of the Gentiles.

Money changers were also present to exchange the pilgrims Greek or Roman coins for the shekels in which the annual Temple tax had to be paid.

According to Jesus, they offended God by *what* they were doing and *where* they were doing it. The Temple should be a house of worship, not a place where daylight thievery and business traffic make prayer impossible.

E. Coming Judgment

Jesus' dramatic demonstration of overturning tables foreshadows the Temple's violent destruction in A.D. 70.

Reflection and Application

(See "Reflection and Application (11:15-19)," *Gospel of Mark* by M. Healy, p 228).

III. THE WITHERED FIG TREE (11:20-26)

Again Jesus leaves the city. The next morning, on their way to the Temple, the disciples discover ***the fig tree withered away to its roots.***

Peter was surprised to see the fig tree withered. This provides the interpretation of the temple cleansing and predicts the judgment to come upon Jerusalem.

Jesus uses this occasion to give a teaching about the need for faith, the power of prayer, and the need for repentance.

Read: Mark 11:20-26

[20] As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

[21] And Peter remembered and said to him, "Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered."

[22] And Jesus answered 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 will come to pass, it will be done for him.

[24] Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

[25] And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have

anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Verse 26 is dropped from most modern translations because it is not in the best Greek manuscripts.

A. Temple and Fig Tree – Judgment

"Jesus' pronouncement on the fig tree symbolizes God's judgment on the temple and its stewards for their spiritual barrenness, a barrenness that consists fundamentally in their refusal to heed Jesus, the Lord of the temple.

*Like the tree, the temple will come to an end: **"There will not be one stone left on another** (GM – MH, p 229).*

IV. FAITH AND FORGIVENESS (11:22-25)

We turn next to another lesson to be drawn from the withering of the fig tree.

While the withering of the fig tree is primarily a prophetic action about Jerusalem, it also provides the occasion to teach about prayer for difficult things, mentioning two essential points for Christian prayer: ***faith*** and ***forgiveness***.

A. Faith

"Have faith in God."

The words ***have faith in God*** are an introduction to teachings on prayer. Jesus tells his disciples to ***have faith in God***, that is, to trust God, rely on God, and have confidence in God.

- ***Faith*** is the right human response to God's ***faithfulness***.
- ***Trust*** is the right human response to God's ***trustworthiness***.

Everything else Jesus will teach about prayer will be based on this trust, reliance and confidence. Prayer is not just a matter of words but an expression of our fundamental relationship with God.

If the father has given us all in Jesus, could he refuse us anything less (Rom 8:32)? Thus the **prayer of faith** is simultaneously intercession and thanksgiving for the same request.

B. Barrenness

The barrenness condemned by Jesus can cause us problems as well. We are called to bear fruit; Jesus wants that fruit. If we're willing to be satisfied with legalistic observances, we will remain barren.

We can never plead that it is not the proper season to bear fruit:

- that we have no time for prayer,
- no need for repentance,
- no reason for faith.

We can argue that we go to church on Sunday, that people call us Christians, that we observe certain religious rituals.

- God, however, wants faith that bears fruit.

C. Forgiveness

Finally, this power of intercession presumes forgiveness. God will not release his power if the one praying will not set free anyone he holds in bonds of unforgiveness.

Our unforgiveness blocks God's forgiveness of us.

V. JESUS' AUTHORITY IS QUESTIONED

Again in Jerusalem – the third time since their arrival that Jesus and his disciples enter the Holy City. It is the day after Jesus cleansed the Temple, and he was walking in the Temple area when

a delegation of **the chief priests, scribes and the elders** – members of the Sanhedrin - approached him.

[27] And 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 they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?"

[29] Jesus said to them, "I will ask you a question; answer me, and 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] And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

[32] But shall we say, 'From men'?" -- they were afraid of the people, for all held that John was a real prophet.

[33] So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

A. The Authority of the Son

"By what authority are you doing these things . . . ?"

Notice how throughout his ministry opposition to Jesus comes not from the people but from their leaders.

- They demand to know where he claimed to get the authority to cleanse the Temple.

Was it his own authority, and thus does he claim to be a prophet directly inspired by God? Or is he the delegate of some other authority?

B. The Baptism of John

In true rabbinic fashion Jesus responds with a question of his own, **“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”** In other words, where did John the Baptist get his authority?

They are now faced with a dilemma in which either answer would disgrace them before the people.

On the one hand, if they answer that **John's baptism** was of **heavenly origin**, then they'll be forced to admit that they have opposed God by refusing to believe John.

If, on the other hand, they claim that **John's baptism** was merely of **human origin** they will face the wrath of the people, since all revered John as a **prophet**.

To avoid the trap they answer, **“We do not know”** - an embarrassing statement from those who are supposed to be able to discern true and false prophets.

Jesus, in turn, refuses to reveal the source of his authority period.

For Reflection

Do I avoid facing up to questions that I would be uncomfortable answering?

Preparation for Week 9 – Mark 12

- Read pages 234 - 255 of *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy.
- Read carefully and prayerfully Chapter 12 of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.
- Review and answer *Study Questions* on Chapter 12 (page 56) of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.