



Time to Reflect

- Read (v1-11) once again. What impacts you the most about Jesus's entry to Jerusalem? Can we identify something that we had never fully noticed or understood before?
- In what ways are we producing fruit in our lives as we seek to serve God with faithfulness and sincerity?

Last week we focused on the third occasion when Jesus predicted his death and we saw how his selflessness contrasted with the selfishness of James and John. In response to their bold and ambitious request, Jesus taught about ambition and humility. This week our attention is drawn to Jerusalem and several events from that week of all weeks which led to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

“In chapter eleven Mark again displays the humanity and humility of our Lord alongside His deity and authority as the Saviour enters the closing days of His ministry.”

(Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant In Mark's Gospel*, p114)

Specifics

- Our passage begins by highlighting that Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem (v1). It is interesting to note that Jesus and his disciples entered Jerusalem at least three times during this most incredible of weeks.
1. When Jesus was hailed as a King upon his entry to Jerusalem on the day that we refer to as Palm Sunday (v1-11)
 2. The next day when he cleared the temple (v15-18).
 3. When he famously wept over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37) and had his authority questioned by the chief priests, teachers of the law and the elders (v27-33).
- The first eleven verses of our passage are well-known and they demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (e.g. Zechariah 9:9).
 - Jesus spoke with two of his disciples (v1b) and he sent them to a nearby village. He gave them very specific instructions and he was confident that they would experience no difficulties (v2-3).
 - The two disciples found everything exactly as Jesus said it would be (v4). They brought the young donkey to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it – a sign of respect and honour (v7). Then the procession into Jerusalem commenced (v8).
 - There was an air of excitement and this was reflected in the declarations of the people (v9-10).
 - Many in the crowds would have been aware of a similar situation which happened many years before and we can read about it in 2 Kings 9.
 - In that passage King Jehu was declared king of Israel in defiance of the existing king. In (v13) of that passage his followers spread their cloaks under his feet as a sign of loyalty. They were determined to make a statement about what they thought was going on.
 - The crowd in Jerusalem believed that Jesus was the promised King who had come to deliver them from oppression, a new King David, and his arrival was being announced in Jerusalem – the city that David

had made his capital 1000 years earlier. What they believe they were seeing was the arrival of a political and military leader.

- Even their shouts in (v9-10) were the cries of a desperate people who were living in difficult times. There are three main cries: 'Hosanna! 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'... 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'
- As our passage continues, we are told that it was the next day and Jesus was back in Bethany along with his disciples (v12). Jesus was hungry and he saw a fig tree in the distance.
- A fig tree was usually more productive than any other tree, giving a large quantity of fruit twice a year. Knowing this, Jesus made his way over to the tree but he found nothing but leaves on it (v13).
- Jesus cursed the fig tree (v14) and later in the passage we are told that it had withered (v21). It is important to note that this episode should not be interpreted as an isolated incident.
- Victor Maxwell writes, "In this last miracle recorded by Mark we find the cursing of the fig tree set alongside the cleansing of the temple. The reason for this is because the cursing of the tree is related to the cleansing of the temple which followed almost immediately."¹
- (v15-17) are quite dramatic. Jesus cleared the temple of money changers and traders. The words spoken by Jesus, and recorded in (v17), are very revealing.
- In the temple there would have been stalls, animals, transactions and lots of people. With all this business and busyness, how could people experience stillness, express reverence, or listen to God.
- All the worldly activity, and worldliness, had become a barrier to devotion. The heart of worship that God longs for was being blocked.
- There was no spiritual fruitfulness in the temple. The comparison with the fruitless fig tree is stark.
- Victor Maxwell helps us unpack the fullness of this comparison. "This was a parallel to what the Saviour found in Israel. The Israelites were pretentious in their appearance of worship and ceremony, but these, like fig leaves used by Adam and Eve, only covered the shame of their barren service and naked religion."²
- There is a profound challenge in these interconnected and related events. God is looking for fruitfulness in our lives, authenticity and sincere Christian faith.
- As we seek to follow God faithfully, we are called to be a faithful and praying people. Note how Jesus challenged his disciples with lessons on fruitfulness, faith and forgiveness (v22-26).
- They were to have faith in God, a deep and unswerving faith (v22-23). They were to believe in the power of prayer without reservation and there was no place for doubt (v24). They were to be radical in demonstrating forgiveness so that they would receive God's forgiveness (v25).
- These are powerful and helpful instructions for all of us as we seek to become the followers that God would have us be. This deep-rooted faithfulness contrasts significantly with the actions of the religious leaders who sought to entrap Jesus and question his authority (v27-33).
- The question that they asked (v28) was undoubtedly a response to the earlier events recorded in this chapter. Victor Maxwell observes, "Jesus Christ had demonstrated His authority by His entrance into Jerusalem as a King, the cleansing of the Temple as a Priest, and the cursing of the fig tree as a Prophet."³
- He responded to their question with a question (v29-30) and the religious leaders were caught in their own craftiness. They chose to keep silent but they were "...looking for a way to kill him (Jesus)" (v18).
- The journey to the Cross was well underway and Jesus, the Servant King, walked this path out of love for us all. He did not come "...to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

¹ Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark's Gospel* (Belfast: Ambassador Productions, 1996), pp116-117.

² Ibid, p117.

³ Ibid, p120.