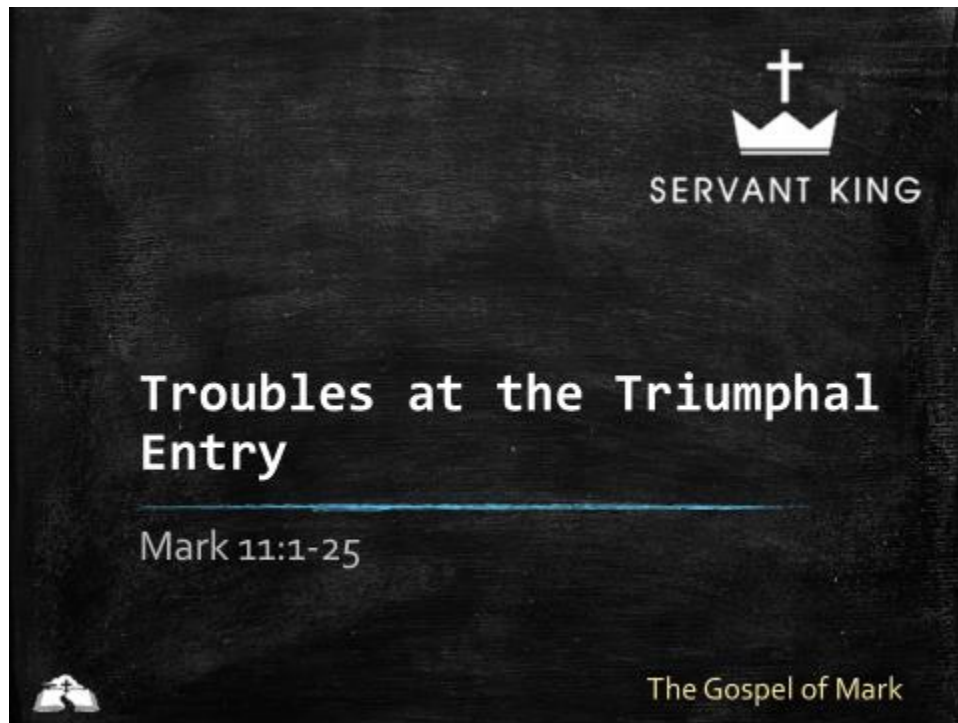


Troubles at the Triumphal Entry

Mark 11:1-25

Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler

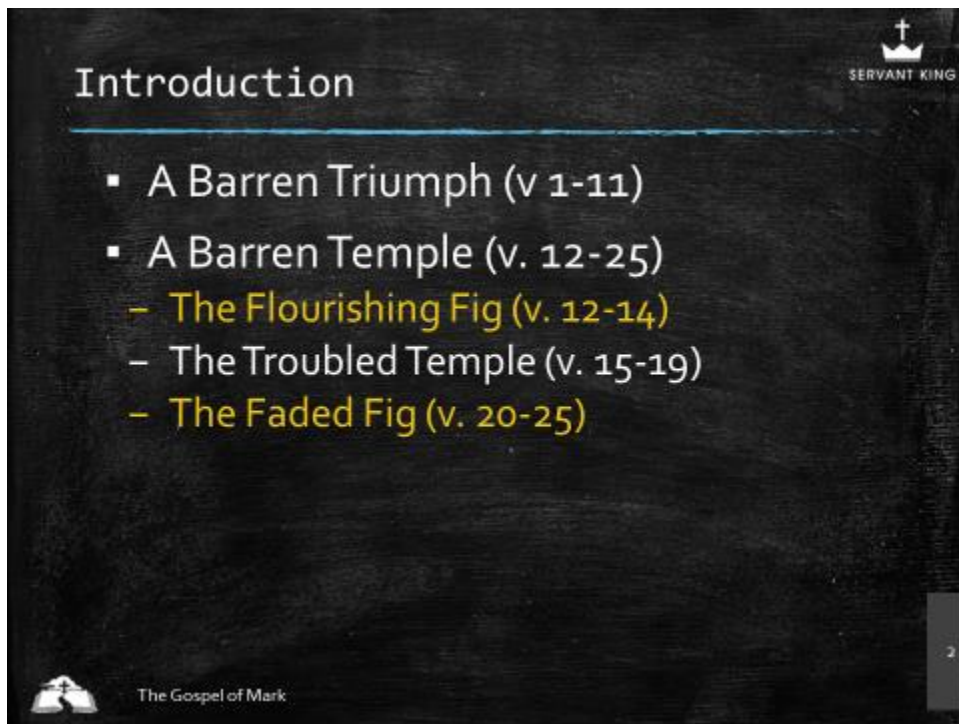
Feb. 21, 2016 AM



This morning's passage begins Mark's account of what is the beginning of the end. The last six Chapters recount the events around what is probably the final week of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. Chapter 11 to the end of the book bring us to the conclusion of Jesus' journey to the cross. Jesus has been teaching His disciples and preparing them for His coming suffering and death. Now the pace quickens as Mark strings the events together, the conflict intensifies, and the time draws near for Jesus to win His victory by giving His life to redeem others. There is an intentionality and awareness that the time the Father had ordained for Him to complete His purpose and fulfill the scriptures is drawing very near.

Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. Mark records the deliberate action and activities of Jesus that draw Him into direct conflict with the religious leaders right in their own backyard, so to speak. These are not the actions of a Messiah blown by the ill winds of an inevitable fate but rather they are the steps of a Messiah who is following a plan set in course before the beginning of time. This is Mark's argument. Jesus knows where He is going and is following a course that leads to the cross, in steadfast obedience to the Father's will.

However, to the disciples, this course is not leading to the expected victory over their Roman oppressors. And to Mark's Roman readers, this course is not the expected ending of a hero's epic story. But again, this is exactly Mark's point. The salvation of the Messiah was not about a national redemption. It was a redemption of an eternal scale. The epic victory of Jesus comes not through the shedding of His enemy's blood but through the shedding of His own blood.



Our passage this morning is found beginning in Mark 11. Before we begin, I want to look at the structure of our passage so that we can have a sense of the theme and organization of the text before us. The overarching theme of this passage is barrenness. There is a sense of irony to Mark's story of the triumphal entry as well as the fig tree and temple. As we shall see, neither are what they appear to be, which is the underlying connection between both accounts.

In most of your bibles you find four headings in verses 1 through 25 of Chapter 11. I would suggest to you that there are really two sections of this passage. The first being the triumphal entry as Jesus enters Jerusalem. The second more complex section is made up of the accounts of the fig tree with the temple clearing between them. This construction of these two similar accounts before and after a seemingly separate account is what some like to call a Markan sandwich. The two outside accounts are the two layers of bread. The inner account, containing the main point, is the meat of the sandwich.

This puts our structure something like this. The first 11 verses depict the irony of a barren triumph. Verses 12 through 25 depict a barren temple consisting of three individual accounts. The first layer of bread is the account of the flourishing fig. The meat layer is next with the account of the troubled temple. The last layer of bread is the account of the faded fig. With this structure in mind, let us go to the Lord before we open His Word.

[opening prayer]

A Barren Triumph (v 1-11)

- The Prophetic Preparation
- The Flourishing Fanfare
- The Unassuming Entry

The Gospel of Mark

3

Let's get started. Please turn to Mark Chapter 11. We will begin at verse 1. Mark begins this section with an account of a familiar story. Anyone who attended Sunday School for any length of time is familiar with the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. An if you grew up in a Baptist church, you probably made paper palm branches and acted out the scene of the people shouting Hosanna and laying down robes for Jesus to ride on. No matter how engrained those images are etched into your mind, let them go and allow God's word speak to us. Follow along as I read from Mark, Chapter 11.

"Now when he was near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of 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. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve."

Mark begins by telling us that Jesus and His followers had drawn near to Jerusalem. Bethphage and Bethany were villages just outside of Jerusalem and given crowds of the Passover season, it is likely that Jesus and the disciples found lodging there to spend their nights. It is not insignificant that at the Mount of Olives Jesus sends for two of the disciples. The imagery of the mountain

should bring to mind the high mountain where Jesus was transfigured and other Old Testament references to mountains as a place of worship and encountering God.

So Mark describes a prophetic preparation for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Note that Jesus takes the initiative here and sends two of His disciples to go into the village and find a colt that had never been ridden and bring it back. The word here for colt in the Greek means literally, "young animal" and is most often translated as colt or young donkey. Mark's reference to the colt having never been ridden before would also have significance as an animal that was set aside for a sacred purpose. The taking of the colt would have been symbolic the right and role of a king. Jesus will not quietly sneak into Jerusalem. He will enter the city as a King.

It is likely that Jesus has in mind to fulfill the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which says, "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 detail Mark provides here indicates the importance of all these elements in demonstrating the Messianic character of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The disciples go and find everything just as Jesus had foretold and follow His instructions bringing back the colt for Him to ride on.

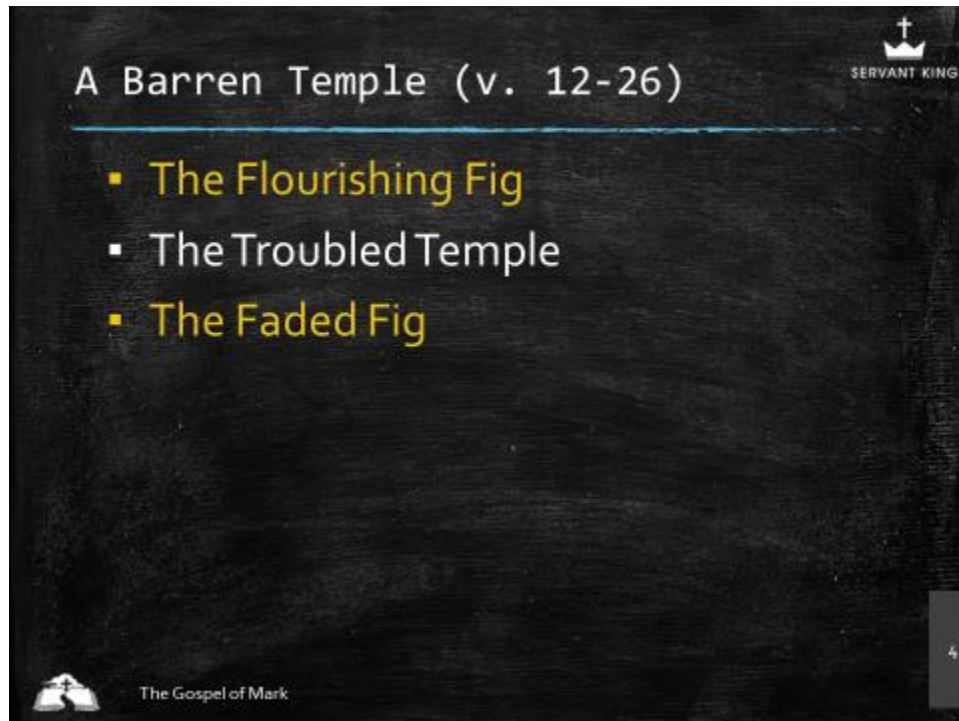
What happens next appears to be a spontaneous and flourishing fanfare to honor the Messiah as Jesus and His followers make their way to Jerusalem for the coming Passover celebration. The Passover time was a great celebration to the Jews and many came from all parts of the country to Jerusalem to take part in the feasts and temple worship. One would envision that the roads around Jerusalem would be busy with people making their way into the city.

In a sign of honor to Jesus, the people place their robes and branches of leaves in front of Jesus and the disciples create a saddle of their own robes. In excitement the people break out in praise chanting one the great Hebrew Psalms, the Hallel Psalm. Shouting "Hosanna", the people were literally saying "save we pray save now". But despite the enthusiasm of the people's messianic praise, they are sadly unaware that the Kingdom of God is about to be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

But their praise here should probably be seen as barren, empty, and even ironic as they clearly do not see the true Messianic image. More likely, they are hailing Jesus as a great prophet and one come to deliver them from Roman oppression. This is more of a pilgrimage into Jerusalem than a victor's triumphant entry. None of them, even the disciples, would realize the truth of what they were saying until later; that Jesus had indeed come to save them. Not as a political Savior. But more importantly as a spiritual Savior. The further irony here is that the true triumph of Jesus' mission is not His entry into Jerusalem, but the triumph at the cross. Though the fanfare will fade away and his followers will abandon Him, it is there the real victory is won.

The passage ends with Jesus and the disciples having arrived in the city in what is best described as an unassuming entry. There is almost a sense of let down as Mark simply notes that it was late. The crowds are now gone. All the pomp and circumstance is short lived. The echoes of enthusiastic praise have long faded. This was not the worship of true disciples but simply hollow shouts of people on the road to Jerusalem caught up in the emotion of the moment.

And note where Jesus goes. He goes to the temple. The final destination of Jesus journey is not Jerusalem, but the temple. The temple which had once been the focal point of Jewish law and worship. The temple which had once been the dwelling place of God. What an image Mark leaves us with here. Jesus is standing quietly in the temple grounds, now void of true worship and the presence of God. Jesus, the one who will one day be worshiped from the hearts of his followers while His spirit dwells within them.



Continuing on into verses 12 to 25, Mark records the story we often refer to as the cleansing of the temple. As we noted earlier, rather than an inclusive account of two stories, it seems that Jesus himself frames the temple events within the context of an illustration of a fig tree. As the bread of our Markan sandwich, the fig tree that is first encountered on their way into Jerusalem is then observed again on their way out of the city. Mark's record of that day to helps us to see the same lessons Jesus is teaching His disciples. Follow along again as I read verses 12 to 14.

"On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 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. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it."

Mark records that on the next day Jesus sets out from Bethany, He is hungry and sees a flourishing fig tree. But finding the tree is without fruit to eat, Jesus curses it in the hearing of His disciples. Now there are two apparent problems with the account. The first is, as Mark records, that it was not the season for figs bear fruit. Therefore, why would Jesus go to the tree in hunger and then curse the tree for not bearing fruit out of season? The second is, why would Jesus use His power in what appears to be a destructive way?

Both problems can be answered in seeing that Jesus is using His hunger and the fig tree's lack of fruit as an illustration. What we see here is an "acted out parable" – a story inside a story. Given it was not the season for figs, Jesus likely had no intention of finding ripe fruit on the tree. His actions that morning were meant to be symbolic and to stick in the disciples' minds. We should also note that to the disciples, the fig-tree would have been a recognized symbol of the nation of Israel; as was the temple. This is an important connection to make as we work through this section.

Jesus' curse here contrasts the false promise and hope given by the tree. It was all show and no go. Despite its full and leafy appearance, there was no fruit. We should reject any suggestion that Jesus is cursing the tree out of disappointment or that this story depicts Jesus as being vindictive. It is likely that Jesus has in mind Jeremiah, 8:13 which says, "I will surely snatch them away," declares the LORD; "There will be no grapes on the vine and no figs on the fig tree, and the leaf will wither; and what I have given them will pass away."

Having set up his illustration to teach the disciples, Jesus moves on to Jerusalem and our focus turns back to the temple. In Jesus' day, the temple would have normally been a busy place. But during the Passover season it would have been chaotic. People from all of Israel and from far away would converge on Jerusalem to observe the Passover and offer their sacrifices at the temple. Follow along as I read verses 15 to 19.

"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. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying 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.'" And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city."

Jesus and the disciples make their way into Jerusalem and enter a troubled temple. To appreciate what is happening here understand that it is estimated that during the Passover around 250,000 lambs were sacrificed. The section of the temple where Jesus and the disciples enter into was the Gentile court where sacrifices were sold to those who had none. What was meant to be offering and sacrifice had been corrupted and turned into commerce and industry. To the religious leaders who controlled this system it was a huge source of income.

The Gentle Court of Herod's temple was roughly as large as 30 football fields surrounding the inner area. It is easy to imagine the sights and sounds of the many tables and cages that filled this area as people bartered for sacrifices. It would have resembled an open air market more than a place for Gentiles to worship.

Observing this disturbing scene, Jesus begins to drive out those who were buying and selling there. Mark records that he overturned tables and prevented anyone from doing business and carrying merchandise through the temple. While the act is extreme and demonstrates a

righteous anger at the perversion of the temple's purpose, this is not an attack or attempt to destroy or hurt. Nor would it bring the temple commerce to an end. Like Jesus' curse of the fig tree, it is meant to emphasize the corruption and barrenness of the temple worship.

The irony here is that the Jews would have expected the Messiah to clear Israel and the temple **of the Gentiles** who now oppressed them. Instead, we have a picture of Jesus clearing the temple **for the Gentiles**. After disrupting the temple commerce, Mark notes that Jesus speaks and teaches to the crowds so that they would understand what He was doing and why. Jesus tells them that the temple was to be called a house of prayer for ALL nations. Jesus appears to be quoting both Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 in combination. This reference to "all nations" would not have been lost on Mark's gentile readers. Mark intended for them to see that Jesus included them in those who desired true worship.

When the chief priests and scribes heard Jesus' teaching they began to actively seek out a way to destroy Him. There may be a sense in which this is the last straw. Jesus has taken the battle to their backyard and exposed their profiteering at the expense of temple purity and worship. They can no longer tolerate his popularity with the people and his powerful teaching.

While the religious leaders fear Jesus, the crowd is amazed at His teaching. Gundry summarizes this well in his commentary, "[Jesus] strikes fear even in the hearts of the hierarchs who are trying to destroy him. In fact, they are trying to destroy Him because they fear Him, because He has a powerful hold on the crowd. He will be crucified, then, not because of any weakness in Him. Quite oppositely, because of His power! Furthermore, the power for which He will be crucified is a power that He exerts for the benefit of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews."

Mark's account continues noting that Jesus and the disciples leave the city that evening. On the following morning they again pass by the fig tree. Follow along as I read verses 19 to 25.

"As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown 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. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.""

The previous day's curse of the fig tree comes to Peter's mind and he points out the tree is now a faded fig. The detail of the tree being withered indicates the total destruction of the tree down to its roots. While Jesus makes no comment on the fig tree, in the sense of an acted out parable, the disciples and Mark's readers are to connect the destruction of the fig tree as an illustration of the destruction of the temple. The fig tree is a picture of the unfruitfulness of Israel's worship. The clearing of the temple represents God's judgment on the shallowness, corruption, and perversion as Israel wandered far from true worship. The destruction of the fig tree then suggests a picture of God's final judgment upon Israel.

Jesus's actions point out that like the faded fig, the temple has also faded. The time of temple worship and law is ending. They will be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. His sacrifice will remove the barriers of walls and curtains to enter into God's presence. His death will end the need for constant sacrifices. The fig tree and the temple must fade so that a new kingdom and a new covenant may replace it; and they will be better and eternal.

While there is no comment of the destruction of the fig tree, Mark records Jesus' response to Peter is a call to faith and forgiveness. At one level, it seems that Jesus is teaching that the power to destroy the tree comes through faith and prayer. The disciples were to see that the strength and power of Jesus' ministry came through His faith and relationship with His Heavenly Father. The power the disciples were to show later in their ministry would not be of themselves, but was of a divine nature. It is possible that on another level, the connection to the destruction of the tree is more of an encouragement to have faith even when the temple is destroyed.

Reflect and Respond

- There is a danger that we become content with the appearance of righteousness and worship and ignore the corruption and barrenness of our spiritual lives
- There is nothing that faith and forgiveness in Christ cannot overcome

The Gospel of Mark

5

I have left little time to close, so let us consider one important application as we reflect and respond on this passage. Like the fig and temple, there is a danger that we become content with the appearance of righteousness and worship and ignore the corruption and barrenness of our spiritual lives. While we give the appearance of spiritual fruitfulness, our roots are withered and there is no life in our worship. And over time our struggle grows weak and we become content with just pretending that we are spiritually strong.

Brothers and sisters, if you find yourself discouraged this morning or if you find yourself hopeless, take heart. The one who replaced the corruption and emptiness of the temple worship can do the same in you. When you have reached the end of your own strength and ability, Jesus is there saying "Have faith in God and trust me." In faith and prayer ask him to move the mountain of

trouble that is in your heart, and He will answer you. There is nothing that faith and forgiveness in Christ cannot overcome.

If this morning you find yourself hearing this message and do not understand what it means to trust Christ for salvation, take heart. The same Jesus that went to the cross has made a way for you. He can replace the corruption of sin and emptiness of your heart with a righteousness and fullness not your own. When you've reached the end of your attempts to save yourself, Jesus is there saying "Have faith in God and trust me." In faith and prayer repent of the mountain of sin that is in your heart, and He will forgive you. There is nothing that faith and forgiveness in Christ cannot overcome.

[closing prayer]

"Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."