

• *The last week of Jesus' earthly life*

Jesus now declares Himself to be the king of Israel

Jesus finds Israel to be without fruitfulness towards God

Jesus cleanses the temple

In the story being told in Mark's Gospel it is now Sunday. Jesus has six more days to live as a man on planet earth. Mark 11:1 to 15:47 will tell the story of this last week of Jesus' earthly life.

Jesus now declares Himself to be the king of Israel, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.^{□1}

What is happening here? Is it that Jesus has made arrangements for a colt to be borrowed? Or is it that Jesus has supernatural knowledge given to Him by the Father, and that a believer in the village ahead has been instructed by the Father to have a colt ready? On the **Sunday** the disciples are to go into the village ahead ^{□1}. They will find a colt and are to bring the animal back. If anyone asks questions they must say 'The Lord has need of it'^{□2}. Jesus promises to return it! It happens as Jesus says^{□3} (11:4-6). They put their spare clothes on the animal^{□4} and as Jesus rides into Jerusalem they throw clothing and branches for Him to ride over^{□5}. The common people were crying out 'Hosanna' which strictly means 'Please save!' but came to have the sense of 'Praise God'. They shouted out their conviction that Jesus was coming in the name of God, that He was bringing God's kingdom, that He was the promised Son of David ^{□6}. He came to the temple and stayed there looking around at what was happening in the temple area^{□7}. It was being used commercially for small-time business people who found it convenient to use the temple as a means of selling their goods. But for the moment Jesus did nothing. He observed before He acted. At the same time He was letting it be well-known that He was in Jerusalem ^{□8}.

Jesus finds Israel to be without fruitfulness towards God^{□1}. At the very heart of the nation's religion was the temple. On the **Monday** morning, as Jesus goes towards the temple He is hungry. He passes a fig tree which has plenty of leaves. Although it is not the season for figs the abundant foliage gives the impression that figs will be found on it. But the abundant foliage is misleading. Jesus curses the fig tree.

It is an unusual story but is to be understood as a kind of acted miraculous parable. Jesus is approaching the temple. Israel makes great claims for its religious life. There is an abundance of religious 'foliage'; Israel claims to be God's people representing Him in God's world. Actually Jesus knows He is about to find no fruitfulness there. Despite all of its religious claims He knows that no life of faith will be found when He gets to Jerusalem.

The acted miraculous parable is for the sake of the disciples. Jesus wants them to know that a great display of religion without any fruitfulness towards God, actually comes under God's curse.

Jesus cleanses the temple. He had done the same thing before three years previously. Jesus had already seen the temple. On the Monday He knows what He must do. He forcibly ejects the small-time businessmen who had been using the temple as their market-place.^{□1}

He now had a lot of support. He was being treated as Israel's Messiah and, for the moment, could do anything He wanted in the temple. He insisted that the heart of the believer's life was not corrupt business but prayer.

One might imagine that the religious leaders of Israel would be happy to have their temple cleansed in this way, but actually this was one more incident that made them intensify their efforts to get rid of Jesus.^{□1} After the day's activity Jesus goes back out of the city again. He is avoiding being taken by the Jewish leaders. It is more difficult to arrest Him when He is staying with the pilgrims camping outside the city. Actually He is staying at a

□1 11:1-11

□1 11:2

□2 11:3
□3 11:4-6
□4 11:7a
□5 11:7b-8

□6 11:9-10

□7 11:11
□8 11:11

□1 11:12-14

□1 11:15-16

□2 11:17

□1 11:18

Principles of Faith

1. Hold on to the faithfulness of God

2. Pray within the limit of your assurance.

house in Bethany (as we know from John's Gospel). He cannot easily be taken prisoner by the Jewish authorities.

The next day, **Tuesday**, Jesus is entering the city again when the disciples notice 'the withered fig-tree'. ¹ Jesus uses the occasion to teach some principles about faith.

1. **Hold on to the faithfulness of God.** Verse 22 is often translated 'Have faith in God' but another translation is 'Hold the faithfulness of God'. A word-by-word translation is: 'Have (or hold) the faith (or faithfulness) of God'. We may translate it 'Hold to the faithfulness of God'. Actually it all amounts to the same thing. To have faith in God and to hold to the faithfulness of God are exactly the same. Yet I think the translation I have suggested brings out the idea better. Faith is not working up some quality in ourselves. 'You must have faith', people say, and of course they are right. But it sounds as if it is some virtue or quality that we have got to have. No, faith is not some virtue that is found in us. Faith is seeing that God is faithful. Faith is simply seeing that God will keep His word. We can utterly depend upon Him to keep utterly and totally to anything that He has promised. Faith is holding to the faithfulness of God.

2. **Pray within the limit of your assurance.** Verse 23 is a very important verse. Let us look at it carefully. It has in it the word 'If'.

Half of the church seems to neglect Mark 11:23, but the other half of the church seems to misuse it and treat it as a kind of technique that we can use to get anything from God.

But Mark 11:23 is not a technique for naming and claiming anything we want from God. Those who teach this way cannot in fact name and claim anything they want. They cannot get the resurrection body or the new heavens and new earth. They cannot get all their wishes immediately and some of their wishes they do not ever get. 'Naming and claiming' often uses this verse in an exaggerated way which is not true to experience and not true to what this verse actually says.

What Mark 11:23 says is 'If...'. *That is the important word: 'If'. 'If anyone says to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea" and he does not doubt but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done...'*. The important word is 'If'. If anyone is able to speak and say 'Be moved' and if he does not doubt.

There are certain times in our life when we know God's will and are able to pray about a certain matter in a very confident way. It is not always like this. Not all praying has this total assurance of faith in it. Sometimes we pray without a total knowledge of what God's will is. But **if** we find that we are able to pray with an absolute assurance of what is about to happen – that prayer will be answered.

11:20-21



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