

Discussion Notes
Mark 11.1-26
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Jesus is on the way from Jericho to Jerusalem. This marks the beginning of Holy Week and his final days before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. This also brings us to the last third of the book of Mark. Mark spends one third of his text on Jesus' final seven days.

11.1-3

- Jesus was not opposed to walking, as we see in most of his ministry. His entrance to Jerusalem was meant to be a living parable. Riding into the capital like royalty, Jesus was making a statement.
- Royalty could commandeer animals as they pleased in that day. Jesus, of course, plans on it being returned.
- Jesus does not ride in on a chariot or a horse. The religious establishment or the leaders of the temple do not welcome him. He enters at the praise of the people on a humble donkey.

11.4-7

- The bystanders letting the donkey go may be a hint at their recognition of Jesus' authority and kingship.
- Passover was the major festival in Jerusalem. The city would swell by the thousands. Amongst the heightened festival excitement, Jesus plans on making a notable entrance.
- When a king would ride into Jerusalem, typically he would head directly to the Temple to make a sacrifice. Jesus will head to the Temple also, but his activity there is not expected.

11.8-11

- The shouts of the people are from Psalm 118.25 "Please save us! Bless the one who comes to save!" This Psalm was popular at Passover. The people's ideas about what Jesus was there to do (bring about an Exodus from the Romans?) was in many people's minds. Jesus comes to bring a different kind of liberation.
- The priests fail to welcome Jesus as he enters the city, so the people speak the words of Psalm 118. For the religious leaders to miss the entrance of royalty to the city would be considered treason.
- Jesus goes to the temple as expected but it was late so he leaves the city again. It is interesting that he doesn't stay in the city. Royalty would normally be offered lodging. Perhaps it is unsafe for Jesus to stay in the city, perhaps he is not welcome by the right kind of people.

11.12-14

- The cursing of the fig tree is an odd event for anyone not familiar with the Old Testament or Jewish tradition. This, like the ride into Jerusalem, is another living parable.
- The story has echoes of Micah 7.1.
- The tree has leaves but no fruit. It essentially represents a broken Israel. It make look good on the outside (an functional priesthood, a completed Temple) but there is no fruit. The tree is to be tested.
- God's measurement is not about outer look but inner fruit.

11.15-17

- Jesus heads to the Temple, the central focus of his ministry while in Jerusalem, and instead of offering a sacrifice an subjecting himself to regular practices, trashes the outer court.
- This outer court was the court where gentiles would gather to worship. They were only permitted this far, but the area designated to them was full of people trying to turn a profit. It was busy with unrighteous activity.
- Jesus is enraged that this activity is blocking non-Jewish worship of God. It is an obvious outburst given his consistent outreaching to non-Jews with the good news of God's kingdom.

11.18-21

- The management aren't happy about Jesus' actions and begin to plot his death. The countdown to cross begins.
- Upon Jesus' temple trashing he leaves the city, sleeps the night, and returns again, passing the fig tree he had cursed the day before..
- The tree is dead, as Peter notes. It is now revealed as it truly is. No fruit, no purpose, no life.

11.22-24

- This may seem an exclusive statement from the entry to Jerusalem and the Temple clearing, but it is not. Some have grossly misinterpreted this text over the years, but seeing it in it's context clears it up completely.
- Jesus was outside of the city when he made this statement and many believe he was referring to the Temple mount – the hill the Temple was built on. As Jesus clash with the religious elite was immanent, this was a little aside to his disciples as he considered their future, one that would put them at odds with Jerusalem's religious leadership also.
- This was an encouragement to his disciples that the old was on it's way out and new was to come. They need to trust that God will be with them and give them all they need to persevere with the Gospel in the face of grave opposition.

11.25-26

- This final instruction was to ground Jesus' disciples in the *way* he had been leading them in. Though he was opposing the leadership and making grand statements the way of the new Kingdom was not of posturing and pride. Jesus will bring in a new Kingdom by sacrifice and love. When the disciples lead in the new Kingdom they must always realize *what* this new Kingdom is all about: grace, forgiveness and love.

Discussion Questions

- What lessons can we take from the living parable of the fig tree?
- What lessons can we take from the clearing of the Temple?
- Does Jesus' opposition to the religious leadership provide precedent for how we deal with those who lead unjustly? How do we balance this with Jesus words about forgiveness and humble actions?