LESSON *nine*

ONE LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Mark 11:1–33

Getting Started

If you knew you had less than a week to live, what would you do?

Setting the Stage

Jesus and His disciples were making their way up the 3,500-foot incline from Jericho to Jerusalem. Their pace was unhurried but purposeful. The culmination of Jesus' ministry, and God's plan of salvation, was rapidly approaching. The fate that awaited Jesus in Jerusalem was horrific but absolutely essential. How fully the disciples understood that fate is open to debate. Jesus had predicted His suffering and death to them three times already, but they still didn't fully grasp the magnitude of what was about to happen.

Still, they followed Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. As they neared the city, they were interrupted in their journey by a blind man named Bartimaeus who begged for Jesus to heal him. Jesus took pity on the man and restored his sight. During the most intense time of His life, Jesus paused one last time to minister to someone in need.

The travelers stopped in the village of Bethany, which was Jesus' "second home." The village, located at the top of the Mount of Olives, offered a respite from the crowds and bustle of Jerusalem. From their perch in Bethany, Jesus and His disciples could look out over the valley at the capital city of Israel. Bethany was the staging area for the final push into Jerusalem.

The narrative pace of the Gospel of Mark changes in the eleventh chapter. If you look back at Mark 1, you will see the author begins his book with Jesus' baptism, which took place when Jesus was well into His adult years. The first ten chapters cover roughly two years of Jesus' public ministry. The last six chapters cover *seven days*. Mark gives great focus and emphasis to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Exploring the Text

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem As King (Mark 11:1–11)

[1] Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany,
at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; [2] and He said

to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. [3] And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."

[4] So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. [5] But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

[6] And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. [7] Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. [8] And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. [9] Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'
[10] Blessed is the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!"

[11] And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

---

1. Read Exodus 12:37–51. Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Why was the Passover celebration especially relevant in light of what Jesus was preparing to do (see Mark 10:32–34)?

2. Read Zechariah 9:9, which was considered a Messianic prophecy. Why did the crowd respond toward Jesus as they did (see Mark 11:8–10)?

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree (Mark 11:12–14)

[12] Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. [13] And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. [14] In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."

And His disciples heard it.

3. Read Luke 13:6–9. The fig tree represented Israel (see Hosea 9:10). Spiritually speaking, Israel appeared to be fruitful, but it was not. What message was Jesus sending to the people of Israel by cursing the fig tree (see Mark 11:14)?

4. Look at Mark 11:20–21. What impact did this brief incident have on Jesus' disciples?

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts (Mark 11:15–26)

15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and
began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and
overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those
who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares
through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not
written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'?
But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they
might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were
astonished at His teaching. 19 When evening had come, He went out
of the city.

20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree
dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him,
"Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For
assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed
and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes
that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.
24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray,
believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against
anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you
your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father
in heaven forgive your trespasses."

5. Jesus had been to the temple and had encountered the money changers many times before. Why do you think He chose this time to disrupt their dealings?

6. What key teachings on prayer did Jesus emphasize in this passage (see verses 23–26)?

The Authority of Jesus Questioned (Mark 11:27–33)

27 Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the
temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him.
28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these
things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one
question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do
these things: 30 The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from
men? Answer Me."

31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From
heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But if we
say, 'From men' "—they feared the people, for all counted John to
have been a prophet indeed. 33 So they answered and said to Jesus,
"We do not know."

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by
what authority I do these things."

7. What do you think the Jewish religious leaders would have done if Jesus had told them His authority came from God? What do you think they would have done if He had told them His authority came from Himself (see verse 33)?

8. Based on this passage, what conclusions can you draw regarding the motives of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders?

Reviewing the Story

Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, the way a king might enter a city. The people of Israel, who desperately wanted a Jewish king, were happy to welcome him. Jesus reminded his disciples that his power extended far beyond earthly realms by cursing a fig tree, which subsequently withered and died. He exercised his spiritual authority by driving the money changers from the temple. Yet the chief priests, scribes, and elders still demanded to know the source of Jesus' authority. Jesus refused to indulge their nonsensical request. He silenced them with a single question.

9. "Hosanna!" means "Save!" By shouting this, what do you think the crowd in Jerusalem anticipated Jesus would do (see Mark 11:9–10)?

10. How would you respond to someone who suggested Jesus lost His temper with the fig tree (see Mark 11:13–14)?

11. How might doubt hinder a person's prayers? How might unforgiveness impact a person's prayers (see Mark 11:22–26)?

12. Why do you think the Jewish religious leaders continued to challenge Jesus even though He made them look foolish and hypocritical every time?

Applying the Message

13. Who do you need to forgive so you can fully experience God's forgiveness?

14. Based on Jesus' words in Mark 11:23–24, what bold prayer requests will you take to God this week?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus' encounter with the money changers in the temple is so startling, and so inspiring, that it should cause us to reevaluate not only Jesus' character but also our own Christlikeness. Jesus was not a man prone to outbursts. His gentle and loving nature attracted people to Him. Powerful religious leaders sought an audience with Him. So did the outcasts of society. He welcomed children into His presence. He brought joy and healing to countless people.

His moral courage was just as striking as His kindness. Jesus was afraid of no one. He never backed down from a confrontation, but neither did He seek one out. He was a person of integrity. He knew when anger was appropriate and when it was counterproductive. He endured constant accusations from the Pharisees but never responded with malice. He countered their accusations and silenced them with His wisdom and reliance on God's Word.

Yet Jesus didn't hesitate to act when the time came to take a bold stand against those in the temple who were perverting God's Word and making it difficult for others to worship. He made His point memorably . . . even though He knew that He would be criticized and vilified for His actions.

Jesus' moral courage calls for an aggressive agenda to your faith. With Jesus living in you, you can apply an aggressive spirit toward things that are worth conquering. You can use that spirit to learn how to express what is in your heart about the injustices of the world. You won't be afraid to stand up and be counted when it is your turn. You will love to surprise children,

the elderly, and disadvantaged people with a strength that protects and encourages. You will use your strength as a Christian to speak and act on behalf of righteousness and truth.

Journaling Your Response

What might happen if you were more courageous in your faith?