

Gospel of Mark 20; Chapter 11, Verses 11 - 33: - Jesus in Jerusalem -

I have omitted Mark chapter 10 verse 32 to chapter 11, verse 10 as we have already looked at these passages in the run up to Easter in 2021. See "On the Way to Jerusalem" on the 10th and 17th of March and the study for Palm Sunday on the 24th of March 2021 (at <http://www.ctrch.org.uk/lent2021/lent2021.html>)

Chapter 11, verse 11:- gives a pause between the events of that first Palm Sunday and those of the following week. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke the cleansing of the Temple takes place on the same day as the entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem. Here in the Gospel of Mark the cleansing of the Temple deliberately comes between the cursing of the fig tree in verses 12 - 14 and the result of that curse in verses 20 - 25.

Verses 12 – 14:- The Lord Jesus had stayed the night in Bethany in the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (see the Gospel of John, chapter 12, verses 1 and the following verses). The fig tree was unseasonal in that it was fully leaved. Normally the leaves would just have been breaking at Passover time. However when there was an abundance of leaves it would be expected that there would be some fruit.

Read the parable of the fig tree in Luke's Gospel chapter 13, verses 6 - 9. This was told when the ministry of Jesus had still one more year in which the 'fig tree of Israel' still had the possibility of bearing fruit.

If we take the picture of the fig tree representing the worship and ceremonial of the Temple in Jerusalem, here in the Gospel of Mark we find the Lord Jesus Christ, in the last week of his earthly ministry, seemingly declaring an end to the 'dressed up' ceremonial of the Temple worship.

Verses 15 – 19:- Mark, in editing his Gospel seems to have deliberately placed the 'Cleansing of the Temple' in between the 'Cursing of the Fig Tree' (verse 14) and its result (verse 20). Notice that the action described in these verses took place in the outer court of the Temple. There is nothing in any of the Gospel narratives to suggest that the Lord Jesus interfered in any way with the Temple worship or ceremonies. Mark makes the reason for the action of the Lord Jesus very clear "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations . . . But you have made it a den of robbers.*" The words "*for all nations*" do not appear in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The reason for the anger of the Lord Jesus is here shown as the deliberate exclusion of the Gentiles from the space which should have been set aside for them. They were being excluded from the possibility of worship of the Lord God.

Verse 19 again helps with the timing of the events of the last week of ministry.

Verses 20 – 25 (26):- The Lord Jesus uses the example of the fig tree for teaching on the power and effectiveness of prayer. In many ways the example of the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ in Gethsemane (Mark 14 verse 36) is, for me, better than the one in these verses. If we are not careful it is easy to blame oneself or others for 'lack of faith' when our prayer is not answered as we wish. There must always be the condition, spoken or unspoken "*not what I will, but what thou wilt*". As in the Lord's Prayer – *Thy will be done*! The teaching on the importance of a forgiving spirit in verses 25 and 26 (in some versions) is important. Again it is part of the Lord's Prayer and familiar to us all.

Verses 27 – 33:- These closing verses of chapter 11 and on into chapter 12 are a record of the final controversies of the Lord Jesus with the Jewish leaders. The 'chief priests' would have been Caiaphas and his father-in-law Annas (see the Gospel of John, chapter 18, verses 12 - 14). the question asked of the Lord Jesus is a double one - "*By what kind of authority are you doing these things?*" and "*who gave you this authority to do them?*". This authority shown by the Lord Jesus was evident from the beginning of his ministry (see Mark chapter 1, verses 22 and 27). The officials in confronting the Lord Jesus were referring to the 'cleansing of the Temple' - compare with the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 16 – 18. In Jewish teaching it was said that the temple could only be cleansed by the Sanhedrin (cleansing and rededication after defilement); by a prophet (especially the return of Elijah before the Last Day) or the Messiah (see Malachi chapter 3, verses 1 - 4). The answer of The Lord Jesus was to ask them a question in return. In effect he asked "*From where did John the Baptist get his authority?*". There was obviously a difference of opinion between the people and the priestly leadership! The people accepted the authority of John the baptist as being from heaven. If the priests agreed with it then the Lord Jesus could ask "*Then why did you not believe him?*". If they said "*From men.*" then there could have been a riot! They gave the only reply possible - "*We do not know*". Once again, confronted with an important decision the religious leadership back off. Then, as for many now, the feeling was that it was easier to make no decision, than to make the wrong one and have to acknowledge that they got it wrong!