

Mark

Chapter Eleven

Introduction

The opening verses of Mark Eleven give you the impression that Israel was ready for the coming of Jesus. The people openly hailed Him as their prophesied King. They spoke of Jesus' saving them, shouting "Hosanna" - "Save now." They anticipated that Jesus would establish the kingdom promised in the Old Testament to King David.

As you read on you quickly see that Israel was not really ready at all for the coming of their King. The Temple had become a place of merchandise, not ministry, and the spiritual leaders were lovers of self.

They were not really ready at all for Jesus! Outwardly there was great activity; but inwardly and spiritually there was great apathy and apostasy.

Jesus comes upon a fig tree:

Mark 11:13 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.

The fig tree had abundant leaves, with the promise of luscious fruit, but upon examination it was fruitless.

The fruitless fig tree is Israel. Outwardly there was the promise of fruit, as they hailed Jesus as David's Son, their Messiah. But inwardly and spiritually they were barren of fruit.

You and I are people waiting for our King to come back. At first glance, we seem to be ready. We have an abundance of "leaves" in terms of our outward activities. Whether or not we are truly fruitful does not depend upon our leaves, however. It depends upon Jesus' looking *beneath* our leaves, below the surface. Today we want to

see ourselves as trees that He has come to examine for lush, satisfying fruit.

#1 When Their King Came To His Temple,
Beneath Their Leaves Israel Was Unfruitful
(11:1-19 & 27-33)

The time predestined in eternity past by His Father had arrived for Jesus to enter Jerusalem as King:

Mark 11:1 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples;

Mark 11:2 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.

Mark 11:3 "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."

The "colt" spoken of is a donkey. We would prefer, because of our own culture, that Jesus would have ridden a horse into Jerusalem! In Israel kings used donkeys. King's David and Solomon rode donkeys.¹ More importantly, Zechariah had prophesied that Israel's Messiah would enter Jerusalem this way:

Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

The Lord's method for getting this donkey was interesting:

Mark 11:4 So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it.

Mark 11:5 But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

Mark 11:6 And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.

I wonder what the disciples thought about the Lord's method? The people in this region were familiar and supportive of Jesus...But still it required courage and faith to carry out this command!

Jesus enters Jerusalem:

Mark 11:7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it.

¹1 Kings 1:33

Mark 11:8 And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Mark 11:9 Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

Mark 11:10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

In every sense, Jesus is being hailed as the prophesied Messiah, the King of Israel. He was riding the appropriate donkey; the people were calling upon Him to "Save now," which is the meaning of "Hosanna." They openly proclaimed Him as the One who would establish "the kingdom" promised to "David."

But, for all this excitement, Israel was not really ready at all for the coming of Jesus to Jerusalem:

Mark 11:11 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.

Jesus "looked around at all things." He surveyed Jerusalem; He surveyed the Temple. In doing so He was taking a spiritual survey of the nation. What He saw was that the Temple had become a place of merchandise rather than ministry, and the spiritual leaders were lovers of self.

To illustrate what He saw from His survey, He used a fig tree they came across the next day on their way back to Jerusalem:

Mark 11:12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.

Mark 11:13 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.

Mark 11:14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

Jesus is using the fruitless fig tree as a parable. The nation of Israel was compared to a fig tree in the Old Testament:

Hosea 9:10 "I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season..."

Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, and Isaiah all likened Israel to the fig tree. Too often, though, Israel was a fruitless fig tree:

Jeremiah 8:13 "I will surely consume them," says the LORD. "No grapes shall be on the vine, Nor figs on the fig tree, And the leaf shall fade; And the things I have given them shall pass away from them."

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, even though they hailed Him as King, Israel was not really ready at all to receive Him. They were spiritually fruitless. The leafy fig tree was a perfect representation. Outwardly, there was a great show of health, a promise of much fruit underneath; but, inwardly, there was no life, no fruit.

The Temple had become a place of merchandise rather than ministry:

Mark 11:15 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.

Mark 11:16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

Mark 11:17 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.'"

Jesus cleansed the Temple twice - once at the beginning of His public ministry, and now again at the end. Thousands of pilgrims came to the Temple to present their offerings during Passover. Their offerings had to be inspected by the priests. The doves they brought to sacrifice might be found unacceptable; or, perhaps, the money they wanted to offer was not in the proper currency. The priests would then send them to the dove salesmen or the money changers - who made an exorbitant profit, taking advantage of the weary pilgrims.

Merchandising had replaced ministry in God's Temple. At Passover the Jews were more interested in profit than in prophecy. They had an opportunity to minister to the Jewish pilgrims, but they preferred to manipulate them.

They also had an opportunity to missionize Gentiles who would visit Jerusalem. God saw the Temple as a "house of prayer for all nations." What impression of God would a Gentile get from visiting the Temple? The Jews wanted only to profit from them, not pray for them.

We must struggle with merchandising in the Church today. It is all too easy for merchandising to replace ministry in the Church...

The spiritual leaders were lovers of self:

Mark 11:18 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.

Mark 11:19 When evening had come, He went out of the city.

When you fear men rather than God, you are a lover of self - caring about what others think of you and how you can maintain your position over them. Skip down to verse twenty-seven and you see more of this:

Mark 11:27 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.

Mark 11:28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

Mark 11:29 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:

Mark 11:30 "The baptism of John; was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me."

Mark 11:31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

Mark 11:32 "But if we say, 'From men' "; they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.

Jesus' question exposed their true motives. Lovers of self, they were lording over the people, not leading them. Any answer they gave would reveal them as too spiritually bankrupt to lovingly lead God's people.

Mark 11:33 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."

They gave a safe answer, again showing their self centeredness. They should have answered the question, allowing the words of Jesus to expose their inward sin and corruption. Like the fruitless fig tree, they were dry at the roots.

Leaders who are lovers of self cannot help prepare people for the coming of the Lord. Leaders ought to take their example from John the Baptist, who said he was a voice for God, pointed only to Jesus, and wished to decrease in the eyes of men so that Jesus could fill their vision.

Israel was the fruitless fig tree. It wasn't immediately visible but Jesus could see it. Beneath their activities there was apathy and apostasy. He longed to enjoy their fruit, but He was disappointed.

What was to become of Israel? Jesus will use another parable in chapter twelve. Israel will be compared to a vineyard whose vinedressers refuse to give the fruit that is owed to its true owner. Applying the lesson, Jesus said,

Mark 12:9 "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others."

The owner of the vineyard is God; the vinedressers are the nation of Israel. God would "destroy" Israel. This was fulfilled in 70A.D. when the Roman legions overthrew Jerusalem and burned the Temple to the ground.

God is, however, not through with Israel! Although He destroyed the Temple, He did not destroy the nation. He is disciplining the nation. Romans Chapter Eleven, and many other New Testament passages, make it clear that God is still dealing with the nation of Israel in discipline. During this period of time that God is disciplining Israel, He says that He will "give the vineyard to others." You and I, and all those through the centuries who comprise the Church, are the "others"!

The Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed; but God would not be without a temple on earth:

1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

You are God's temple on earth - individually and corporately. One day Jesus is coming for His temple, to bring you to heaven:

John 14:2 "...I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

There is going to be a Rapture. The Rapture is the catching away to heaven of all the saints of the Church Age in which we live,

between the resurrection and the return of Jesus. You can't know the exact date of the Rapture of the Church. It is always imminent.

Since all of this is true,

#2 When Your King Comes For His Temple,
Beneath Your Leaves You Want To Be Fruitful
(11:20-26)

Remember the lesson of the fig tree? Jesus went to it looking for fruit. Now He comes to you looking for fruit. Outwardly, you may appear spiritual. You may have a lot of leaves! But what's underneath? Jesus sees underneath. Your secret prayer life reveals whether you are fruitful or fruitless. For example, in your secret prayer life, Jesus sees whether or not you bear the fruit of *faith* and the fruit of *forgiveness*.

Bearing the fruit of Faith:

Mark 11:20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

Mark 11:21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

Mark 11:22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God.

"Have faith in God." Believe and you won't be barren. Faith is a fruit Jesus is delighted with when He rustles your leaves looking for it!

Jesus gives you a fantastic look at the potential fruitfulness of faith:

Mark 11:23 "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.

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

We shouldn't try to minimize what Jesus says about prayer in these verses. At the same time we must qualify what He says by what the Bible says elsewhere and overall concerning prayer. After all, none of these disciples ever commanded the Mount of Olives to

be cast into the Dead Sea! Prayer must always be in the will of God, as Jesus Himself emphasized many times.

Think of these verses in their context. Peter asked Jesus about the fruitless fig tree. Jesus began to talk about prayer! Perhaps it has something to do with His activity of looking for fruit by disturbing the leaves to see what is really underneath. When trials come upon us, perhaps it's really only Jesus disturbing our leaves to see what is going on beneath them. Faith is a fruit that can ripen during our trials. Jesus finds it to be a particularly sweet and satisfying fruit.

Bring forth the fruit of faith when the Lord comes looking for it.

Bearing the fruit of Forgiveness:

Mark 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

Mark 11:26 "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Jesus sees whether you pray with forgiveness towards those who have offended you. Like the fig tree, you may outwardly appear healthy. But if the fruit of forgiveness is absent, it's only a matter of time until you wither away. Unforgiveness will block the flow of God's Spirit - the life-giving moisture you need to flourish.

There are a lot of misconceptions about forgiveness. There is teaching that you must forgive yourself; there is another teaching says or you must forgive God. These are blasphemies!

Ephesians 4:32 tells you to "...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." God's forgiveness for you in Jesus is to be our model. God's forgiveness in Jesus is *not* unconditional; it is conditioned upon repentance and faith in Jesus. God is ready and willing to forgive everyone; He actually forgives only those who repent of their sins and personally trust Jesus to save them for eternity.

You are to be ready and willing to forgive those who offend you. Be ready and willing to be restored to fellowship with them. Don't hold grudges, or gloat at their sins and setbacks, or be glad at bad

news about them. Being ready and willing to forgive others keeps you in fellowship with them.

It also keeps you in fellowship with God! Jesus says that if you aren't ready to forgive others, it will hinder your fellowship with your Father - because He is their Father, too.

The Lord sees you in prayer. He knows if the lush fruit of forgiveness is being produced in secret. He will often come looking for it.

Faith and forgiveness are two of the fruits Jesus is looking for. Let Him be refreshed and satisfied by finding them growing beneath your leafy exterior.

Conclusion

Jesus spoke of a fruitless fig tree on another occasion. Turn with me to Luke Chapter Thirteen.

Luke 13:6 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

Luke 13:7 "Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?'

Luke 13:8 "But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.

Luke 13:9 'And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

Here is another fruitless fig tree. In its context, it is also a symbol of Israel. This fig tree was tended, cultivated, and watered for three years by its vinedresser, but still bore no fruit. Israel had been tended, cultivated, and watered by her vinedresser - Jesus Christ - for the three years of His public ministry. Still they bore no fruit.

More importantly for us, the vinedresser - Jesus - tells exactly how He goes about encouraging fruitfulness in a fruitless fig tree. He will do two things to the fruitless tree - He will dig it, and He will dung it!

Jesus will *dig* the fruitless tree:

He will expose the roots to find out what is wrong. As in Mark Eleven, there was a problem with the roots. That's where your dryness always begins - in the secret places of your heart. Dryness there leads to barrenness, regardless the show of leaves.

Then, Jesus will *dung* the fruitless tree:

The "manure" He speaks of is *dung*. I like that word better because it leads me to Philippians 3:8, which says,

Philippians 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Compared to the Lord, and my relationship with Him, everything in this world is a pile of dung. My fruitfulness depends on the extent to which I find the world and all that it offers me to be dung.

Israel seemed ready for the coming of their King to His Temple. They weren't.

The Church seems ready for the coming of our King for His Temple - to take us to heaven in the Rapture. Are we? We need to let Him look beneath the leaves!

If we aren't ready, if we are all leaves and no fruit, we need only let Jesus *dig* us and *dung* us, and fruit will once again begin to ripen - fruit that is His delight to taste.