

The Final Journey



SABBATH AFTERNOON

TO JERUSALEM. Through the past several chapters of Mark, Jesus has been on a long, meandering journey. Now Mark tells us the goal of this trip south from Galilee: “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid” (*Mark 10:32, NIV*).

It is a dramatic scene: Jesus going on ahead, the disciples a step behind, wondering what is about to happen, and others in back of them feeling apprehensive. The last, climactic events are about to begin.

We have now come to the last seven days or so of Jesus’ earthly life. As do the other Gospel writers, Mark devotes disproportionate space to this short period, 6 of the 16 chapters that comprise his book. For Matthew, the numbers are 7 chapters out of 28; for Luke, 6 chapters out of 24; and for John, 10 chapters out of 21. The implications are clear: As important as the life and teachings of Jesus were, His death and resurrection were even more important.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we sometimes pray for the wrong things? What does it mean to live in light as opposed to darkness? Why did Jesus cleanse the temple a second time? Why did Christ curse the fig tree?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 10:32–11:25.*

Memory Text: “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mark 10:45, RSV*).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 21.*

Foolish Request *(Mark 10:32-45).*

After reading the entire selection for today, focus on verse 35. Considering all the miracles that they had seen Jesus already do, why was their request so “reasonable”? How do we, in our own way, make “reasonable” requests from God (*read also Matthew 17:20, Luke 1:37*) that are not answered as we think they should be?

As humans, we view the world from a very narrow perspective: our own. And no matter what light and truth we are given, no matter what we learn, we still filter it all through ourselves, through the very narrow and confined view of the world that we, as fallen beings, have. Thus, oftentimes we request things that we believe would be good for us and yet, in the grand scope of things, aren’t—though we are utterly convinced they are and God should give them to us immediately.

How did the request of James and John reveal their ignorance for what they were asking?

How does Christ’s response in Mark 10:42-45 expose their ignorance?

Even the disciples, after all this time with Jesus, revealed their blindness to the most important spiritual things. Christ’s words in verses 42-45 represent a radically different view of what leadership, power, and success mean. It’s a great example of how perverted our own views of the world are. No wonder, then, that like the disciples, we can pray for things that we think are good and needed when in the end we, as James and John, don’t know what we are asking for.

Are you still waiting for prayers that have yet to be answered? What are they, and how can you, by faith, believe that there’s a good reason (which you still can’t understand) why they aren’t answered as you wish?

Blind Bartimaeus (*Mark 10:46-52*).

Jesus was on His way up to Jerusalem, and Jericho was the last city or village He would pass through on His way there. His mind must have been filled with the events that the next few days would bring. He had come to the final week of His life, to the climax of His work that would decide the destiny of the world forever and the outcome of the long controversy with evil. But with so much to occupy His thoughts, He nevertheless took the time to help a blind beggar.

Study the encounter between Jesus and blind Bartimaeus (*Mark 10:46-52*). Notice what happened after Jesus healed him. How, in one sense, is this incident symbolic of what should be the experience of everyone who has experienced the saving power of Christ in their lives?

Numerous times, the Bible talks about those who don't know the Lord as walking in darkness (*John 8:12, Acts 26:18, Eph. 5:8, Col. 1:13, 1 Thess. 5:5, 1 Pet. 2:9, 1 John 1:6, 2:11*). The main thing about darkness, of course, is that there is no light. Those who move in darkness stumble, grope, fall, and even if they move ahead, they don't know which direction they are going in.

All this, though, changes when we come to Jesus, who is light. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (*1 John 1:5-7*).

These images, that of darkness and light, are metaphors, symbols depicting something else other than themselves. Darkness means spiritual ignorance, it means sin, hatred, prejudice, jealousy, greed, covetousness. Those who walk in darkness live without the saving knowledge of God, without understanding the reality of who God is and the love that He has for us. And just as light is the opposite of darkness in a literal sense, it's also the opposite in a spiritual sense, as well.

Before being saved by Christ, you lived in darkness (whether you knew it or not). After coming to Christ, you came to the light. Write down just what new things you "saw" after coming to the light. How did they change your life? Where would you be now if you had remained in the darkness?

The Triumphal Entry *(Mark 11:1-11)*.

The triumphal entry occurred on Sunday, one week before the Resurrection. Christians of various persuasions celebrate the day in various ways. For some, it is “Palm Sunday” and is marked by appropriate hymns, Scripture readings, and sermons. Seventh-day Adventists do not follow a liturgical year; that is, a worship calendar that designates each Sabbath through the year in terms of Scripture passages and sermons. However, we are keenly interested in the life of Jesus, and especially its closing scenes. Therefore, the events of the last Sunday of Jesus’ life provide material for deep contemplation.

How did Jesus go out of His way to draw attention to His entry into Jerusalem? *(Mark 11:1-11)*.

What was the significance of His riding on a colt and coming from the Mount of Olives? *(see Zech. 9:9)*.

Jesus could have come up to Jerusalem quietly, as He had before. But He chose to draw attention to Himself. He sent His disciples to obtain a colt, and He entered the city from the Mount of Olives. These acts were not lost on the crowd, who already were waiting for Him to act as the longed-for Messiah. Although Jesus would not act the part of political leader and deliverer that they hoped for, He was the Messiah. So, He deliberately entered the beloved city in the manner that the prophet Zechariah had foretold. And the crowd went wild!

“Hosanna. Gr. *hosanna*, a transliteration of the Aramaic *hoshar’na*, meaning ‘save, now’ or ‘save, I pray thee.’ . . . Here the expression may be considered a prayer to God that salvation may come to Israel through Messiah King.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 471.

What a start to the Passover week! But the same crowds who shouted “Hosanna!” and spread their garments in the way on Sunday by Friday were shouting: “Away with Him! Crucify Him!”

We all have spiritual highs and lows, times when we feel very enthusiastic about God and our faith and times when we are discouraged, filled with doubt, and barely hanging on. Like the crowd, we’re one minute praising God and the next turning away from Him. How do you work your way through these spiritual lows? What lessons have you learned from these times that you could share with someone who, perhaps, is going through a low time now? What Bible verses did you find especially helpful?

A Den of Thieves (*Mark 11:12-19*).

In the selection for today, read carefully verse 17, the Old Testament verse that Jesus quoted. What was the temple supposed to be? What had it become? What crucial lesson is in there for us, not only as individuals but as a church?

Just as Jesus had deliberately drawn attention to Himself by the manner of His entry into Jerusalem, so His first act in the city was certain to arouse the anger of the religious establishment. He publicly challenged the practices of those responsible for the conduct of worship, setting His authority over against theirs. This act of cleansing the temple put on display His role as Messiah, One whose authority surpassed all others.

In Jesus' time the priesthood and the temple were in the hands of the Sadducees. By controlling the temple services, the Sadducees gained great wealth. The pilgrims who came up to Jerusalem three times each year could not bring their sacrifices with them. Instead, they had to buy them in Jerusalem. The priests controlled this sale of animals. Furthermore, the animals could be bought only with using the currency of the temple, so the pilgrims had first to change their money into the temple coinage and then purchase their animals for sacrifice. On both transactions—the money changing and sale of animals—the temple authorities benefited handsomely.

In these ways the temple worship had become corrupted. What should have been a house of prayer for all nations had deteriorated into a money-making scheme that exploited the common people and made the religious leaders rich. No wonder Jesus burned with righteous anger. Words were not enough: He drove out the animals and overturned the tables of the money changers. But by so doing, He sealed His doom. There could be no way now for the religious leaders to tolerate Him any longer. He had touched their wallets, and they would not rest until He was out of the way.

In what ways can we, either as individuals or as a church, turn away from our mission and instead focus only on improving our own lot, yet doing it all under the cover and veneer of truth?

Jesus Curses the Fig Tree *(Mark 11:12-14, 20-26 (see also Matt. 21:18-22, Luke 13:6-9)).*

Read the various accounts of this same story. The Life-Giver curses a tree, and then it withers and dies? Why does this seem so out of character for Jesus? What message, what warning, is in there by this action?

Jesus is hungry, sees the fig tree in the distance with leaves, is disappointed when He doesn't find any figs on it, and pronounces a curse upon it. The fig tree subsequently withers and dies. The writers weren't embarrassed by what Jesus did, nor did they try to conceal this apparently strange act. Instead, the Holy Spirit led them to include the account because it had vital teaching for the followers of Jesus to the end of time.

Every word and every deed of Jesus during the last week is freighted with significance. We have already studied His dramatic manner of entry on Sunday and the very public act of clearing the temple. This act was done, not for the general public but for the instruction of His disciples. It was probably early Monday morning when Jesus cursed the fig tree. But something had taken place the previous evening of great significance. Mark does not mention it, but Luke records that Jesus looked on the beloved city and wept over it, foretelling how Jerusalem would be surrounded by foreign armies and broken down (*Luke 19:41-44*). Then, the next morning, Jesus curses the fig tree. The connection should be obvious.

Notice what Jesus says to Peter (*Mark 11:22-26*) after he asks the Lord about the withered tree (*vs. 21*). How do these words fit in with what Peter said about the tree?

“Have faith in God,” Jesus says to them. That is, trust in the Lord, pray to Him, rest in His goodness, and forgive others their sins. Jesus points His followers away from earthly, fallen things to the great principles of truth. What earthly things and earthly principles are you clinging to that, in the end, will shrivel and die like the cursed fig tree? What does Jesus say here that can help you change?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law of the New Kingdom,” “Thy King Cometh,” “A Doomed People,” and “The Temple Cleansed Again,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 547–551, 569–600.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What evidence from this week’s lesson shows that Jesus’ sufferings and death were not just an accident of history?
- 2** How did Jesus directly challenge the religious establishment of His day? Think of other times when He did so, as well. Why do you think He did this? Are there ever times when we, too, should challenge the establishment? If so, when and under what circumstances, and how can we do it in the same spirit that Jesus did?
- 3** As a class, discuss Christ’s words in Mark 11:23-26. Contrast them with what we studied in Sunday’s lesson about prayers that God doesn’t answer as we wish. How can you reconcile the two ideas presented in these sections?
- 4** For those who are willing, talk about prayers asked in faith that have not been answered as hoped for or expected. How have they dealt with this test of faith? What can others in the class share that could help someone struggling with unanswered prayers?

Summary: Our study this week has the ring of high drama. For years Jesus has anticipated this time and prepared for it. With determination He leads the way up to Jerusalem, enters the city in the royal manner foretold by prophecy, and exercises the authority of the Messiah. For the disciples the few days of the week are filled with eager anticipation; for the nation, they are the last, fading opportunities to embrace their King.

Facing the Devil's Wrath

Asav Kumar Valluru

Asav teaches at an Adventist school in India. He was a Christian, but he found Adventists strange. They did not smoke or drink or attend festivals. In time, however, he realized that Adventists teach the truth, and he asked the school staff to hold meetings in his village not far from the school.

He invited his neighbors to come and offered a plot of land for the meetings. During the meetings Asav, his wife, her parents, and 15 other people took their stand for truth. They built a thatched-roof prayer shelter on the land Asav had donated.

Asav's wife operates a small grocery shop in front of their home. One night rats knocked over a kerosene lantern and started a fire that burned Asav's thatched-roof home and his father-in-law's home next door. The families escaped with their lives, but they lost everything.

Asav borrowed 10,000 rupees (about US\$225) to rebuild his home and grocery store and to restock the store. Ten days after they moved back in, a neighbor poured kerosene over himself and lit a match to commit suicide. The ensuing fire burned 30 homes, including Asav's home and store and the believers' prayer shelter. Once more Asav was homeless.

ADRA provided clothes, dishes, and blankets, and the government offered loans and materials to rebuild. Asav and his in-laws built cement houses, which would not burn. He invited the believers to worship in his home. Asav usually preaches, but teachers from the Adventist school help too.

Some villagers said that Asav's troubles came because Asav had left the Sunday church and had stolen away other members to join the Adventist church. Asav remained silent when accused and thought to himself, God will take care of their accusations. I will trust Him.

Soon after the second fire, Asav was asked to teach full time and on a permanent basis at the Adventist school. With his increased salary he has begun to repay part of the loans he took to rebuild.

Asav has started a Branch Sabbath School in a nearby village. He teaches the people songs and Bible stories; he preaches to them and prays for them. The response has been good, and today 20 people worship in that village on Sabbaths. "God has been good to me," Asav says, smiling.

Asav Kumar Valluru teaches Telugu at the Adventist school in Ibrahimpatnam, eastern India.