

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?

Key Text: *Mark 10:33, 34*

Teachers Aims:

1. To underline the relationship of Jesus' final days to His entire life.
2. To emphasize that Jesus' death was not merely an unfortunate accident.
3. To show the Messianic nature of Jesus' final acts.

Lesson Outline:

I. Spiritual Blindness (*Mark 10:52*).

- A. All of us suffer from degrees of spiritual blindness.
- B. Jesus gives us a glimpse of God we would otherwise never have been able to experience.
- C. Jesus' divinity helps us understand our own lives.

II. Triumphal Entry (*Matt. 21:4, 5; Mark 11:2-10*).

- A. Jesus emphasized His messiahship by fulfilling Old Testament prophecy.
- B. The cleansing of the temple was a claim of divine authority.
- C. As Messiah, Jesus came to reform religious practices that had become corrupt and meaningless.

III. Cursing the Fig Tree (*Mark 11:20-26*).

- A. The fig tree symbolizes useless religious beliefs and practices.
- B. Jesus draws Peter's attention to faith in God and eternity (*Mark 11:22-26*).
- C. Many of the things we regard as spiritually important may, like the fig tree, be fruitless.

Summary: While we may feel we are conducting our spiritual lives to the best of our ability, Jesus may have something better for us, just as He did for the people of His time. As such, it is our duty to listen to what God is saying to us and not merely to fall into spiritual/religious habits.

COMMENTARY

“Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem” (*Mark 10:32, NKJV*). So begins our study this week. For the third time (*Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32*) Jesus spoke of His journey to the cross. Each time the account became more grim. Yet, even as the crisis loomed ahead, He dealt with four situations: unholy ambition, intense faith, cross versus crown, and cursing and cleansing.

I. Unholy Ambition (*Mark 10:35-45*).

Earlier, Jesus had defined greatness in terms of servanthood and warned that those who seek to be first shall actually be last (*Mark 9:33-37*). Why, then, did James and John ask that Jesus let them sit on the right and left sides of His heavenly throne (*Mark 10:35-37*)? The request may have been sincere and earnest, but was it not ambi-

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?

tious and unacceptable? Christians should not demand that God do what they wish. Instead, they are to approach Him with the attitude of *Not my will, but thine be done*. As Jesus' cousins, James and John may have expected Him to grant their request. They were probably better off than others socially. (Their father was rich enough to employ servants; *see Mark 1:20*.) But they failed to realize one crucial principle: "In the kingdom of God, position is not gained through favoritism. It is not earned, nor is it received through an arbitrary bestowal. It is the result of character. The crown and the throne are the tokens of a condition attained; they are the tokens of self-conquest through our Lord Jesus Christ."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 549.

Jesus is our example. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*).

II. Intense Faith (*Mark 10:46-52*).

Jesus was going to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. A great multitude followed Him; but no crowd was ever too large to keep Him from noticing a cry of faith. This time the cry came from Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. Physically challenged, socially ostracized, poverty-stricken, and condemned as a sinner, he stopped the Lord of the universe on Main Street. That is the beauty and wonder of the gospel: Jesus cares for each individual. Neither His impending agony nor the noise of the crowd could keep Jesus from meeting the needs of one helpless person.

Bartimaeus was a beggar. He had nothing. It was his heart that conquered his circumstance. Faith requires neither eyes nor ears, feet nor hands. All it needs is a heart yearning to connect with its Maker.

"His persevering faith is rewarded. . . . All who feel their need of Christ as did blind Bartimaeus, and who will be as earnest and determined as he was, will, like him, receive the blessing which they crave."—Ellen G. White comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1111.

III. Cross Versus Crown (*Mark 11:1-12*).

The third situation in this week's study is a sensitive one: the crowd's eagerness to make Jesus the king, and His steadfastness to the Cross. The people, it seemed, had waited too long for this occasion. The Miracle Maker was certainly worth the coronation, for with a word He could conquer the Roman army and establish David's throne. They expressed their anticipation of such events with loud Hosannas (*vs. 9, NKJV*). Jesus, however, "remained true to the humble lot He had accepted. The burden of humanity He must bear until His life was given for the life of the world."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 571.

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?

Our concepts of Jesus are limited by our selfish desires. Jesus, however, had a wider view. The people expected Him to proclaim Himself as the Messiah of an earthly kingdom. But His concepts of the Messiah and His kingdom were totally different from their concepts. The bearing of the Cross must precede the exclamation of the crown.

IV. Cursing and Cleansing (*Mark 11:12-24*).

Mark 11:12-24 presents the fourth situation for our study: the cursing of a fruitless fig tree and the cleansing of the temple. Fruit

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Mark 10:32–11:26*

- ① When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, he made a scene: “ ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (*Mark 10:47, NIV*). In spite of the crowd’s scorn, he would not be silenced until he had Jesus’ attention. His persistence paid off; Jesus restored his sight. Scripture’s testimony is: “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 4:19, NIV*). What does this verse say to you?
- ② The triumphal entry (*Mark 11:1-11*) was one of the few times in His public ministry when Jesus allowed His followers to honor Him as the Messiah. The way and manner He entered Jerusalem were a fulfillment of prophecy. Yet, Jesus knew that before the week was over He’d be abandoned by His friends, condemned by His enemies, and crucified. What misconceptions about Jesus still persist among Christians and non-Christians? What can we do to set the record straight?
- ③ “Righteous indignation” is rarely both. What gave Jesus the right to disrupt the temple services by overturning the money changers’ tables? How is it different from the indignation we might use to overcome evil?
- ④ Ellen White said, “The cursing of the fig tree was an acted parable.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 582. She went on to say it was a warning against pride and self-sufficiency and the absence of humility, love, and benevolence. Spend a few moments reflecting on the wealth and talent represented by our church members and institutions around the world. Compare those with the simple kingdom principles demonstrated by members. NOTE: One isn’t good and the other bad; we need both to carry out Christ’s commission.

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?

bearing is a necessary part of life. At the personal level, one must be rooted in the soil of faith in order to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Believers must repent, worship their Maker, praise His name, and commit themselves to His service. If all we have, however, is the lush foliage of pretension, Jesus must step in! With justice on His lips, with a whip in His hands (*John 2:15*), the Lord must curse the barren fig tree and cleanse the temple from its unholy practices.

Where faith in God is deep and abiding, the fig tree shall bear

Witnessing

In our study this week the author speaks of the intense spiritual darkness that surrounds those who have not yet found Jesus Christ as their personal Friend and Companion. That imagery is then contrasted with the explosion of intense light that envelops the sinner at the time of spiritual conversion. The light leads the convert into a life modeled on Christ's own example.

Many of the miracles Jesus performed during His ministry here on earth involved improving the quality of life for the recipient. Jesus was deeply touched by human frailty and suffering brought on by the unrelenting bombardment of Satan and his evil angels. The Son of God was moved to heal the sick, the maimed, the crippled, and the demented. Physical, mental, and emotional well-being were often restored through the loving and compassionate nature of Christ.

Today, our church operates a vast health-care network around the globe. Countless lives have been touched and improved through this people-to-people ministry. Circling the globe are Seventh-day Adventist-owned and operated hospitals, clinics, medical launches, rehabilitation centers, and so forth, staffed by dedicated and caring Adventist health-care professionals. Thousands of men, women, and children from all cultures and backgrounds, believers and nonbelievers alike, daily experience the healing touch of this ministry located in their own community.

Ministering to the children of the world are the thousands of committed Adventist educators who serve in the church's educational system in order to make a difference in children's lives, one child at a time. These foot soldiers in Christ's army are dedicated in their determination to make a difference through the education of the mind, heart, and soul.

Health care and education: These are just two areas of the church in action, two areas of ministry where your contribution as a volunteer or paid employee would be invaluable. Your involvement will make a difference in the quality of life for those you reach. You will be a light bearer modeling Jesus, the Light of the world.

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?

fruit, and the temple shall become the dwelling place of God. Genuine faith has the power to open the doors of heaven, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: What would you do if you were told you had only 24 hours to live? Whom would you see? What kinds of regrets would you have about the life you've led up until that moment? Would your last 24 hours be similar to your other days? If that were so, what kind of statement of your life would that last day make? What if that last day is crammed with trying to make up for the other wasted or lost days of your life?

Thought Questions:

- ➊ Jesus' triumphant ride into Jerusalem was a fulfillment of Zechariah's Messianic prophecy. What other reasons did Jesus have for entering the city this way?
- ➋ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He was met by a crowd shouting Hosanna, urging Him to be their King. Yet, less than a week later, many from the same crowd were screaming to have Him crucified. What made these people change so quickly? Why is the human race so fickle?
- ➌ In Jewish tradition a king riding a colt symbolizes a peaceful coming, while riding a horse symbolizes war. Jesus the Conqueror of evil chose to ride a colt. Why? This same Jesus is also referred to as both a Lamb and a Lion. Explain this apparent contradiction of terms. How do they relate to Christ's character?

Application Questions:

- ➊ During Christ's last week, His mind was filled and worn with so much care. So many things were to occur in such a short time. Yet, on His way to Jerusalem, He took the time to stop and heal Bartimaeus. In today's busy world, what can we learn about priorities through Jesus' example during His last days?
- ➋ The final days of Jesus' life were filled with urgency. There was so much work to be done. In spite of this stressful atmosphere, Jesus maintained the ability to distinguish between what was urgent and what was important. He knew cleansing the temple was important. He knew that healing Bartimaeus was important. What is the difference between the urgent and the important? How does the urgent sometimes get in the way of accomplishing what we are meant to do?

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.