

Study of the Gospel of Mark

Chapter 11 (Part 2)

Background

In the first 19 verses of Mark 11 we reviewed the events of two days, Sunday and Monday of Holy Week. Now in 11:20 Mark begins his record of “Busy” Tuesday, a study which will take us all the way to Mark 14:9. Mark records more about this one day than any other day in the life of Jesus – even more than Maundy Thursday and Good Friday (combined!). Just as the Jewish people were preparing for the celebration of the Passover when they would kill the spotless lamb, so God is making preparations for the fulfillment of the Passover when the Lamb of God would be killed on the altar of the cross....

1. Read v.20-26. Peter calls attention to the result of Jesus’ words to the barren fig tree from the previous day (see v.12-14). Peter says that Jesus “cursed” the fig tree, and was amazed that it withered and died so quickly. While this is a miracle, it is unique among the miracles of Jesus. What was unique about it? (See the miracle harmony sheet for help.)

2. Jesus uses the amazement of His disciples to again teach His disciples a deeper lesson on the power of faith and the crippling effect of doubt and unbelief. How does doubt effect our prayers and our trust in God and His promises? (See James 1:5-8 for more on doubt and prayer.)

3. In what might seem an unexpected turn, Jesus also connects prayer to forgiveness. To “forgive” literally means to “let go” or “send away.” The Holy Spirit uses this term to describe what God has done with our sins (1 John 1:9). Having forgiven our sins (which are great) God expects us to show the same love and forgive the sins of those who sin against us (see Matthew 18:21-35). Jesus says that our attitude toward our neighbor is directly related to our prayers. In what way is this true?

4. Read Mark 11:27-33. This is the first of many attacks on Jesus this day. No doubt they are speaking specifically about Jesus' actions of driving out the businesses from the temple the day before (Mark 11:15-18). What does this reaction by the Jewish leaders tell us about their openness to the teaching of Jesus? What can we learn from the example of the Jewish leaders?

5. Instead of directly answering their question, Jesus asked them a question. While might seem like the action of a politician, we find the wisdom of our Savior at work in this question as He once again pointed them to the Gospel. If they answered Jesus' question correctly, they would at the same time answer their own question. How ?

6. Mark tells us that the Jews "reasoned" among themselves about how to answer Jesus' question. Luther had a great deal to say about the danger of reason in the spiritual realm. Luther writes:

"Let reason, the enemy of faith, stay far away from this matter. In temptations brought on by sin and death reason does not rest on the righteousness of faith, for it is completely ignorant of it; it rests on its own righteousness or, at best, on the righteousness of the Law."

The Holy Spirit warns us of this as well through the inspired words of the apostle Paul:

"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

What lesson can we learn about the role of our reason in relation to the Law and the Gospel messages of God to us?
