

Mark 11

This is just an outline of something you could do and will require more work from leaders before it can be used as a full study.

vv1-11 – The Triumphal Entry

- Fulfilment of the scriptures – we see that Jesus is continually fulfilling scripture (e.g. Matthew 26:52-54) and quotes it on the way to the cross (Luke 23:28-30) and on the cross (Matthew 27:46). It shows us that his life was shaped by scripture and even in his most painful moment, he had complete faith and trust in the Word of God
- Jesus is in control of what's happening – he knows how to get the colt, he tells the disciples what to say etc. It highlights the voluntariness of Jesus' death
- Practical application:
 - o It can shape our approach and attitude to the Bible. Some people feel like they have to understand every word of scripture and sort out every supposed contradiction. Instead, we can be encouraged that Jesus himself completely trusted and followed the scripture. This can sometimes be a real challenge when the Bible says difficult and hard things, but in order to follow Jesus fully we need to follow his loyalty to scripture

What is the relevance of the donkey being a colt (a baby)?

- This is a very unlikely/surprising thing for a king! People were expecting the Messiah to be a political/military leader, but a baby donkey is really not an appropriate war horse! "Jesus juxtaposes a triumphant riding with a humble and lowly means of transportation." (Tim Keller) It shows us that Jesus came as a peacemaker, and that the power he brings is vastly different to what was imagined.
- It is 'unbroken' – it's never been ridden before. It would be impossible in human strength for someone to just jump on and control the colt. "An unbroken animal remains calm under the hands of the Messiah who controls nature. Thus, the event points to the peace of the consummated kingdom" (Don Carson, 'Matthew' page 438). Tim Keller also suggests that this is a foreshadowing of the healing of all of nature (see Isaiah 11:6, 9); that is, Jesus is the one who is able to bring all that is chaotic and fallen about nature under control.
- Check out Zechariah 9:9-11 – this is the prophecy that Jesus fulfils.

What does this whole scene tell us about who Jesus is?

- Check out what people call out about him in verses 9 and 10. They are recognising that he is the King from David's line that they have been waiting for.
- Jesus is entering Jerusalem; the centre of power. He could have chosen to embrace the kind of power represented there: political, mainly self-seeking, violent. Instead, he shows his power in humility.

Spend some time reflecting on and praising Jesus for who he is.

Vv 12-19 – Jesus clears the temple

In the Old Testament, people went to the tabernacle to meet with God (Exodus 25:22). There is a description in Exodus 26 of the tabernacle. Only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies (the throne room in the tabernacle) and he could only go in once a year. He had to bring a sacrifice to atone for sins. Once this was completed, God blessed the people.

Solomon then built a more permanent sanctuary (1 Kings 8:41-43). But God also alludes to a 'Son of David' building a truly permanent 'house' for God and for us (2 Samuel 5:6-10; 7:1-16). Solomon's temple gets destroyed (1 Kings 11:11-13); 2 Kings 25:8-11). Ezekiel later prophesies a new temple and 'a new David' to build it (Ezekiel 37:24-28; 40-43). It will be way better and grander than Solomon's temple. (see Ezekiel 37 and 48).

After the exile when people returned to Israel from Babylon they built another temple, but it didn't fulfil the grandeur of the prophesy. People cried because it wasn't as good as Solomon's temple (Ezra 3:13). This was the temple that was around in Jesus' time.

In Zechariah (Ch 9 – 14), we hear about the coming of the Messiah riding on a colt (Zechariah 9:9). We hear that "the Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name" (Zechariah 14:9) and that the Messiah won't just build a building, but will make everything holy. They would no longer need the temple with its holy of holies because all things would have been made holy (see Zech 14:20-21). People would no longer need to go to the temple and make sacrifices in order to be close to God. Instead, the Messiah would make them close to God. He "will mediate the very presence of God back to earth. He will be the door to God, the final temple" (Tim Keller)

Mark 11 basically shows Jesus fulfilling this prophecy, and all the OT prophecies that linked the Messiah to the temple.

Jesus cleansing the temple:

- Notice another connection with Zechariah 14:21 '...And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day.'
- Jesus wanted non-Jewish people to be able to come to the temple to worship and to find out more about who God was. However the temple had become a marketplace, showing that there was no concern for encouraging meaningful worship. It was noisy and smelly, making concentration on God hard.
- People were going to God's meeting place, but not actually meeting with Him. When Jesus confronts this, he shows us that he hated 'religion' that which was concerned with rituals rather than internal disciplines of prayer and worship.

- We see that Jesus is powerful and authoritative – he’s not just a really nice guy who goes around speaking to the poor etc – he gets angry and worked up. Notice that in coming to the city humbly (and almost comically) on a donkey, Jesus was not pretending he had no power or authority. He combines both qualities.
- This incident is an example of Jesus’ judgment. Often we are uncomfortable with this word. But notice how concerned with *justice* Jesus’ judgment is here. He wants all peoples to be able to access God, and he wants God to be given His due.
- Tim Keller points out that the only person who can rearrange furniture in a house is the owner. Jesus shows us his divinity by exercising his right to rearrange the temple (God’s house, and therefore Jesus’ house). For us, this means that because our bodies are living temples, Jesus has the right to rearrange the ‘furniture’ in our lives. This can be uncomfortable and can often show us areas of our lives that we haven’t properly given over to God.

What does this all mean for us?

- Jesus is not just a moral teacher. He is a saviour – he is the one (the ONLY one) who makes the way to God.
- Christianity is not about being ‘a good person’ – we are now temples in which the Holy Spirit lives
- If Jesus replaces the temple, which was at the centre of the Jews’ spiritual lives, then Jesus must be at the centre of our lives.
- We don’t need a temple anymore. We can have access to God all the time, wherever we are. We have the privilege of a personal relationship with God (John 1:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:6). If we believe in Jesus, we can pray and know that God hears our prayers.
- We are ‘priests’ in the temple alongside Jesus the High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Vv 12-14 and Vv20 – 26 – The Withered Fig-Tree

The incident in the temple is ‘bookended’ by the fig tree. Mark probably wants us to see a parallel between what happened in the temple and what happened with the tree.

What is going on here?

- Get people to think this through
- Have people reflect on other places in the Bible where ‘fruit’ is mentioned. What does it symbolise?
- What possible connection could the fig tree have to the cleansing of the temple?

Some critics have used this incident as an example of Jesus being capricious, but that’s not it!

There are many times in the Bible when agricultural terms are used to refer to Israel, and in particular their spiritual state. In Isaiah, Israel is referred to as an unfruitful vineyard (see 5:2); 'planted' for *good* but which produced *evil* and *violence* instead. Similarly, individual people can be referred to as producing good or bad fruit, or no fruit (see Matthew 7:15-17 for example). See also Gal 5:22-23, Luke 3:8-9, Ephesians 5:9, Hebrews 13:15 for other uses of 'fruit' in the New Testament.

According to Tim Keller, in Palestine during a certain time of the year, little nubs appear on fig trees just before the fruit and leaves start to come in. Travellers ate them off the tree. Jesus got to the tree and saw that the leaves were in but there was nothing edible – the tree was useless because not only was there nothing to eat at the time, but it wouldn't bear figs at all that season. It was a fruitless tree.

The incident with the fig tree is meant to operate as an enacted parable; the fig tree is representative of the unfruitfulness of Israel (and anyone who claims to know God); their failure to live in line with what they claim to believe/who they claim to be.

Jesus shows that God is against this. He does not want people to pretend to love Him, or go through the motions, but to love Him.

(Given that all of us will fail to love God, it is important to remember what we learned about Jesus above – *he* is the way to God, *he* gives us access to God, not our perfect obedience. This is a relief! Nevertheless, the incident with the fig tree stands to show us how seriously God takes hypocrisy and empty religion)

You can have a discussion here about how you know whether you are bearing fruit, and the importance of having real 'heart changes' happening. It is easy to be really involved at church but without bearing fruit. Maybe check out some of the passages mentioned above regarding fruit to see how they might apply.