



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

Chapter 11

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Introduction

- Up till now, the Lord Jesus Christ was withdrawing from the multitudes, ordering the evil spirits and those He healed, to refrain from telling about Him
- Yet, in this chapter, and for the first time, we find Him giving much attention to prepare for His entry into Jerusalem, on a similar level of the preparation for the feast of Passover, 14:13-16
- He enters in a great procession that rocked the whole city



Introduction

Chapter Outline

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The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- Two places near Jerusalem; Bethphage began where Bethany ended, and reached to the city itself
- Bethphage literally means "the house of green figs," as Bethany, lying a short distance west of it, means "the house of dates"
- The date palm growing in the neighborhood would furnish the branches with which the multitude strewed the way on the occasion of our Lord's triumphal entry
- It appears from St. John, 12:1 that our Lord on the preceding Sabbath had dinner, and probably passed the night, at Bethany



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- And that on the following day He had come still nearer to Jerusalem, namely, to Bethphage; and from thence He sent two of his disciples for the colt
- St. Mark mentions only the colt
- St. Matthew mentions the donkey and the colt
- They are symbols of the Old and New Testaments
- *on which no one has sat*, Animals which had never before been used were alone admissible for sacred purposes, Numbers 19:2



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- *The Lord has need of it*, Is the message that Our Lord directed His disciples to deliver because it would be strange if they should not say something to the owners of it
- It looks as if this title, "the Lord", was what Jesus was well known by; John 11:28 unless it can be thought, that the owner of the colt was a believer in Christ
- Perhaps this man may have been a secret disciple
- Secret disciples, such as the five hundred who afterwards gathered to one spot in Galilee, and the hundred and twenty who met after the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:6; Acts 1:15



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- The two disciples went to the village, where Christ sent them, without objecting any difficulties that might present, in the execution of these orders
- They went and found the colt tied at the door, not in the highway, but in a back way or alley, which went round the house
- Observe the extremely thorough details of the circumstances specified
- The disciples would find the colt tied; it had never been ridden
- It would be found not in the courtyard, but outside, at the door of the house; in a back lane or alley skirting the house



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- And someone would be near it, and the words which they would speak are predicted, and the answer is suggested which the disciples were to make
- The colt, tied at the back gate, as if ready for a rider, has been interpreted as a symbol of the Gentile world to be brought to Christ from the lanes and alleys of Heathendom, Luke 14:21
- St. Athanasius the Apostolic commented on sending the two disciples to untie the colt, saying that it is a symbolic mission to untie the bonds of the Gentiles, the bonds of pagan abominations



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- *the colt ... outside on the street*, St. Athanasius also sees in it a symbolic portrait of the first man, Adam, who was driven out of paradise, to find himself in a village “outside” Jerusalem, standing on the way, not able, by himself to return to the garden of Eden
- Who were these two disciples sent by the Lord to untie humanity, but the preachers of salvation all along the New and Old Testaments?
- The Lord granted His people His word, to let us enjoy reconciliation: in the Old Testament, through shadows and symbols, and in the New Testament through the truth



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- *threw their clothes* refers to their acknowledgment of Him as their King
- This crowd was composed of pilgrims who were coming to the festival at Jerusalem, and the whole multitude of the disciples, Luke 19:37
- Fired with enthusiasm, they stripped off their garments, as the two disciples had done, and with them made a carpet over which the Savior should ride
- Such honors were often paid to great men



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- St. John, 12:13 particularizes palm trees as having been used on this occasion
- But there was abundance of olive and other trees, from which branches and leaves could be cut or plucked to adorn the Savior's road
- The people appear to have behaved on this occasion as if at the Feast of Tabernacles, roused by enthusiasm to unintended action
- The word Hosanna literally means "Oh, save!"
- It was originally a formula of prayer and supplication, but later became a term of joy and congratulation



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- It was a Hebrew imperative, "Save us, we beseech thee," it is from Psalms 118
- That Psalm belonged specially to the Feast of Tabernacles
- So here the cry signifies "Blessings on the Son of David!" i.e. the Messiah, acknowledging Jesus to be He, the promised Prince of David's line
- Even though Jesus is the "King of Glory" riding into the holy city of Jerusalem He has not come as a conquering king like His ancestor David; He has come as a humble servant of God the Father



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- The martyrs threw garments in the way by putting off the garments of the flesh, and thus preparing a way by their blood for the servants of God
- Many threw their garments in the way, by subduing their bodies in fasting and abstinence
- *those who went before and those who followed*, There were people going before Jesus and more behind Him
- Those who went before the procession of the Lord, are patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament; while those who followed Him, are the apostles and the disciples of the New Testament



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- St. Mark does not record the Temple cleansing on Sunday of Jesus' first day in Jerusalem
- Some think that He was surrounded by an enthusiastic and admiring multitude and after *He had looked around at all things* He left without any comment or action at that time and *went out unto Bethany with the twelve*
- His keen and searching eye saw at a glance all that was going on, and penetrated everything



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- However, some think that He went into the temple, into the court of the Gentiles; where He found and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of them that sold doves Matthew 21:12
- And then after He made a thorough visitation of it, and search into it, and corrected what was amiss in it *He went out to Bethany* which was near two miles off and lodged there
- For some reasons He did not think fit to stay in the city



The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11

- Jesus and the Apostles will spend every night on the Mount of Olives or in the village of Bethany, Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:11; Luke 21:37
- Bethany was the home of Jesus' friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus



The Fig Tree Withered 11:12-14

- The Triumphal Entry being on the first day of the week, this following day was Monday
- Only Matthew and Mark record the cursing of the fig tree, Matthew 21:18-19, and both Gospels agree that this event happened the day after Palm Sunday
- *He was hungry*, This showed His humanity
- The fact that He hungered may lead us to think that He had not been spending the night in the house of Martha and Mary
- It is far more likely that He had been in the open air during the previous night, fasting and praying



The Fig Tree Withered 11:12-14

- The seeing the fig-tree “afar off,” is a touch peculiar to St. Mark, and adds force to the narrative, as implying a keener pressure of hunger than St. Matthew’s description
- Christ knew there was no fruit upon it, and that *for it was not the season for figs*
- But *having leaves*, created expectation
- Other trees would all be bare at this early season
- Our Lord approaches the tree in His hunger, with the expectation of finding fruit



The Fig Tree Withered 11:12-14

- But as He draws near to it, and realizes the fact that the tree, though full of leaf, is absolutely fruitless, He forgets His natural hunger in the thought of the spiritual figure which this tree began to present to His mind
- Many scholars questioned the significance of cursing the fig tree, that is why the Church dedicated its readings, on Monday of the Paschal (Holy) week, and the eve of Holy Tuesday, to deal with its spiritual meaning
- The fig tree, according to the biblical concept, symbolizes Israel, Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7; Ezekiel 17:24; Micah 7:1-6



The Fig Tree Withered 11:12-14

- The Jews were this unprofitable fig tree, full of the leaves of profession, but fruitless
- The first time a fig tree is mentioned in Scripture is in Genesis 3:7
- It was leaves from the fig tree that Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness
- Their nakedness is a symbol for the consequences of their sin of rebellion against God's divine authority and being no longer "clothed" in God's divine grace but being "dis-graced"



The Fig Tree Withered 11:12-14

- Jesus' prophetic act in cursing the fig tree will become clear after His third prophetic act and in what Jesus tells the disciples in Mark 11:20-26
- This tree may not only be a symbol of the Jewish people, who made a great show of religion but also of any outward professor of religion
- The cause of the curse of withering, is the loss of true wisdom
- That is why the readings of the Holy Monday, dealing with the withered fig tree, draw our attention to the necessity of acquiring wisdom, Sirach 1; Isaiah 5; Wisdom 1:1-9; Proverb 1



The Fig Tree Withered 11:12-14

- That action was unique in the life of the Lord Christ
- We have not heard Him curse any other tree, nor passed a severe chastisement on anyone; but we see Him all along the four gospels, as the compassionate and merciful Master, who feels the weaknesses of sinners, and supports them till they stand up
- However, this story was narrated to confirm that, though He is the compassionate Lord, who came to save, and not to condemn, yet, He is likewise the Judge!
- He wishes that no one will fall under the curse of witherness: thus He only cursed that one tree

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- The buying and selling was for the convenience of Jews residing at a distance from the Holy City, a kind of market had been established in the outer court, and here sacrificial, incense, oil, wine, and other things necessary for the service and the sacrifices, were to be obtained
- The merchants in the Temple area were selling doves and pigeons that were the sacrifices of the poor, for ritual purification of a woman, and for lepers, Leviticus 12:6-8, 14:21-22, 15:14,29 as well the as sheep goats and bull calves that the priests had approved as other "unblemished" sacrifices according to the Law

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- The chief priests made money under this arrangement from the "cut" they took from the vendors
- Money would be required to purchase materials for offerings and to pay the yearly Temple-tax of half a shekel due from every Jew
- Coins that bore pagan images or the images of the Roman emperor were not acceptable for the purchase of sacrifices or for Temple donations
- All this could not be received except in a native coin called the Temple Shekel, which was not generally current
- Strangers therefore had to change their money at the stalls of the moneychangers, to obtain the coin required

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- This trade gave ready means for fraud, which was only too common
- We are used to see the Lord Christ, the meek, the gentle and the compassionate, kindly treating all and taking children in His arms
- But now we see Him dealing firmly with those who are corrupting His temple; realizing what He has symbolically done to the fig tree, in driving out the evil people from the temple
- Christ went to the temple, and began to reform the abuses in its courts, to show that when the Redeemer came to Zion, it was to turn away ungodliness

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- The offenders, it appears, did not make the least resistance
- Probably they were struck with a panic by the secret energy of Christ's omnipotence
- To this purpose, Jerome says, "For, a certain fiery and sparkling radiance issued from His eyes, and a divine majesty shone in His face."
- Those who were passing from the sheep market, Bethesda, into the upper part of the city, the shortest cut was through this court and by Solomon's Porch

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- The distance would be greatly increased if they went round it
- So the priests permitted servants and laborers, laden with anything, to take this shorter way through the great court of the temple
- But our Lord hindered them, forbidding them with the voice of one that had authority and compelling them to go back
- Origen asserts, that our Savior's driving so many thousands out of the temple, poor and humble as He appeared, was a more astonishing miracle than even His giving sight to the blind

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- St. Mark, writing for Gentiles, assures them that the God of the Jews is the God of all the nations and that the court of the Gentiles, which was then so profaned, was a constituent part of His house of prayer
- St. Jerome notes Christ's action in driving out the profaners of the temple as a great proof of His Divine power, that He alone should have been able to cast out so great a multitude
- The words, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer*" are a quotation from Isaiah 56:7

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- These *thieves* were the buyers and sellers of sheep, oxen, and doves, and the money changers, and the priests that encouraged them, and had a profit out of them
- What effect this strong reproof of our Savior had upon the Jewish priests, and other ministers of the temple?
- It is related by the evangelist in the subsequent words *they might destroy Him*
- Not only put Him to death, but utterly *destroy Him*
- A desperate attempt, which they could not but fear was fighting against God

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- They wanted to wipe out His name and influence as a great spiritual energy in the world
- This action of His raised them to the highest pitch of fury and indignation
- Their authority and their interests were attacked
- But the people still acknowledged His power; and the scribes and Pharisees feared the people
- They were obliged to protract their wicked plans for a short time, as the multitude were in admiration of His doctrines

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

11:15-19



- *the people were astonished at His teaching,* Both as to the matter of it, which were such words as never man spoken; and, as to the manner of it, being with such majesty, power, and authority, as the Scribes and Pharisees did not teach with
- And also at the miracles, by which it was confirmed, as well as at the reformation and discipline He was introducing; which was done with such an air of sovereignty and power, as was amazing
- *When evening had come,* In Greek means literally, and whenever evening came; that is, every evening
- During these last days before His crucifixion, He remained in Jerusalem during the day, and went back to Bethany at night or to the Mount of Olives

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree 11:20-24



- The next day, Tuesday, as Jesus and His disciples walk toward Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, they passed the cursed fig tree and the disciples saw that it had withered to the roots and died
- Notice how St. Mark has purposely structure the narrative of the Temple cleansing between the narrative of the cursed fig tree so the reader does not miss the connection between the two prophetic acts

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree 11:20-24



- Literally, "Have the faith of God." full, perfect, effectual faith in Him
- This may mean, have strong faith, or have confidence in God; a strong belief that He is able to accomplish things that appear most difficult with infinite ease, as the fig-tree was made to wither away by a word
- Trust in the Divine omnipotence
- The things which are impossible with men are possible with Him

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree 11:20-24



- With great earnestness He seeks to impress upon them a truth which would be of the greatest significance to them, when they went forth, as His Apostles, to establish and spread His kingdom—that a determined and constant faith in God would overcome all difficulties, even the most impossible to the eye of sense
- *whoever says to this mountain*, It is not physical but moral obstacles to the progress of His kingdom were in the Redeemer's view

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree 11:20-24



- And that what He designed to teach was the great lesson, that no obstacle should be able to stand before a confiding faith in God
- Scholars believe that the moving mountain refers to every thing difficult
- Praying in faith justifies us, and so removes mountains of guilt, never to rise up in judgment against us
- It purifies the heart, and so removes mountains of corruption, and makes them plain before the grace of God

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree 11:20-24



- *whatever things you ask*, That is, according to the revealed will of God and for the glory of His name
- *believe that you receive them*, It is obvious that, as a rule, such words imply prayer for spiritual rather than temporal blessings
- We are to believe, not that we shall one day have what we pray for in a future more or less distant, but that we actually receive it as we pray

Forgiveness and Prayer

11:25-26



- To the exhortation to confidence in prayer, Jesus links on another principal requisite of being heard—namely, the necessity of forgiving in order to obtain forgiveness
- The prayer even of strong faith is not perfect, unless the temper of the worshipper is also that of the Charity which forgives offences
- The prayer to be received, has to come out of a heart with practical faith

Forgiveness and Prayer

11:25-26



- The sign of that practical faith is the forgiveness of the trespasses of others, in order to get the forgiveness of our Father, and the purification of our hearts
- The Lord intended, to let the response to prayers be in our hands; namely, if we listen to others, He will listen to us; and whatever is our verdict on them, will be the verdict on us
- And as St. Cyprian says: “There is no more excuse... When you are judged by your own verdict, you are getting what you have earned.”

Jesus' Authority Questioned

11:27-33



- We learn from ver. 18 that the chief priests and scribes had already been seeking how they might destroy Him, and they wanted to establish some definite charge, whether of blasphemy or of incitement to rebellion, against Him
- They now approach Him as He walked in the temple, and demand by what authority He was doing these things
- They got disturbed, when they saw Him, alone, able to cleanse the temple from the moneychangers, the dove-sellers, and all the corrupt people

Jesus' Authority Questioned

11:27-33



- In other words, who appointed You a teacher; or who ordained You a High Priest?
- They posted that question in order to catch Him with a word
- If He says, it is by His own authority, He would be condemned as a blasphemer; and if He says, it is by an authority of somebody else, people would begin to doubt Him, because they saw Him performing divine works

Jesus' Authority Questioned 11:27-33



- The Lord answered them by a question of His own, concerning the Baptism of John the Baptist
- It is as though He said, "You do not believe Me when I say that I have received power from God. Believe then John the Baptist, who bare witness of Me that I was sent from God to do these things."
- The argument is unquestionable

Jesus' Authority Questioned

11:27-33



- It is this: "You ask from whence I derive my authority - from God or from men? I in My turn ask you from whom did John the Baptist derive his authority to baptize and to teach? from heaven or from men? If he had it from God, as all will confess, then I too have the same from God; for John testified of Me, saying that he was but a servant, the friend of the Bridegroom; but that I was the Messiah, the Son of God: and this too when you sent messengers to him for his special purpose, that you might know from him whether He was the Messiah." John 1:20, 10:41

Jesus' Authority Questioned 11:27-33



- The Pharisees got confused, and were afraid to accuse John of being false
- Privately; perhaps, they withdrew at a little distance for a short time, and consulted among themselves what answer to provide
- So they refrained from answering the Lord's question, proclaiming that they were not seeking the truth, and were not worthy of recognizing it
- Thus the Lord refused to answer their question
- The reason for their refusal to answer again illustrates their self-serving hypocrisy

Jesus' Authority Questioned

11:27-33



- *We do not know*, This is a broken sentence, but very expressive
- The evangelist leaves his reader to supply what they meant
- They deemed it prudent not to finish the sentence; and probably cut it short with some significant gesture
- They did not like to confess that they feared the people; although this was the true reason why they hesitated to say that John's baptism was of men
- They knew that all the people held John to be a prophet
- They were thus thrown on one or other horn of a dilemma

Jesus' Authority Questioned

11:27-33



- Once again Jesus has turned the religious hierarchy's attempt to discredit Him back upon them
- St. Augustine presents us with an explanation saying: "They closed the door to themselves, through pretense of ignorance of what they know, that is why He did not open it for them, as they did not knock, according to what is said, *"Knock, and it will be opened to you."* (Mt. 7: 7) They did not only refrain to knock, but they also denied what they know; so tightly closing the door before their own face."

Jesus' Authority Questioned

11:27-33



- We should observe, there are here two reasons for concealing the truth from inquirers
- 1st, when he that inquires after the truth is incapable of understanding it
- 2nd, when on account of some contempt of the truth, or some other evil indisposition, the person is not deserving of having the truth laid open to him



Discussion

- What was the significance of Jesus choosing to ride in to Jerusalem on a colt?
- What three details surrounding the triumphal entry into Jerusalem recall Psalm 118?
- Why does Jesus curse a fig tree when it is not even the season for figs?
- What is the problem Jesus finds with the merchants in the court of the Gentiles, since selling sacrificial animals there is admittedly a service to pilgrims?



Discussion

- Why was Jesus so angry at the temple?
- What personal baggage do you “carry through the Temple area” when you come into it? Why do you think Jesus might forbid you to carry such baggage there?
- Why do you think Jesus exhorts His disciples to “have faith in God” when Peter points out that the tree Jesus cursed has withered? Given the symbolism of the fig tree and Jesus’ cursing of it, what is the connection with a living faith?
- Why do some people find forgiveness so hard? How come the Father’s forgiveness here seems dependent on our forgiveness of others? What is the point Jesus is making?