*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 22 – 27

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, March 22 Mark 11:1-7**

*“The Lord needs it”*

As Jesus prepares to enter the city of Jerusalem, he directs his disciples to fetch a colt from a nearby village and shows his supernatural foreknowledge by predicting precisely what they will find: an unridden male colt, tied up, close to where they enter the village. He also warns the disciples that they will be challenged when they try to take the colt. The answer they are to give, “The Lord needs it,” shows that Jesus is purposeful in his use of the colt to enter Jerusalem. The disciples obey, and everything takes place as Jesus said it would.

Jesus orchestrates a grand entrance into Jerusalem that departs significantly from his previous patterns of movement in the Gospel of Mark. He has walked everywhere else in his ministry except for the times he crossed the lake in a boat. The decision to complete this last stage of his journey to Jerusalem riding on an animal deviates from Jesus’ previous attempts to avoid calling attention to himself. On this day, Jesus encourages public recognition and rejoicing by his provocative entrance.

*All things come together to accomplish your purposes, Lord. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 23 Mark 11:8-11**

*“Hosanna!”*

Mark reports that the disciples saddle the animal with their own garments, and the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him (as a crowd did when Jehu was anointed king in 1 Kings 9:12-13). Jesus’ followers and those Passover pilgrims caught up in the excitement of the moment also line the streets with leaves and branches and fill the air with a chorus of “Hosanna” (meaning, “Save us!”). The street chorus chant is from one of the Hallel (thanksgiving) Psalms (Psalm 118:25-26) and from an Enthronement Psalm (Psalm 148:1).

The excitement generated by Jesus’ arrival ends with somewhat of an anticlimax when he enters the temple, only to look around and leave. Mark raises the readers’ expectations that something grand will happen, but nothing does. This colorless ending to Jesus’ dramatic entry into Jerusalem depicts more than meets the eye. It sets the stage for what will happen on the next day, events that will reveal that he comes not to praise the temple but to pronounce God’s judgment on it.

*Entering Jerusalem you were proclaimed a king, Lord, and so you are. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 24 Mark 11:12-14, 20-21**

*“The cursing of the fig tree”*

The fig tree incident (vv. 12-14 and 20-21) brackets the temple action (vv. 15-19) and interprets it. It reveals more clearly that Jesus does not intend to cleanse the temple. Instead, his actions visually announce its disqualification. The fig tree that has not borne fruit is cursed; it is not reformed or cleansed. When no fruit found (verse 17: “My temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”), destruction follows. (The temple was destroyed in 70AD by the Romans.)

When we are told that “it was not the season for figs,” it makes Jesus’ actions seem outlandish. Why curse a fig tree for not bearing figs out of season? Jesus surely knows it is not fig season. This detail is a clue for the reader to look beyond the surface meaning and to see its symbolic meaning. The word “season” (*kairos*) is not the botanical term for the growing season but a term used to denote the time of the kingdom of God (1:15). The barren fig tree represents the barrenness of temple Judaism that is unprepared to accept Jesus’ messianic reign.

*Remaining in you, Lord, and you in me will produce fruit. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 22 - 27

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, March 25 Mark 11:15-19**

*“Jesus’ action in the temple”*

Many suggestions have been offered to explain Jesus’ action in the temple. Some attribute Jesus’ ferocity to his righteous indignation over flagrant abuse, assuming he wants to reform temple practice. Others suggest that he is purifying the space used for commerce for its proper use for prayer. Probably the most common view, influenced by the term “den of robbers,” assumes that Jesus is protesting because the temple has become a crooked business, defrauding worshippers.

A key question to ask is why Jesus would attempt to reform or purify something that he predicts will soon be destroyed (13:2). The best answer is that he does not intend to reform the temple. Jesus is a prophet and prophets do not simply make announcements; they also engage in prophetic actions to communicate. His demonstration is a prophetic protest that symbolically puts an end to the activities that contribute to the temple’s normal functioning: its monetary support through money changing, and its sacrificial system through the purchase of sacrificial animals.

*I want my life, Lord, to be a “temple” for prayer. Amen.*

**Friday, March 26 Mark 11:22-25**

*“You can say to this mountain . . .”*

We have generalized Jesus’ statement, “If anyone says to this mountain . . .” into a proverb about a difficult task: “faith is able to move mountains.” Jesus does not say “mountains” but specifies “this mountain,” most likely referring to the temple mount, Mount Zion. Contrary to expectations, the mountain of the Lord’s house would not be exalted but would metaphorically be cast into the sea, where those who caused little ones to stumble would be thrown. In spite of the temple’s immense power and holiness, it would be destroyed.

Most Jews regarded the temple as the place where prayer was particularly effective. By contrast, Jesus assures his disciples that the effectiveness of prayer has nothing to do with the temple or its sacrifices. When he dies on the cross, access to God is opened up for all. His death creates a new house of prayer, a temple not made with hands, which will be without barriers or limitations. Jesus concludes with the promise of God’s forgiveness. As with prayer, forgiveness does not require a man-made temple.

*Through you, Lord, prayer is effective and forgiveness is offered. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 27 Mark 11:27-33**

*“By what authority are you doing these things?”*

The temple leaders challenge Jesus to present his credentials: “By what authority are you doing these things?” “These things” have to do with Jesus’ actions in the temple, actions which usurp their power and authority, and directly challenge the authenticity and existence of the temple itself. As we have seen, Jesus has condemned the temple. As is his custom, Jesus fends off his adversaries with his own question. He asks them about John’s baptism and demands that they answer him.

They ask by what authority Jesus could assail the temple system, and he refers back to the ministry of John the Baptizer. John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins that bypassed temple ritual. It was free; no sacrifice was required except that of a repentant heart. No money exchanged hands. Jesus implicitly aligns himself with the ministry of John, and if John’s ministry was from heaven, then the temple has become irrelevant. Unwilling to answer Jesus’ question about John’s authority, Jesus does not answer their question about his own.

*I know, Lord, that all you did and said was by the authority of your Father. Amen.*