

The Moral of the Story is..."

Mark 4:1-34

☞ **What would you like to praise God for today?**

Story of the Farmer Scattering Seed

1 Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. There was such a large crowd along the shore that he got into a boat and sat down and spoke from there. 2 He began to teach the people by telling many stories such as this one:

3 "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. 4 As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. 5 Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The plant sprang up quickly, 6 but it soon wilted beneath the hot sun and died because the roots had no nourishment in the shallow soil. 7 Other seed fell among thorns that shot up and choked out the tender blades so that it produced no grain. 8 Still other seed fell on fertile soil and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted." Then he said, 9 "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!"

10 Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him, "What do your stories mean?" 11 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret about the Kingdom of God. But I am using these stories to conceal everything about it from outsiders, 12 so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:

'They see what I do, but they don't perceive its meaning. They hear my words, but they don't understand. So they will not turn from their sins and be forgiven.'

13 "But if you can't understand this story, how will you understand all the others I am going to tell? 14 The farmer I talked about is the one who brings God's message to others. 15 The seed that fell on the hard path represents those who hear the message, but then Satan comes at once and takes it away from them. 16 The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. 17 But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word. 18 The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the Good News, 19 but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for nice things, so no crop is produced. 20 But the good soil represents those who hear and accept God's message and produce a huge harvest--thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted."

Illustration of the Lamp

21 Then Jesus asked them, "Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed to shut out the light? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine. 22 "Everything that is now hidden or secret will eventually be brought to light. 23 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand! 24 And be sure to pay attention to what you hear. The more you do this, the more you will understand--and even more, besides. 25 To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But to those who are not listening, even what they have will be taken away from them."

Illustration of the Growing Seed

26 Jesus also said, "Here is another illustration of what the Kingdom of God is like: A farmer planted seeds in a field, 27 and then he went on with his other activities. As the days went by, the seeds sprouted and grew without the farmer's help, 28 because the earth produces crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. 29 And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle."

Illustration of the Mustard Seed

30 Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? 31 It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, 32 it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can come and find shelter."

33 He used many such stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they were able to understand. 34 In fact, in his public teaching he taught only with parables, but afterward when he was alone with his disciples, he explained the meaning to them.

Mark 4:1-34 (NLT)

PRAY for God's guidance

1. What experience, if any, have you had farming or gardening... houseplants?
2. What are the four types of soil on which these seeds fall? What kind of growth occurred in each soil type?

Why does the word not take root at all in some people?

What causes the second plant to wither?

What three things choked off the third plant?

3. How are the parables like a spiritual hearing test?

What blocks understanding?

4. What distinguishes those who are told the "secret of the kingdom" from those "outside"?

5. How does one become good soil?

6. What does this parable teach about failure and success in evangelism?

7. [vv. 21-25] If Jesus is the lamp, what is He revealing (see also vv. 11-12)?

What is the secret of growing in Christ or receiving more of Him?

8. [vv. 26-29] What part, if any, do people play in the growing kingdom?

9. [vv. 30-32] What does the contrasting seed and bush teach about the kingdom?

10. How does knowing that the growth of the kingdom is initiated and empowered by God affect your life and ministry as a Christian?

Wrap up: At what stage is the kingdom in your life now: Still a seed? Sprouting? Outgrowing the "weeds"? Producing a harvest?

Prayer: For one another
For missionaries

Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

Chapter 4

Notes for Verse 2

Jesus taught the people by telling parables, short stories using familiar scenes to explain spiritual truth. This method of teaching compels the listener to think. It conceals the truth from those who are too stubborn or prejudiced to hear what is being taught. Most parables have one main point, so we must be careful not to go beyond what Jesus intended to teach.

Notes for Verse 3

Seed was sown by hand. As the farmer walked across the field, he threw handfuls of seed onto the ground from a large bag slung across his shoulders. The plants did not grow in neat rows as accomplished by today's machine planting. No matter how skillful, no farmer could keep some of his seed from falling by the wayside, from being scattered among rocks and thorns, or from being carried off by the wind. So the farmer would throw the seed liberally, and enough would fall on good ground to ensure the harvest.

Notes for Verse 9

We hear with our ears, but there is a deeper kind of listening with the mind and heart that is necessary in order to gain spiritual understanding from Jesus' words. Some people in the crowd were looking for evidence to use against Jesus; others truly wanted to learn and grow. Jesus' words were for the honest seekers.

Notes for Verses 11,12

Some people do not understand God's truth because they are not ready for it. God reveals truth to people who will act on it, who will make it visible in their lives. When you talk with people about God, be aware that they will not understand if they are not yet ready. Be patient, taking every chance to tell them more of the truth about God, and praying that the Holy Spirit will open their minds and hearts to receive the truth and act on it.

Notes for Verses 14-20

The four soils represent four different ways people respond to God's message. Usually we think that Jesus was talking about four different kinds of people. But he may also have been talking about (1) different times or phases in a person's life, or (2) how we willingly receive God's message in some areas of our lives and resist it in others. For example, you may be open to God about your future, but closed concerning how you spend your money. You may respond like good soil to God's demand for worship, but like rocky soil to his demand to give to people in need. We must strive to be like good soil in every area of our lives at all times.

Notes for Verse 19

Worldly worries, the false sense of security brought on by prosperity, and the desire for things plagued first-century disciples as they do us today. How easy it is for our daily routines to become overcrowded. A life packed with materialistic pursuits deafens us to God's Word. Stay free so you can hear God when he speaks.

Notes for Verse 21

If a lamp doesn't help people see, it is useless. Does your life show other people how to find God and how to live for him? If not, ask what "bowls" have extinguished your light. Complacency, resentment, stubbornness of heart, or disobedience could keep God's light from shining through you to others.

Notes for Verses 24,25

The light of Jesus' truth is revealed to us, not hidden. But we may not be able to see or to use all of that truth right now. Only as we put God's teachings into practice will we understand and see more of the truth. The truth is clear, but our ability to understand is imperfect. As we obey, we will sharpen our vision and increase our understanding (see James 1:22-25).

Notes for Verse 25

This verse simply means that we are responsible to use well what we have. How much we have is not nearly as important as what we do with it.

Notes for Verses 26-29

This parable about the kingdom of God, recorded only by Mark, reveals that spiritual growth is a continual, gradual process that is finally consummated in a harvest of spiritual maturity. We can understand the process of spiritual growth by comparing it to the slow but certain growth of a plant.

Notes for Verses 30-32

Jesus used this parable to explain that although Christianity had very small beginnings, it would grow into a worldwide community of believers. When you feel alone in your stand for Christ, realize that God is building a worldwide kingdom. He has faithful followers in every part of the world, and your faith, no matter how small, can join with that of others to accomplish great things.

Notes for Verses 33,34

Jesus adapted his methods to his audience's ability and desire to understand. He didn't speak in parables to confuse people, but to challenge sincere seekers to discover the meaning of his words. Much of Jesus' teaching was against hypocrisy and impure motives -- characteristics of the religious leaders. Had Jesus spoken against the leaders directly, his public ministry would have been hampered. Those who listened carefully to Jesus knew what he was talking about.

Dealing With the Disappointments of Ministry

Mark 6:1-30

☞ **What would you like to praise God for today?**

JESUS REJECTED AT NAZARETH

1 Jesus left that part of the country and returned with his disciples to Nazareth, his hometown. 2 The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They asked, "Where did he get all his wisdom and the power to perform such miracles? 3 He's just the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.

4 Then Jesus told them, "**A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family.**" 5 And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any mighty miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Then Jesus went out from village to village, teaching. 7 And he called his twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two, with authority to cast out evil spirits. 8 He told them to take nothing with them except a walking stick--no food, no traveler's bag, no money. 9 He told them to wear sandals but not to take even an extra coat. 10 "**When you enter each village, be a guest in only one home,**" he said. 11 "**And if a village won't welcome you or listen to you, shake off its dust from your feet as you leave. It is a sign that you have abandoned that village to its fate.**"

12 So the disciples went out, telling all they met to turn from their sins. 13 And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

14 Herod Antipas, the king, soon heard about Jesus, because people everywhere were talking about him. Some were saying, "This must be John the Baptist come back to life again. That is why he can do such miracles." 15 Others thought Jesus was the ancient prophet Elijah. Still others thought he was a prophet like the other great prophets of the past. 16 When Herod heard about Jesus, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has come back from the dead." 17 For Herod had sent soldiers to arrest and imprison John as a favor to Herodias. She had been his brother Philip's wife, but Herod had married her. 18 John kept telling Herod, "It is illegal for you to marry your brother's wife." 19 Herodias was enraged and wanted John killed in revenge, but without Herod's approval she was powerless. 20 And Herod respected John, knowing that he was a good and holy man, so he kept him under his protection. Herod was disturbed whenever he talked with John, but even so, he liked to listen to him.

21 Herodias's chance finally came. It was Herod's birthday, and he gave a party for his palace aides, army officers, and the leading citizens of Galilee. 22 Then his daughter, also named Herodias, came in and performed a dance that greatly pleased them all. "Ask me for anything you like," the king said to the girl, "and I will give it to you." 23 Then he promised, "I will give you whatever you ask, up to half of my kingdom!"

24 She went out and asked her mother, "What should I ask for?" Her mother told her, "Ask for John the Baptist's head!"

25 So the girl hurried back to the king and told him, "I want the head of John the Baptist, right now, on a tray!"

26 Then the king was very sorry, but he was embarrassed to break his oath in front of his guests. 27 So he sent an executioner to the prison to cut off John's head and bring it to him. The soldier beheaded John in the prison, 28 brought his head on a tray, and gave it to the girl, who took it to her mother. 29 When John's disciples heard what had happened, they came for his body and buried it in a tomb.

30 The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and what they had taught.

Mark 6:1-30 (NLT)

👉 **PRAY for God's guidance**

1. What childhood escapade of yours do you hear about most often when you visit family?
2. After these power draining miracles (raising Jairus' daughter and healing the woman with a bleeding problem) what happens when Jesus goes home?

What do the four questions (vv. 2-3) reveal? How is Jesus' ministry limited in Nazareth?

3. How do you think Jesus felt about His reception in Nazareth?

How does your family react to your faith in Christ? How does that affect you?

4. What does the disciples' assignment (6:6-12) tell you about the kingdom of God?

About teamwork? Our responsibility?

5. What impact would this have on the villages? The disciples? On Jesus the "discipler"?

6. How is the disciples' message like that of John (1:4) and Jesus (1:14-15)?

7. [vv. 14-16] What explanations were people coming up with for Jesus' power and authority?

How would this weaken His claim on their lives?

8. [vv. 17-20] What did Herod think of John the Baptist?

Why does Herod jail John? How much did "peer pressure" have to do with Herod's actions?

How does what we do under pressure reveal what we are really like?

9. John was Jesus' cousin; someone Jesus, no doubt grew up with, loved and respected. How do you think word of John's martyrdom impacted Jesus? (also see Matt. 14:12,13)

Wrap up: What disappointments have you struggled with recently: Grief? Rejection? Fatigue?

What comfort can you draw from viewing the human side of Christ? His divinity?

Prayer: For one another

Chapter 6

Notes for Verses 2,3

Jesus was teaching effectively and wisely, but the people of his hometown saw him as only a carpenter. "He's no better than we are -- he's just a common laborer," they said. They were offended that others could be impressed by Jesus and follow him. They rejected his authority because he was one of their peers. They thought they knew him, but their preconceived notions about who he was made it impossible for them to accept his message. Don't let prejudice blind you to truth. As you learn more about Jesus, try to see him for who he really is.

Notes for Verse 4

Jesus said that a prophet (in other words, a worker for God) is never honored in his hometown. But that doesn't make his work any less important. A person doesn't need to be respected or honored to be useful to God. If friends, neighbors, or family don't respect your Christian work, don't let their rejection keep you from serving God.

Notes for Verse 5

Jesus could have done greater miracles in Nazareth, but he chose not to because of the people's pride and unbelief. The miracles he did had little effect on the people because they did not accept his message or believe that he was from God. Therefore, Jesus looked elsewhere, seeking those who would respond to his miracles and message.

Notes for Verse 7

The disciples were sent out in pairs. Individually they could have reached more areas of the country, but this was not Christ's plan. One advantage in going out by twos was that they could strengthen and encourage each other, especially when they faced rejection. Our strength comes from God, but he meets many of our needs through our teamwork with others. As you serve Christ, don't try to go it alone.

Notes for Verses 8,9

Mark records that the disciples were instructed to take nothing with them *except* staffs, while in the Matthew and Luke accounts Jesus told them *not* to take staffs. One explanation is that Matthew and Luke were referring to a club used for protection, whereas Mark was talking about a shepherd's crook. In any case, the point in all three accounts is the same -- the disciples were to leave at once, without extensive preparation, trusting in God's care rather than in their own resources.

Notes for Verse 11

Pious Jews shook the dust from their feet after passing through Gentile cities or territory to show their separation from Gentile influences and practices. When the disciples shook the dust from their feet after leaving a *Jewish* town, it was a vivid sign that they wished to remain separate from people who had rejected Jesus and his message. Jesus made it clear that the listeners were responsible for what they did with the gospel. The disciples were not to blame if the message was rejected, as long as they had faithfully and carefully presented it. We are

not responsible when others reject Christ's message of salvation, but we do have the responsibility to share the gospel clearly and faithfully.

Notes for Verses 14,15

Herod, along with many others, wondered who Jesus really was. Unable to accept Jesus' claim to be God's Son, many people made up their own explanations for his power and authority. Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life, while those who were familiar with the Old Testament thought he was Elijah (Malachi 4:5). Still others believed that Jesus was a teaching prophet in the tradition of Moses, Isaiah, or Jeremiah. Today people still have to make up their minds about Jesus. Some think that if they can name what he is -- prophet, teacher, good man -- they can weaken the power of his claim on their lives. But what they *think* does not change who Jesus *is*.

Notes for Verses 17-19

Palestine was divided into four territories, each with a different ruler. Herod Antipas, called Herod in the Gospels, was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip ruled over Traconitis and Idumea. Philip's wife was Herodias, but she left him to marry Herod Antipas. When John confronted the two for committing adultery, Herodias formulated a plot to kill him. Instead of trying to get rid of her sin, Herodias tried to get rid of the one who brought it to public attention. This is exactly what the religious leaders were trying to do to Jesus.

Notes for Verse 20

Herod arrested John the Baptist under pressure from his wife and advisers. Though Herod respected John's integrity, in the end Herod had John killed because of pressure from his peers and family. What you do under pressure often shows what you are really like.

Notes for Verses 22,23

As a ruler under Roman authority, Herod had no kingdom to give. The offer of half his kingdom was Herod's way to say that he would give Herodias's daughter almost anything she wanted. When Herodias asked for John's head, Herod would have been greatly embarrassed in front of his guests if he had denied her request. Words are powerful. Because they can lead to great sin, we should use them with great care.

Notes for Verse 30

Mark uses the word *apostles* here and in Mark 3:14. *Apostle* means "one sent" as messenger, authorized agent, or missionary. The word became an official title for Jesus' 12 disciples after his death and resurrection (Acts 1:25, 26; Ephesians 2:20).

Jesus - More Than Just A Great Guy

Discovering His Power & Commitment To Meet Our Needs

Mark 6:30-56

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

JESUS FEEDS FIVE THOUSAND

30 The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and what they had taught. 31 Then Jesus said, **"Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest."** There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat. 32 They left by boat for a quieter spot. 33 But many people saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and met them as they landed. 34 A vast crowd was there as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he taught them many things.

35 Late in the afternoon his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and it is getting late. 36 Send the crowds away so they can go to the nearby farms and villages and buy themselves some food."

37 But Jesus said, **"You feed them."**

"With what?" they asked. "It would take a small fortune to buy food for all this crowd!"

38 **"How much food do you have?"** he asked. **"Go and find out."**

They came back and reported, "We have five loaves of bread and two fish." 39 Then Jesus told the crowd to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat in groups of fifty or a hundred.

41 Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and asked God's blessing on the food. Breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people. 42 They all ate as much as they wanted, 43 and they picked up twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish. 44 Five thousand men had eaten from those five loaves!

JESUS WALKS ON WATER

45 Immediately after this, Jesus made his disciples get back into the boat and head out across the lake to Bethsaida, while he sent the people home. 46 Afterward he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

47 During the night, the disciples were in their boat out in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on land. 48 He saw that they were in serious trouble, rowing hard and struggling against the wind and waves. About three o'clock in the morning he came to them, walking on the water. He started to go past them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the water, they screamed in terror, thinking he was a ghost. 50 They were all terrified when they saw him. But Jesus spoke to them at once. **"It's all right,"** he said. **"I am here! Don't be afraid."** 51 Then he climbed into the boat, and the wind stopped. They were astonished at what they saw. 52 They still didn't understand the significance of the miracle of the multiplied loaves, for their hearts were hard and they did not believe.

53 When they arrived at Gennesaret on the other side of the lake, they anchored the boat 54 and climbed out. The people standing there recognized him at once, 55 and they ran throughout the whole area and began carrying sick people to him on mats. 56 Wherever he went--in villages and cities and out on the farms--they laid the sick in the market plazas and streets. The sick begged him to let them at least touch the fringe of his robe, and all who touched it were healed.

Mark 6:30-56 (NLT)

👉 **PRAY for God's guidance**

1. When you need a break from things, where do you go... what do you like to do to relax?

2. Why did Jesus decide to take the disciples away (v.31)?

What happened as soon as they left?

What was Jesus' response?

3. How did the disciples and Jesus differ in the way they viewed the whole situation?

What emotions might have been expressed by the disciples in v. 37?

4. What would you feel as a disciple when you gathered the leftovers?

What was the lesson to be learned?

5. [vv. 45-56] What problem were the disciples encountering?

How did they respond to Jesus' appearing? How would you have responded?

6. What is the significance of Jesus' walking on the water and His response to their terror (see Is. 43:1-3; 44:8)?

Who is He revealing Himself to be?

7. [v. 52] What should they have perceived in the lesson of the loaves that would have prepared them for this?

Does Jesus ever "lose sight" of us? (see Matt. 28:20)

Wrap up: When you have a need of fear, do you come searching for Jesus or do you usually try to meet your own needs in some other way?

How can you practice allowing Jesus to meet your needs?

Prayer: For one another

For church planters

Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

Notes for Verse 30

Mark uses the word *apostles* here and in Mark 3:14. *Apostle* means "one sent" as messenger, authorized agent, or missionary. The word became an official title for Jesus' 12 disciples after his death and resurrection (Acts 1:25, 26; Ephesians 2:20).

Notes for Verse 31

When the disciples had returned from their mission, Jesus took them away to rest. Doing God's work is very important, but Jesus recognized that to do it effectively we need periodic rest and renewal. Jesus and his disciples, however, did not always find it easy to get the rest they needed!

Notes for Verse 34

This crowd was as pitiful as a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are easily scattered; without a shepherd they are in grave danger. Jesus was the Shepherd who could teach them what they needed to know and keep them from straying from God. See Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; and Ezekiel 34:5ff for descriptions of the Good Shepherd.

Notes for Verse 37

In this chapter different people have examined Jesus' life and ministry: his neighbors and family, Herod the king, and the disciples. Yet none of these appreciated Jesus for who he was. The disciples were still pondering, still confused, still unbelieving. They did not realize that Jesus could provide for them. They were so preoccupied with the immensity of the task that they could not see what was possible with God. Do you let what seems impossible about Christianity keep you from believing?

6:37-42 When Jesus asked the disciples to provide food for over 5,000 people, they asked in astonishment if they should go and spend eight months' wages on bread. How do you react when you are given an impossible task? A situation that seems impossible with human resources is simply an opportunity for God. The disciples did everything they could by gathering the available food and organizing the people into groups. Then, in answer to prayer, God did the impossible. When facing a seemingly impossible task, do what you can and ask God to do the rest. He may see fit to make the impossible happen.

Notes for Verse 49

The disciples were surprised to see Jesus walking beside them on the water. But they should have realized that Jesus would help them when they were in trouble. Though they had lost sight of Jesus, he had not lost sight of them. His concern for them overcame their lack of faith. The next time you are in "deep water," remember that Christ knows your struggle and cares for you.

6:49,50 The disciples were afraid, but Jesus' presence calmed their fears. We all experience fear. Do we try to deal with it ourselves, or do we let Jesus deal with it? In times of fear and uncertainty, it is calming to know that Christ is always with us (Matthew 28:20). To recognize Christ's presence is the antidote for fear.

Notes for Verse 52

The disciples didn't want to believe, perhaps because (1) they couldn't accept the fact that this human named Jesus was really the Son of God; (2) they dared not believe that the Messiah would choose them as his followers -- it was too good to be true; (3) they still did not understand the real purpose for Jesus' coming to earth. Their disbelief took the form of misunderstanding.

Even after watching Jesus miraculously feed 5,000 people, they still could not take the final step of faith and believe that he was God's Son. If they had, they would not have been amazed that Jesus could walk on water. The disciples did not transfer the truth they already knew about Jesus to their own lives. We read that Jesus walked on the water, and yet we often marvel that he is able to work in our lives. We must not only believe that these miracles really occurred; we must also transfer the truth to our own life situations.

Notes for Verse 53

Gennesaret was a small fertile plain located on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum, Jesus' home, sat at the northern edge of this plain.

What Worship Says About You

Mark 11

☞ **What would you like to praise God for today?**

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

1 As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany, on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. 2 **"Go into that village over there,"** he told them, **"and as soon as you enter it, you will see a colt tied there that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs it and will return it soon.' "**

4 The two disciples left and found the colt standing in the street, tied outside a house. 5 As they were untying it, some bystanders demanded, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6 They said what Jesus had told them to say, and they were permitted to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and he sat on it.

8 Many in the crowd spread their coats on the road ahead of Jesus, and others cut leafy branches in the fields and spread them along the way. 9 He was in the center of the procession, and the crowds all around him were shouting,

"Praise God! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Bless the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Praise God in highest heaven!"

11 So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked around carefully at everything, and then he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he went out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

JESUS CURSES THE FIG TREE

12 The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. 13 He noticed a fig tree a little way off that was in full leaf, so he went over to see if he could find any figs on it. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. 14 Then Jesus said to the tree, **"May no one ever eat your fruit again!"** And the disciples heard him say it.

JESUS CLEARS THE TEMPLE

15 When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants and their customers. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the stalls of those selling doves, 16 and he stopped everyone from bringing in merchandise. 17 He taught them, **"The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a place of prayer for all nations,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves."**

18 When the leading priests and teachers of religious law heard what Jesus had done, they began planning how to kill him. But they were afraid of him because the people were so enthusiastic about Jesus' teaching. 19 That evening Jesus and the disciples left the city.

20 The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it was withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, "Look, Teacher! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

22 Then Jesus said to the disciples, **"Have faith in God. 23 I assure you that you can say to this mountain, 'May God lift you up and throw you into the sea,' and your command will be obeyed. All that's required is that you really believe and do not doubt in your heart. 24 Listen to me! You can pray for anything, and if you believe, you will have it. 25 But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."**

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHALLENGED

27 By this time they had arrived in Jerusalem again. As Jesus was walking through the Temple area, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders came up to him. They demanded, 28 **"By whose authority did you drive out the merchants from the Temple? Who gave you such authority?"**

29 **"I'll tell who gave me authority to do these things if you answer one question,"** Jesus replied. 30 **"Did John's baptism come from heaven or was it merely human? Answer me!"**

31 They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe him. 32 But do we dare say it was merely human?" For they were afraid that the people would start a riot, since everyone thought that John was a prophet. 33 So they finally replied, "We don't know." And Jesus responded, **"Then I won't answer your question either."** Mark 11:1-33 (NLT)

PRAY for God's guidance

1. What is the closest you have come to meeting a world leader or celebrity?
2. What was unexpected about the way Jesus entered Jerusalem? How does it confirm His character (see Zechariah 9:9)?

In light of the response He received, what were the expectations of the crowd? The disciples (see 10:37)?

3. Have you ever misunderstood Jesus' purposes, praising Him one day and despairing the next?
4. What do you find most significant about the triumphal entry into Jerusalem?
How eager are you to welcome Him into your life today?
5. [vv. 12-26] How does the story of the fig tree relate to the clearing of the temple (vv. 13-14, 20-21)?

In what ways did the Pharisees cover their fruitlessness with flashy foliage?

6. This profiteering on the sale of sacrificial animals took place in the only area where Gentiles could worship. Why would that especially anger Jesus (**see Isaiah 56:6-8 and Jeremiah 7:9-11**)?
7. How are prayer and worship linked together? What conditions for effective prayer are revealed here?
8. [vv. 27-33] Why were the leaders concerned about authority? In their eyes, who had legitimate authority?

Why doesn't He answer them directly?

Wrap up: Why is it impossible to worship and question Jesus' authority at the same time?

What phrase, verse or thought stood out to you the most today?

Prayer: For one another

Chapter 11

Notes for Verses 1,2

This was Sunday of the week that Jesus would be crucified, and the great Passover festival was about to begin. Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the Roman world during this week-long celebration to remember the great exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 12:37-51). Many in the crowds had heard of or seen Jesus and were hoping he would come to the temple (John 11:55-57).

Jesus did come, not as a warring king on a horse or in a chariot, but as a gentle and peaceable king on a donkey's colt, just as Zechariah 9:9 had predicted. Jesus knew that those who would hear him teach at the temple would return to their homes throughout the world and announce the coming of the Messiah.

Notes for Verses 9,10

The people exclaimed "Hosanna" (meaning, "Save!"), because they recognized that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. (See also Psalm 24:7-10; Psalm 118:26.) They spoke of David's kingdom because of God's words to David in 2Samuel 7:12-14. The crowd correctly saw Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies, but they did not understand where Jesus' kingship would lead him. This same crowd cried out "Crucify him!" when Jesus stood on trial only a few days later.

Notes for Verses 11-21

In this passage, two unusual incidents are related: the cursing of the fig tree and the clearing of the temple. The cursing of the fig tree was an acted-out parable related to the clearing of the temple. The temple was supposed to be a place of worship, but true worship had disappeared. The fig tree showed promise of fruit, but it produced none. Jesus was showing his anger at religious life without substance. If you claim to have faith without putting it to work in your life, you are like the barren fig tree. Genuine faith has great potential; ask God to help you bear fruit for his kingdom.

Notes for Verses 13-26

Fig trees, a popular source of inexpensive food in Israel, require three years from the time they are planted until they can bear fruit. Each tree yields a great amount of fruit twice a year, in late spring and in early autumn. This incident occurred early in the spring fig season when the leaves were beginning to bud. The figs normally grow as the leaves fill out, but this tree, though full of leaves, had none. The tree looked promising but offered no fruit. Jesus' harsh words to the fig tree could be applied to the nation of Israel. Fruitful in appearance only, Israel was spiritually barren.

Notes for Verses 15-17

Jesus became angry, but he did not sin. There is a place for righteous indignation. Christians are right to be upset about sin and injustice and should take a stand against them. Unfortunately, believers are often passive about these important issues and instead get angry over personal insults and petty irritations. Make sure your anger is directed toward the right issues.

11:15-17 Money changers and merchants did big business during Passover. Those who came from foreign countries had to have their money changed into temple currency because this was the only money accepted for the temple tax and for the purchase of sacrificial animals. Often the inflated exchange rate enriched the money changers, and the exorbitant prices of animals made the merchants wealthy. Their stalls were set up in the temple's court of the Gentiles, frustrating the intentions of non-Jews who had come to worship God (Isaiah 56:6, 7). Jesus became angry because God's house of worship had become a place of extortion and a barrier to Gentiles who wanted to worship.

Notes for Verses 22,23

The kind of prayer that moves mountains is prayer for the fruitfulness of God's kingdom. It would seem impossible to move a mountain into the sea, so Jesus used that picture to say that God can do anything. God will answer your prayers, but not as a result of your positive mental attitude. Other conditions must be met: (1) you must be a believer; (2) you must not hold a grudge against another person; (3) you must not pray with selfish motives; (4) your request must be for the good of God's kingdom. To pray effectively, you need faith in God, not faith in the object of your request. If you focus only on your request, you will be left with nothing if your request is refused.

Notes for Verse 24

Jesus, our example for prayer, prayed, "Everything is possible for you . . . Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). Our prayers are often motivated by our own interests and desires. We like to hear that we can have anything. But Jesus prayed with *God's* interests in mind. When we pray, we should express our desires, but want his will above ours. Check yourself to see if your prayers focus on your interests or God's.

Notes for Verse 27ff

The religious leaders asked Jesus who gave him the authority to chase away the merchants and money changers. Their question was a trap. If Jesus said his authority was from God, they would accuse him of blasphemy; if he said his authority was his own, they would dismiss him as a fanatic. To expose their real motives, Jesus countered their question with a question about John the Baptist. The leaders' silence proved that they were not interested in the truth. They simply wanted to get rid of Jesus because he was undermining their authority.

