

THE AUTHORITY OF THE MASTER

Mark 11:12-33

Introduction:

He was born in an obscure village, the son of a peasant woman.

He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter's shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he became a wandering preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of those things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through a mockery of a trial. He was executed by the state. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that **One Solitary Life**.

Jesus' impact on the life of mankind on earth is seen in his life but is seen even more in his death. It was what he accomplished by his death and subsequent resurrection that has changed the course of history.

The events that we find recorded in chapters 11-16 of the book of Mark all occur during the last few days of Jesus' life—a total period of 8 days, starting with Jesus' presenting himself as the Messiah by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey on the first day of the week, and ending with his resurrection from the dead on the first day of the following week.

As you look at the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, you will find that about a third of the space is given over to this final week of his life. This one-week period was the culmination of everything he had come to do.

Over the coming weeks, I want for all of us to journey through those days with Jesus, seeing the events of that final week. Last Sunday, we looked at the event we refer to as the triumphal entry, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, declaring himself to be the promised Messiah, the one who would sit on the throne of David, to rule in justice and righteousness.

But the confusing part for the people of Jesus' day was the fact that the kingdom was not to be established quite yet. In fact, we are still waiting for that kingdom period. Jesus wanted them and us to know that his first coming was not to establish the earthly kingdom, but to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin. He came to bring reconciliation between sinful man and a holy God.

Well, this morning I want to walk through the events we find in the rest of chapter 11. The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem took place on Sunday, the first day of the week. The rest of chapter 11 takes us through the next day, Monday, and into Tuesday, the third day of the week.

What I want to do is to briefly look at the events and highlight some of what happened on these days in Jesus' life. Then I would like to try to draw out some significant points of application for us. I believe that the events of this chapter are all connected, culminating in the passage we read a few minutes ago.

A Brief Look at the Events

The Cursing of the Fig Tree – vv. 12-14

- On the following day – this is now Monday morning.
- Jesus is on his way back into Jerusalem from Bethany
- Being hungry he looks for some fruit on a fig tree
- Finding none, he curses the tree, declaring that it should never bear fruit again
- "...And his disciples heard it."

The Cleansing of the Temple – vv. 15-19

- The previous day he had surveyed what was going on in the temple
- Now he shows his anger and frustration, driving out the merchants

- He began teaching those who were there about the sanctity of the temple – reference to Isaiah 56:7, contrasted with the merchandising and commercialism they had brought into the temple
- v. 18 – the resentment of the scribes and Pharisees

In the evening they again left the city, going back out to Bethany for the night.

The Withered Fig Tree – vv. 20-25

- “...in the morning...” – this is now Tuesday morning
- The fig tree has withered up and died
- Peter is amazed by what has happened.
- Jesus teaching about faith, prayer and forgiveness
 - God is not limited in what he can do
 - We need to believe in his power and authority
 - Holding a grudge and refusing to forgive one who has wronged us will hinder our prayers
 - If we expect God to forgive us we need to be willing to forgive

Jesus’ Authority is Questioned – vv. 26-33

- This is still Tuesday morning – they arrive back in Jerusalem.
- Jesus is confronted by the Jewish leaders – they are probably still upset about what happened in the temple the day before
- The question – who gave you the authority to go against our rules and practices?
- Jesus responds to their question with a question of his own about the baptism of John
- The fear of the elders and chief priests and their inability to give a clear answer to Jesus’ question
- Jesus then refuses to answer their question

The Common Thread

So, what is the common thread through all of these events in this chapter. I believe it all comes down to the question the Jewish leaders asked Jesus – “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” The chief priests and elders asked the right question, they just didn’t want to know the answer.

All throughout the ministry of Jesus, if there was one thing that both amazed and frustrated the Jewish leaders is was the authority that Jesus demonstrated in his speech and actions.

Mark 1:22 – “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”

Mark 1:27 – “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’”

Mark 2:6-11 – Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”

This went on for 3 years. Now he has demonstrated his power and authority again in different ways. He showed the power of God in the cursing of the fig tree, which was intended as a lesson for his disciples. He confronted the establishment in the temple, which raised the ire of the Jewish temple leaders – the elders, scribes and chief priests. They have had enough and confront him with their question.

This is all about authority. And what he refused to tell those Jewish leaders, because he knew the hardness of their hearts, was that his authority came from his heavenly Father, and from within himself. After all, he was and is God Almighty. Those men who challenged his authority were, in fact, challenging the right of God himself to perform whatever actions he desired or felt were necessary.

Application and Conclusion

That is a very quick run through these events and a quick look at the thread that ties them all together. But now, as we wrap this up there are two areas of application that I would like to address.

1. First, there is the question of Christ's authority in our lives. We do not have the privilege or the responsibility of going through life with Jesus physically walking beside us. We do not encounter him in the flesh as we enter the "temple" or walk through the marketplace. Yet, he is every bit as present with us as he was when he walked the roads of Galilee or the streets of Jerusalem with his disciples. The question is: Do you recognise the authority he has over your life and are you willing to daily submit to his authority?

2. The second area of application is a bit more subtle but just as important. The authority that Jesus demonstrated is also the source of our power and authority in ministry.

As you look at the account of Jesus cursing the fig tree, there is a lesson in it for us. *Read vv. 20-24 again.* Think about what Jesus is saying. Obviously, he is not advocating that we go around moving mountains and withering up trees just to prove that we have his power. But what I believe he is pointing out is that the God we serve is not restricted in any way in what He can do. And we have his authority behind us. When it is necessary and within his will to do so, we can bring his authority to bear on any situation we face.

This is especially true in the ministry to which God has called us. I want to close by referring you to what we call the Great Commission. It is found in Matthew 28:18-20. We often quote it beginning with v. 19. *Read vv. 19-20.* That is our commission. It is what God has appointed us to do as believers and churches. But it is vital that we include v. 18. Listen again to Jesus' words.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore..." When we take the message of Christ to the ends of the earth or to the neighbour across the street, we go with all the authority of heaven behind us – *see v. 20.*

So, the authority of the Master. He has ultimate authority to do whatever he wishes in this world. He has complete authority over us, but as we work to accomplish his will, we do so with all of his authority behind us.