

## Gospel of Mark Chapter 11 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "Understanding what is an unforgivable sin". An alternative title would be "dealing with ingratitude". I'm not sure which one is better, so I'll let you pick. ☺ Let me explain that title and what is going on here. In this chapter, Jesus "officially" gets corporately rejected by the nation of Israel. My goal for this lesson is to explain why that is significant and how that affects all of our lives.
  - a) Let me start by defining what is an unforgivable sin. Jesus said that every sin of mankind is forgivable except the denial of the Holy Spirit (See Mark 3:29). What Jesus meant by that is that God wants a relationship with us "so bad", that He is willing to forgive any and all sins we have committed no matter how bad they are, just by asking. We may still have to pay a price to society or say, our health for our sins, but not to God. So what is the unforgivable sin of the "denial of the Holy Spirit?" It is, in effect, to spend a lifetime denying who Jesus is and the fact that His sin-payment is sufficient for our sins.
  - b) This leads to the key event of this chapter, which is "Palm Sunday". This is an arranged event by Jesus where he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey proclaiming Himself to be the promised Messiah (i.e., eternal king) of Israel. Many Israelites were willing to accept Jesus as long as He would overthrow the Roman Government. At the same time, they would not accept Him as one who had to die for their sins. That too, is an example of the denial of the Holy Spirit, which is to deny that Jesus is God and His sin payment is sufficient to cover all of our sins of our lives.
  - c) The other significant event in this chapter revolves around a fig tree that was cursed by Jesus and then that tree instantly dies. The lesson is not about putting curses on things or say, those who reject us. The curse is about learning the fate of those who refuse to follow Jesus and what is their ultimate fate. In this case, it was the nation of Israel at that time.
  - d) This comes back to alternative title, which is dealing with ingratitude. A point of this chapter is to realize that just as we can experience ingratitude from people who are not thankful for what they have received, so also God in effect, experiences ingratitude when people refuse to accept Jesus' payment for their sins.
    - i) That does not mean we give up on people if they don't accept Jesus as their Savior or if they have an ungrateful attitude about life. I pray for lot of people that their hearts be opened to the truth. The good news is God can and does work through imperfect people like you and me to make a difference for Him and lead people "we never expect" to understand who is God and what He wants for our lives.
2. This leads us back to this chapter. Again, the main story is about Jesus making his famous "donkey ride" on Palm Sunday. After this, Jesus leaves the scene after He was in effect, rejected by the masses for what He wanted to accomplish: He wanted the Israelites to understand and accept the fact that He was their promised Messiah and He came to give them eternal life.
  - a) The related good news of the chapter is that their (the Israelites) loss became the gain of the whole world. I am convinced that the corporate Israelite rejection of Jesus was necessary in order for the world to accept Jesus as God. I'll explain why I believe that was necessary through this chapter.
  - b) Again, the other significant event of this chapter is Jesus cursing a fig tree. The fig tree is symbolic of the nation of Israel. The fact that Jesus cursed that fig tree is symbolic of the fact that God does "curse" at some point all who refuse to accept Jesus' payment for their sins. It also teaches us that God would no longer primarily be working through the Nation of Israel and now God would primarily work through the Christian church.
  - c) That does not mean that God no longer cares for Israel or non-saved people. My point is road to salvation would be through Christians and the Christian church.

3. OK, let's say we know all of this. We understand how Jesus got rejected and we understand that God works through the Christian church to lead others to Him. What does all of this rejection and ingratitude of Chapter 11 have to do with my life? In other words, why should I care?
  - a) The point is just as God can "in effect" experience ingratitude for people refusing to turn to Jesus, so we can experience ingratitude when we want to do something nice for someone, and they refuse to be grateful for what they have or what they received.
  - b) One has to remember that this world is imperfect and just as we hurt others, so others are going to hurt us. Sometimes that "hurt" comes through ingratitude, and all we can do is suffer for it. If we get into an argument and we realize how the other person has hurt us, all we can do, in reality is pray for that person and also, look at our part and see what can be changed in our own life. In other words, we can't fix others, only work on ourselves. When we are hurt by feelings of ingratitude or "whatever", all we can do is give those feelings to God. The point is God can relate to the pain we go through when we are hurt by others and in order to get past that pain, we have to give it to Him.
  - c) My concluding point of this introduction is simply that Jesus had to deal with rejection and so do we. What we should catch is that despite that rejection, Jesus is still in charge of the events at hand. When things are going wrong all around us, we have to remember that Jesus is still in charge and allows these things to happen, ultimately for His glory.
  - d) There, that is confusing enough to complete the introduction. ☺ Let's start Verse 1.
4. Chapter 11, Verse 1: As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "
  - a) If you recall from the beginning of last week's lesson, I mentioned that the "where" from the end of Chapter 9 to the start of Chapter 10 was in the northern region of Israel at Jesus' "home" base" of Capernaum. Jesus then started to travel south along the Jordan River, with the goal of working his way to Jerusalem.
    - i) The last part of Chapter 10 mentioned Jesus healing a blind man near Jericho. If one looks at a map of Israel, one can "sort of" trace Jesus' journey from the north, along the Jordan River, then through Jericho and eventually reaching Jerusalem.
  - b) Now that we've established the fact that Jesus has reached Jerusalem, understand that this is the last time He will be in that city. In this chapter we are now on the last week of Jesus' life that covers His death and the resurrection. That covers the "when" of this chapter.
  - c) Two small towns are mentioned in these verses, named Bethphage and Bethany. They are on the outskirts of Jerusalem roughly 1 and 2 miles away. The text mentions that Jesus sends two unnamed disciples ahead of him to go find a colt (a young donkey) that is tied up at a certain place. Jesus specifies that if anyone complains to those disciples that they are stealing this animal, the disciples are to say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back".
  - d) This is leading up to the famous event that we call "Palm Sunday". If you don't know, "Palm Sunday", is the Sunday before Easter Sunday. It is the day Jesus publicly proclaimed Himself as the promised Messiah and rode on this donkey into Jerusalem.
  - e) Some commentators believe that Jesus pre-arranged this event. The theory goes that the last time Jesus was in Jerusalem, he arranged with the donkey owner that one day He (Jesus) would need to borrow the colt and the secret code phrase is the "Lord needs it".
    - i) The other possibility is simply that Jesus knew "prophetically" the donkey would be there and He simply told the two disciples who got the animal exactly what God the Father told Jesus about getting the animal.
    - ii) The truth is just "how" Jesus did this is a mystery.

- f) Now that we have the "where, when and how" aspects of the story completed, we can focus on the "donkey ride" event itself. Understand that, this is the big moment where Jesus publicly proclaims Himself as the Promised Messiah for the Nation of Israel.
- i) In other words, if the Nation of Israel collectively is either going to accept or reject Jesus as their promised Messiah, this is when that moment is to occur.
  - ii) Think of it this way: If you read through all the Gospels, there are a number of times where someone wanted to honor Jesus as the Promised Messiah and Jesus refused to do so. Now the "opposite" occurs, where Jesus arranges to be worshipped and the nation of Israel has the big chance to say "yes or no" to Jesus.
  - iii) Also understand that it is now only a matter of days before a big Jewish holiday, which is Passover. This is an annual event where Jewish people are required to remember how God lead their ancestors out of Egypt. There is an ancient ritual that is practiced by Jews on this day to remember that historical event.
  - iv) The City of Jerusalem was an "average sized" city of that time. However, just prior to this holiday the city "swells in growth" as many come to celebrate this holiday.
    - a) Roughly thirty years after this event, a historian named Josephus writes about a typical Passover celebration. He mentions that over 100,000 lambs were slaughtered for this holiday. If one figures a lamb could roughly feed ten people, that means the population of Jerusalem at this time was roughly 1,000,000 people who were celebrating this Passover event.
    - b) Therefore, when Jesus visibly rode on the young donkey (down a very visible mountain) into Jerusalem, a large crowd witnessed this event and had the opportunity to accept Jesus as the Promised Messiah of Israel.
- g) Now we get to the important "why" question: Why mention the story of Jesus going into Jerusalem by way of the "Mount of Olives" (a mountain that looks over Jerusalem). Why did Jesus arrange to get a young donkey to ride upon for this trip?
- i) As I have stated numerous times in my commentary on the Gospel of Mark, this book was written for a non-Jewish audience to read. So, why explain to a non-Jewish audience that Jesus publicly proclaimed Himself as the Messiah of Israel?
  - ii) For starters, it is so the world would know that the Jewish people of that day rejected Jesus as their Messiah. In other words, "Their loss became our gain".
  - iii) There is a theory that if the Jewish people would have accepted Jesus as their Messiah, then he would have set up the "eternal kingdom" then and there. Since Jesus was "collectively" rejected, and God knows all things before hand, it is just speculation and we don't know for sure.
- h) Let me ask this "why" question another way: Why was it necessary for the Nation of Israel to reject Jesus in order for Him to be accepted by the world?
- i) First, understand that this rejection was part of God's plan from "time immortal".
  - ii) Also understand the Jewish nation did reject Jesus a few days later. The religious leaders sentenced Jesus to death and they had the Romans do the killing for them.
  - iii) Also understand that in another "sense" no one killed Jesus. He was aware of all the events leading up to His crucifixion and Jesus understood that all of these events were necessary in order for Him to die for everyone's sins.
    - a) Jesus allowed all of this rejection to happen, as it was part of God's plan.
  - iv) Back to the question: Was it necessary for the Jewish nation to collectively reject Jesus so that He could be "King" over everyone and anyone who has decided to accept Jesus as their savior? I believe the rejection was necessary in the sense that Jesus came 1) For the Jewish nation first and 2) for the world. In other words, it required the Jewish nation to reject Jesus in order for the world to accept Him.

- v) Think of it another way: Would Paul have been as successful preaching Jesus as the "Savior of all people", if Jesus was simply a king ruling the world from Israel? If that were the case, people all over the Roman world might accept Jesus as the "Guy who overthrew the Roman government", but they would not accept the idea of Jesus as the only true "God" who always existed and reigns forever.
  - vi) In other words, if the Jewish people accepted Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus might have overthrown Rome and ruled that world from that time. That would have made Jesus a great military leader like David, but the world would not have accepted Jesus as "God, first last and always".
  - vii) Therefore, the rejection of Jesus by the Nation of Israel was a necessary step, even though it ended up causing the unnecessary death of multitudes of Jewish people for 2,000 years. In other words, a lot of innocent Jewish people were killed under the "excuse" that their ancestors had rejected Jesus.
    - a) God has never called on Christians to kill unbelievers. We as believers are to be living witnesses for God and "that's it". It is up to God and Him alone to decide who should be saved and who should not.
  - viii) The sin of the Jewish nation of that day is the same unforgivable sin of anyone and everyone who rejects Jesus complete payment for the forgiveness of sin. The point is there is an eternal price to be paid for that rejection.
  - i) OK, I have wandered way off topic in order to explain Jesus purpose for setting up this "donkey ride" on the Sunday prior to Jesus' resurrection. Getting back to the verses, notice that no actual donkey ride has happened yet. All that has happened so far is Jesus gave the order to two of His disciples to go get the young donkey and if anybody questions why they are taking it, they are simply to say in effect, "The Lord needs it".
5. Verse 4: They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup>some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.
- a) When you read Verses 4-6, it makes you wonder why either verses 1-3 or verse 4-6 are both necessary. In verses one to three, Jesus tells the disciples what to do and in Verses 4-6 are essentially making the same point with things happening as Jesus predicted.
  - b) As I stated earlier, it makes one wonder if Jesus pre-arranged this event or was Jesus predicting the event as it would happen. Either answer is possible and whatever is the answer does not effect who Jesus really is. If Jesus truly is God, I don't have problems with Him predicting His own future, and I equally don't have a problem if somehow, Jesus prearranged this event.
6. Verse 7: When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.
- a) In these two events, it mentioned people putting their cloaks (outer garments) on the road in front of Jesus and others threw their cloaks on the donkey for Jesus to sit on. The verse also mentioned that some people spread out branches that they cut down in the field.
  - b) Without getting too much into Middle East "customs and traditions", this act of the laying of clothing and palm branches are part a practice for greeting a king coming into town.
  - c) Notice Mark said the branches were cut down. I once talked to a religious Jewish person who believed this event didn't happen in the spring (when the Passover holiday occurs), but in the fall. That is because in the fall, Jewish people cut down palm branches to make portable dwelling places to live, as part of another Jewish ritual. I am grateful Mark uses the word "cut down" to indicate that people went to the trouble of cutting down branches specifically for this event. The Greek word for "cut down" takes away that false view that Jesus arranged this event at a different time of the year.
  - d) We now get to the actual donkey ride of Jesus down a hill, very visibly into Jerusalem. So, onto the big question: Why did Jesus arrange this event here and on this day?

- i) It has nothing to do with any desire on Jesus' part to be worshipped. This is all about the nation of Israel publicly either accepting or rejecting Jesus as their promised Messiah. In Luke's Gospel (19:42) that describes this same event, Jesus says that this is "your (Israel's) day" using the New King James translation.
  - ii) My point here is that this day is prearranged as a time when the nation of Israel was to recognize that their Promised Messiah was here. That is why Jesus organizes this parade for Israel to recognize this event. Remember again that this city was crowded in preparation for the Passover holiday, which was days away.
  - iii) In fact, on this same day was when rabbi's inspected the lambs and decided which ones were fit for sacrificing. Given the fact that the historian Josephus said (thirty years later) that 100,000 lambs were slaughtered for this holiday, this was a major event. My point here is that while the rabbi's were choosing all the lambs to be sacrificed, Jesus was saying in effect, "Pick me, as your sacrificial lamb."
  - iv) The Jewish people by this time should have known Jesus was the Messiah. If the miracles or His teaching were not enough evidence, there were also Old Testament predictions that lead to this date. For example, the last few verses of Daniel Chapter 9 makes a prediction that leads to this exact date (i.e., Palm Sunday). Even if the Rabbi's could not calculate the exact date, they should have known the time for the coming of the promised Messiah of Israel is "about now".
  - v) My point is while the exact date and time of Jesus Second Coming is a mystery, the exact date and time of Jesus first coming was hinted out in the Old Testament.
- e) Meanwhile, I left Jesus sitting on the donkey, ready for his famous ride. ☺
7. Verse 9: Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! " "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" <sup>10</sup> "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"
- a) Personally I visualize this like the singing of a song. There was one group singing "Hosanna" and the other group followed with "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". Whether or not it actually happened that way, we don't know.
  - b) The important point is Jesus made the ride and many people greeted Him as the promised Messiah for the nation of Israel. This same nation would reject Him a few days later.
  - c) Since the "Palm Sunday" event is only the second event that all four gospels recorded, (the first was the feeding of the 5,000), we get more details from other gospel sources.
    - i) Matthew's Gospel (21:5) mentions that this event is the fulfillment of a prophesy as stated in Zechariah 9:9 and quotes that verse. Luke's Gospel (19:41) says that Jesus "wept over Jerusalem". Jesus knew His rejection would be the underlying reason for the upcoming destruction of the city, which would happen roughly forty years later. John's Gospel (12:16) emphasizes the fact that the disciples did not fully comprehend the event until after Jesus had died and rose again.
    - ii) Meanwhile, I believe we are only studying Mark at the moment. ☺ Mark gives us hints that some people did cheer Jesus on as the Messiah, but stops short of giving us the Jewish background of this event.
  - d) God the Father wants us to come to Jesus out of the realization that we can't please Him based on our efforts. It is the realization that we need Jesus for our sin payment that gets people to give their lives to Him. That is why it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross and yes, that is why it is necessary for the Israelites to reject Jesus at this time in history.
  - e) Yes, the Israelites were collectively still held accountable for their rejection but at the same time, Jesus was very aware that this rejection would happen in the first place. In other words, these people were held accountable for their rejection of Jesus just as all people are held accountable for what they did with their knowledge of Jesus.
  - f) So, how could Israel (collectively) be guilty of rejecting Jesus and at the same time, argue that Jesus arranged all of this and knew His destiny? The short answer is we have the

insight of seeing things from God's perspective. The point is the Jews that rejected Jesus are equally as guilty as anyone today who chooses to reject Jesus and tries to please God (or just doesn't care) based on their own human efforts.

- i) In other words, the Jews who rejected Jesus here are not guilty for sending Jesus to the cross, but for refusing to accept His sin payment for their own sins.
8. Verse 11: Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.
- a) Personally, I had to wonder what people thought when Jesus finished his donkey ride and then "pretty much" left town to go back to Bethany. As I stated earlier, Bethany is about two miles away from Jerusalem.
    - i) In other words, I wonder if the disciples thought that at the end of the donkey ride, Jesus would overthrow the Roman soldiers stationed at Jerusalem and lead a revolt over the Roman government? After all, that is what most Jews expected of the Messiah, one who was going to set up a new worldwide government based out of Jerusalem at this time.
    - ii) I also wondered if some people were disappointed that Jesus didn't "do much" at the end of the donkey ride and that led to the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.
  - b) The important point here is that the "donkey ride" was completed and now Jesus could just go back to where he was staying as there was nothing else to accomplish on this date. Yes other gospels record that Jesus was visually upset of how He was rejected, but as far as Jesus just "sitting there" and continuing to mull over the rejection, that was not to happen. At this point, Jesus called it a day, as it was obvious that the Jewish people would not accept Him as the Messiah unless He would overthrow the Roman's.
  - c) I suspect the Roman soldiers were nervous about this event. They were outnumbered by all of the Israelites gathered for this festival. Now here comes this man on a donkey and people are calling Him "the king". I bet Roman soldiers stopped near wherever Jesus stopped just to see what He was going to do. Once Jesus just "walked away" from the events of the day, I suspect there was a big sigh of relief by the Roman soldiers.
9. Verse 12: The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup> Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.
- a) Verse 12 begins with the "Monday" of the big week. It mentions Jesus leaving the town of Bethany and heading back to Jerusalem, when Jesus spots a fig tree.
  - b) OK, time for a quick lecture on fig trees. Such trees usually bloom fruit twice a year, in the summer and late fall or winter. The fruit would grow soon after the leaves were growing. Remember that Jesus was timing this event around the Jewish holiday of Passover, which was always in the springtime. Therefore, it would not be normal for figs to be blooming at this time of year when this event took place.
    - i) With that understanding, it makes Verse 13 more difficult to explain, based on Jesus phrase of, "It is not the season for figs". If Jesus were being literal, He would not have cursed the fig tree. Since this is not the time of year when fig trees do bloom, what was Jesus point of cursing this tree?
      - a) The key to understanding this story is when Jesus said, "It is not the season for figs", He was figuratively speaking of the Nation of Israel.
      - b) The Old Testament has a number of references comparing the Nation of Israel to a "fig tree". (See Hosea 9:10; Nahum 3:12; Zechariah 10:2).
    - ii) Therefore, Mark is pointing out that the Nation of Israel is rejecting Jesus at this moment is similar to this particular fig tree not bearing fruit at this moment.

- iii) Also know that this is the only account in any Gospel story of Jesus cursing some object with the intent of destroying it. That is why commentators associate this story of the tree destruction with Jesus saying the nation of Israel no longer being fruitful, from the "cross onward". God is now primarily going to work through the "church" to lead people to Him and no longer through the nation of Israel.
    - c) That does not mean God is done with the nation of Israel nor does it mean that no individual Jewish person can be saved. It just means the end of an era where prophets will no longer be sent to the Jewish nation and now God is going to work "through" the church to lead others to salvation.
      - i) By the way, most evangelical Christians also believe that God is still planning to work through the nation of Israel "once again" in some future time once the "church era" is over, but for now, I won't go down that road. ☺
    - d) Jesus continues this story of the cursing of the fig tree later in the chapter. At that point, Jesus is using the cursing of the fig tree to make the point that His followers will be given great power to do miracles, but I am getting ahead of myself in the story.
    - e) The important thing to remember about this little story is simply that Jesus curses a particular fig tree as a symbolic gesture to show that the nation of Israel failed to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and now it is "too late" for them as a nation.
      - i) Again, this just refers to the end of the era where God primarily works through the nation of Israel and for the last 2,000 years, God has primarily worked (in terms of leading people to salvation) through Christians and the Christian church.
      - ii) OK, enough theology. ☺ Time for a new story.
10. Verse 15: On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup> and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. <sup>17</sup> And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it `a den of robbers.' "
- a) Now we have another famous story where Jesus "overturned" the tables.
  - b) If you read all four gospels carefully, there were actually two times that Jesus did this act. Once was early in his ministry and once was here on "Monday" of the "big week".
  - c) Let me give a little background of what was happening here:
    - i) As I was stating, there were lots of visitors to Jerusalem at this time for the big holiday of Passover. In preparation for this holiday, people would offer sacrifices for their sins. In order to have animals for their sacrifices, they would purchase the animals at the temple. Money was also exchanged from various currencies into the local currencies to make offerings for the temple.
    - ii) Many Jews living elsewhere were also exchanging their currency to the local one in order to pay an annual "Temple Tax" required by all Jews to be paid.
    - iii) It was a known fact that the chief priest at that time was corrupt. This is recorded in Jewish history as well as in the bible. In other words, the people working these tables were charging high prices for the sacrificial animals and money changing. At the same time, the religious leaders had a piece of the action. Understanding that helps to explain what was happening for this story.
    - iv) I remember a friend who was teaching this story at my church. He gave a great illustration: The day before he taught this, he took his kids to Disneyland and he was complaining about the high prices Disneyland charges for things. During his class he stated the priests were selling sacrificial sheep at "Disneyland prices". ☺ Well, all of us in the class caught the reference and understood it.

- d) Given all of that, the text says that Jesus didn't like the fact that the people working the tables were profiting off of the tourists and overturned the tables.
- i) This verse does not mean we are to overturn tables of places we think are charging too much money for their merchandise. Jesus point here is that the Temple was to be a place to worship God and it should not be used to make a profit.
  - ii) Mark's Gospel makes the point that the Temple is to be a house of prayer for all nations. Here Mark is showing the "Gentile" significance of the Temple.
  - iii) Further, Jesus uses the term "My house", (via the Greek translation) to describe the temple. This is one time Jesus acknowledges the existing temple as being a place that is "God ordained" for the purposes of worshipping Him.
  - iv) When Jesus overturned the tables, the point was not to say this Temple is "no good", it was just to make the point that the Priests should not profit off the fact that visitors were in town to worship God.
  - v) I have to admit, I would wonder what Jesus would do with a lot of tables set up outside of churches that are used to sell things. I'll let that one go at that. ☺
- e) The particular table Jesus chose to turn over was used to sell doves. If one studies the Old Testament, there were a number of animals used for making sacrifices. The type of animal sacrificed was usually based on what one could afford. If somebody was poor, offering doves is the cheapest form of sacrifice that one could make.
- i) In other words, God does not care so much about the amount of income or savings we have when it comes to worshipping Him. He cares that we make the effort to come to Him. Therefore, if someone could not afford to sacrifice a sheep or goat, the lowest and cheapest form of a sacrifice was doves.
  - ii) My point here is that Jesus specifically picked on the table selling doves at inflated prices, as the poor people were being hurt the most by the high prices.
- f) One more thing before I move on. Verse 16 also mentioned the fact that people used the Temple area in effect as a short cut to cut across town. Along the same lines of the complaint that the religious leaders were "short-changing" people in the exchange of money and the sale of animals, they were also allowing the temple area to be used as a short cut. In other words, they didn't do anything at that time to stop that practice.
11. Verse 18: The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.
- a) Remember that the "top religious leaders" had a piece of the action. That is a documented fact through non-biblical sources. Therefore, they were angry at what Jesus was teaching and they were looking for a way to kill Him as they feared His popularity.
  - b) Let me put it this way: I believe a large crowd cheered when Jesus overturned the tables. People usually know when they are being ripped off and the "average tourist" was probably happy about the fact Jesus stopped the inflated prices for selling doves.
    - i) Therefore, the corrupt priests wanted to get rid of Jesus, but they feared a revolt because the crowds liked Jesus. They were afraid their "system" would be exposed with Jesus growing in popularity.
12. Verse 19: When evening came, they went out of the city. <sup>20</sup> In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. <sup>21</sup> Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"
- a) We now move from "Monday" of crucifixion week to "Tuesday" of the same week. Verse 19 mentions Monday night when Jesus and the disciples left the city. Verse 20 mentions "Tuesday morning" when they started walking back to the city of Jerusalem.
  - b) In these verses, we are back to the story of the fig tree. It is at these verses where the disciples noticed that the tree that Jesus cursed earlier in the chapter (Verse 14) and withered and died "from the roots" (we'll get to that in moment) and died.



- c) In other words, the disciples noticed the tree that Jesus just cursed the day before had died in the one day period since they last saw the tree.
  - d) So, why did Peter mentioned it "withered from the roots"? In other words, Peter could just have said that the tree died. Why is it significant to mention the fact that the tree died "from the roots".
    - i) I believe the symbolic idea is similar to the parable of the four types of soil (from Chapter 4). The idea is that the only type of person who makes a difference for God is the ones planted in "good soil". The plants in Chapter 4 that eventually died or did not flourish were the ones planted in bad soil.
    - ii) Which leads us to this fig tree. If this tree died from its roots, the symbolic idea is that there is not enough substance in the ground to "feed" the tree what it needs. The reason a tree puts roots in the ground is to provide the water and minerals the tree needs to survive and grow.
    - iii) What I am getting at is that if a tree doesn't have "healthy roots", it will die. The symbolic point is that the Nation of Israel is like a tree and it will no longer be "fruitful" in that the growth of people who believe in God will now come from the Christian church and not from Israel.
  - e) In the last 2,000 years, the Christian church has grown from a handful of followers, by "word of mouth" and has grown to billions of people around the world. At the same time there are not multitudes of people following God by converting to Judaism. There are a relatively small number of converts, but the nation of Israel has never produced the type of fruit (i.e., growth) for God that He desired.
    - i) Another way to look at the historical significance is that the Nation of Israel failed to get the surrounding world to look to God as the way to approach life. It took the growth of the Christian church to accept the idea of a single God. (For what it is worth, Muhammad and Islam did not come until seven centuries later.)
    - ii) The point here is that Jesus cursed this fig tree as a symbolic gesture that Israel "collectively" will not produce "fruit for God". The tree withered from its roots in the sense that the nation of Israel will no longer be God's main way of working to lead people to Him.
    - iii) The point of this "cursing" is that the nation of Israel will no longer serve as the primary means by which God works through the world.
    - iv) OK, I've now successfully beaten that point to death. ☺ Let's get back to the text.
13. Verse 22: "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. <sup>23</sup> "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.
- a) Jesus uses the point about the cursed fig tree to teach His followers to have faith in God.
  - b) Jesus is saying in effect, "Just as I have cursed this tree, so you (my followers) will also have the power to do anything you ask for in prayer.
    - i) These verses are not saying we can move mountains into the sea or kill the nearest fig tree just by praying hard enough for that event to come true. ☺
    - ii) These verses are not saying just as Jesus was rejected on Palm Sunday, so we should curse those who reject Him or reject us preaching to them. ☺
    - iii) These verses are saying that anything we pray for that is God's will for our life can and will be done if we are willing to trust that it is God's will.
    - iv) The reason we can and should pray for anything is that we don't know what is God's will for our lives. I pray with the concept that God is going to ignore any prayer request that is not His will to accomplish at that moment in time. It is like the old saying: God has three answers to prayer: Yes, no and "not now". We have to be willing to accept any of those three responses to prayer.

- c) There is a false notion that the reason more of our prayers are not answered is that we didn't pray with enough faith expecting the answer to be yes. The correct understanding of prayer is about getting God's will done for our lives and not our will. God is not some "genie in a bottle" who is there to grant all of our wishes. God is interested in getting His will done. Since learning what is God's will for our lives is usually uncertain, we can and should pray for whatever is on our minds, but with the understanding that it is God's goal to get His will done, not ours.
  - d) At the same time, we need to pray with the idea that God has heard our prayers, God is interested in what we have to say and God is willing to say yes at times to our prayers.
  - e) It never ceases to amaze me how God does answer my prayers. It is amazing to think of all the billions of people praying to God, how He can hear all of those prayers and answer those that are His will to get done. Those who can't accept that fact of a God that is "big enough" to handle all of that prayer have the mistaken idea that God is "much smaller" or simply doesn't care about our individual lives. Personally, I have seen way too many miracles happen that can only be explained through prayer to God.
14. Verse 25: And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. "
- a) The final line of this message about prayer deals with the issue of forgiving others.
  - b) So why is that line there? Didn't we just spend most of this lesson dealing with ingratitude and the fact that God does not forgive those who reject Jesus?
    - i) If you think about it, this verse is confusing in context to the surrounding verses. What does this verse have to do with cursing the fig tree or praying to God about the requests of our hearts at any given moment?
  - c) In many ways, this verse does tie well to the whole lesson theme, but I need to explain.
    - i) First, let's put everything in context. Jesus just cursed a fig tree "to death". This leads to a teachable moment about how to pray to God. Jesus in effect (in the previous few verses) says that anything is possible through prayer. It is just a matter of having faith that God could answer that prayer and that it is God's will that the specific prayer request of the moment be answered.
  - d) That leads us to Verse 25. To shorten it, the key point is that if we want God the Father to forgive us of sins, we have to forgive others. Why is that there?
    - i) For starters, in order to approach God the Father, we need to come to Him "sinless". We are eternally forgiven based on our trust in Jesus' payment for our sins. At the same time, when we become aware of things we have done or areas of our lives that are displeasing to God, He wants us to confess those sins to Him.
    - ii) What's the purpose of that? A key reason is so that we can receive forgiveness for those sins. Further, it helps to acknowledge that we have sinned and in effect we are telling God, "The way we have been doing "x" is wrong and God's way of handling whatever "x" is, is the right way to do it." Finally, we must agree to change our ways to avoid doing "x" the wrong way in the future.
    - iii) OK, so what does this have to do with forgiving others? The short answer is "everything". If we want God the Father to have a forgiving attitude over what we have done wrong, it is essential for us to have a forgiving attitude over how others have hurt us. If we are focusing on how others have hurt us, that "pain" is blocking our relationship with God. Therefore, our inability to forgive others must be confessed as sin to others and we must make the effort to forgive that person(s) of hurting us, even if that hurt is legitimate.
    - iv) Remember my lesson theme has to do with dealing with rejection. One way we personally deal with it, is to give that pain to God and make it "His problem". That is another way we give the pain others have caused us to God.

- v) Let me try this from another angle: The way others have hurt us may have everything to do with "them" and nothing with us. We may have been hurt by someone who was drunk or simply were putting their desires before us. We still may have to file charges against crimes against society, but in order to move on in life, we have to forgive them for how they have hurt us. God wants us to forgive them not to avoid punishment, but for us to let go of the pain that can separate us from God in our thoughts and in our prayers.
  - vi) If all of this is true, why didn't God forgive Israel for rejecting Jesus? In a sense, He has in that they are not guilty of "first-degree" murder, but "second degree". Murder in the "second degree" essentially means that one did not perform the murder, but one approved of and went along with the planned murder.
    - a) The point is the nation of Israel collectively rejected the idea of Jesus dying for their sins and just as it is today, it is an unforgivable sin.
    - b) What if someone rejects Jesus for a good portion of their life and then accepts Him? Are they guilty of an unforgivable sin? No. One is only guilty if one spends their entire lifetime refusing to turn to Jesus.
  - vii) While you are digesting that thought, I'll move on to Verse 27. ☺
15. Verse 27: They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. <sup>28</sup> "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"
- a) This chapter is going to end with a discussion between Jesus and the religious leaders.
  - b) I'm sure the religious leaders were mad at Jesus for overturning the tables. As I stated earlier, the religious leaders had a "piece of the action" of the unfair exchange of money or unfair prices paid for sacrificial animals. The religious leaders confronted Jesus and the asked Him in effect, "Why did You do these things?"
    - i) Remember that the religious leaders were much smaller in number than the masses of people who came to Jerusalem to worship God. These religious leaders wanted that large crowd to look to them for guidance and here was Jesus condemning their animal and money exchange practices as wrong.
    - ii) In other words, Jesus was questioning their religious authority and the religious leaders in turn, were questioning "Who was Jesus" and by what authority does He claim to "outrank" their authority as the religious leaders.
16. Verse 29: Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>30</sup> John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"
- a) Jesus answers their question about "authority" with a question of his own. Jesus asks whether or not they accept the authority of John the Baptist. Remember that among other things John stated quite bluntly that Jesus is the promised Messiah.
  - b) In other words, Jesus put the religious leaders on the spot. John the Baptist was a popular figure in Israel. If the religious leaders say they don't believe John was sent from God, they feared an uprising of the Jewish people as John was accepted as a profit. If they say they accept John as a profit, Jesus would then ask, "Why didn't you believe him?"
  - c) If the religious leaders said in effect, "Well, we asked you a question first?" Jesus could legitimately respond, the people accept Me just as they accepted John the Baptist so are you (the religious leaders) going against the "Jewish crowd"?
    - i) If the crowd accepted Jesus, why do you (me) say that they are guilty of an unforgivable sin? It is because the crowd accepted Jesus as someone who could overthrow Rome, but not as someone who would die for their sins.
  - d) Notice that despite the rejection of the Jewish leadership, Jesus was still in charge. He knew He had them "over a barrel" with that question.

17. Verse 31: They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'<sup>32</sup> But if we say, 'From men'...." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)<sup>33</sup> So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."
- a) The Jewish religious leaders understood that no matter which way they answered Jesus' question they would lose. This group truly feared the "average Jew" not respecting them so they were afraid to say that John the Baptist was a prophet of God. That is why they gave the answer of "We don't know".
    - i) In other words, Jesus was showing them how they were guilty in effect of "Blaspheming the Holy Spirit" by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.
  - b) Jesus responded to this answer in effect by saying, "If you can't give me an answer about John the Baptist, how do I expect you to understand My authority?"
    - i) Translation: Jesus' authority is God the Father. John the Baptist came to preach a message of repentance for people to turn to God the Father for the forgiveness of sins as the Messiah was coming.
    - ii) Let me put it another way: The religious leaders wanted to approach God based on their own "goodness". Yes they believed in confession of sin, but given that, they believed they were now "100% sin free" solely based on the fact they probably did confess what sins they thought they were guilty of committing.
    - iii) In that way, these religious leaders were like the fig tree with leaves, but no fruit. They claimed to be following God, yet over and above the fact they were cheating people at the tables, they refused to completely trust in God for the forgiveness of their sins and believed they could approach God based on their own "goodness".
      - a) These religious leaders were experts on "God's laws", but they were too proud to accept the idea of eternal forgiveness for their sins.
    - iv) In effect, that is what keeps most people out of heaven: They believe God will accept them as they are and they don't need Jesus to pay the price for their sins.
18. This leads me back to my opening issue of dealing with rejection. These religious leaders rejected Jesus as both a teacher sent from God and as God Himself. Even until the end, Jesus is giving them every opportunity to repent and turn to God, but they refused to do so. Those who reject Jesus are saying in effect, "I am good enough just as I am", and that in effect, is what keeps people from turning to God for complete forgiveness of who they are.
- a) It also leads us to understand how and why people reject us when we teach of Jesus.
  - b) Further, people in life are going to hurt us and that requires forgiveness on our part. Let's face it, most of us who are Christians understand that people who refuse to turn to Jesus will face eternal punishment for refusing to accept that reality.
  - c) The final question therefore is, "How does any of this affect my life today? Other than it affecting me being a good witness for Jesus, what do I do with this information?"
    - i) The related point of this lesson is that when others hurt us, we can and should take that "hurt feeling" to God as He can relate to our pain. Just as God "feels the rejection" that others have for Him, so He can relate to the pain we feel when others reject us or we are hurt by that rejection.
    - ii) The point is we can take our "internal hurt feelings" to God for healing as He can relate to what we are going through when we are hurt by that situation.
    - iii) On that positive note, I'll end this lesson and take it to prayer.
19. Father, help us to see people who have hurt us as people who need Jesus in their lives. Help us to take the pain we have received by others hurting us and giving that pain over to You to deal with. We know that You can handle and fix situations that are out of our control. We trust that You can work in ways that are beyond our understanding. Help us to give that pain to You, so that we in turn, can forgive others and be a good witness for You in all that we do in life. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.