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Mark 11:12 - 11:33



Gospel of Mark - Steve Gregg

In Mark 11:12-33, Steve Gregg discusses the events of Passion Week, highlighting Jesus' teachings about faith, forgiveness, and judgement. The story of the fig tree serves as a warning to Israel to produce "fruit" or face judgement, while the cleansing of the temple reveals Jesus' disapproval of the corrupt business taking place there. Gregg also explores the concept of imprecatory prayer, where believers pray for God's will to be done even if it means the downfall of their enemies. Throughout the passage, Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and love for enemies, while challenging those who question his divine authority.

Transcript

So, we come again to Mark chapter 11, and we have entered what's usually called the Passion Week. In case you're not aware, as I was not in my youth, I didn't know this, and maybe you don't know this either, that the word passion means suffering. We usually use the word passion differently in modern English, but it comes from the Latin word for suffering.

And so, when we call it the Passion Week, we mean the week of his suffering, or the week in which he died, of course. And so, that's the week that we are now in. We have the triumphal entry described in chapter 11, verses 1 through 11.

When Jesus came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he then looked around, checked out the temple, and did nothing but went back to Bethany, which is just a couple miles away, down on the east side of Jerusalem. It was close enough that Jesus could spend his nights in Bethany, and go every day into Jerusalem. And that's what he did each day.

That was his pattern on the Passion Week. He would spend the evenings in Bethany, and it was only a couple miles away, so he could walk every morning into Jerusalem, do his teaching there, do the things he did, and then return. And it's almost certain that where he was staying in Bethany was at the home of Lazarus and Mary and Martha, who were a brother and two sisters.

They have not really been mentioned in the book of Mark, but they are mentioned both

in the Gospel of John and in Luke, as living in Bethany, in a house that often hosted Jesus when he was in the area. So, this would be now the next day, verse 12. This would be Monday.

Now, the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, he was hungry and seen from afar a fig tree having leaves. He went to see if perhaps he would find something on it. And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

In response, Jesus said to it, let no one eat fruit from you ever again. And his disciples heard it. Now, in one of the other Gospels recording this event, it says, and immediately the fig tree withered up from the roots and the disciples commented on it.

Where Mark makes it clear that it, although it may have in fact immediately begun to wither from the roots, they didn't see that until later. And they comment on it later in the next day when they're passing the same fig tree and find it's withered up. In fact, we might even just jump down to verse 20 to see the sequel to this, because it's hard to comment on verses 12 through 14 without including the information in verses 20 through 24.

Because that was Monday morning. Apparently, as they were entering Jerusalem, by the side of the road was a fig tree. It had leaves all over it and Jesus was hungry.

It was not quite yet the season for figs, so one might not really expect to find figs on it, except that it had leaves and from what I'm told, and I'm not I'm not an expert about horticulture, but I'm told that some of the fig trees would get their leaves early and their figs early as well. And having the leaves might be seen as an indication that it also could have had figs on it. And Jesus hoped to find figs on it, but didn't find any.

And so he said, let no one eat figs from you ever again. Now, the next day in verse 20, in the morning, this would be Tuesday morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree which you cursed has withered away.

So Jesus answered and said to them, have faith in God. For surely, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things which he says will come to pass. He will have whatever he says.

Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you prayed, believe that you received them and you will have them. Now, this teaching about faith, we will get into in its proper chronological place. There are some things to talk about first.

But the fact that the fig tree withered up and died is what we need to be aware of in verse 20. So Jesus said to the tree in verse 14, no one will ever eat fruit from you again.

And in verse 20, we read that was true.

It died. It didn't ever produce fruit again. Now, the meaning of this particular miracle, and we would have to class this as a miracle, has been one of the things that gives some people problems.

For one thing, it just doesn't seem very fair of Jesus to curse this fig tree. It wasn't its fault. It wasn't the season for figs.

It couldn't be expected at figs. So why would he curse the fig tree? How unkind of him. I guess tree huggers would particularly have concern about the feelings this tree might have of injustice that it had suffered.

However, the Bible does not support a worldview where we have pity on trees and plants and things like that. There was no injustice done for the simple reason that a tree doesn't have any rights to violate. So it's not as if it was.

I mean, if Jesus had just walk up for no reason, cut the tree down, that would have been no injustice. There's nothing somehow immoral about Jesus being mean to the tree. But there is meaning in it.

The interesting thing is, as far as I know, this is the only miracle Jesus ever did that was destructive in nature. His miracles were usually of healing, delivering, feeding, providing, but destroying, it wasn't his habit to destroy. On the other hand, this week was a special week.

It wasn't his habit to ride into Jerusalem being proclaimed Messiah openly either. There was a sense in which he was now doing things he didn't do on other occasions. Many of them were symbolic in meaning.

And I believe this was as well. You're going to find that in the remaining teaching of Jesus, the one thing most prominent in almost everything Jesus says is about the judgment that's coming on Jerusalem. The whole of chapter 13 is going to be about that.

There's going to be parables that he tells about that. It's going to be the focus of his remaining public ministry is the impending judgment on Jerusalem because of what they were now doing. They were turning from him.

In Luke's gospel, for example, it says that Jesus in chapter 9 of Luke, it says that he was approaching the city and he wept over the city and predicted its destruction and said, Oh, Jerusalem, if you had known in this your day, the things that pertain to your peace. He says, but now they're hidden from your eyes because it says the day is coming when your enemies will cast a siege mount about you and they'll lay you to the ground and your children within you and not one stone to be left standing on another. This was something he predicted as he came to Jerusalem, apparently before the triumphal entry.

And so this last week is a week of Jesus giving many warnings to Israel about the judgment coming upon them. And why? Well, because they have not produced the fruit that God was looking for. Now, Jesus had earlier in his ministry told a parable about a fig tree.

It's found in Luke, chapter 13, and I believe that this prior telling of this parable may provide the backdrop for the message that Jesus was giving by cursing this fig tree. Because in Luke, chapter 13, a parable that's only found in Luke's gospel, verses six through nine, says he spoke this parable. A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came to seek fruit on it and he found none.

That sounds kind of familiar. He came looking for fruit on his fig tree and didn't find any. Then he said to the keeper of the vineyard, look, for three years I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree and finding none.

That's probably about the length of time Jesus had been in the ministry. Cut it down. Why does it use up the ground? Why draw the nutrients from the soil for a plant that's not going to produce anything from it? Put something in here that'll make better use of the soil.

Why use up the ground? Why waste the ground? But he, that is the keeper of the vineyard, said to the owner, sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well, but if not, after that, you can cut it down. End of parable.

What's the message there? There's a fig tree that has been devoid of fruit. Every time the owner has come looking for fruit, three years is specifically mentioned. And so the owner says to the keeper, let's cut that down.

It's not worth anything. And the keeper says, well, let's just give it this year. Also, the rest of this year, let's wait till harvest season, see if it comes up a thing.

And if it doesn't, then this will be its last chance. And it'll be cut down. Now, Jesus gave this parable earlier in his ministry.

But it seemed to be a warning that Israel, from whom God had been seeking fruit, and especially in the ministry of Jesus, giving them opportunity to produce that fruit because the Messiah had come and was giving them the light and the truth and all the things necessary for them to receive the kingdom and to produce the fruit of the kingdom. They were not doing so. And therefore, the tree was doomed.

Unless it would turn around and bear some fruit, it had one more chance, one more season. The last three seasons had not been promising. Jesus had been ministering for about three years and is basically saying this last year is the last year you're going to have to get it right.

And this, of course, overlaps in meaning with the parable that Jesus would tell later in the week about the vineyard. See, this picture was also in a vineyard, according to Luke 13, but about the vineyard that the owner was sought fruit from. But the tenants of the vineyard did not produce the fruit and they killed the messengers that came looking, even killed the owner's son.

And therefore, he was going to destroy them because they had destroyed his son and had not produced the fruit of the vineyard that they own. The whole idea here is that Israel was likened in the Old Testament as well as in these places. Israel was likened to cultivated plants that God, the owner, was seeking produce from.

He expected them to produce something. In Isaiah 5, we have the parable of the vineyard there, about how God said, I've cultivated this fruitful hill, I've removed the stones, I put up hedges, I built a wine press, I've done everything to make this a fruitful thing. I planted it with the choicest vine, gave it every advantage, and it didn't produce good fruit.

Therefore, Isaiah said, I'm going to tear that down. I'm going to tear down the hedges, I'm going to let the enemies come in and destroy that vineyard because they didn't produce fruit. And in Isaiah chapter 5, where God's talking about the fruit he was seeking from Israel, he mentions what it was.

Isaiah 5, 7. He says, for the house of Israel is the Lord's vineyard and the men of Judah are his pleasant plant. He came looking for justice, but he found oppression. He came looking for righteousness, but he found the cry of the victims.

That is, God heard cries of victims instead of finding righteousness and justice in Israel. He gave them every advantage. He gave them the law.

No other nation had the law. That should have instructed them how to be righteous and how to be just. He cultivated them.

He protected them from their enemies, put a hedge about them. He gave them a protected place and gave them everything necessary to produce justice and righteousness. He looked for that fruit, but he didn't find it.

They didn't produce it. He sent messengers to say, where's the justice? Where's the righteousness? God wants fruit from this vineyard. And they killed the messengers, including Jesus.

Now, this is only changing the metaphor a little bit. You've got the vineyard, but in the vineyard, there's this tree. The tree, I'm sure, represents Israel.

Perhaps it even represents Jerusalem at the center of Israel, the head. In any case, the owner has every reason to expect fruit from his trees or else get rid of them. Just like in

Isaiah, God said, I didn't get fruit from a vineyard.

I'm going to get rid of the vineyard. Just the same idea. God's looking for justice.

God's looking for righteousness from Israel. They haven't come up with it. He's given them three years, especially to come up with it by sending Jesus to instruct them in how to be righteous and just and to please God.

They haven't produced the fruit even then. So he's saying they've just got a little while more. If they don't produce fruit, then that tree's coming down.

And having given that parable, Jesus then gives this visual lesson of the same thing. He comes to this tree looking for fruit. There's no fruit.

And so he says, that's it. No more fruit from you. You've had your last chance.

No one will ever eat fruit from you again. Now, he didn't cut the tree down, but instead the tree just withered up from the roots. But the point is, it's the same lesson.

It's just a visual lesson to what Jesus had given verbally in a parable earlier. Israel is like a fig tree that should be producing fruit for its owner. And Jesus says, I'm going to give you just, you know, one more season.

And when Jesus came to that fig tree, that season was over. And he found no fruit there. So he cursed it.

And that's what happened. So, although it was a destructive miracle, it was a miracle that was a sign. And like all signs, they convey information.

The information was that Israel's doom was sealed. Because God had looked long enough for them to produce the fruit, and they hadn't produced it. And so they wouldn't anymore again.

Now, notice this. He doesn't talk about a last day's turnaround here. He doesn't say, no one's going to eat fruit from you again until the end of time.

And then you'll be restored. And you'll produce fruit again. Jesus said, no one will ever eat fruit from this tree again.

Israel is finished as far as God is concerned. And in the later story Jesus told in the same week about the vineyard, he said the master is going to take the vineyard away from those guys and destroy them and give it to someone else. And so that was, of course, saying that they are not going to be producing any fruit anymore.

Someone else was given that task now. That would be the nation that he's given it to is the church. So anyway, here we have the visual acted parable of the fig tree.

Mark 11, verse 15. So they came to Jerusalem. This is on Monday when they, you know, he is cursed the fig tree, but they don't find it until the next day and comment on it.

But they're on their way to Jerusalem. They curse the fig tree. Then he arrives in the city.

And Jesus went into the temple as he had done the night before. But this time he starts doing stuff. He began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

Now, the money changers were people who would exchange foreign currencies for temple currency. You have to realize that the temple was the center of worship for all Jews around the world. And in the time of Jesus, most of the Jews were not living in Israel.

They had to come from foreign countries to worship there. And if they're going to bring an animal to the temple, let's say you're in Greece or Rome or North Africa, you're a Jew living in one of those places and you're going to come and offer sacrifices in the temple. And maybe you have a herd of sheep or something where you live.

But are you going to travel with those animals? It's much easier just to buy an animal once you get to Jerusalem and sacrifice it. In fact, the law actually made that provision that a man who didn't want to travel that far with his animals could perhaps sell his animal at home, take the money and buy another animal in Jerusalem and offer it instead as a substitute for the one he had at home. Now, because people would do that a lot, these ships coming, carrying Jewish people to Israel for their feasts from all different countries, they weren't full of livestock.

The people just came and brought their money. And they were going to buy animals there. Now, the priest had set up a very lucrative business there because you pretty much had to buy their animals.

Now, you could buy someone else's animal, but any flaw in the animal would disqualify it for sacrifice. And the priest had become very expert at finding, you know, freckles inside the upper lip of the animal or, you know, anything that's not perfect. They go, oh, this animal's not qualified.

Oh, you know, the hair on this ear is longer than the hair on that ear. It's not perfectly symmetrical. This animal, I'm sorry you can't offer this to the Lord.

You've got to have a perfect animal. And so the priest had their own livestock for sale that were bred for the purpose. And in most cases, they could disqualify any other animal than the ones that they were selling, legitimately or not.

But you couldn't buy their animals with foreign currency. You had to use temple currency. And so just like when you visit another country and you want to buy things, you take your American currency to the exchange and get the local currency to buy

stuff.

People who came from other places, if they're going to buy their animals from the temple, had to use temple currency. Well, they didn't carry that kind of money from Rome and from Greece. They had to go to a money changer.

Now, the money changer had these people at their mercy. The people had to pay whatever rate exchange was asked because they were the only game in town. You couldn't go to a competitor and get a better deal.

So these money changers, of course, often took advantage of people and gave a very unfavorable rate of exchange favorable to the money changer, not favorable to the person. And what this meant was, of course, that people who were out of a heart of desiring to worship God and who are obligated to do so were put in a position where the religious establishment could totally take advantage of them. They couldn't just say, well, I don't I don't approve of this rate of exchange.

I think you're I think you're, you know, bilking me here. And therefore, I'm not going to offer sacrifice. No, they had to offer sacrifice.

It was not optional. And and like I said, there was no competition. The priest had their own thing going and there's no competition.

So they had all these stalls of animals in the temple precincts for people to buy them and did the money changers there. And it was all big, corrupt money making scheme that was made on the backs of people who actually wanted to worship God. And and their religious sentiments and their obedience to God was making them victims of that establishment that controlled the temple.

And this was, in fact, as Jesus described it, a den of thieves. So he went in, he started turning over the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And he wouldn't allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

Now, it's interesting to picture what was going on here, because if it was, you know, just carry this up to the temple, Jesus and the answer to that. He he not only drove them out, he wouldn't even let someone walk through the temple carrying merchandise. And how he did this and got away with it is a curious matter.

I mean, I'm sure he just caught him by surprise. And they were so stunned. They were like a deer in the headlights.

They just, you know, didn't know what to do. I mean, it wouldn't have taken too much for the temple guards to come and just pull him away and say, what are you doing here and arrest him? But they weren't expecting this kind of behavior. I think they're just stunned.

And they just watched and probably paralyzed to watch him take charge of the situation. They confronted him about it, but but he they didn't stop it. And perhaps because they knew he was right, you know, when you got a guilty conscience, it's kind of it kind of weakens you in the conflict.

In verse 17, he taught saying to them, is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of thieves. Now, the statement, my house should be called a house of prayer for all nations comes from Isaiah chapter 56 and verse 7. Whereas the statement that they've made it a den of thieves is actually a quotation from Jeremiah chapter 7 and verse 11.

Two statements about the temple in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Now, the statement that my house should be called a house of prayer for all nations. The fact that he mentions all nations here and also in the context in Isaiah 56, it's a reference to Gentiles being allowed to worship God in the Jewish temple.

Has made most people assume, and it's probably the case that these animal stalls and many churches were set up in the court of the Gentiles. The temple that Solomon built had various courts, which were into which only certain people were allowed. There was a court of the Gentiles and beyond that, the Gentiles could not go.

It was the most remote part of the temple. Gentiles could come to the temple worship, but they couldn't go any deeper than this outward court of the Gentiles. There was a court of the women where the Jewish women could go, but they couldn't go past a certain point either.

Only Jewish men could go beyond a certain point. They had these different restrictive barriers. There actually was a sign.

Archaeologists have found it in the Temple of Solomon at the at the wall, at the edge of the court of the Gentiles before you go past it into the court of women. There's a sign that said no Gentiles can go past this on pain of death. It says if you die going past this, you've taken your life into your hands because they said you'll be killed if you take a Gentile or you're a Gentile go beyond this.

That's one reason that Paul was arrested in his last visit to Jerusalem. He was accused of having taken a Gentile beyond that point. Apparently, he had not done so, but he was accused of it and therefore the Jews sought to kill him.

Anyway, it is probable that all these sales of animals and the money changes that that business was set up in the court of the Gentiles. That way, it wouldn't interfere with the Jews doing their worship, but it would interfere with the Gentiles. Any Gentiles that want to come worship would be trying to worship God and there's all these animals around you and money changes and people complaining about the rate of exchange and

haggling for the price of the animal.

You know, this Gentiles are trying to worship God and in the court of the Gentiles, there's this all this business going on. And that would be no doubt why Jesus would say the scripture says that God's house is to be a house for all nations, not just the Jews, all the nations, the Gentiles and you people have prevented that. And not only have you prevented it, you have made the place into a house of thieves, a den of thieves because you're ripping these people off.

And the scribes and chief priests heard it and thought how they might destroy him for they feared him because all the people were astonished at his teaching. And when evening had come, he went out of the city. So he was teaching as well.

We don't have record of teaching other than this. Perhaps this is a digest of his teaching. He might have taught for hours, making these particular points that are summarized in verse 17, because it says he taught saying so this almost sounds like a declaration rather than a teaching.

It's possible that he spent the whole day teaching in the temple and the text of his message was Isaiah 56, 7 and Jeremiah chapter 7, verse 11. But after that, he went back to Bethany Monday evening. Now, verse 20 is, of course, Tuesday morning now in the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots and Peter, remembering, said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree which you curse is withered away.

So Peter's giving he may just be registering his astonishment, but perhaps he's kind of looking for an explanation from Jesus. This is not the kind of thing that Jesus had done before. He never killed a tree before.

And at least not this way. And Jesus answered and said to have faith in God. It's interesting.

Jesus does not make any connection between this fig tree and Israel on this occasion. It seems very clear that the fig trees cursing does represent the cursing of Israel. As I said, the connection with the parable that Jesus had told in Luke 13 seems to make that clear, as well as the fact that this becomes the theme of almost all his talking in this final week.

But instead of talking about the meaning of the fig tree withering, he gives them a different lesson on faith. Now, it doesn't seem likely that Peter was saying, wow, Lord, I'm impressed. I didn't know you could do this kind of thing.

And she's oh, yeah, if you have faith, you can do this kind of thing, too. I mean, that kind of a lesson should have been given back when they saw the very first miracle. Wow, Lord, you healed that guy.

Yeah, well, if you have enough faith, you can do that, too. I don't know why Jesus simply

used this as an occasion to talk about faith. Because I don't think Peter was I don't think that Peter's astonishment was was was kind of the thing where Jesus said, yeah, and you could do this kind of thing, too.

After all, we don't know that the disciples ever were authorized to curse fig trees and do those specific things. But Jesus gives a different lesson in different words here about faith. And I think it is related to Israel and the fig tree incident, just not so obviously so as one might wish.

Because when he says, have faith in God in verse 23, he says, for surely I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, not to a mountain, but to this mountain. What now? Mount Zion. Where Jerusalem was, that's where they were, this mountain, where the temple is, where Jerusalem sits, this whoever will say to this mountain, the.

Removed and cast into the sea now, what would that suggest that would suggest the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of Jerusalem into the Gentile world, the sea and the Old Testament prophets was a symbol of the Gentile world, as opposed to the land which represented Israel in the prophetic utterances of the of Isaiah and the other prophets. And. It sounds like he's referring to this mountain where Jerusalem sits being thrown into the sea, dispersed among the Gentiles.

The destruction of Jerusalem. And he said to them, if you say to this mountain, be removed and cast in the sea and you don't doubt in your heart, but if a person believes that those things that he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says now. Is he saying that the disciples should pray for the destruction of Jerusalem? It's an interesting question in the Gospel of Luke, verse 18.

There's this parable that Jesus tells. In Luke 18. Verses one through eight.

Then he spoke a parable to them that men are always to pray and not lose heart and notice the notice the story there was a certain in a certain city, a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city and she came to him saying, Avenge me of my adversary. In other words, judge the man who's persecuting me, she says to the judge, he doesn't immediately.

He would not for a while, but afterward, he said within himself, though I do not fear God or regard man yet because this widow troubles me. I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming, she weary me. So in the picture, this woman has someone persecuting her and she's asking the judge to vindicate her and to avenge her against the her adversary.

This is a prayer for judgment. This is a prayer for a judge to do something hurtful to the persecutor of this widow. And he's not doing it immediately, but eventually he does for whatever reasons given in the parable.

He didn't want to be bugged anymore about it. But in verse six, then Jesus said, hear what the unjust judge said and shall not God, who, unlike the man in the parable, is not unjust and not unconcerned. If the unjust judge could be persuaded, how much more would God, who is neither unjust nor uncaring, shall not God avenge his own elect who cry out day and night to him, though he bears long with them? I tell you, he will avenge them speedily.

Notice his elect. The church are crying out to him about what vengeance he doesn't say shall not God answer the prayers of his people. No, he says, shall he not avenge those who are calling out to him to avenge them from their persecutors? And he says, I tell you, he will avenge them.

He actually indicates that the church would be praying for God to avenge it against its persecutors. Now, the early persecutors of the church was Jerusalem. It was the Sanhedrin that killed Jesus and and stone Stephen and and persecuted Saul after Saul turned on them.

They first sent him out, but if you look at Revelation chapter six, which not everyone would agree with me in saying that this is in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem, but I think it is. In Revelation six, verse nine, when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who've been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they had, like Stephen, like the Christians that were persecuted by the Sanhedrin. And they cried with a loud voice saying, how long, oh, Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the land.

Now, these are saints in heaven. They died, their martyrs, first century martyrs, I believe their persecutor has been Jerusalem. The land, earth and land of the same word in the Greek, it means the land of Israel, I believe it could mean the earth, but I think it means land.

It could the word can mean either one equally. And in my opinion, what we're seeing in Revelation here is that the book of Revelation is going to describe the destruction of Jerusalem, but before that destruction is described, we see why in heaven John sees the complaints being raised before the judge, like the widow to the judge saying, avenge me of my adversary, these saints who have died saying, our blood has remained unevent. How long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell in the land? Now, depending on the time frame of this, those who dwell on the land could be almost anybody.

If this is the first century Christians, the ones who killed them were the Jewish authorities. Jerusalem, Jesus said, oh, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and persecute those who are sent to you. Even says Jesus even says to Jerusalem, I will send to you prophets and wise men and scribes and you will persecute them and kill them.

And Jesus said, Jerusalem will do all that. And they did that. That is the history of the book of Acts.

Is Jerusalem persecuting the church now? We might have a more idealized view of Jerusalem as the holy city and so forth. And at one time, that's how God viewed it. But it was not the holy city in the days when it crucified Jesus and the days of the apostles.

It was the unholy city. It had become a spiritual Sodom and a spiritual Egypt, according to Revelation 11, 8. Revelation 11, 8 says that city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt where our Lord was crucified. Jerusalem is where our Lord was crucified.

Revelation refers to it as a spiritual Sodom and a spiritual Egypt. It's not a holy city. It's a very unholy city.

It's the persecutor of the saints. It's drunk with the blood of martyrs. And that being so, in Revelation, we see the martyrs crying out to God in heaven for vengeance.

In the parable of the widow and the judge, he said, The Lord will avenge his elect who cry out to him day and night. There's this ongoing prayer for vengeance. Why? Is this because Christians are vengeful? No, it's because Jerusalem was seeking to stomp out the kingdom of God.

You know, when you pray, Father, your kingdom come. Do you know what that means? That means it's going to have to oppose the opposition. For the kingdom of God to win, it means that that which is opposing it will have to lose, will have to be removed, will have to be judged.

There's a sense in which this is an imprecatory prayer. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth. Sounds good and positive to us because we're on God's side.

But to those who are opposing him, what does it mean for his will to be done on earth? What does it mean for his kingdom to come? It means that he, like a bulldozer, comes and he mashes down all the opposition. In the early church, the great opposition to the kingdom of God was Jerusalem itself and its establishment, killed the king and his servants and tried to stomp them out completely. And the prayers of the saints for the kingdom to come were, in effect, a prayer for that opposition to be overthrown.

Now, in view of that, Jesus says in Mark chapter 11, as we saw, verse 23, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, and again, it's this mountain, they're standing at Mount Zion, whoever says to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea and does not doubt but believes in his heart that it'll happen. He's basically saying your prayers of faith will be the means by which this reality will come about that was symbolized by the fig tree being cursed. The fig tree being, you know, withered up has the same meaning as this mountain being cast into the sea, Jerusalem being dispersed and destroyed.

Now, if you look also at Revelation chapter 8 and verse 8, one of the visions that he has, Revelation 8 says, Then the second angel sounded and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea. It's interesting, a mountain thrown into the sea and it's going down in flames to this mountain is like it's on fire under the judgment of God and it's cast into the sea. Now, that's what Jesus said would happen if the saints would faithfully pray for this, for the overthrow of the opposition.

You know, I personally believe that communism fell in modern times because of the prayers of Christians. I mean, it wasn't just the courage of Ronald Reagan saying, Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall. I mean, an earlier generation of presidents saying that to Khrushchev would not have gotten the results they would have been laughed at.

Khrushchev would have just said, hey, we've got nukes. You don't tell us what to do. But things changed in the world to a point where eventually an American president could say, tear down that wall.

And he did. Gorbachev brought the bulldozers and knocked down the wall. What a miracle.

I mean, for those who have been in bondage under communism, the Christians especially, who have been persecuted severely those years, for 70 years, they just see a miracle of the enemy collapses. The enemy is in a sense destroyed. And that, I believe, is a result of Christians praying, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Well, that means the communist kingdom has got to go down. Because you can't have the kingdom of God ruling in Russia and the communist atheists ruling too. And you couldn't have the kingdom of God prevailing in the world and Jerusalem still stomping it out in resistance.

And so the prayers of the saints actually do bring down the opposition. In the first century, the opposition was Jerusalem. And I think that Jesus commented on the mountain being cast in the sea is not just a general teaching about faith.

There'd be plenty of other opportunities to talk in general about faith, but this is talk in the context of the fig tree being withered. I think Jesus is giving another angle of it. This fig tree represents the destruction of the Jewish nation, of the state of Jerusalem.

And if you have faith like I had, I was able to curse the fig tree. You can do the same thing. You can say to this mountain, be cast in the sea and it'll be done.

And in verse 24, he says, therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them. This first. Mark, 11:24 is often been used by the word of faith teachers to say, you know, you can just ask anything you want to and you have to believe that it's already happened.

And if you believe it's already happening, you give positive confession about it before it's even realized. Then it will come about because you believe that you receive them and you will have them. And so, you know, this kind of a carte blanche, kind of a promise about prayer has often been used by Christians to say, listen, anything you want, if you have enough faith, you get it.

But that just doesn't work out in reality. Have you ever noticed that? Ever prayed for anything and it didn't happen, even though you really believe it would? Which reminds me, we need to pray for your daughter, but we'll do that afterwards here. I pray for a lot of things that didn't happen, but I had as much faith when praying for those things that didn't happen as I had for the things that did happen.

There's other factors besides one's faith that determine whether a prayer is going to be answered or not. But I think that we have to take the statements of Jesus about this in their context. Jesus is not just giving a teaching about generic prayer here.

He's saying to his disciples, in essence, Jerusalem is your enemy now. Jerusalem is going to persecute you. They're going to drive you out of Israel.

They're going to persecute you. They're going to send agents after you to arrest you. They're going to be your enemy.

And you're going to have only your prayers as your defense. You're not going to take up arms against them. You're going to just pray and have faith in God.

And if you pray, even though the judge bears long with you, like that unjust judge in the parable who didn't for a while answer, eventually he did. And he said in that parable about the widow, he said, God will avenge them speedily, though he bears long with them. When he gets around to it, he'll do it fast.

And I think Jesus is here just simply saying in the context of what he's talking about, your prayers will be your response to this persecuting city. And God will hear your prayers. If you have faith, you'll find that this mountain will be removed and it'll be cast into the sea as a result of your prayers.

And if you really believe that your prayers will be answered, they will. I don't know that he's trying to give such a carte blanche as it looks like. If you take verse 24 all by itself without any context, it just sounds like you're saying anything you pray for, you'll get it if you want it enough and believe it enough.

But he's talking about a specific kind of praying, a warfare praying against the enemies of the kingdom of God. And he's not just talking about asking for stuff you want. Now, verse 25, and whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive them that your father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

But if you do not forgive, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses. Now, verse 26 isn't found in the Alexandrian text. Its contents are found in the Texas Receptus, followed by the New King James and the King James, but it's not found in the Alexandrian text.

However, whether it is part of the original text, not its information is certainly implied. He said, if you have any in verse 25, if you have anything against anyone, forgive them so that your father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. Clearly implied that he can't if you don't.

So the information found in verse 26 is implied in the wording of verse 25. However, the information is found indisputably in Matthew chapter six, which is also in the context of prayer. Interestingly enough, because it's in Matthew six, when Jesus teaches what we call the Lord's prayer.

Our father in heaven, how do you name your kingdom come? Your will be done and so forth. As soon as he finishes with that prayer, he says in verse 14, Matthew six, 14. For if you forgive men, their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you.

But verse 15, if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father give you your trespasses, which has the exact same information. That's in Mark 11:26, which isn't found in the Alexandrian text of Mark, but it is found here in Matthew in the Alexandrian text as well as all texts. Now, in connection with prayer, Jesus says, forgive now in the Lord's prayer.

One of the petitions was forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And Jesus is also teaching about praying. In Mark 11:25, and I think it's interesting that he said that in connection with the cursing of the fig tree and the passing of the mountain in the sea, in other words, there's a sense in which you're like that widow saying to God, avenge me.

But in another sense, you've got to be forgiving if anyone has done you wrong. What is the connection with that? How can you be forgiving of your persecutors and still wish them to be brought under ultimate judgment? I think what it means is that your prayers for God's will to be done, even for the downfall of his enemies, should not be in any sense coming out of a personal vendetta that you have against them because they're hurting you. In the Old Testament Psalms, we have many imprecatory prayers that David prayed.

As you read through the Psalms, you run across these from time to time where he wishes very great evils on bad people. He wishes that, you know, their path will be slippery and they'll fall and rise no more and their children will be orphans and things like that. You'll find a lot of Psalms where those prayers are made against the wicked.

But David was not a vindictive man toward his enemies. I mean, every case we know of, whether it was Saul trying to kill him or Absalom trying to kill him or Shimei cursing him or whatever, David always was very forgiving. When he had the opportunity to kill Saul, he said, I'm not going to kill him.

If God wants to kill him, let God do it. I'm not going to touch the Lord's anointed. Even though Saul was trying to kill him at the time.

His son Absalom rebels against him and David weeps when Absalom dies. He tells Job, don't kill Absalom, don't hurt him, capture him, maybe, but go easy on him. And when Absalom is killed, David weeps almost to the point of offending his whole nation.

When Shimei is cursing him and saying to David falsely, oh, this plight that's come upon you with your son rebelling, that's because of the evils you did to the house of Saul. It's a false accusation. David didn't do anything to the house of Saul.

But David, knowing that, still has no malice toward him. And his servants say, shall we go kill this guy who's cursing you, King David? And David says, nah, no one's going to die today for that. He said, if God sent him to curse me, let him curse.

Now, David was not a vindictive guy toward those who did bad things to him. But when you read the imprecatory Psalms, his prayers of imprecation or judgment are against those who forsake God's laws that rise up against God. That's what David's concern is.

David prays for the judgment on those who oppose God, but he doesn't have anything personal against them in the sense that they've hurt him. And therefore, he's got some spite. You've got to be very forgiving toward people.

Stephen, when he was stoned, said, Father, do not lay this sin against their charge. Notice he didn't say, don't lay any of their sins against them. They were under judgment.

The Sanhedrin was going to come under judgment for their sins. But David, Stephen said, don't don't lay anything heavy on them for this particular sin. This is just against me.

They're killing me. I forgive them. But at the same time, he was not forgiving them of everything that would bring judgment upon them.

He was just bearing them no malice himself. If you look at Second Timothy, chapter four, Paul has something like an imprecatory prayer. Second Timothy four, verse 14, Second Timothy 4:14, Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm.

May the Lord repay him according to his works. Now, may the Lord repay him according to his works is not wishing him well. That's that's praying that God will judge the guy for his evil works.

But notice verse 16. At my first defense, he means when he first stood on trial for his life before Nero. No one stood with me.

All forsook me. All my friends left me. May it not be charged against them.

Now, what's the difference between Alexander the coppersmith and Paul's friends who abandoned him in his hour of need? He wants God to judge Alexander the coppersmith. He doesn't want God to judge these other guys who abandoned him when he was on trial. Why? Well, he holds no malice toward those who did who betrayed him, his friends who stabbed him in the back.

That's just a personal offense against Paul as far as he's concerned. He can forgive that. But Alexander the coppersmith, his problem is different.

Look at verse 15. You also must beware of him for he greatly resisted our words. Alexander is an opponent of the gospel itself.

My friends who abandoned me in my hour of need. They don't oppose the gospel. You're just weak.

At the hour I needed their support, they just left me. But they weren't turning against God. They were just weak, cowardly people.

I don't wish them ill for it. But this guy who's opposing the gospel. Well, I hope God takes care of him because he's the enemy of God.

You see, there's an interesting fine line between having a desire to see God do the right thing, even at the expense of the wicked. For God to defend and vindicate his own name and his own message, his own kingdom in judging the wicked. It's one thing to want that and still to have no personal malice against them, even wish that they could be forgiven and restored.

You'd be glad to see it. And I see this, these things put together here in this passage in Mark 11. You have to be forgiving, but you also have to pray that God will avenge the blood of the innocent because that's what justice requires.

And he's going to have to take out those people who are killing the Christians because you love them, too. You love the Christians, too. But you leave it to God.

That's the thing. David wished ill on those who were wicked, but he didn't take vengeance into his own hands. He just prayed, God, you take care of it.

And that's what we're supposed to do. We don't rise up against our persecutors. We pray that God will take care of them.

That might even mean that he judges them. But we're just leaving that up to God. We

bear no malice toward them.

We forgive our enemies. We love our enemies, hopefully. But we still love God more.

And his fortunes of his kingdom are more important than the well-being of any individuals who are his enemies. Now, verse 27. And they came again to Jerusalem.

And as he was walking in the temple, this is probably that same day, Tuesday. The chief priests, the scribes and the elders came to him and they said to him, By what authority are you doing these things? And by these things, they must be referring to driving the people out of the temple the previous day because he hadn't really done much else. Maybe his teaching in general.

They might have meant, by what authority are you teaching? What authority stands behind your words? But do these things sounds like it's referring to his actions. And the one thing that they would feel most just in confronting him about was his disruption of the temple the previous day. Who authorized you to do that? How can you justify that? By what authority do you do these things? But Jesus answered and said to them, I will ask you one question.

Then answer me. And I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John.

Was it from heaven or from men? Answer me. Answer me. Put them on the spot.

He doesn't just ask a question and leave it up to them whether they'll answer it. He says, you answer that question. I command you.

Well, they didn't answer him, as a matter of fact. But he put them on the defensive, definitely. He's taking charge of this conversation.

Was that from God or from men? You tell me. You answer me. Give me an answer to that.

And of course, by implication, the answer they would give if it was correct would be the answer to their question about him. By what authority are you doing these things? In other words, is it human or divine authority? You're acting like it's divine. You're saying my father's house is to be not a den of thieves.

You act like you've got some kind of authorization from God to clean his house. And, you know, is this authority by which you think this from man or this from God? And he says, well, let's talk about John the Baptist for a moment. Was his authority from man or from God? Now, this created a serious problem for his questioners because they had opposed John the Baptist also.

They had not followed John the Baptist. Obviously, if they had believed that John was

from God, they would have had to believe that he that Jesus was because John had testified of Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. If they had said, well, John was a prophet of God, they knew that Jesus was there.

Then why didn't you believe him? You just said he's from God, but you clearly didn't believe him. So are you saying that you oppose someone who is from God? So the only other answer they could really give would be, well, John's authority was just human. But they didn't dare say that publicly, although they might have thought it because they knew that John, especially since his death, had become a folk hero and in the minds of all people, a prophet of God who had been a martyr.

John had been, after all, very popular during his lifetime to all Jerusalem had gone out to be baptized by him. He was impressive. His ministry had anointing.

Everyone believed he was a prophet of God, except for the religious leaders. They may have even suspected that they didn't let themselves go there. They didn't want him to be a prophet of God, so they didn't give that any serious consideration.

But everybody else knew. And now Jesus is saying, is John from his ministry? Is that from heaven or from man? Well, they couldn't say from heaven because Jesus would clearly say, well, then you obviously made the wrong decision, didn't you? And if John's ministry is from heaven, that's where mine's from because he recommended me. He endorsed me.

So if you will give an honest answer about John, you'll have your answer that you want to know about me. But they wouldn't give an honest answer about John. And they wouldn't, not only would they not say he was from heaven, they wouldn't even say he wasn't from heaven because that would be a very unpopular statement for them to make.

And the people would suddenly say, what? You didn't recognize John? See, these Pharisees and such, you know, they didn't want people to know that they were opposed to John necessarily because John was too popular. And so it says they reason among themselves, verse 31, saying, if we say from heaven, he'll say, why then did you not believe him? Not only in general, why didn't you believe John in general, but why didn't you believe him when he spoke about me? So we can't say that. But if we say it's from men, it says they feared the people for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.

So they came back to Jesus and said, we don't know. And Jesus answered and said to them, well, then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. He knew they were not really ignorant.

They were just not willing to be honest. Telling the truth would not go well for them. And so he's essentially saying, well, if you don't have any more respect for the truth than that, then why should I tell you the truth? Why should I answer you? Why do you want

me to give you an answer if you don't even care what's true? You know, if you're honest, you'll recognize that John was from God and then you'll recognize that I'm from God.

Because John and I were partners. John and I were two peas in a pod. John was my forerunner.

He endorsed me. We preached the same message of the kingdom of God. If you recognize John is from God, then you wouldn't have to ask for my authorities from.

But you refuse to recognize John as being from God. And you're not even honest enough to say that you think it was just from men. If you're no more honest than that, I don't see why I owe you any answers to your questions.

Why should I be honest with you? And so Jesus didn't didn't answer them. And he told them why. Because they were not willing to be honest.

Why play games? Why should he accommodate them if they're not going to, you know, just have an honest conversation and speak their minds because they're afraid of what people think. And thus ends that chapter. And we'll take a break there and come back to chapter 12 next.