

95-08-20Mark

Why, at this particular point in Jesus' ministry, did He take Peter and James and John up on the mountain and reveal to them His future millennial kingdom glory? Sometimes we don't stop and ask ourselves the question, why did He do that? And yet it's an important question to ask because Jesus did have a reason. Now, we looked at this last Sunday in Mark, chapter 9, and we saw what happened. We saw Jesus go up there.

We saw that He took only three of the twelve disciples with Him. Interestingly, they were the same three who were in the upper room when Jairus' daughter was raised. And we noted in that connection that there was a picture of the nation of Israel involved there, and that it was a foreshadowing of things to come.

The nation of Israel, from a human perspective, is going to pass away. But Jesus says, it's not gone for good. She is not dead.

She's only asleep. And people laughed Him to scorn. And for the last 2,000 years, you could look in vain to find the nation of Israel.

There wasn't even a dot on the map that was called Israel. Palestine has been overrun by many countries over the centuries. And only in our generation, which is an exciting time to live, by the way, have we seen the reconstruction.

Actually, this would be in your generation. I wasn't born yet when Israel went back into the land in 1948. But in the time in which we live, we see the reconstruction of the civil entity called Israel.

And that is a preparation for when God will fulfill the promises, like Jesus reaching down and grabbing the daughter's hand and saying, Daughter, arise. He's going to come back and reconstruct the nation of Israel with the throne of David, with the Levitical offerings in place as a memorial to His work on the cross. All of these things are coming.

And if you've attended our Tuesday night study for the past couple of weeks, we've seen in the grand sweep of God's plan how in each different phase or each different dispensation, God has selected a particular way to work with us and to reveal His character in a particular way. And we know that the remaining seven years of the age of Israel are coming up as soon as we depart this life, either through reuniting with Jesus Christ after death at the rapture, or by being changed in the twinkling of an eye and meeting Him and the dead in Christ in the air. Immediately following the rapture of the church, which is us, that last seven years, the clock for Israel will begin to tick away, the final seven years.

Following that, Jesus Christ will return with us to fulfill all of the covenants and the promises and the prophecies to Israel, fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant, the Palestinian covenant, the Davidic covenant, the Mosaic covenant. All of the promises that God made to Israel will be fulfilled in that

final thousand years of human history. This is foreshadowed and it's pictured in the Scriptures.

Many other things are also pictured in the Scriptures. And one of the things that people in this day should have known is that before the crown, before the Messiah coming to reign and to fulfill all of those promises, something comes first. Something has to happen before Jesus fulfills those promises and sits on that throne.

It's the cross. It's the suffering that's pictured in Isaiah and in many other prophecies of the Old Testament. Israel did not understand that there was a cross before the crown.

They wanted the Messiah immediately. Jesus, if you recall, has just instructed His disciples on the kind of Messiah that He is. He said, who do you say that I am? Peter says, you are the Christ.

He says, don't tell anyone. I need to tell you what kind of Christ I am before you go and teach about me to the nations. And so Jesus began to explain that He would be arrested and would suffer and be crucified and would rise again the third day.

But this didn't register with the disciples. Peter rebuked the Lord after he taught these things. And Jesus said, Peter, you're speaking the words of Satan.

Get thee behind me, Satan. You've got your mind on a human perspective. You're looking for the crown without the cross.

You're thinking the things of man instead of the things of God. That's the decision that you and I face every single day. We have a choice in the way we approach every decision, every circumstance.

Think about the issues that have come up in your life just in the past few weeks. The people with whom you have to deal. The various pressures, whether it's physical testing or financial testing or uncertainty about the future or uncertainty about what to do in some situation in your life.

You have a choice. You face the choice. I face the choice that Israel faced.

Are we going to think the things of God or are we going to think the things of man? What was Israel's problem? Why was Israel thinking the things of man? Why is Peter thinking in human terms instead of in divine terms? Peter was probably the furthest along theologically, scripturally, of any of the twelve disciples. He's the one that put together the Feast of Tabernacles with Moses and Elijah showing up on the Mount of Transfiguration. He's the only one that did.

John was there. James was there. But they were unable to cycle anything through their soul and come up with a reason for what they were seeing.

Peter said, this is the glory of Messiah. This is Emmanuel, God with us. It's time to fulfill the Feast of Tabernacles.

God dwelling with us. Let's build some booths. He was at least thinking.

He was further along than the rest. But the difficulty is, even Peter did not accurately apply his Old Testament knowledge to his current circumstance. Jesus Christ took Peter, James, and John, the ones who were qualified to even begin to understand what they would see on that mountain.

He took them up there to show them what is coming. That's the hope. That's the goal.

He's just got through saying, I'm going to be arrested. I'm going to be crucified. I'm going to die.

And after that, He goes up and shows them His reigning glory with Moses and Elijah resurrected. And the voice of God, this is My beloved Son. Listen to Him.

He's trying to tell you something. There's a cross before the crown, but the crown is coming. Peter and James and John, when they go through this crucifixion experience, when they go through this awful time of rejection in Israel, need something to cling to.

What's going to sustain them through the pressure that they are about to face? Jesus says, let Me give you something to hang on to. Let Me give you a hope that will sustain your faith. That hope is the coming of Jesus Christ, His return in glory.

Think about what Jesus said. God's voice from heaven, what does it say? This is My beloved Son. I'm pleased with Him.

Listen to Him. Listen to what He's saying. There's going to be a cross.

There's going to be a crown. This is something that was known in the Old Testament Scriptures. Read Isaiah 53.

Read the suffering servant passages. He was bruised for our iniquities. He's wounded for our transgressions.

The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and by His stripes we are healed. You can't go straight to the crown. Where are the stripes? Where is the iniquity taken care of? Where are the pictures in the Levitical offerings fulfilled? That has to take place first.

It seems so simple when we look back at it, but in the time in which the disciples were living, it was a difficult thing to figure out. Here's Jesus. He's among us.

Let's bring in the kingdom. They didn't think about what they knew from Scripture. They didn't think about what Jesus was teaching.

And it didn't make sense to them until they, like us, could look back at it. And after He was resurrected, after the day of Pentecost, it all made sense. And you can read Peter's great speech

in Acts chapter 2, where his understanding has come to flower.

And he says, look, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Look at Psalm 2. Look at Psalm 110. Look at all of the messianic prophecies that Jesus Christ fulfilled.

Peter had a clear view of what the transfiguration meant once it all fell into place. But Jesus gave Peter and James and John that vision to cling to, that hope. We have a similar thing.

Isn't it interesting that in the New Testament Scriptures, one out of every 25 verses refers either to the rapture or to the second coming of Jesus Christ. It's a tremendously important topic. It's something that is supposed to be the focus of our hope.

When I say that word hope, you immediately think of several things that we have covered many, many times. What is the means of living the Christian life? It's faith. But what is the motivation? Why do we persevere? Why do we move forward through the tribulation that Jesus promised us we would have? Because we, like the disciples, ought to see Jesus Christ in glory, flanked by the law and the prophets, fulfilling every prophecy, fulfilling every Old Testament picture.

That's why we persevere. That's why God has left us in this life, is to learn the lessons that we can only learn in a fallen world with a fallen nature, looking for that blessed hope, the appearing of Jesus Christ. Forgetting those things which are behind, we press forward.

We are looking to the Author and Finisher. He's not only the beginning of our salvation, He will finish it. He will complete it.

We will be ultimately sanctified when He returns for us. So this is an important concept. God gives us that hope in our lives to sustain us in the same way that Peter and James and John were given that hope at the Transfiguration.

Now, why only three disciples instead of eleven or twelve? How many of us actually have that hope as a reality in our soul? How is that reality created? Everyone understands that there is some bright future where we have eternal life. That's what we learn at salvation, isn't it? But is it a present reality? Is it as real to us by faith as what Peter and James and John saw on the mountaintop? For many of us, it is not. For many of us, we are more concerned with a solution now.

A solution to my problems today. That's pie in the sky. I need help today.

I'm facing some difficult circumstances now. That's fine for later, but I'm more concerned with the here and now. Wasn't that Israel's problem? Isn't that why Israel missed the Messiah when He was in their midst? They were more concerned with Roman rule.

They were more concerned with Roman taxes and the temple taxes and the requirements of the law that were distorted and inflicted on everyone. The heavy yoke of legalism that the Pharisees

placed on people. They were concerned with those problems and they wanted an immediate solution to their immediate problems.

The Lord of Glory walked in their midst and they didn't even see Him. He walked among them and taught in their streets and they missed Him. Why? We've got to orient to the plan of God.

We've got to back up and look at where we are in God's plan. What has happened? What is happening? What will happen? And what will happen is our hope. That's what gives us perspective in life.

Paul says, I reckon the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed. That's the perspective we must have, but very few of us have it, frankly. We're not sustained by that hope.

It doesn't create a reality in us that's more real than anything else in life. I like the illustration of a board, like a two-by-twelve. You can think of it as a plank about as wide as the bench of the pew there that you're seated on.

If I lay a twelve-foot plank about as wide as that pew down on the ground and I say, please walk from one end of this to the other, most of us who can walk unaided can step up on one end of that board and walk the twelve feet along it and step off on the other end without any difficulty. Now, why is that? Why do we do that without fear, most of us? Because we see the perspective. We see that there is a carpeted floor immediately on either side.

If anything should happen, we're protected. We won't step down more than two inches, and so there's no fear. If I take that very same board and I put it across the alley between two five-story buildings and I say, walk across this board, now we have an entirely different frame of reference.

We have an entirely different circumstance surrounding that board. What if I am unsteady? What if I step off? What if I slip? The consequences would just be horrible. And great fear and great trepidation, this becomes a major challenge to walk twelve feet across a five-story high height.

Same board, same feet, same balance mechanism in our brain, but it's an entirely different proposition. Why is it? Because of the context, because of the surroundings and the possibilities that we see. Our lives as believers are secure in Christ.

We are secure with the provision that God has made. Many times in life, our circumstance and our challenge looks like that board five stories high. What shows us that there is in reality a carpeted floor immediately beneath that board and that we have nothing to fear? It's the truth of the Word of God.

It's the security of God's provision, God's promises, the future that He has given us. Peter is going to deny the Lord. Why? Because he's afraid.

All he can see is the potential of arrest and torture and death at the hands of the Romans if he's identified with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, Peter, I'm going to pray for you. Satan wants to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed that your faith won't fail.

It's your faith that will show you that you're secure. It's your faith that will show you you have nothing to fear. You don't need to be afraid.

You don't need to deny Me. But Peter could not cycle the truth that Jesus Christ had taught him through his soul in that pressure situation, and he couldn't see the carpeted concrete on either side of that board. All he could see was the five-story drop, and he was afraid, and he would not walk that board.

That's our challenge. That's what we face. Jesus gave him the best picture of hope that He could give him.

He took Peter to the mountaintop and said, Peter, look, here I am in glory. I know what's on the other side of the cross. Don't be afraid.

God's plan will be fulfilled. God's forward movement in the progress of revelation and the plan of salvation is going to be fulfilled. It's a reality.

Here it is. Here's the voice of God coming from heaven. Listen to what Jesus is telling you.

But it didn't sustain Peter in the crisis. He failed. Israel in this generation doesn't have a picture of God's reality.

They are consumed with the immediate problems of the moment. What if I can't pay my taxes? What if the Romans get upset and arrest and torture us? That's all they could see. And the Lord of glory walked among them for 33 years, and they never saw Him.

The three and a half years of this public ministry, they never saw Him. And guess what? God's requirement from Israel was that they see Him. God requires that of us.

We are called to faith. We are called to holiness. God will not accept that failure.

And when we fail in that way, we will be disciplined. Israel is going to be disciplined. It's prophesied in the Old Testament.

It's fulfilled in the New Testament. It is fulfilled as we sit here this morning. And until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, it will continue as discipline on the nation for missing the Lord of glory because they did not walk by faith.

That's the message of the Transfiguration. That's the message we're going to see this morning in Mark chapter 11. Turn with me to Mark chapter 11.

This is rather ironically titled in most Bibles, the triumphal entry. What a tragic misnomer this is. This is anything.

They ought to call this the tragic entry. This is not a triumph. It's a tragedy.

This is the culmination of Israel's rejection of the Lord of glory. And we call it the triumphal entry. What a bad name.

Look at this in Mark chapter 11. They drew near Jerusalem to Bethphage and Bethany. By the way, do you know what the town of Bethphage, do you know what its name means? It's the house of figs.

House of figs. At the Mount of Olives. What does the Mount of Olives remind us of? Do you remember when we started the Gospel of Mark and we talked about the ministry of John the Baptist out there by the Jordan and we said, why the Jordan? If I had a message to proclaim to the nation of Israel, I'd go to the capital and I'd get on the corner of the temple or I'd get in the center of the marketplace and get a big crowd and tell them.

We often hear this. You know, this good word, we need to get it out where the people are. We need to get the people under this good word so they'll hear it.

That's not what John did. John went to the Jordan. Nobody hung out out there.

It's in the rift valley there between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. It's arid. It's a wasteland and you've got the muddy Jordan flowing and he's standing there at the bank talking to the canyon walls.

And what does he say? Change your mind. The kingdom of God is at hand. And we went back to Ezekiel and we saw the glory of God that lived in the temple, lived in the Holy of Holies, depart and go to the threshold and go to the gate.

And where was the last place it was seen before it departed to the nation? The Mount of Olives. Then it departed heading eastward and the glory of God departed from Israel because Israel didn't walk by faith. Israel did not love the Lord with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength.

And the glory departed. They set up idols in the temple courtyard. God snatches up Ezekiel by the hair of the head, plants him in the temple courtyard, and He says, look at these idols.

People are putting something up on the same level of priority as the God of glory. I won't stand for it. It's a failure that I will not countenance.

And God left. The presence of God, the glory of God, left Israel heading east. The prophecy of Ezekiel, which we saw, was that one day the glory of God would return from the east, over the

Mount of Olives, come back through the city gate, come back over the threshold and reenter the Holy of Holies to its rightful place with no idols and no competition for God's rightful place and God's rightful glory.

Jesus Christ, in this entry to Jerusalem, personifies and embodies the glory of God. And so here He is, Bethany, Bethphage, the Mount of Olives, coming from the east. And this is the entry, this is the time when Israel can accept the Lord of glory.

He said to His disciples, go into the village. When you've entered it, you will find a colt tied on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it.

This was the traditional way that a king would enter the capital city. He would ride on a donkey or the colt of a donkey. It was a sign of humility.

It's not unlike when a great Roman conquering hero would come down the great main avenue in Rome to be hailed by the population. And Caesar is sitting up on the dais and here comes the conquering hero back from the wars. And he would be riding in a beautifully decked out chariot and all the armies would be marching behind him.

And here he is, the successful general. And right behind him is a servant whispering in his ear, Sic transit gloria mundi, the glory of the world fades away. Reminding him, don't let this go to your head.

And there's a similar idea in the king entering the capital city in a humble position, riding on the colt of a donkey. It's a reminder not only to the king but to the people that this is a service position, not an authority position to be abused. So here comes Jesus in this symbolic way riding on a colt.

In verse 4, they went their way. They found the colt tied by the door outside on the street. They loosed it.

Some of those who stood there said, what are you doing loosing this colt? And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it.

And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then those who went before and those who followed cried out saying, Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our Father David that comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Now this looks like a great thing. It looks like Jesus is being accepted.

He's hailed as the Davidic King. He's being hailed as the Messiah. They're saying all the right things.

This is where we get Palm Sunday. We just think of palm branches. We don't take our suit coats off and throw them in the floor these days.

But this is what these folks did to smooth the way for the King. What's the matter here? What is the problem? This is a great show without substance, isn't it? Does the nation of Israel truly recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah? Do they have in place in their minds the cross before the crown? Are they acquainted enough with their Old Testament Scriptures to understand the progress of the plan of God and what must take place in what order? They do not. They're doing the same thing here that they did to Jesus after He fed the 5,000 in John.

You go to John and see that they wanted to make Him King at that point. It's a right thing, but it's at the wrong time. It's a right thing, but it's at the wrong place in the priorities.

There's something that must come first before Jesus can rule as the conquering King, and they don't understand that. Their motivation for hailing Jesus Christ as King is not that they recognize that He is the Son of God and that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. They would hail any man who they thought had the prospect of throwing off Roman rule and solving their immediate problems.

Hey, great, let's have a Jewish King. Let's rise up and revolt. Let's get an army together and throw off Roman rule.

Let's get rid of these oppressive taxes. Let's get rid of these garrisons in our towns and these pagans that walk among us and defile us. Hey, if we're going to get a King, that's great.

And their motivation is entirely wrong. They're not informed by the Old Testament Scriptures. They don't recognize Jesus for who He is, even though He's manifested it in many, many ways.

They're doing a right thing for the wrong reasons. And that is a trap that we can fall into. And we can justify the right thing that we're doing in a dozen different ways.

Look at this passage of Scripture that says thus and so. I'm on solid ground here. I'm doing a right thing.

And yet, if we don't understand where we are in God's plan, if we don't understand the things that must come first, a right thing can become a wrong thing. Our simplest example of this is looking at someone who has an active ministry of some sort. Let's say we're an evangelist or a missionary or a pastor.

We are also a spouse and we have children in our home. I can go out and do a right thing, which is ministry. But if I do it at the expense of my wife and my children, if I set that right thing in a wrong priority so that another right thing suffers, and I wind up divorced and with wayward children, that right thing is no longer a right thing.

Because of how I did it and when I did it and the priority that I assigned to it, that ministry becomes evil. Why? Because there was a higher priority. God says, A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they too shall be one flesh.

And God will never call a believer to sacrifice their marriage or their children on the altar of ministry. And any time that happens, we are doing a right thing in a wrong way for the wrong reasons. Any time that happens.

You cannot tell me that standing at the judgment seat of Christ and saying, Well, I neglected my wife and my children to share the Gospel, that God is going to say, Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Even though you neglected your wife and your children, here's some extra souls coming into the kingdom. That's not going to glorify God.

God is glorified in the picture that's represented by the husband and the wife. There are many specific commands in Scripture that say, Husbands, love your wives as you love your own body. If you can truck your own body out there to ministry, then you can take care of your wife.

And there are first things first. Israel got their priorities mixed. They think that's great, let's have a conquering king, but they've completely overlooked the suffering servant.

They've completely overlooked where they are in God's plan. And because of that, they missed the Lord of glory. So here they are in this tragic entry into Jerusalem.

And the difficulty here is that as he comes in, and they say these things, Hosanna, they're actually quoting from over in the Psalms. You might turn back with me to Psalm 118. And if they had even thought about the Psalm that they were quoting from, it should have afflicted their conscience and made them recognize the very principle that we're talking about.

Psalm 118 is a messianic psalm. It's a psalm that talks about the coming Messiah. And you'll notice that it says, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

His mercy endures forever. Let Israel now say, His mercy endures forever. Let the house of Aaron now say, His mercy endures forever.

Now think about that. This is the nation of Israel, and who is Levi? That's the priests. That's the people who minister in the temple.

If anyone ought to recognize the manifestation of God's mercy, it's the Levites. It's the people of Israel. In the whole world, they are the ones who should recognize it first.

Skip down here to verse 25. Save or deliver now, I pray, O Lord. O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you from the house of the

Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us life.

Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you. You are my God, I will exalt you.

Even in the midst of quoting, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Israel has forgotten about the sacrifice bound to the horns of the altar. They have forgotten that Messiah will be truly God. God with us, Emmanuel.

They've missed it. They see Jesus Christ as the human solution to a human problem. They're quoting Scripture.

They're acknowledging Jesus Christ. What can possibly be wrong with that? It's not the action. It's the motivation behind it.

It's the lack of understanding, the lack of application of Scripture that has gotten them into trouble here. Now, back to Mark chapter 11, verse 11. After this tragic entry into Jerusalem, with people proclaiming Him in a superficial way for wrong reasons, these same people, just a few days hence, are going to be saying, crucify Him.

Look in verse 11. Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. We just saw in Psalm 118 that they talked about the house of the Lord, that we're going to proclaim Him in the house of the Lord.

Jesus goes to the house of the Lord and looks around, and what does He see? The heart of the people is not turned toward God. There isn't genuine faith. There isn't a genuine change of mind.

There isn't a genuine acceptance of the kingdom of God. This is superficial. It's wrongly motivated.

It's wrong-headed. And Jesus sees that. Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple, and He looked around at all things.

And what does He see? Well, He doesn't see what He wants to see because He's going to come back the next day and cleanse the temple. He looked around. He evaluated the heart of worship in Israel, the place of function of the Levites who are supposed to be saying, His mercy endures forever.

And He doesn't see it. He doesn't see the faith. He doesn't see the heart for God.

He doesn't see the change of mind that is required by God. So the hour is late. He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

He goes back out, follows the same path that the glory of God followed in Ezekiel when it left Jerusalem. He follows the identical route back over the Mount of Olives, back to Bethany. Look in

verse 12.

Now the next day when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. Having seen from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. 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. Then in verses 15-19, we have the cleansing of the temple.

And then in verse 20, now in the morning, after the cleansing of the temple, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. Peter, remembering, said to Him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree which you cursed has withered away. Now notice what we've got here.

Don't we have kind of a sandwiching effect? We see Jesus going to the temple and coming back out. Then we see the fig tree. Then we see Jesus going back to the temple.

And then we see the fig tree again. Remember the last time we had kind of a sandwich like this? We had two things that were interwoven. Remember the woman with the issue of blood and Jairus' daughter? Jairus comes and says, Lord, my daughter's at death's door.

Here comes the woman with the issue of blood and interrupts that. And then we return to the story of Jairus. And we saw that that construction is significant because it tells us that those two events are intertwined.

Their symbolic significance is related. It's a single picture with these two different things. Same thing here.

It's a device that Mark uses to draw our attention and force us to liken and to compare two different things. So what we want to look for now is how does this fig tree episode relate to the tragic entry and Jesus' activities at the temple? So notice, Jesus first went into the temple and He looked around. He was looking for something at the temple, wasn't He? And apparently, He did not find it because He left.

And He's going to come back and make a change in the temple. If He had come there and found what He was looking for, He wouldn't need to cleanse the temple the next day, would He? So He went to it and He didn't find what He was looking for. Now with the fig tree, Jesus comes out in verse 12 and He is hungry.

What is hunger? Hunger's a desire, isn't it? Hunger causes you to look for something to satisfy that hunger. Hunger requires satisfaction. When God looks at us, He desires something, doesn't He? When God looked at the nation of Israel, He desired something.

He desired something that He did not see. Jesus goes to this tree. In verse 13, He saw this fig tree having leaves.

He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it, in the same way that He went to the temple the previous day to see if He would find something in it. When Jesus gets to this tree, He found nothing but leaves because it was not the season for figs. This season for figs is something Mark mentions.

Matthew, in his parallel account of this, doesn't mention that. And it almost seems to confuse the story because we say, well, this seems mighty unreasonable of the Lord to go to a tree and look for fruit when that fruit is not in season. It seems kind of unfair to the tree that it would get cursed because it didn't have fruit at an unseasonable time.

You may know this. I don't know very much about plants, but I read up a little bit on fig trees. Fig trees have a year where they will grow.

They'll put out branches. And the following spring, in March, let's say, those branches that were grown the previous year will put out what they call early figs. They're smaller than the figs that will come later, but those branches from the previous year will put out some figs.

And so you can get a crop of small figs in the spring, along about May or June, those ripen. Then, in the meantime, new branches are growing on the tree. And by the fall, those new branches will put out larger, more well-developed figs.

And so you have a second harvest of large figs at the end of the summer and in the early fall when they ripen. Well, we know, because this is close to Passover, that we're in the month of April here in this episode. So in March, the early figs should start coming out on the branches and they should ripen after April in May and June.

Well, Jesus goes to this tree. Now, it's not the season for ripe figs, but He doesn't see any figs. He doesn't see the little early figs that ought to be hanging on the tree getting ready to ripen in May and June.

Now, He desires that that tree have a fig that He can eat, doesn't He? He's hungry, and that's why He goes to the tree. So this seems strange. Well, is He wanting to eat green figs? It seems like that would do something awful to your digestion, not to mention your taste buds, to eat some kind of a green fruit.

Well, we know without going back and documenting it all from the Old Testament that the fig tree represents Israel, right? That fig tree is the nation of Israel. Israel is a special nation. They are a peculiar people, are they not? God has an expectation from Israel that He doesn't have from any other nation on the planet, right? To them belong the law and the prophets.

To them God has entrusted His presence and the oracles that reveal His character. Israel is a special nation. They are the recipients of supernatural presence and supernatural power from God.

They're a special tree. They're an unusual tree. This is something from Israel that He doesn't expect from any other nation.

He expects fruit. It doesn't matter what the season is for the rest of the trees in the land. That tree, Israel, ought to produce.

Remember over in Luke, I think it's in chapter 12 or Luke 13, Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree. Look in Luke 13.6. He spoke this parable. A certain man had a fig tree planted in a vineyard.

And he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Well, that sounds familiar. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this tree and found none.

Cut it down. Why does it use up the ground? But he answered and said to him, Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, fine.

But if not, after that you can cut it down. What is the picture here? We have a man who owns a vineyard. And he's got a gardener there that's taking care of this fig tree.

And he comes and he says, I own this fig tree here that you've been taking care of, but for three years it hasn't produced any figs. Cut it down. But the keeper, the man who lives with the tree on a daily basis, says give it another chance.

Give it one more year. Let me fertilize it. Let me encourage it.

Let me nurture it. And if it still doesn't produce fruit next year, then you can cut it down. And apparently that's what the landowner does.

Now let me test your knowledge a little bit. At this point of the tragic entry into Jerusalem, how long has Jesus had a public ministry among Israel? Three and a half years. For the first three years, no fruit was born.

And that last year of ministry is their last opportunity. Jesus has fertilized and dug around the fig tree. He sent His disciples out with the message.

He's multiplied His efforts by a factor of six by sending those six disciple teams. We know that He also sent out 70 with a similar ministry. Jesus has gone above and beyond to try to encourage the fig tree to produce fruit.

And it has not. There's also a very interesting passage I'd like you to look at in this connection over in Leviticus 19. This is a section of miscellaneous instructions.

And this particular portion here talks about what Israel should do when they come into the land. Leviticus 19, verse 23. When you come into the land, when you cross the Jordan and go into the

promised land, and this is not a picture of heaven.

This is a picture of spiritual production and spiritual maturity, isn't it? This is the place where we become useful in God's plan. We may have to wander in the desert a while before we get there, but eventually we pass into that place where God can bless us and we can produce. When you come into the land and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised.

Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year, all of its fruit shall be holy, appraised to the Lord.

The first three years in the land, let the trees grow. Let them produce what fruit they will. Let that fruit fall to the ground.

Let the seeds be planted to produce more trees. Whatever. In the fourth year, that fruit is all dedicated to the Lord.

No one eats it. It's an offering. It's a first fruits type of offering, that fourth year.

That's the fruit that's dedicated to God. Then in the fifth year and following, He says, you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase. I am the Lord your God.

Now this is significant for the future of Israel, because here Jesus Christ has come and for three years there has been no fruit. In the fourth year, who gets the fruit? Who gets the fourth year fruit? You can speak up. If you've been following at all.

Who gets the fourth year fruit? God does. The fruit of the fourth year belongs to God. The husbandman has said, give me the fourth year to see if I can get this tree to produce fruit.

And if not, you can cut it down. This is Israel's fourth year. This is the year where their fruit should be dedicated to God.

And when Jesus goes to the tree, the fruit is not there. Now they're saying the right things. They know all about the law.

They've got a big religious life. They've got guys dropping money bags down at the temple. They've got all kinds of sacrifices going on.

Hosanna, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. They have a form of godliness, but they have denied its power. Faith and an understanding of the plan of God is not a part of this worship system.

And because of that, when Jesus goes to the tree, the fruit that belongs to God is not there. And what happens to the tree that doesn't produce fruit in the fourth year? What did John tell Israel way back there at the Jordan? The axe is already laid at the root of the tree. You'd better get

busy and change your mind.

That's the picture. That's why Jesus curses this fig tree. Sure, it's not the season for figs.

The season refers to all trees, all fig trees. But this tree is Israel, and this tree is supposed to produce. It's a special tree.

It's a tree that God has dug around and hedged and fertilized. This is the season for that tree. This is the fourth year, and it has not responded to the ministry of Jesus Christ and His disciples.

And what is that response? It's faith. It's looking at God's plan and acting on it and not getting into a superficial system of worship, a superficial man-centered, man-oriented, human energy, fix my problem now viewpoint. It's looking at the plan of God and being oriented to that plan and being prepared for that eternal fruit that Jesus talks about with His disciples in the upper room.

So now back here in Mark 11, where are we left? Down in verse 20, "...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 cursed has withered away." And what is Jesus' response? This is so interesting because when we read it quickly, it doesn't seem to make any sense. Jesus says, have faith in God.

Isn't that the message of this fig tree? Why is the fig tree cursed? Why is there no fruit in the fourth year? No faith. No trust in God when the chips are down. No faith when you can't see the solution to the problem.

No faith when it looks as though the board is over the five-story drop. You've got to know the Word of God and you've got to believe it when the chips are down. You've got to step out when you don't know how God is going to solve the problem.

That's faith. Israel doesn't have it. How can they believe that the Messiah that they want to deliver them is instead going to suffer and die? That makes no sense.

We don't need a suffering, dying Messiah. We need somebody to get these Romans off our back. Peter even says that.

Rebukes the Lord of glory. No faith. The fig tree and the cursing of the fig tree is a picture of no faith.

And so what is Jesus' first response when He's asked about it? Have faith. Be encouraged by this example. Learn from it.

Do something different than what Israel did. Have faith in God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

Now this is one of the most abused promises in Scripture. People are trying to get Maytag washing machines and Mercedes Benz automobiles and all kinds of things. I believe.

Notice carefully. He says, if you do not doubt in your heart but believe that those things will be done. Now that's faith.

What is the object of faith? Is the object of faith my desire for some particular object or some particular solution to a problem? What is the object of faith? You may answer. It's the Word of God. It's the promises of God.

It's the plan of God, the character of God. How can you be confident that when you ask for something, it will be fulfilled? There's no doubt in your heart. There's no question anywhere in your soul.

Because you base your request squarely on the plan of God. Your understanding of the promises of God, the purposes of God. You're oriented to history.

You're oriented to where you are, what has happened, what is happening, what will happen. You have to know the Word of God to pray this kind of prayer. You've got to pray in accordance with God's purposes.

Sometimes God will purposely construct a situation in your life and my life to force us to claim a legitimate promise. God has said, seek first the kingdom. All these things will be added unto you.

Well, sometimes we're seeking first the kingdom and these things are not added unto us. What does that do? We go to God in prayer and say, hey God, of course, I hope we have more respect than that, but we say, Heavenly Father, You have promised that if I seek first the kingdom, You will supply. And it is that recognition in our prayer that God honors.

And basing our requests on that, we're asking in Jesus' name. We're praying in Jesus' name. What does that mean? If I go to Uganda or I go to Libya or some far off place and I make a request of the government and I say, this is in the name of the United States or this is in...