

Prayer:

Slide # 1

Theme: *Christ the King*

Outline:

- Chps. 1-2 The Advent of the King. (Proving His LEGAL right to the throne by His genealogy.)
- Chp. 3 The Forerunner of the King and the King’s baptism.
- Chp. 4 The Test of the King. (Proving His MORAL right to the throne by not yielding to temptation; and exhibiting His kingdom resume.)
- Chps. 5-7 The Pronouncements of the King. (Proving His JUDICIAL right to the throne as seen in the wisdom of His kingdom teaching.)
- Chps. 8-10 The Power of the King. (Proving His PROPHETICAL right to the throne by fulfilling prophecy.)
- Chps. 11-12 The Rejection of the King.
- Chp. 13 The Parables of the King.
- Chps. 14-16 The Revelations of the King.
- Chps. 17-20 The Instructions of the King.
- Chps. 21-23 Formal Rejection of the King.**
- Chps. 24-25 The Predictions of the King.
- Chps. 26-27 The Passion of the King.
- Chp. 28 The Resurrection of the King.

What we call Passion Week (the last week of Christ’s earthly ministry) began in earnest on what we call Palm Sunday with what is commonly referred to as Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. This triggered a negative response from the religious leaders that grew in escalation throughout the week culminating in the crucifixion of Christ.

Right in the middle of this rising tension of hostility towards Christ we have this cryptic event in which Christ curses a fig tree after not finding fruit on it. It professed to have fruit in that it had leaves, but it had no fruit and so Christ cursed it.

The significance of this story has long baffled everyone including Bible commentators.

R C Sproul wrote: “The biblical accounts of Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree have vexed scholars for centuries. For one thing, this perplexing narrative records for us the only miracle in the New Testament that involves destruction. Furthermore, on the surface, it seems that Jesus overreacted to this innocent fig tree for not bearing fruit when it was not the season for figs. The late Bertrand Russell, who wrote an essay titled “**Why I Am Not a Christian**,” cited this narrative as one of his reasons for repudiating Christianity. He said this incident displays Jesus as a man who expressed vindictive fury to an innocent plant, manifesting behavior that was not that of a righteous man, let alone the Son of God.

Obviously, this story is very significant as seen in the fact that not only did Matthew record it but so also did Mark. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary at this point speaks for a great many of conservative Bible scholars.

Slide # 2

Although there is no statement that the situation should be regarded as parabolic, that seems to be the only reasonable explanation of the incident (for trees have no moral responsibility). It provided a graphic sequel to the earlier parable of Luke 13:6-9 regarding the Jewish nation, unfruitful despite every advantage.

– **Wycliffe Bible Commentary**

There are a number of reasons to think Christ was using this as an object lesson at this point. For one thing consistently when Christ did miracles, they had SIGN value. For example, when Christ fed the 5000 (not including women and children) He then followed up by saying, “**I am the bread of life**” (Jn. 6:35). When Jesus said, “**I am the light of the world**” He then followed up by healing the man born blind (Jn. 9). So consistency would be that when Jesus miraculously cursed this fig tree it most probably had in view a symbolic purpose.

And with that in mind the entire surrounding context relates to Israel’s rejection of her Messiah as led by her religious leaders which in turn causes Christ to repeatedly pronounce judgment on them. Thus, the CONTEXTUAL argument as to the meaning of the cursing of the fig tree is that this was a symbolic judgment being pronounced against Israel.

To show all the more that apart from this understanding it makes no sense Mark 11:13 adds the detail that “**it was not the season for figs**”.

Why would Christ curse a fig tree for not having figs when it was not even the season for them? Therefore, it would seem this only makes sense if there is an intended object lesson being portrayed that is reflective of what is happening in the immediate context.

Mark presents the accurate chronology.

Slide # 3

Jesus curses the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14).

Jesus cleanses the temple (Mark 11:15-19).

Jesus explains the His cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:20-24)

Slide # 4

Its structure provides the key to its interpretation. First, Jesus cursed the fig tree. Then He cleansed the temple. Finally He came back to the fig tree with a lesson for the disciples. There is unity of subject matter in the whole section. – **Thomas Constable**

Once again CONTEXT is King in trying to discern the meaning. And the FLOW of thought involving judgment continues into our study today. What has just been illustrated in Matthew 21 in relation to the cursing of the fig tree connects thematically to what now follows in terms of conflict with the religious authorities and Christ's parabolic judgment on them as seen in the remainder of the chapter.

Matthew 21:23–32 (NKJV)

23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”

The word “**Now**” in the Greek (kai) is a connective showing there is a continuation of thought here. The cursing of the fig tree relates to the conflict that follows – which in turn connects to the parables of judgment.

This is now Tuesday. Christ has just cursed the fig tree and then He goes to the temple – evidently to the court of the Gentiles.

Either way the goal was undoubtedly to try and trip Him up in front of the crowd and try to get them to turn on Him.

When they challenged Him about “**doing these things**” they probably had in view His disrupting of the commercial activities of the temple the day before which had caught them off guard and then His on-going teaching ministry that was taking place right then. In the parallel text of Luke, it says that Jesus during these days was preaching the gospel (Lk. 20:1) and that the people “**were very attentive to hear Him.**” (Lk. 19:48).

In addition, these leaders may also have had in mind His Triumphal Entry; His accepting praise as Messiah; and His healing people in the Temple.

But in particular it would seem that they were probably especially upset about His clearing the temple the day before and now His boldness to once again be on the scene teaching the very next day. They had a little time since the day before to prepare a response and so here they are confronting Him over the issue of His AUTHORITY to do these things.

The issue of AUTHORITY is a LORDSHIP issue and it became the great controversy in view behind the growing hostility of these religious leaders. They felt threatened and “**sought to destroy Him**” as it says in Luke 19:47. They were not there with open minds but rather seeking any way possible to destroy Jesus.

But Jesus was more than up to their challenge...

24 But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

25 The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’

26 But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.”

Christ’s response was to tie His ministry to that of John the Baptist. It was brilliant! So brilliant that it immediately threw them on the horns of a dilemma that they didn’t see coming. It was a marvelous demonstration of wisdom that totally befuddled His opponents. God has a way of doing that! As it says in 1 Cor. 3:19, “**the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.**”

John's baptism in effect refers to his entire ministry which was characterized by a baptism of repentance. Baptism at core signifies **IDENTIFICATION**. To be baptized by John indicated that one was identifying with his message of repentance in preparation for the Lord.

In asking whether John's baptism was from heaven (meaning God-ordained) or from men, Christ was asking about what was the source of his authority for his ministry. Really, in giving the proper answer to the question they would have the answer to their question because John's ministry was inherently linked to the truth of WHO Jesus was.

It was brilliant because John had no credentials either, other than being the clear fulfillment of prophecy – which of course is a heavenly credential that totally verifies his authenticity. And everyone considered John to be a prophet. And if he was a true prophet then what he said about Jesus was true and should be accepted.

Give them credit for proper reasoning in terms of thinking through the ramifications of how they might answer. They were smart enough to realize that if they said from heaven, then Jesus would counter with, ***“Why then did you not believe him?”***

They knew full well that John had claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 and as such he was the forerunner to the Messiah.

Slide # 6

Isaiah 40:3 (NKJV)

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.

John 1:23 (NKJV)

23 He said: “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the LORD,” ’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

They knew full well of John's testimony that he clearly declared that Jesus is the Son of God.

Slide #7

John 1:34 (NKJV)

34 And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

Slide # 8**Acts 19:4 (NKJV)**

4 Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, **saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.**”

To endorse John’s ministry as being from heaven would in effect mean to believe in Jesus as the Son of God who is the Messiah which they refused to do. And to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah-God would clearly mean that His authority was from God. They absolutely refused to go there. To do so would mean to condemn themselves for not believing it.

But on the other hand, they also had another problem, because if they said John’s ministry was just man-centered that would be a political problem with the people because they all considered John to be a prophet.

I love it! They were trying to trap Jesus, but in truth He turned this around on them to where they were trapped with no way out. Either way they answered they would be in trouble.

Lesson number one never try and outsmart Jesus! You are going to lose. Jesus never lost an argument. In fact, when He asked the questions His critics were dumbfounded. His wisdom was so profound that as they said in John 7:46, “***No man ever spoke like this Man.***”

27 So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Here they show what they are made of. They were dishonest and they were cowards. They were dishonest cowards. They feared men instead of having a proper fear of God. This is the stuff of politics instead of true God-honoring conviction and principle. They were game players – religious game players which is the worst kind of player.

And so, they were evasive, not being willing to answer the question. Jesus in response said, “***Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.***”

Footnote: As the esteemed religious leaders in Israel, they were charged with being able to discern who was a true teacher and who was not. Thus, pleading ignorance was really an admission that they were not qualified to be spiritual leaders. They were a total sham!

And the point is made: If they did not know whether John's ministry was of God, then who were they to make any judgment call about Christ's ministry – especially since they were linked together.

Those that reject the light that is given are not given more light. If they would not be honest with the truth, then Jesus would not give them any more. *"Why should He tell them what they already knew but were unwilling to admit?"* (William MacDonald)

Slide # 9

They were judged by Christ. In His refusal to answer much the same question the disciples had just asked Him [How did the fig tree wither... v. 20], the Lord indicates His rejection of them. This fact is borne out by the following parables. – **Stanley Toussaint**

But Christ had one more parting shot at them in the form of a parable. Christ dealt with unbelief in the form of parables and so it is here. But in this case, He does it in such a way that it serves to further expose them for the religious hypocrites they were.

Christ then proceeded to give a series of 3 parables that were so indicting that the religious leaders actually got it.

Slide # 10

Matthew 21:45 (NKJV)

45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they **perceived that He was speaking of them.**

Slide # 11

Parable 1 (Mt. 21:28-32) – Rejection of John the Baptist

Parable 2 (Mt. 21:33-46) – Rejection of the Son

Parable 3 (Mt. 22:1-14) – Rejection of the Invitation

These parables focused on the issue of the acceptance or rejection of Christ and need to be understood in light of the preceding CONTEXT of verses 23-27 which is all about the issue of Christ's AUTHORITY!

The great issue before the nation, and before the leaders of the nation was the issue of Christ's LORDSHIP authority!

The first parable is a stinging rebuke of the religious leaders for their failure to obey John's call to repentance and to embrace Jesus as the Son of God.

28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’

The owner of the vineyard represents God, and the two sons represent two different responses in Israel to the ministry of John the Baptist and hence to Jesus as the Messiah.

29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went.

This first son represents the sinners in Israel who before John's ministry were living in disobedient rebellion, but then under John's ministry they came to repentance. Note the connection here between genuine repentance and a change in action.

Slide # 12

No one who truly repents fails to show clear evidence of his inner heart change by his outward obedience. – **Edward Hindson**

1 John 2:3 (NKJV)

3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.

The second son represents the religious hypocrites in Israel who initially claimed to be obedient and responsive to John's ministry. Yet, as time went along, they clearly came to reject him and his God-ordained ministry.

Slide # 13

John 5:35 (NKJV)

35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were **willing for a time to rejoice in his light.**

For a time they seemingly rejoiced in John the Baptist's ministry. But when John the Baptist called the religious leaders out on their sin and called them to repentance, they turned on him.

Slide # 14

Matthew 3:7–8 (NKJV)

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 Therefore **bear fruits worthy of repentance,**

Luke 7:29–30 (NKJV)

29 And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

30 But the **Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.**

The religious leaders refused to align with John's message of repentance. They were good with it on the level of a "religious ritual" but the emphasis on repentance which John's baptism signified they could not go along with.

The point of this parable was to point out the hypocrisy of Israel's religious leaders. The disobedient hypocritical son said, "*I will*" but then was guilty of not following through. Again, in type, this corresponds to the leafy fig tree which outwardly professed to be there but in fact was a phony. That was these religious leaders.

Slide # 15

The fruit of one's life ultimately proves whether or not one is obedient to God's message. A person's actions ultimately prove whether or not he is obedient to God. – ***ESV Study Bible***

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV)

21 "Not everyone who **says** to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven.

There are talkers and there are doers. A mere talker does not a believer make.

"At the day of Doom men shall be judged according to their fruits. It will not be said then, did you believe? But, were you doers or talkers only?". – ***John Bunyan***

Talk is cheap and if it is not backed up by doing it is shown to be bogus. In 1st John there are professors and there are possessors. A mere professor is self-deceived.

31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.

Christ set them up with a very simple question – one that is so easy no one could miss it. He asked which of the two did the will of his father – and of course they answered **“the first”** – the one who actually went and did the work. But in answering the question these religious leaders unwittingly condemned themselves as Christ will go on to show.

The irony is that while they refused to answer Christ’s earlier question, in the parable that follows Christ got them to answer in a way that indicted themselves. Again, only a fool tries to trick or outsmart Christ. He never loses and only LOSERS take Him on. Lesson: Don’t play mind games with Jesus.

And then Jesus made this application saying, **“Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.**

Wow! This was shocking and it was insulting! Jesus was actually saying that the tax collectors and harlots (the worst of society) were entering the kingdom before these esteemed religious leaders.

This was shocking because tax collectors and harlots were considered by the Jews generally to be the scum of the earth. Tax collectors were Jews who were considered traitors because they now worked for Rome, and they often were guilty of extortion concerning their fellow Jews.

Harlots were immoral, living in obvious rebellion to the law of God. No one thought they would see the kingdom.

But here Jesus put both these categories of ill reputes before the religious leaders. But note carefully the word **“before”**.

Slide # 16

The present tense and the prefix “before” indicate that it was still possible for the leaders to enter the kingdom. Therefore, by pointing out their sin, the King was acting in grace. – **Stanley Toussaint**

In other words, the tax collectors and harlots who had repented at John's ministry had already established their place in the kingdom to come, and thus had entered in before these religious leaders, but the door of grace was still open for them too if they would repent.

It is well to note that, while the kingdom is no longer proclaimed as having drawn near, entrance is still being accomplished.

– ***Stanley Toussaint***

In saving faith, we “**enter**” into a kingdom position – that is our position although in practice the actual kingdom remains future. The same is true in regard to heaven. Right now the believer is said to be seated together with Christ in heavenly places in Eph. 2:6. That is our position – spiritually speaking, but we are not actually in heaven yet. And the same is true of the kingdom.

Upon saving faith the Bible in Col. 1:13 says we are “**conveyed into the kingdom of the Son**”. That is our spiritual position, but we are not actually in the kingdom yet. We are still praying as Christ taught us to pray, “**Your kingdom come**”.

It is evident from texts like Lk. 7:29-30 that many tax collectors and sinners ultimately responded positively to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Slide # 17

Luke 15:1–2 (NKJV)

1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”

The tax collectors and sinners were open on a level that the religious leaders were not. In fact, the religious leaders complained about it.

Jesus then further explains the meaning of His parable.

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

John came proclaiming a message of REPENTANCE. That was the major essence of his ministry. He came to prepare the people to receive the coming Messiah by calling them to repentance. And those truly repentant indicated that in getting baptized – which is why it was called “**a baptism of repentance**” (Mk 1:4).

Now we have already noted as seen in Matt. 3:7-8 that it was not the baptism itself that caused people to get right. This is seen in the fact that the religious leaders initially came to get baptized but John told them to go and “**bear fruits worthy of repentance**”. (Mt. 3:8). The key thing was repentance. And of course, if one was truly repentant, then they would indicate that in getting baptized.

Baptism didn't cause the repentance it just symbolized it!

In John's baptism the people were saying I am repenting of my sin and getting right with God in anticipation of the coming Messiah Who will bring in the kingdom. Thus, those truly repentant were ready to receive the Messiah and go into the kingdom.

John came “**in the way of righteousness**”. John taught the right way and that the way to be right with God was through repentance – through accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah Who is the Son of God.

The marks of John's ministry could be summarized in this way:

Slide # 18

- Prepared the Way for the Messiah
- Called the people to Repentance
- Introduced Jesus to the Nation
- Promised the kingdom on the condition of Repentance

So, “**In the way of righteousness**” means showing the people the way in which they could be right with God and thereby go into the kingdom (cf. Mt. 11:12). Indeed, John's ministry was “**from heaven**”. It was truly “in the way of righteousness” (cf. Mt. 22:16).

The expression “John came to you in the way of righteousness” means that he came preaching the necessity of righteousness through repentance and faith. – **William MacDonald**

Consistent with this, Peter in Acts 3:19-21 would later say to the Jews that they needed to repent and be converted so that they could be forgiven and that Jesus could come and bring in the kingdom.

John's ministry of repentance was about people coming to where they admitted they were wrong, and that God was right, and in this way they were able to get right with God.

Luke 7:29 describes repentance as people "**declaring God just**" (or right) as seen in the ESV. That is repentance! It acknowledges that God is right, and I am wrong, and in doing so it lines up with God's truth.

Thus, John came "**in the way of righteousness**" in that he called people to repentance and pointed the way to Christ. In pointing to Christ John did two things. 1) He pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God and 2) He pointed to Jesus as the Son of God. These are the two great things we must believe in order to be saved, commonly expressed as receiving Christ as Savior and Lord. These are the two great points necessary to believe in order to be right with God.

Slide # 19

John 1:29 (NKJV)

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**"

John 1:34 (NKJV)

34 And I have seen and **testified that this is the Son of God.**"

Jesus spoke of a righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Slide # 20

Matthew 5:20 (NKJV)

20 For I say to you, that **unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees**, you will by **no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**

You see the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was all about an outward legalistic type of righteousness. It was self-oriented. The "**way of righteousness**" presented by John was all about an internal reality – a heart reality - being right in the heart on the basis of repentance and believing in Jesus for Who He is as the Lamb of God Who is the Son of God.

Jesus essentially linked their ministries as seen at the time of Baptism. In coming to John the Baptist for baptism Jesus said to John, “**thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness**” (Mt. 3:15). Baptism symbolizes identification and in being baptized by John Jesus was identifying with John the Baptist’s message in that He was the fulfillment of it.

The evidence of John the Baptist’s ministry being from heaven is seen in the fact that he fulfilled the forerunner prophecies to the letter. 700 years before the time of Christ Isaiah said a voice would come crying in the wilderness saying, “**Prepare the way of the LORD**” (Isa 40:3).

Four hundred years before the time of Christ, the LORD in Malachi 3:1 said He would send His messenger before Him (John the Baptist – Mt. 11:7-10) and then the Lord would come suddenly to His temple – which in partial fulfillment had happened just shortly before this.

Think about how impossibly hard it is to rig a forerunner. It has to be predicted 100s of years in advance and then be fulfilled to the letter. The forerunner had to be born at just the right time. He had to be in the right place, with just the right character, with just the right message.

John came crying in the wilderness in perfect accord with Scripture. He came living a righteous life with the right message of how to get right with God. It was an explosive national ministry. And John totally pointed to Christ making the issue solely about Jesus and not about himself. Every detail about his life from before he was born aligned perfectly with the prophetic Scriptures.

Thus, the religious leaders were tremendously accountable for rejecting all this plain evidence that aligned perfectly with prophecy. They had no excuse.

Jesus in effect said if you want evidence of my AUTHORITY over the temple look to the evidence as found in John the Baptist MY forerunner who fulfills the forerunner prophecies about the Messiah. All the prophecies related to him have been fulfilled to the letter as he pointed to ME as the Son of God.

The evidence was more than ample. The problem was that these religious leaders refused to believe. They refused to repent, and they refused to believe and for this reason they did not have a place in the kingdom.

And unless they at some point came to the place of repentance and faith, they will never see the kingdom.

The pattern of John and Jesus sets the pattern for NT faith. John emphasized repentance and then as Jesus comes on the scene, we are called to believe in Him as the object of our faith. John pointed out our sin problem and the necessity of repentance – acknowledging our sin problem – that we are wrong and God is right. Paul brought it all together...

Slide # 21

Acts 20:21 (NKJV)

21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, **repentance** toward God [admitting we are wrong and God is right] and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ [the answer to our sin problem as our God-Savior].

“the way of righteousness”

I think the **greatest proof of the supernatural character of the Bible is Christ Himself**. It would be impossible for a person no matter how brilliant or wise, no matter how educated, or even a group of persons, some kind of committee, to invent Jesus Christ.

Impossible! Impossible to put together all those elements of the OT that picture Him, that predict Him in detail. That He would be born of a virgin, that He would be born in Bethlehem; that He would come out of Egypt... [that He would have a specific type of forerunner...] There are so many details no committee could have ever known. ... And the Bible presents Jesus in unambiguous and unmistakable terms and the only way you can go look for Jesus and not find Him is if you don't believe what the Bible says.

– John MacArthur

Exactly!

Want PROOF of Christ's authority? Consider what Christ presented as exhibit "A" - the prophetic proof as found in the person of John the Baptist. Only God could predict this forerunner 700 years in advance and then align it perfectly with the life of Lord Jesus Christ.

The only question that remains is will we believe the prophetic evidence?
The religious leaders refused to believe but the tax collectors and harlots
did believe and thereby secured their position in the kingdom!

What about you? Have you believed? Do you have a place in the kingdom?

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!