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I. Introduction

In this lesson we begin to near the climax and the end of Jesus' life on earth—the final geographical phase of His adult ministry is what is usually referred to as the Judean ministry. We do not know the length of time that He was actually on the road after He left Galilee for the last time, heading for that final fateful visit to Jerusalem. We have referred to that period of His ministry as the period of rejection, the period in which He traveled under the shadow of the cross. But in Mark 10 (and its parallels in Matthew 19 and Luke 18), at some point—perhaps several weeks before the Passover that would bring about His final demise—Jesus finds Himself in Judea, the southernmost territory of Israel, teaching along the road to the crowds who gather and answering questions of various inquirers.

II. Final Days of Jesus' Ministry

A. Question of Divorce

The first episode that the Synoptic Gospels relate during this phase in Mark 10 (and parallels) is a question designed to trap Him, by some of the Jewish leaders, on the theme of divorce. This was a hotly debated issue among the two Pharisaic schools of Shammai and Hillel, both interpreting the Deuteronomic legislation of Deuteronomy 24 in different ways, Hillel very liberal in situations in which divorce might be permitted and Shammai very strict. Jesus seems to side with Shammai, as He replies that only in the case of adultery or marital unfaithfulness is divorce permitted; but in one sense He is even stricter than Shammai by pointing out that it is merely permitted rather than actually mandated, as that branch of Pharisaism would have taught. But the main thrust of this opening passage of Mark 10 is Jesus' words that point back to God's initial intentions for couples from creation

Marriage & Divorce in Matthew 19

FORMING A MARRIAGE

leave & cleave

become one flesh

RUPTURING A MARRIAGE

physical presence

-BUT-

sexual infidelity

Mark 10:6-9

But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

Marriage & Divorce in 1 Corinthians 7

FORMING A MARRIAGE

leave & cleave

become one flesh

RUPTURING A MARRIAGE

sexual fidelity

-BUT-

physical desertion

Rupturing the Marriage Covenant in Genesis

MATTHEW 19

sexual fidelity

become one flesh

MATTHEW 19

physical desertion

leave & cleave

onward. He alludes to the teaching of Genesis 2 that a man shall leave his father and mother, cleave unto his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Therefore, the ordinary and expected faithfulness of the marriage ordinance is one that is to be lifelong. Only under exceptional circumstances does God even countenance separation.

This teaching matches the teaching of Jesus in the third antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and it is supplemented in 1 Corinthians 7, as Paul admits a second exceptional situation—namely, when an unbelieving partner wishes to leave. The question that comes to many people's minds today is whether or not there are any other such situations in which God could countenance divorce, perhaps as the lesser of two evils. And it may be significant to notice what the two exceptions of the New Testament have in common. Both rupture one half of the marriage covenant as outlined in Genesis. In the one case the sexual fidelity, becoming one flesh, has been broken; and in the other case the leaving and cleaving, the physical proximity and allegiance to one's spouse above all other human individuals, has been broken.

Perhaps the way to ask the question if there are any other exceptional circumstances not foreseen in the cultures of Judaism or Corinth is to ask the question: Are there any other situations in which a marriage, already de facto, is ruptured? We need to be very careful lest we ever begin to make a list of such situations and suggest to people that it is always acceptable. It may be much more biblical and much more sensitive to simply proceed on a case-by-case basis. But we dare not lose sight of the main thrust of Jesus' teaching here, and that was to call a culture that had grown very liberal in its toleration of divorce back to a much higher and much more stringent ethic, much like we saw in His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

B. Self-denial

The next encounter in Jesus' Judean ministry, as He is heading up to Judea to Jerusalem along the road, is a brief story about self-denial, in which He blesses little children who are brought to Him and uses that as an occasion to teach about how one must enter the kingdom like a little child.

Luke 19:8

*Zacchaeus' Conversion . . .
I give half of my possessions
to the poor, and if I have
cheated anybody out of
anything, I will pay back
four times the amount.*

Luke 19:23

*Why then didn't you put my
money on deposit, so that
when I came back, I could
have collected it with interest?*

Here we must be careful what part of childlike we take Jesus to be referring to; certainly He is not calling on believers to be childish, but rather to be childlike in recognizing their dependence on someone other than themselves—in this case, God in Christ.

C. Christian Stewardship

The third encounter that Mark 10 and parallels narrate is that with the rich young ruler— a much more detailed account in which Jesus astonishes His disciples by commanding this wealthy young inquirer to sell all His possessions, give to the poor, and come and follow Him. We must recognize that this is not a command that Jesus gives to every would-be disciple. In fact, Luke seems to make this point particularly clear by immediately juxtaposing the stories of the conversion of Zacchaeus—in Luke 19 after His parallel to the rich young ruler in Luke 18, and then the parable of the pounds (minas) also in Luke chapter 19, beginning in verse 11.

Put together, these three stories illustrate three very different models of Christian stewardship. In one case the command is to sell all, in the second case Zacchaeus who voluntarily gives up only half and promises to restore fourfold what he has cheated anyone from, and then the parable of the pounds, which commends those servants who invest their master's money. They do not give any of it away; in fact they earn even more. But lest we suddenly become content with an unbridled capitalism, we are reminded that all of the money ultimately returns to the master. Whichever model we follow, whatever God calls us to do in our particular situation, what is important is that 100 percent of that belongs to Him. And whatever percentage we may specifically give away for the needs of the poor (and Luke certainly makes it clear elsewhere, as we have seen in earlier lessons, that we are to be generous—we who have surplus wealth), for the very needy people—particularly Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world— whatever percentage we may give we must consider all that we have to be on loan from God, and be good stewards of it.

D. Third Passion Prediction

At the end of Mark 10, Jesus then turns to that teaching

about His upcoming suffering and death, the third and final passion prediction of Mark 8, 9, and 10. In this context, He rebukes His followers who are squabbling over who is going to be greatest in the coming kingdom by pointing out that whoever wants to be greatest must be servant of all. And in this context appears Mark's famous chapter 10 verse 45, which we have alluded to earlier, that highlights one of Mark's key perspectives on Jesus: Jesus the suffering servant—He who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life, a ransom for many.

III. On the Verge of the Final Week

A. On the Way to Jerusalem

At this point we have arrived on the verge of the last week of Jesus' life. The healing of blind Bartimaeus at the end of Mark 10 occurs in the context of Jesus being in the vicinity of Jericho down near the Jordan River, just a day's climb up the road leading to Jerusalem, leading to the capital city. John's gospel, in chapter 12, narrates a story that immediately precedes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and therefore, chronologically, must be the event that is dated next. John says this took place six days before the Passover, which would mean that we are speaking of the Saturday prior to Jesus' death on the day we call Good Friday.

B. Jesus in Bethany

This was the story of Jesus in Bethany—what today we might call a suburb of Jerusalem—a small village on the far slopes of the Mount of Olives, at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, whom He had recently raised from the dead. Here Mary anoints Jesus with an expensive, almost a year's worth in wages, bottle of perfume, anointing Jesus as it were for His upcoming death and burial. John draws the contrast between Mary's response and Judas' response very poignantly. Some have speculated that perhaps these were the first two to really comprehend and believe that Jesus was going through with this ignominious plan to allow Himself to be arrested and crucified. But each reacts in diametrically opposite ways: Mary out of faith, and Judas out of cynicism and skepticism, perhaps upset that Jesus was not going to be the military ruler to overthrow the Romans, putting the final nail in

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Mark 14:7

The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want . . .

| Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Matthew 26

Mark 14

John 12

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Judas' coffin, so to speak—his plan to betray Him.

At any rate, Judas in this passage protests that this money that Mary in essence wasted could have been given to the poor: another reminder that Jesus was not a uniform ascetic—there are times for lavish expense and outpouring of worship for Christ. But it is that Jesus' response, "The poor you have with you always," is often misinterpreted by modern well-to-do believers. It is in fact an excerpt from a quotation from Deuteronomy that continues by saying that you can help them any time you want, as Mark's parallel points out. Therefore, Deuteronomy goes on to say, "I command you to be openhanded and generous toward the needy in your land." Mary's exceptionally lavish outpouring of love is for an exceptional situation; the norm for Christian living should be compassion for the poor. Mark and Matthew place this story in a different context in Mark 14 and Matthew 26, as if it took place on the night of Jesus' arrest, although the careful reader will note that there are no specific chronological connectors to require us to place this event there. Presumably Mark and Matthew have moved it forward thematically, as they group material together thematically in many other places in their gospels, precisely because of the significance of Mary's anointing to prepare Jesus' body for His burial.

IV. Palm Sunday

We may resume, then, the sequence of the Synoptic Gospels beginning with Mark 11 (and parallels) as we turn, on an almost day-by-day basis, to the events that eventually brought about Jesus' death. On Sunday, that Sunday that we today call Palm Sunday, Jesus is traveling up the road from Jericho toward Jerusalem and is celebrated with strewn palm branches and cries of "Hosanna!" meaning, "God save us!" in ways that suggest He has a great following.

But although He is performing a Messianic act, riding on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey, in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, the significance of the animal is lost on the crowd. This is no Roman general riding triumphantly into Jerusalem on a white horse; this is a very powerless individual coming on a simple beast of burden. The Messiah was to come to Jerusalem in humility, but this fact was largely lost on the crowds. Little

wonder then, their disappointment and their dramatic change of behavior only five days later when presumably at least some of the same individuals in the streets of Jerusalem were calling out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

V. Monday

A. Bad News for a Figless Fig Tree

On Monday, after lodging in Bethany with Mary and Martha again, Jesus then reenters Jerusalem. En route He curses a fig tree, which is close by the road, that bears no fruit. This is the only miracle of destruction in the Gospels after the story of the demons that were cast into the swine in Mark 5; again it is not about destruction of human life but only, in this case, of a plant. But there is more symbolism here, it would seem, than simply Jesus’ petulance at a tree that should have been bearing fruit and failed to relieve His hunger.

Fig trees in the Old Testament frequently symbolized Israel or the blessings of Israel in the Messianic age, when every Israelite would sit and enjoy the abundance of the land under his own fig tree. As Jesus curses the fig tree and the disciples marvel about it, His reply is, “Truly I say to you, that if you have enough faith you will be able even to say to this mountain ‘Be cast into the sea,’ and it will be done.” This mountain probably refers to Mount Zion, the mount on which the temple sat—the mountain that the disciples and Jesus would have been looking at as they traversed the slopes of the Mount of Olives coming down into the Kidron Valley, just to the east of the city of Jerusalem.

Rather than being a *carte blanche* that we can do anything, however supernatural, if we simply have enough faith, this was probably a very specific teaching that fits in with the symbolism of the destruction of the fig tree, that fits in with the little parable of Luke 13:6-9 that talks about a fig tree representing the people of Israel that is soon to be destroyed if she does not repent— all combining to threaten the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem, of the temple, and of the entire sacrificial system for which the temple stood. In short, Jesus’ teaching here is symbolic prophetic action of the coming new age that He was inaugurating. This same symbolism appears, and therefore our interpretation of this



Luke 13:6

A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.



passage seems to be confirmed, by the other thing Jesus does this Monday of Passion Week, namely what has usually been called “cleansing the temple.”

B. Temple Tantrum

Again, that is somewhat of a misnomer. Just as the triumphal entry is perhaps better called a triumphal, the temple cleansing is more a temple clearing. It is not that Jesus believed that at this late date He really could reform the practices in the temple; it is more of a prophetic gesture to symbolize that the days of the entire temple system are numbered. One scholar has cleverly called this Jesus’ “temple tantrum”; and that perhaps is, however tongue-in-cheek, a better name than the temple cleansing. Soon there will be no temple and there will be no need for a temple, as those who worship God come to Him through Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice for sin, in whatever part of the world they may live.

VI. Tuesday

A. Controversial Teachings

Jesus then, on Tuesday, takes up a series of teachings of controversies with various groups of people milling about the temple precincts. Here it makes sense to have surveyed, early on, a little bit about the various groups of Jewish leaders, because all of the questions they ask and Jesus’ answers then make good sense. The chief priests asked by what authority Jesus had upset things in His earlier temple tantrum. They are the ones in charge, and therefore the question of authority is a natural one. Jesus does not answer directly but tells a short story, which in essence points out that His authority comes from the same place John the Baptist’s did. And because John was popular among the crowds the authorities will not admit that he did not come from God, but neither will they say it directly; so, therefore, stalemate is reached.

The Pharisees and the Herodians, not normally companions except perhaps against a common enemy, then ask Jesus about taxes. The Herodians, supporters of Herod and the status quo, would have supported the paying of taxes while the Pharisees would not have. How can Jesus answer and not

Who Else is Above David?

Lord = Yahweh (God)

Lord = Adonai (?)

David - King of Israel

Jesus' use of Psalm 110:1
(Mk 12:35-37, Mt 22:41-46, Lk 20:41-44)

alienate one of the two groups? Well, He does so with His famous reply that in a sense acknowledges the legitimacy of both domains, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,” but in so doing recognizes God as the higher authority. Caesar is not absolute as he would have claimed.

The Sadducees then come and inquire about Jesus’ teaching about the resurrection, mocking His belief in an afterlife. But He finds a way to quote even from the Torah, the five books of Moses, a passage to prove the existence of the resurrection. A lawyer (naturally) comes and asks about the greatest commandment. Jesus replies in fashion that several Jewish leaders would have agreed with, “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” Then with all of these questioners or would-be tricks having been foiled, Jesus turns the tables and asks them about a passage in Psalm 110:1 in which David says, “The Lord (Yahweh, God the Father) says to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” In essence, the question He asks is, Who is this other Lord who is greater than David, if not the Messiah? The crowds have no reply.

From this point on, Jesus then embarks on sharp rebukes told in most detail in Matthew 23—of the scribes’ and Pharisees’ hypocrisy, and closes His time of teaching in the temple by commending the sacrificial and generous giving, even though the net worth of it was very small, of a widow who places into the temple treasury two small copper coins. Jesus leaves the temple, perhaps reminiscent in a way of Ezekiel’s description of the glory of God departing from the temple because of the wickedness of the nation back in the times of the exile in the Old Testament.

B. Olivet Discourse

He takes His disciples and He goes up to the Mount of Olives, and He gives to them what has been called the Olivet or the eschatological discourse, a sermon that occupies Mark 13, Luke 21 and, in greatest detail, Matthew 24 and 25. Having just been in the temple and left it, the disciples comment on the beauty and grandeur of what in the ancient world was considered one of the great wonders, architecturally and aesthetically, of the ancient world. Jesus’ reply undoubtedly

Destruction of the Temple = End of the Age?



Mark 13:7-8

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

Mark 13:10

And the Gospel must first be preached to all nations.

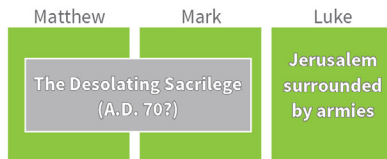
stuns them when He says, “Truly there will not be one stone left upon another.” And that triggers a two-part question from the disciples: When will the temple be destroyed, and when will the end of the age come?

No doubt in the disciples’ minds these two events were the same. They probably could not imagine God’s plans for His people Israel continuing without a temple. Surely its destruction would bring about the end of the age. But as Jesus replies to the question He seems to separate His answer to the question into two parts. Now here, if ever, is a passage which both lay people and scholars have interpreted in very different ways, and we do not have the time to rehearse all of the different approaches to an interpretation of this message. Let me simply give one approach that reflects a broad consensus or cross section of evangelical biblical scholarship, even though it is perhaps not always as well known in certain parts as various other interpretations.

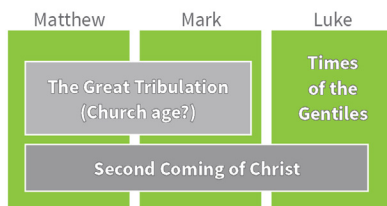
Jesus begins at the beginning of Mark 13:5-23 by responding to the first question: When will the temple be destroyed? The first part of His answer is to refer to certain signs which must be fulfilled, but which do not in and of themselves demonstrate that the end or the destruction of the temple will happen immediately. These include the rising of false messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines, persecution, and the Gospel being preached to all nations. There is no question about most of these events having been fulfilled, perhaps several times already in the first generation of Christianity. The Gospel being preached to all nations, at first glance, seems to be in a quite different category. We today speak of the Great Commission having yet to be fulfilled. Yet Paul can say, at least in some provisional sense, in Romans 10:18, that the Word of the Lord has gone forth to the entire earth—perhaps by that meaning representative sections of all major parts of the Roman Empire. And we need to recall that the term for the whole world that is used in several places in the New Testament could also be interpreted, and was in many other texts, as simply referring to the known world, i.e., the Roman Empire.

In verses 14-23, Jesus then proceeds to events immediately surrounding the temple’s destruction, although from other texts in the New Testament, particularly the book of Revelation, we sense that similar events may be repeated

The Olivet Discourse



The Olivet Discourse



even on a grander scale at the very end of human history. Here it's significant to compare Matthew and Mark's accounts with Luke's. Here is where Matthew and Mark speak very cryptically of "the abomination that causes desolation," whereas Luke speaks of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies—precisely what happened in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Then a period in which the Gentiles overrun the city ensues until that time is fulfilled.

All of the gospel writers speak of this as a time of great tribulation. And while we are used to thinking of the Tribulation in the book of Revelation as the period immediately preceding the end of human history, it would appear that in this context Jesus is speaking of the entire church age—the entire period at least from the destruction of Jerusalem to His Second Coming—as a time of great tribulation for His people in a variety of ways. This explains the way Matthew can then say in verses 24 and following of Matthew 24 that immediately following these events of the Tribulation, the return of the risen Christ will occur.

We cannot predict the time or the date of this. Mark 13:32 makes that very clear. Not even Jesus, in the limitations of His incarnate human form, knew the day or hour of His return. But the sermon continues for an entire chapter in Matthew, summarized much more briefly in Mark, with a collection of parables that all teach the main point of this sermon of Jesus: to be watchful, to be alert, to be about the business of Christ regardless of how long or how short it is until His return. That sermon then climaxes and closes with the discussion of the parable of the sheep and the goats—reminding people that all nations, all people, will be called to account one day, at a judgment day before God.

Mark 13:32-33

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.