

Triumphal Entry - Making it Happen

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] As we come then to this opening section of chapter 11, in some weeks since we've had an opportunity to continue our progress through this section of Mark's account of the Gospel, we find Jesus now at the foot of the other side of the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives is quite a large mountain to the east of Jerusalem, not large by our standards in this country, but a considerable hill. And Bethany and Bethphage are on the other side of it from Jerusalem.

So he's not coming to the bottom of the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, it's on the far side. It's rather like the big hill Ronyeville, you know, it's at Leverborough. It's the same hill which, you know, they were going to dig chunks out of at Linger Bay around the other side.

And it's the same mountain which you see clearly from the Leverborough side, as you can see also from the Linger Bay side. But it's the same hill. So likewise the Mount of Olives, they're coming at it from the other side, the steep side that Bethany is on.

And here now, as they approach, coming now to Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away from it, and the foot of the Mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples.

[1 : 12] Now, Bethany, we're not quite sure exactly what its name means. There's various descriptions and various suggestions and different ways that different languages can be understood.

The most common one appears to be either it means house affliction or poverty or sorrow. Often poverty brings sorrow with it. So house of affliction or poverty or sorrow is what Bethany means. Bethphage is quite clear. It means house of figs. And it's not without significance that it's a fig tree. Jesus is later looking for fruit on in that particular area.

So we have this incident in verses 1 to 6, where Jesus is securing the services of this young donkey, a colt, on which never man sat. Now, we would make a mistake if we think, isn't it amazing to just go and find this donkey and buy a miracle?

People just let them go. There's no suggestion here that this is a miracle. There's no suggestion here that this is incredible divine intervention. But rather, the colt of the donkey implies arrangement, not miracle.

[2 : 19] It implies that Jesus has made plans. He has contacted whoever happens to own this young donkey. He has arranged with them, either personally or with a go-between or whatever, that on this occasion, as on various others, he knows what he is doing.

He knows how he intends to enter Jerusalem. And he will know the prophecy from Zechariah that we'll come to in just a wee minute. And he is deliberately, as you can say it with all reverence and without fear of it appearing inappropriate, he is deliberately setting out to make prophecy come true. He is setting out to make prophecy come true. So that those who know the scriptures, and many of the Jews in those days were quite familiar with their scriptures.

They would see, oh, wait a minute, this is what the scripture talks about. This is it. This is it actually happening before our eyes. He intends that that should be seen. He intends that this should be his entrance.

He has visited Jerusalem many times in the past, and almost always, we must assume, on foot. But why suddenly now does he ride into Jerusalem on this donkey?

[3 : 29] Except in order to make prophecy come true. And it is no less genuine a fulfillment for all that. He has decided what he is going to do.

He has decided and arranged what use he is going to make of ordinary means at his disposal. Even down to what seems to be the arranging of a password.

Now, if anybody says, why are you losing the call? Say this. And then they'll let you go. Then they'll give you this donkey that you need. Now, we cannot have a more perfect example to follow than that of Christ.

And so often we get hung up on waiting for the special miracle of which we have no promise.

Waiting for the flash of lightning, the angelic appearance, the divine voice from the clouds, the Damascus Road experience of which we, again, have no promise.

And we think, oh, well, I've got to wait until that happens. I've got to wait until God intervenes and God does his thing. If anyone could have utilized the miraculous to wow everyone and to magically make it happen.

[4 : 46] If anybody could have said, watch over there, boys, and I'll make a donkey appear out of nothing. I'll turn that sheep into a donkey. So I consider that he had the power to do that. That would have been abuse of his power.

Jesus wasn't setting out to do magic tricks. But if anybody could have used the miraculous in order to impress people, it was Jesus. But instead he chose to make use of ordinary means.

What does he himself do? He makes use of these things which are already the case. He makes arrangements. If he doesn't have it, he asks for it.

Or he borrows it. Just as he is doing here. This is a borrowed colt. A borrowed donkey. And he's borrowing it from somebody else. You know, and he does this a lot in his ministry.

You know, when he preaches from the boat and when he goes out onto the Sea of Galilee, he goes to sea in a borrowed boat. Simon Peter's boat. When he rides into Jerusalem here, it's a borrowed donkey.

[5 : 46] When he ate the Passover meal with his disciples, it is in a borrowed upper room.

Furnished and made ready. He doesn't own it. It doesn't belong to him or to any of his immediate disciples as far as we know.

He was buried in a borrowed sepulchre. If he doesn't have it, he asks. If he doesn't own it, somebody else would supply it. You know, and again as I stress, Jesus is our perfect example. He owned nothing in earthly terms. But he achieved everything. And all these people from whom he borrowed didn't cost them anything, did it?

The guy who gave him the upper room for the use of the Passover, he wasn't the poorer after Jesus' disciples had been undone. Simon Peter's boat wasn't used up a bit more just because Jesus had preached from it or sailed across the Sea of Galilee in it.

He wasn't another poorer. The person whose donkey he borrowed, he wasn't any poorer or worse off. And likewise, after Joseph of Arimathea put him in his new tomb and then he rose again.

[6 : 47] So he still had the empty tomb to use for himself afterwards. He was none the poorer. But all of these people were honored beyond measure by the use that Christ made of the things that God had put into their hands.

He made use of ordinary means. And so likewise we, in the most important decision of our lives, instead of waiting for, well, where's the flash of lightning?

Where's the angelic voice? I can't do a thing unless God intervenes. God has put into your hands all that you need. You have his word. You have his promise.

You have his truth. You have what he says. Ask and it shall be given. Seek and ye shall find. Him that cometh to me, I will in no eyes cast out. You have what you need.

If the Lord has given you abundance of fuel and fire lighters and matches, don't complain to the Lord that you're cold if you haven't made use of what he gives you.

[7 : 50] He has given all that we need. And Jesus himself is our perfect example. He has given you use of ordinary means. He has given you use of ordinary means. To bring to pass that which God himself has prophesied in his word.

Don't waste half of your life waiting for some zap, pow, lightning strike miracle of which you have no promise.

Jesus made right use of ordinary means. And he, as you say, is our perfect example. You've got his promises. You've got his Bible. You've got his gospel. You know what you can do.

You read it. You take hold of it. You believe in his truth. The Lord has given us all that we need.

Jesus decided what was going to happen.

He could easily have walked into Jerusalem. He could easily have got a horse from somebody. He could have got a camel. He could have got whatever he wanted. But he chose a donkey because

he intended prophecy to be fulfilled.

[8 : 51] He made sure it happened. That is what you and I must do with the means that the Lord puts at our disposal. The ordinary means he has given us.

The cult was found in a place where two ways met. Of course, in the original context, we're just talking about a physical suite in a physical village in Bethany or Bethphagia.

It's almost certainly simply to make it readily identifiable where they would find it. But in spiritual terms, which is not an inappropriate use here, in spiritual terms, the illustration could hardly be clearer.

The means are at your disposal. And there are two ways that you could go. To follow with Jesus or to go away without him.

Whatever you do, somebody's going to ask you, What are you doing, losing the cult? What are you doing here at this parting of the ways? What way do you plan to go? Come on, hurry up, make a decision.

[9 : 52] People are going to ask you. The world is going to be honored here. People are going to demand. What is it that you're going to do? What are you doing, losing the cult? Where are you going to go?

Here's the cult. In a place where two ways met. Whatever directions your different lives may have come from.

And whatever may be the different experiences that you have gone through. All of us have this meeting point in Christ. It is where two or two hundred different ways meet.

And the decision that must be made. The Lord has given us all that we need in order to do it. Jesus then chooses at the cult whereon never man sat.

Now of course he is made like us. In so far as in his human frailty he personifies God in all his humility. But his use here may indeed be somewhat of a miracle.

[10 : 57] But to admit here this is a cult on which never man sat. That means it's an unbroken young dog. It's not been trained. It's not been used to having people saddle it or ride on it or whatever.

It is untamed. And which would under normal circumstances never consent to be thus ridden. Much less by a complete stranger. But I think it's fair for us to take here that Jesus is demonstrating here just quietly and in passing.

As the text moves on his absolute control over all things in creation and nature. Over the animal kingdom. Just as he gives complete control over the human kingdom of man.

Just as he has complete control over the forces of nature and the wind and the waves and so on.

This donkey which ought to buck and bronc and throw off such a rider.

That it doesn't know and who suddenly tries to sit on it. It's never been sat on before and yet here it goes meekly and tamely. With this complete stranger sitting on it.

[11 : 58] Riding into the noise and bustle of the city. And it just doesn't. This I would suggest to you again in all reverence and humility. Is a miracle in itself. And in that sense Jesus yes is making use of the miraculous.

As well as of the ordinary means. Why does it have to be one on which no man sat? Again I would suggest to you that in this Jesus will not share his glory with any other.

It is demonstrable hereby that only Christ could do what he is doing here. Riding this unbroken donkey. This untamed colt on which never man sat.

Only Christ could have such power. As a complete stranger coming face to face with this most stubborn of the animal kingdom here. There are often practical reasons why what Christ makes use of has to be untouched by man.

You know it was a new tomb into which he was put. That Joseph and Amatha had had cut out of a rock and just made ready for himself. Why does it matter if it was a new tomb? Well obviously if you're going to put the remains of Jesus into a tomb where there are other bodies.

[13 : 11] And remember what they did they just put the body in and they would seal it up and the body would just quietly decay in there. And then eventually when it was completely gone to bones they would gather up the bones and put it in a smaller box.

That's the way they dealt with death and with human remains. But once it was sealed in it you've got lots of other bodies. And Jesus rises on the tomb and he goes. People come and say oh loads of bodies are there.

Any one of them could be Jesus. Any one of them could be him. You know who's to save one of these bodies. Come on that's not proof. That doesn't mean that he's risen from the dead. You've got all these other corpses in here.

Any one of them could be him. There's none. There's only Jesus in there. When he rises from the tomb the tomb is empty. There's nothing else. There's nobody else in it. This is the fact of the resurrection that has to be confronted by those who would deny his divinity.

Likewise his virgin birth. It would have been perfectly possible for the Lord to use the virgin Mary. But after her marriage and still to be the Holy Spirit that the Lord implanted in her womb.

[14:17] Even after she'd been married to Joseph. Such that that child was purely of God. But who would believe it? And how would it be proved that it wasn't just Joseph in the normal way of marital relations?

No it had to be. The purity of the virgin Mary. So there could be no question that this was tainted fallen human seed. This was the work of God's Holy Ghost.

A cult of which never man sat. Pure untainted man as his mother. A new tomb in which never man lay. Christ needs must demonstrate in his life and ministered.

Whilst he is like us in his human frailty. He is at the same time separate from sinners. Untainted by any possible suggestion that there is anything impure or anything that can be contradicted.

Or anything which can detract from his glory and the purity of it. No other is to take credit for what he himself has achieved.

[15:22] From verse 7 then on to verse 11. We have his entry into Jerusalem. They brought the coat to Jesus and cast their garments on him and he sat upon him.

Now Luke's version of the gospel account says, and this is one little testimony to his kingship. They set him. They set Jesus thereon.

In other words, the disciples sort of lifted him up or gave him a foot up, a stirrup up so he could get hurt. They set him on. As though he were a king. Which of course he is.

Preparing for his entry into Jerusalem. They put their garments on. In the absence of a saddle.

Others put their garments in the way. They cut down branches and strawed them in the way.

We're so familiar with the sort of Sunday school Bible picture in our head. That we miss the fact that this isn't trumpets and gold and silver that's being used here.

[16:18] This isn't riches and cloth and silk and so on. This is just ordinary poor people's garments passed in the way so a donkey's hoops can line over them. Just cutting down branches from the palm trees and storing them in the way.

This is the offering of the poor. There is no greatness. There is no wealth. There is no outward pomp and circumstance here. This is just the joyful greeting of the crowds of pilgrims.

Says the whole multitude. Likewise, greet them many. Spread their garments in the way. And cut down branches off the trees and straw them in the way. This is the joyful greeting of the poor.

Now, sometimes, I think we mentioned in the past, people have questioned, how could the crowds be shouting Hosanna at the beginning of the week? And by the end of the week, they're shouting crucify.

And we're almost certainly, these are different crowds. Different people. Different setting.

Remember that when people came to Jerusalem for the feast, they traveled in huge numbers. They traveled in big convoys.

[17:18] Like a whole village would go together. And they would travel in company. This was for safety and protection. And also, it means that you're going with people you know on the way.

You feel safe. You're all going as a group. And it also means that those who are now converging on Jerusalem, very likely, many of them have come from Galilee.

Many of them in this grouping have seen the works that Jesus has done. And they are ready to greet him as the Messiah. And it's the chief priests and the scribes in Jerusalem who are saying, you know, who is this?

Who is this person? Who does he think he is? And they say, oh, this is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth in Galilee. They are convinced that this is the Messiah. Now, as Jesus enters Jerusalem here, he is bringing to pass, as we said, deliberately, first of all, one prophecy.

Three prophecies get filled in that one afternoon as he comes. First of all, Zechariah chapter 9, at verse 9, where we read, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

[18 : 19] Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy king cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass and upon a colt, the fall of an ass.

Now, in Mark's account, this is just mentioned. It's not specifically stated that it is the fulfillment of prophecy. Only Matthew chapter 21, verses 4 and 5, explicitly states this to be the fulfillment of prophecy.

But, of course, it is. Zechariah chapter 9, verse 9. And the people who go ahead of him and who shied and cried, Hosanna, they are themselves bringing prophecy to pass.

And what they do, probably unconsciously. But they are quoting from Psalm 118, verses 25 and 26. Where we read, in the English version, Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord.

O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. Now, this morning we were talking about Joshua.

[19 : 25] And remember how we said the name Joshua means Jehovah's salvation. And the words salvation and save and saviour, they're all going to bound up together. And so, you'll remember that at least once, I think it's in the book of Numbers, Joshua is referred to as Oshia, the son of Nun.

And they dropped the J-O from the beginning. Oshia. And what we have in the original Hebrew, this verse 25 in Psalm 118, is actually, the Hebrew sounds, Hoshia-ha-na.

It's like the name Oshia, but Hoshia-ha is what we've got. Hoshia-ha and then Na. Hoshia-na, which is save now. And it's simply been translated by the English translators.

Save now, I beseech thee. But the words that you have in the actual Hebrew are Hoshia-ha-na.

Save now. Now, when this is put into the Greek, the Hoshia-ha-na, it simply changes slightly and it becomes Hosanna.

Which means, again, literally, save now. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. This is what they're crying. Hosanna.

[20 : 36] Blessed be he is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our father, David, that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Hoshia-ha-na. Save now.

Save now. You've got a crescendo building up here of those who anticipate a messianic event. The crowds here are effectively saying, this is the Messiah.

Now it's coming. Now it's the fulfillment. Now it's building up to a crescendo. Now you might think, this would be the perfect time for Jesus to go storming into the temple and knock over the tables of the money changers.

I'm doing all in a great big crescendo there. And maybe all the crowd would have joined in and you have a good going riot there in the temple. And everybody would really notice. But Jesus doesn't work that way.

He's not interested in explosive civil disobedience or a mob. Rather, he has stated his claim. And we read that he entered into Jerusalem, into the temple.

[21 : 38] There's been no sort of warning beforehand. No messenger saying, here comes the Messiah. Everybody else get ready. Here comes the prophet Jesus of Nazareth. It is without warning in that sense.

It is without any kind of herald going before him. This is what is meant in Malachi chapter 3 at verse 1, where it says, The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in.

Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. He will come suddenly. Without any outward heralding or warning, he will come to his temple. Now, that same verse, you'll notice that it is bound up with the preface to Jesus' own ministry, with that which was John the Baptist.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. And yet, still when the Lord comes to his temple, he comes suddenly. He comes, as it were, without warning.

Now, we know that this verse speaks of John the Baptist, because right at the beginning of Mark's account of the gospel, you may remember when we were looking at that a few, several months ago in chapter 1, we read in verse 2, As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before me.

[23 : 00] This is John the Baptist, the voice of one crying in the wilderness. And so as he prepares the way of Jesus' arrival for his public ministry, Yet, when Jesus finally comes to claim his authority over the temple, he comes suddenly.

He comes, as it were, without warning. Although the way he's been prepared for his coming on the world stage, his arrival in the temple is unheld it, unprepared in that sense by the world.

And, you know, this both and scenario, this is really very true to us, isn't it? Because we can't say we haven't had warning about the Lord coming. We can't say we haven't been told, He's coming back again.

You've got to get ready. You've got to be prepared. You've got to prepare the way of the Lord. And so we do. We have to make sure that when he comes, as his servants, we are found ready. We are found with our loins guarded and our lamps burning and ready to open to the Master when he comes.

And yet, you know, he delays. Like the bridegroom in the parables, you know, he takes his time and 2,000 years is gone. And, okay, it doesn't matter to us. It's 2,000 years because we only get one lifetime in the midst of all of that.

[24 : 11] Maybe 50, 60, 70 years, whatever we're given, it's much shorter than 2,000. It's this lifetime you're going to make the most of. We have been told, we have been prepared, and yet when he comes, when he comes to his temple, he comes suddenly.

He comes, in a sense, without warning. After all the preparation, and after all the warning we've been given, the faithful waiting on him, and the unfaithful thinking, oh, well, you know, time enough, you know, it's taken ages, he's not right here.

And yet, Jesus says, when the Son of Man comes, it will be as a lightning that shines from the east even unto the west. The messenger of the covenant will come suddenly to his temple.

So we've got three words of prophecy accomplished here in that one journey from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. You've got Zechariah chapter 9 and verse 9. Behold, thy king cometh lowly, riding upon an ass, the coat, the foal of an ass.

You've got Psalm 118, the messianic psalm, crying out, Save now! Hosanna! Hosanna! Save now! Blessed be the name of the Lord, and he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[25 : 18] And then you've got the messenger of the covenant, Christ, coming to his temple suddenly. Malachi chapter 3, verse 1. And he enters in, and he looked round upon all things.

And now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve, when he had looked round upon all things. Now as we say, he could easily have made that, his great big finale, and destroy all the tables, the money changes ever.

No, he doesn't. Not at this stage. He sees all that is wrong. Just as when the Lord is about to return, he sees. He knows all that is in your life and mine.

He sees all the evil that is done in the world. He sees all the torture and abuse of his children, their imprisonment, their discrimination against them, the brutality that they suffer.

He sees. He knows. He is mindful of it all. He comes, and he looks round upon it all. But he doesn't destroy it yet.

[26 : 21] There is yet one more day. He sees. He knows. He recognises. And he remembers. It is nearly time for him to cleanse it all.

It is nearly time for him to purge his house, his temple, and this world. Nearly. And he is there on the very threshold of it. He has come to his temple, but not quite.

The eventide was come. There is one day more. One day of grace. One opportunity left. It is not quite yet.

Jesus entered into Jerusalem, into the temple, when he had looked round upon all things. And now the eventide was come. He went down from the Bethany with the twelve.

I want to ask you tonight if you think, if you believe whether Christ has come and looked upon your life, whether he surveys all that is in it, and sees the thoughts and the secrets of your heart, whether he knows the things that you do or don't do, whether he looks round upon it all, whether he looks with pleasure, or with sadness, with disappointments, or with disapproval or anger.

[27 : 39] Only you can answer that. But you can guarantee that he sees. It is the same as Hagar in the desert in Genesis. Thou God, seest me. Came to his temple, and he looked round upon everything that was in it.

Is he looking right into your life just now? Is he looking right into your life tonight? Looked round upon all things. He is going back out again for now. But he's coming back.

And when he comes back again, he will put right all that is wrong. We have yet one day, one night of grace, in which to ensure that we are right with God.

One opportunity more. But we have no promise apart from that. He has given us the tools. He has given us the ordinary means. He entered into Jerusalem.

He entered the temple. For when he had looked round upon all things, and now the even tide was come, he went out of the temple, and he went to twelve. He didn't do it then. He could have done.

[28 : 40] But he waited. The Lord has waited before he overturns the tables and worldliness and destructiveness in your life. Then it is of his grace and not of his weakness that we have yet been given one more opportunity.

And on the morrow when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry. Now we must understand this to be ordinary physical hunger. Jesus was a man, a human being, just as we are.

He went. He got hungry. He got tired. He got thirsty. He needed to sleep. And all these physical frailties and weaknesses that we likewise have.

He was hungry. We don't know the reason why. We don't know whether perhaps whoever his hosts were, they might have been ready to do breakfast for the disciples and for Jesus, but maybe Jesus, you know, as was his man, had gone out early before it was light to pray on the mountainside.

We don't know. The fact is that he left the house. He left his lodgings to head for Jerusalem early in the day without having anything to eat. He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree afar off, having leaves, he came.

[29 : 51] If happily he might find anything thereon. And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves. The time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever.

And his disciples heard it. And then, of course, later on, we'll come to him due course and subsequent weeks, the fig tree is then all dried up from its roots. And this causes some people huge amounts of consternation.

And they, Oh, that is so unfair. The poor little fig tree. You know, Jesus cursing it because the time of figs was not yet. You know, how could it possibly produce figs if it wasn't the time of figs? You know, Jesus is behaving like a small child.

Some people have said and said in all honesty. And saying, Oh, these are believing Christians who have said, Oh, this is terrible. You know, why does Jesus behave like this? We can't understand why he would do this.

As with all these things, there's so much more being taught here than just the niceties of horticultural procedure here. Jesus comes to this fig tree in the place that is the house of figs expecting to find fruit.

[31 : 00] He has physical hunger. And the figs, the fig trees, I'm not a specialist in any of these things, but of course, from what we understand, fig trees normally produce because they're a very fruitful plant, they're able to flourish in comparatively dry and difficult soil.

And they're so fruitful they normally produce two crops in a year. In the same calendar, you'll produce one crop, an earlier crop, in the spring. And this is considered not quite the best crop, but you know, there's fruitfulness there.

And then again, they'll produce another crop in the late summer. And that is considered the better of the two crops. But if they produce a crop in spring, now, if the fact that there is foliage, there's enough fruitfulness, there's enough water in the ground, to produce this abundant foliage, lots of leaves, you would expect, remember that this is Passover time, approximating to say, our Easter, sort of time in the year.

And so you would expect at the spring time that if, at the very least, it's not quite ripe time for figs, if you search through the leaves, you would expect to find, perhaps, you know, not fully formed yet, but still unripe figs there.

You'd be able to see the little portions of fruit, maybe not fully ready, maybe not fully ripe, because the time of figs maybe isn't quite time yet, maybe the harvest isn't quite ready, but you'd expect to find something.

[32 : 29] You'd expect to find something perhaps partially formed, not yet fully matured, ripe and figs. You would expect something, but we're explicitly told.

If he might find anything there, or when he came to it, he'd find nothing but leaves. No partially formed fruit, no almost ripe, but not quite yet, no hard little, nothing like that, portions of fruitfulness there, nothing but leaves.

There's not even the pretense here of fruit about to grow. There's just abundant foliage and nothing behind it, nothing under it.

What this means by the time of figs was not yet. Maybe it just means the greater summer harvest hadn't come yet, but you'd expect something for the spring.

You'd expect something to be seen. If you remember Jesus in the parables, when you know that the person who's got the five talents, and he makes five more, and then I'll say, oh, well done, good and faithful servant.

[33 : 34] And there's a guy who's only got the two talents, and he can't make quite as much. It's not really what to say to him, oh, where's your ten talents? But instead, he's had his two talents, this look master, you know, your two talents, you've made two more talents.

And he likewise gets told, well done, good and faithful servant. But the guy who's only got the one, he says, oh, what's the point? I can't do anything with this. He's a hard guy.

He's a cruel master. I'm not going to risk it. I'll just break the ground and give it back to him again. Nothing. Nothing at all. Not even interest, not even usury, nothing at all.

And this is what Jesus finds here. There's all the foliage, all the promise, all the fruitfulness. It's not lack of water. It's not lack of opportunity. But he searches. He doesn't find half right, nearly formed, two talents worth, doing its best.

He finds nothing. Just leaves. Just outward show. Which as long as it's not examined, as long as nobody lifts the leaves and looks, as long as nobody digs too deep, it looks okay.

[34 : 39] Is that what our lives are like? And I'm not saying, oh, yes it is. Oh, thank you. I don't know what's in your heart. I don't know what's in your individual life. I know some of what's in mine.

And that's problem enough. But what happens if somebody lifts the leaves? What happens if somebody begins to search through the foliage? What will they find?

Or not find? As the case may be. Will they find the little hard, partially formed fruits, struggling away to do its best, not quite ready for the harvest, but you know what's getting there?

Will they find fully ripe figs ready to be black, and you can really find nothing. Just a foliage. Just the outward appearance. It's all show and all vanity and there's nothing inside.

This is the problem. That Jesus finds nothing. And that's the reason for what he pronounces them afterwards. You see, in other words, you've got an outwardly deceiving appearance, promising much, all this foliage, all this leaves, and it's time for the spring harvest, at least, of the leaves.

[35 : 54] Now, people feel sorry for the fig tree sometimes. Oh, the poor little fig tree, that's not very nice. Jesus cursed it, and all dried, and withered up from the roots. And yet, they read the prophecy of Jonah, and they don't say, oh, the poor little gourd.

You know, that God destroyed it in a night. And when Jonah feels sorry for the gourd, they say, oh yes, that's terrible, Jonah making such a fuss about the gourd. There it is. And yet, here with the fig tree, oh, the poor little fig tree.

What a shame. Jesus is using, just as the Lord uses the gourd, and Jonah is using the fig tree here, his complete control over all of nature and creation to demonstrate to his disciples, the disciples heard it.

We read verse 14. And later on, from verse 20 onwards, they remark upon it, and Jesus is able to use it to speak to them about faith and about prayer and about the need for fruitfulness.

We'll come to that in subsequent weeks. But the curse does not make the fig tree barren. I'll say that again. The curse does not make the fig tree barren.

[37 : 01] It is already barren. There's nothing on it but leaves. The only thing Jesus has done is he has exposed its emptiness. He has exposed that what seems to be fruitfulness and lush foliage in fact conceals nothing.

Nothing at all. So he doesn't make it barren. But rather he seals it in to its own barrenness. And if that fig tree is never going to produce fruit, then what is the point of its cumbering the ground?

Why does it take up nutrients in the soil? It doesn't. There's never going to be anything else. So it withers up and dies. It is destroyed because of its lack of fruitfulness.

Just like, you know, this world. This world when the last redeemed soul has been gathered in. The Lord isn't going to cause this world to keep on spinning around and all the universe carrying on before.

This is a package. You buy a packet of crisps. You eat it as you're going along the road. You treasure the little packets. Oh, this wonderful little empty packet. I'm going to keep this. I'm going to

iron it.

[38 : 12] I'm going to stick it in my drawer and I'm going to look after it. Take it out and look at it every now and then. The only reason you got that crisp packet was for the crisps inside it. That's the only reason. You bought it and you've eaten the crisps.

What do you do? You chuck it away. You're not going to keep it because it has fulfilled its purpose. And you didn't buy it and say, ooh, that horrible packet. How am I going to get the crisps? No, you buy the packet with the crisps.

But the objective is to eat the food inside. The objective is what's there inside. And when you've got what you need from it, you throw away the packaging.

This world is the packaging and the souls that are redeemed from within it, they are what the Lord is really aiming at. When the packaging is empty and he's gathered all his redeemed souls to him in heaven, he doesn't need the packaging anymore.

What's he going to do with it? We're told in Peter, all the elements will melt with fervent heat. It'll all be destroyed. God will make a new hell and a new earth. What use the packaging if it's empty?

[39 : 13] What use the fig tree if there's no fruitfulness in it? What use is this life you have been given if it is not being used to contain that which is most precious?

You see, the fig tree in a parable that is told by Gideon's son, Jotham, in Judges 9, he tells this parable about how the trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them.

They said to the olive tree, rain thou over us. But the olive tree said to them, should I leave my fatness wherewith by me they honour God and man and go to be promoted over the trees? And the tree said to the fig tree, come thou and rain over us.

But the fig tree said unto them, should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit and go to be promoted over the trees? The fig tree in that parable knows its purpose.

My good fruit, my sweetness, that's why I exist. What is our chief end? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

[40 : 19] That's why the packaging of this life has been given to you. That is why we have been given this number of years upon the world, upon the earth. What is the purpose of it?

What's the purpose of the crisp packet? To have crisps in it. What's the purpose of the fig tree? To have figs on it. What's the purpose of your life? That there be good fruit and the sweetness of the Lord's mercy in your life to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

That's why you were given this life. That's the purpose of the years and the breath in your body.

That is why all the necessary tools have been put in front of you.

that is why if your heart is cold, the Lord has given you kindling, He has given you fuel, He's given you fire lighters, He's given you matches, He's given you everything you could need, He has given you all the ordinary means at your disposal.

And like Jesus who makes use of ordinary means, we are expected likewise to do so instead of sitting waiting, saying, well, where's the lightning bolt from heaven? Where's Damascus bolt?

[41 : 29] Where's the angelic choir? Come on, why isn't it happening, Lord? He has put it in your hands and He expects like the servants in the parable, occupy till I come.

Make use of what I have given you. Read what I have said. Study the word. Take it in. Make use of it. It is utterly 100% true and it is true for you and it is true for any others.

So Jesus doesn't make this fruit tree barren by cursing it. He seals it in to its barrenness. The goodness and sovereignty of God.

You don't want to bear fruit? That's fine. You won't bear fruit. You don't want to enter the promised land? You won't be allowed to enter the promised land. You don't want to spend any of your life with Jesus? You won't be able to spend even eternal life with Jesus.

You don't desire Him? You won't be made to get Him. Don't worry. This is God's perfect justice that He gives to us exactly what we desire.

[42 : 34] But we are sealed in to that desire. When Christ finds in us no evidence of what He looks for, we are given the opportunity, the fig tree knows what is its glory.

Not to reign over the trees of the field in Job's parable, but its good fruit and its sweetness. The sweetness in your life is the gospel of Jesus Christ if you have it.

The fruitfulness is His spirit within you, bringing forth fruit to the glory of His Father. Do we know our chief end and purpose? Do you realize that sooner or later the Lord will come looking for fruit beneath the leaves?

Now when He goes into the temple, verses 15 to 18, this is not something Jesus is doing quietly. He means to be noticed. He means to cause a stir. He means there to be a scene to draw attention to the corrosive abuses going on, the indifference, the religious impotence that's going on in the temple.

This is not how it was meant to be. Now the sense is some people again defend the money changers here. And they say, oh my God, it was just in the temple precincts that they were.

[43 : 54] It was just, it wasn't in the actual temple itself. It's just in the outward courts. No! It was in the court of the Gentiles. That in which all nations who were not themselves ethnically Jewish were to come and to pray.

This is what He says, you know, in Isaiah 56, verses 6 and 7, the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it and taking hold of my covenant.

Even them will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar, for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people, all nations.

In Jeremiah 7, verse 11, we read, Is this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.

That which was meant as a place of prayer has become a house of merchandise, of fevery. And it is so easy for that to happen because sacrifice was something you do outwardly.

[45 : 09] Sacrifice, you buy your sheep, you buy your lamb, you buy your doves, you sacrifice and you get to say, right, I'm doing my duty, I'm doing my religion, I get to feel good, pay the money, make the sacrifice, go home, feel good about myself.

It's all outward. It's all merchandise and it's all going on in the temple precincts. And Jesus said, what is meant to be happening here is that these are holy precincts.

These are as far as the Gentiles are able to come. They're not able to go into the court of the women, they're not able to go into the court of Israel, the court of the priests, this is all they've got.

And you are turning the Gentiles' place of prayer into a marketplace, carrying vessels through it, using it as a shortcut, making that which is holy into that which is worldly.

He overturns the tables of the money changers, he makes a statement, he claims back his father's house for his father's purpose. Jesus means to do this, he means to purge his temple, he means to make the statement and he knows there will always be opposition to it.

And again, we have to ask ourselves, what is the use we make of the courts of the Lord's house? What is it that we desire to do, to transact a business or worldly engagement or to enter into this relationship, this prayer with the Lord?

[46 : 32] And when the evening was come, he went out of the city. Why did he go out of the city? Because it was night. Eventually, Jesus leaves a place when it is dark.

When Jesus leaves a city, when Jesus leaves a home, when Jesus leaves a heart, you know that it is night in that place. That is why he is gone.

Don't let the night rule your heart. Don't let the darkness take control of your life. Don't let the world and the flesh and money and commerce dominate that which you behold.

This is the Lord's house. This is the Lord's time. This is the Lord's day. These are the things of the Lord he has put in your hands. The ordinary means of which he desires to make a holy use.

We are given time to use it. Let us do so. Let us do so. Let us do so. Let us do so.