

Holy Week as Recorded in the Gospels
Session #2: Events and Teachings

TEACHINGS IN AND AROUND THE TEMPLE

Greeks Seek Jesus (Jn. 12:20-50)

John has very little material between Palm Sunday and the Last Supper. None of the synoptic material is found in John, or vice versa. John does not tell us if these Greeks were Jewish converts or just happen to be in Jerusalem for Passover and were curious. We know that there were Gentiles who were considered “God-fearers,” who did not convert to Judaism but believed in the God of the Jews. In any case, they asked Philip about seeing Jesus. Philip in turn consulted Andrew, and then they brought the request to Jesus. This encounter between the Greeks and Jesus produced one of Jesus’ great discourses concerning the necessity of his death. In this section, Jesus says, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life will keep it for eternal life” and “I did not come to judge the world but to save it.” A voice comes from heaven (reminiscent of Jesus’ baptism), and those around heard God affirm Jesus. Although Jesus had performed many miracles, had taught in a way that stirred all of Palestine, and had fulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah, there were many who still did not believe. Yet, there were some believers in the Sanhedrin (the ruling council of the Jews), but they would not acknowledge Jesus publicly (Jn. 12:42-43).

Meaning of the Withered Fig Tree (Mt. 21:20-22; Mk. 11:20-26)

Last week we spoke about the cursing of the fig tree as being a metaphor about Jerusalem and the people’s lack of faith. Now we have an interpretation about the meaning of the withered tree. When the Disciples notice the withered tree, Jesus offers a broader interpretation, about faith, the power of prayer, and forgiveness.

Questions about Authority (Mt. 21:23-27; Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8)

The cleansing of the Temple plus the power and popularity of Jesus were more than the Sanhedrin could endure. When he arrived in Jerusalem they tried to discredit him by asking him about his authority to teach. Jesus answered them with a question about the source of John the Baptist’s authority (Mt. 21:25) making them look foolish.

Three Parables of Warning

After Jesus exposed the unbelief of the religious leaders toward John the Baptist, he gave a trilogy of parables concerning the judgment of all unbelievers, including the Jews: First: The Parable of the Two Sons (Mt. 21:28-32). Jesus makes the point that its not what you say that matters, but what you do. Harlots and tax collectors repented and will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Second: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mt. 21:33-46; Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19). This parable is more of an allegory telling of how the Jewish leaders killed the prophets, and would also kill God’s Son. The Kingdom of God will therefore be taken away from them and given to a nation (the Church? True believers?) producing the fruits of the Kingdom. Third: The Parable of the Marriage Feast (Mt. 22:1-14; Lk. 14:16-24). Matthew and Luke tell this parable quite differently. The theme in Matthew’s version is very much like the Parable of the Tenants. Luke emphasizes the compassion on the outcasts who will be included in the Kingdom. Matthew adds the parable about the wedding garment (vs. 11-14), that may or may not be related to the main parable.

Three Profound Questions from Religious Leaders (trying to trip Jesus up)

At his point, various religious groups with contradictory beliefs combined their forces in an attempt to discredit Jesus. They carefully presented their questions in the presence of many of Jesus’ followers:

- First, Jesus was asked about civil obedience, by the Herodians and Pharisees, who were usually antagonistic of each other, but their mutual opposition to Jesus brought them together in a diabolical scheme. They asked Jesus, “Is it lawful to give tribute (taxes) to Caesar or not?” This was an explosive question in Palestine, with religious and political overtones. Jesus finesses an answer, “Render ... to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
- Next, the Sadducees, who were the most influential sect in Jerusalem, asked Jesus a question concerning the resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, while the Pharisees did, and this question in Mt. 22:24-28 was the Sadducees’ proof question to reinforce their beliefs. Jesus’ answer exposed the ignorance of the Sadducees, who were recognized as faithful followers of Moses.
- Finally, a scribe came to Jesus and asked, “Which is the first (greatest) commandment of all?” (Mk. 12:28). Again, this was bitterly debated in Jesus’ day. And again, Jesus quoted the Scriptures, this time to the Scribes, who were supposed to be

experts in the Law. Jesus quoted from the “Shema,” recited daily by the Jews (Deut. 6:4-5). Then he added a second great commandment from Lev. 19:18. It seems that no one had ever linked the two before (Love God, Love Neighbor as Self).

Jesus Silences Critics with a Counter-question (Mt. 22:41-46; Mk 12:35-37a; Lk. 20:41-44)

After confounding his critics by answering their three questions, Jesus asked them a counter-question regarding the person of the messianic King: “What do you think of the Christ; whose son is he?” They said he was a son of David. Jesus then quoted Psalm 110:1 – the Messiah may be David’s son but also is David’s Lord! The Jewish leaders were silenced and asked no more questions.

Woes to the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 23:1-36; also see Mk. 12:38-40; Lk. 20:45-47)

At this point, the righteous indignation of Jesus exploded. He exposed the empty legalism and hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. Humiliated after their sparring with Jesus, they probably wanted to sneak away and plot against Jesus, but Jesus would have the last word! Perhaps standing on “The Steps of the Teachers” Jesus preached the most blistering sermon of his ministry - seven “woes,” according to Matthew (Mk and Lk have a very brief snippet, only). He is through playing games – and so he speaks the naked truth, and burns his bridges. If his fate wasn’t sealed before, it is now.

Jesus Laments over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37-39; Lk. 13:34-35)

Matthew places this lament at this point during Holy Week, Luke places it earlier in his Gospel (Luke has Jesus weep over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday). Brokenhearted, Jesus agonized over his beloved city. He had wanted to protect them from disaster, but they would not respond. Therefore, he predicts the coming destruction of the city (70 AD).

The Widow’s Mite (Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4)

Probably exhausted, Jesus sat down near the Temple Treasury and observed people bringing their offerings. He marveled at the gift of a widow, which meant more than all the gifts of the wealthy. After this, Jesus left the Temple and never taught in it, nor in the streets of Jerusalem again.

TEACHINGS FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

The “Son of Man”

Prominent in this section are references to “the Son of Man” (a significant title in Mark’s Gospel). The meaning of this phrase is very problematic. In Psalm 8:4, it is used merely as poetic parallelism (a poetic device in Hebrew poetry), with no special significance. In Ezekiel, the Lord addresses the prophet with this phrase (Ez. 2:1), with no special meaning. However, in Daniel 7:13 and following, the prophet sees a vision of “one like the Son of man” to whom God (“The Ancient of Days”) gives a kingdom. But in 7:18, it is the saints of the Most High who receive the kingdom. Therefore, Son of Man may be a collective term for the Israelites. Or it may refer to an angelic figure like Michael (Daniel 10:13). In later times, both rabbis and Christians interpreted “Son of Man” in Daniel 7:13 as an individual mediator of salvation, identified with the Messiah. For the most part, this phrase is used by Jesus to refer to himself, in three contexts: 1) referring to his present earthly, at times humble, life and activity (Mk. 2:10,28); 2) predictions of his suffering, death, and resurrection (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34); 3) his coming as the future Son of Man in glory (Mk. 8:38; 13:36; 14:62).

A Synopsis of Teachings

Note: There are scholars who believe that this apocalyptic sermon (“the Little Apocalypse”) was not spoken by Jesus but was placed on his lips by the early church preoccupied with the delay of Christ’s return. They would cite similarities between this material and other later apocalyptic writings we have in the New Testament. This may be possible, however we know that apocalyptic images and thought were prevalent in Jesus’ day (Essenes) and could well have been incorporated into his teaching.

Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple (Mt. 24:1-3; Mk. 13:1-4; Lk. 21. 5-7)

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of his disciples came to him and pointed out the grandeur of Herod’s Temple, which was made of white marble and was breathtaking. The front was covered with gold, shining in the sun. Herod, who was a builder at heart, began enlarging and beautifying Zerubbabel’s Temple in about 19 B.C. The Jews told Jesus (Jn. 2:20) that the Temple had been in renovation for 46 years. It would not be completed until 64 A.D. However, even in Jesus’ lifetime before its completion, it was

dazzling. Jesus told his disciples that not one stone would be left standing on another. This prediction came true in 70 A.D., only six years after its completion. Titus, the Roman general, put down the Jewish Revolt (Zealots/siege of Massada), recaptured Jerusalem, and destroyed the Temple. The siege of Jerusalem was horrible. Josephus reports severe famine, where women ate their newborn children, 1,000,000 deaths, hundreds crucified, and 100,000 enslaved. Following the Revolt, the Jewish religion was abolished in Palestine, and the Jews were scattered all over the Roman world. The sacrificial system was abandoned and has not been reestablished to this day. The Temple was never rebuilt. The Disciples asked for clarification about Jesus' prediction about the destruction of the Temple/Jerusalem. On the Mt. of Olives, Jesus teaches about the end times.

Signs of the Parousia (Second Coming) (Mt. 24:4-8; Mk. 13:5-37; Lk. 21:8-11)

It is obvious that the predictions in these verses referred to both the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the return of Christ to the earth, but no verse in this section clearly divides the two topics – however, one topic seems to lead into the other. According to this passage, there will be four signs of Christ's Second Coming: 1) some will come in my name and lead you astray; 2) wars and rumors of wars; 3) nations will rise up against nations; 4) famine and earthquakes.

The Beginnings of the Troubles (Mt. 24:9-14; Mk. 13:9-13; Lk. 21:12-19)

Persecution will present opportunities when you can bear testimony to your faith. Family members will turn against you, but those who endure to the end will be saved.

The Desolating Sacrilege (Mt. 24:15-22; Mk. 13:14-20; Lk. 21:20-24 – also see 2 Thes. 2:2-4)

The phrase is used in Dan. 9:27 to denote the pagan altar set up in the Jerusalem Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC; and in Mark 13:14 it may refer to the failed attempt by the emperor Caligula to install his statue in the Temple (40 AD) or to an event such as the display of army emblems in the Temple in the war of 66–70 AD. Clearly, Jesus is drawing upon the prophecy of Daniel in this section (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). These prophecies foretell the desecration of the Temple by soldiers, the setting up of “the desolating sacrilege” (an idol) in the Temple, and the cessation of the sacrifices and offerings. It then calls on all to remain faithful during the time of desolating sacrilege (for 1290 or 1335 days – see Dan. 12:11-12).

The Culmination of the Troubles (Mt. 24:23-25; Mk. 13:21-23)

Beware of false Christs and false prophets who will try to lead you astray (echoes of Dan. 13:1-3, and Revelation warnings to the seven churches).

The Day of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:26-28; Lk. 17:23-24,37)

If they say he is here or there, don't believe or follow them. The Son of Man will come like lightning that lights up the entire sky from the east to the west. (Mt. 24:28 and Lk 17:37 is a strange verse)

The Parousia of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:29-31; Mk. 13:24-27; Lk. 21:25-28)

After the tribulation there shall be signs in the heavens, which shall be shaken (compare Rev. 6:12-13). Then the Son of Man shall appear in the heavens and all the tribes shall mourn (compare Rev. 1:7). He will send out his angels with a trumpet call (compare Rev. 11:15) and they shall gather the elect from the four winds (compare Rev. 7:1-3). Luke adds the encouraging words, “Now, when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The Parable of the Fig Tree (Mt. 24:32-33; Mk. 13:28-29; Lk. 21:29-31)

As mentioned in the previous session, the episode of the cursing of the fig tree may have been an elaboration of this saying about the fig tree, as it relates to the signs of the coming of the Son of Man (or “Kingdom of God” in Luke).

The Time of the Parousia (Mt. 24:34-36; Mk. 13:30-32; Lk. 21:32-33)

“This generation” will not pass away until all these things take place (what are we to make of this claim?). Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus' word will not. No one knows the day or the hour, only the Father.

Mark's Ending to the Discourse (Mk. 13:33-37)

The Parable of the Doorkeeper (Mt. 25:14-15b, 24:42, 25:13; Lk. 19:12-13, 12:38 – similar material)

Mark ends this discourse here with The Parable of the Doorkeeper. Matthew and Luke contain similar material, but it is incorporated into The Parable of the Talents, found later in Matthew's version of this discourse, and occurring earlier in Jesus' ministry in Luke's Gospel. The lesson of the Doorkeeper parable: Watch, because you don't know when the Master will return. Don't let him find you asleep!

Luke's Ending to the Discourse (Lk. 21:34-36)

Again – watch, and pray that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, so you can stand before the Son of Man. But what shall we do in the meantime (See themes on the right margin):

The Need for Watchfulness (Mt. 24:37-41; Lk. 17:26-27,34-35)

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Luke places this saying earlier in the ministry of Jesus. The coming of the Son of Man will be as in the days of Noah. People continue to go on in sin, but the Son of Man will sweep them away like the Flood (working side by side, one will be swept away, the other left). Note that in the Flood, the waters swept away the evil ones. In this case, which are swept away and which are left? (is the reward to be swept away, or to be left???)

The Watchful Householder (Mt. 24:42-44; Lk. 12:39-40)

READINESS

Again, Luke places this material elsewhere. The Son of Man is coming like a thief at a time no one expects. Watch then, and be ready.

The Faithful and Wise Servant (Mt 24:45-51; Lk. 12:42-46)

OBEDIENCE

Similar to the Parable of the Doorkeeper, the message is that when the Master returns, he had better find us faithfully doing what he has instructed us to do, lest he punish us as hypocrites. In both Gospels, the master is delayed.

The Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt. 25:1-13)

PERSONAL PREPARATION

This is also called The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. Five were prepared for the Bridegroom's arrival, five were not. The parable emphasizes the joy of those who are prepared when the Lord comes, and the condemnation of those who are not.

The Parable of the Talents (Mat. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-27)

PRODUCTIVE FAITH

Luke included this parable at an earlier point (told somewhat differently – a nobleman who goes to a distant land to make himself king). In this parable, Jesus is illustrating the place of good works in the Christian life. Faith which does not produce results is questionable faith. The Son of Man, when he returns, expects us to have been productive Christians.

The Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46)

COMPASSIONATE HEART

This parable describes the common practice of herders of separating sheep from goats. It compares this practice with what of Christ ("the King") will do at the last Judgment. Those who are "sheep," who "inheriting the kingdom" are those who have shown compassion on others. In the process, Christ says, they have shown compassion on him. Those who did not show compassion are "goats" who will be punished.

A Summary of the Days Jesus Spent in Jerusalem (Lk. 21:37-38)

Luke says that Jesus divided his time between the Temple and the Mount of Olives, teaching in the Temple by day, lodging on the Mount of Olives by night.

Next Session: We will begin "the Passion Narrative:" the conspiracy against Jesus, the anointing at Bethany, the Last Supper, the agony in the garden, and the arrest.