



### **Weekly Study**

#### **Week 8: The Entry into Jerusalem and the Cleansing of the Temple**

#### **Read Mark 11:15-19**

This lesson is about two things:

- 1) An overview of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the week in and outside of Jerusalem
- 2) A closer look at the cleansing of the temple

#### **Review**

Sometimes, it helps us continue to remember things if we look back at where we have been and what we have learned so far:

- The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “the synoptic gospels” because they all follow the same basic story of Jesus’ life, with some variations. The Gospel of John has a very different sequence. The word gospel means “good news.”
- The Gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel, with a focus on faithfulness in the face of persecution, on the healings and miracles of Jesus, and with a great sense of urgency, using the word “immediately” very often. It was probably written by a traveling companion of Paul, right about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
- The Gospel of Matthew is the Jewish Gospel, and it was probably written 80-90 AD in Syria of Antioch, where a large contingent of Jewish refugees had fled after the destruction of Jerusalem. Its purpose is to show Jews that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, and that Christianity is really the true Judaism. It most often uses the phrase “this is to fulfill the prophecy...” It also points to the Kingdom of Heaven as beginning to come to pass, and that the Kingdom of Heaven is overtaking the kingdom of the world.
- The Gospel of Luke is the first of a two volume set – Luke and Acts. It has a focus on Jesus for the whole world, especially focused on Gentiles, outcasts, the powerless, and the poor, as well as the responsibility of the rich. It also emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, and the sense of joy in following Jesus.

- Jesus begins his ministry when he is about 30 years old, and is baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist. He is anointed by the Holy Spirit and his identity is established as God's beloved son. He is then led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted, tested, tempered by the devil.
- Jesus goes to Capernaum, where he performs his first healing in the Synagogue. He then goes to Nazareth, his hometown, where he is rejected by his own people.
- Jesus teaches and heals and cleanses lepers throughout Galilee, using Capernaum as his home base. His healings are not designed to convince people he is the Messiah, but rather to demonstrate his compassion and the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven/God as being the presence of health, wholeness, justice, righteousness, and peace. His parables are not designed to convince people to follow him, but to show the difference between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, and could be understood through the eyes of faith.
- Galilee was a hotbed of Jewish resistance. Throughout this time, the tensions began to rise with the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Herodians. Periodically, Jesus goes to "the other side" of the Sea of Galilee, Gentile territory, but also the territory of Herod Philip.
- Sometime near the beginning of his third year of ministry, when he hears of the death of John the Baptist, he takes his disciples and leaves the country of Herod Antipas, going first to Tyre and Sidon, and then to Caesarea Philippi.
- In Caesarea Philippi, he begins to be very clear about his coming death and resurrection. Because Peter proclaims him as the Messiah, and the disciples appear to be finally beginning to understand, Jesus authorizes his church to carry on after his death, and reminds them of their nature as servants rather than masters.
- He leaves Caesarea, and goes with Peter, James, and John up onto a mountain, where he is transfigured before them, a foretaste of his being "glorified." The word "glory" really means "shine" or "glow." Both Jesus and his disciples are reminded of his identity as the beloved Son of God.
- He comes down the mountain and on his way south to Jerusalem, reminds the disciples two more times that he is to suffer, die, and rise again. Each time, he reminds them of their roles as servants. The healing of blind Bartimaeus as he is on the outskirts of Jericho, which is in Judea about 16 miles from Jerusalem, is a demonstration of such servanthood, as Jesus asks him, "what do you want me to do for you?"

### **The first days in Jerusalem: An overview of events**

There is some disagreement in the gospels regarding the day that certain things happen during this week in Jerusalem. For example, Matthew and Luke record the confrontation with the money changers in the temple on the first day, what we call Palm Sunday, immediately after the entry into the city. The Gospel of Mark records it on the second day instead. For the sake of simplicity, the chronology below follows the Gospel of Mark, with additions from the gospels of Matthew and Luke in places where Mark does not record the event at all.

#### **Day 1 (Sunday)**

##### ***The Entry into Jerusalem (and first prediction of its destruction)***

When Jesus gets to Bethphage and Bethany, two small sister villages about two miles from Jerusalem along that Jericho road, he sends his disciples to retrieve a colt from the village. Jesus rides down the

Mount of Olives on the eastern side of Jerusalem, toward the Eastern Gate. The crowds outside the city wave branches, and shout “hosanna!”

Four important things to note about the Palm Sunday story:

- 1) The Gospel of Matthew (which always points out the prophecy) reminds us that Zechariah 9:9 tells us that the Messiah would come humbly, riding on the colt of a donkey.
- 2) The palm branches are a sign of royalty. This is spiritually significant – it is a sign that we recognize Jesus as King and the inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- 3) The palm branches are also a political symbol. They not only are a sign that Jesus is the king, but also that they believe he is a particular kind of king. Before the Romans conquered Israel, and put Herod in place as king, there was a dynasty of kings called the Hasmoneans. These kings began with Simon Maccabaeus, who along with his brother Judas Maccabaeus defeated the Greek Seleucid rulers and made Israel an independent state. (The feast of Hanukkah is a celebration of this victory and the rededication of the temple.) The palm branch was a symbol of the Hasmonean dynasty of kings, a clear affront to Roman rule and to Herod.
- 4) The word “hosanna” is written in Greek in the New Testament, but they have actually simply taken a Hebrew phrase, “*hoshiya na*,” which means, “Save me!” Over the years, it had come to mean, simply, “Salvation!” and is followed by, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Part of the way down the road on the Mount of Olives, the Gospel of Luke records that Jesus stops and weeps over the city and predicts its destruction because they do not recognize “the day of your visitation” - that he is the Messiah. If you go there today, you will find on the road down the Mount of Olives a modern-era church designed in the shape of a teardrop, with a window that looks out over the city of Jerusalem. The church is called “Dominus Flevit,” which means “The Lord wept.”

When he enters the city, the Gospel of Mark records that he simply goes to the temple, looks around at everything, and returns to Bethany for the evening.

## **Day 2 (Monday)**

### ***The Cursing of the Fig Tree***

As they left Bethany on Monday morning, Jesus and the disciples came across a fig tree that was not bearing fruit. Jesus uses the tree as an object lesson regarding Jerusalem itself. He curses the tree, saying, “may no one eat fruit from you again.” This story literally “surrounds” the story of the cleansing of the temple, with an explanation of the event after the temple cleansing. The fig tree promised something it couldn’t deliver – it had leaves but no fruit. In the same way, the sacrifices at the temple were meant to offer reconciliation to God, but this system will soon be replaced by Jesus as the means for reconciliation.

### ***The Confrontation in the Temple***

When they enter the city on day 2, Mark records that Jesus goes right to the temple and confronts the money changers and the seller of pigeons. The words used are that he “drove out” and “overturned the tables and the seats” of those doing business there.

Let’s look for a moment at the temple. This temple was the second temple on the spot. (See map and model at the end of this lesson.) This temple replaced Solomon’s temple, which was destroyed in 586 BC. This temple was eventually destroyed as well, in 70 CE. Sometimes, you will hear Herod’s temple called

“the third temple” meaning that the rebuilt first temple, completed by Ezra and Nehemiah after the return of the Israelites from Babylon, is thought of as “the second temple.”

The outermost court was called “The Court of the Gentiles” and this is where the money changing and trading occurred. It was a huge plaza. On the northwest side of the Court of the Gentiles was the Antonia Fortress. The northeast corner of the Court of the Gentiles was the pinnacle of the temple. Both Jews and Gentiles were allowed in this area. The next court that one would enter is the beginning of the temple proper, and it is called the “Court of Women,” It was a sort of large porch in front of the temple, which only Jewish men and women could enter. Beyond that was a court that surrounded but was outside the altar area, called “the Court of Israel,” which was the court of the men. The “Court of the Priests” was further in, and it could only be accessed by priests. This is where the altar of sacrifice was located. Within this court was the “Holy of Holies,” which was only entered once per year (Yom Kippur) by the high priest.

In confronting the money changers, Jesus is confronting two basic interrelated powers that be.

First, he was confronting the economic system, and the corruption that dominated it. As Myers points out, “The temple, fundamentally an economic institution, was the center of the economic life of Jerusalem, driving employment for many petty producers like bakers, incense makers, goldsmiths, and so forth.” (Myers 1988, p300). This was particularly true during the pilgrimage festivals, and the Passover was the biggest of these. The population of Jerusalem and the surrounding area would have swelled from 40,000 to perhaps 500,000 people during this time, and all of the pilgrims would bring money to spend. It was common for the chief priests and other religious officials to get their cut of the take.

Doves were the poor man’s sacrifice. If one could not afford a lamb or a goat, he or she could bring a dove. Those who sold doves outside of the temple were especially preying on poor pilgrims. Luke 2:24 tells of Jesus’ family bringing doves when they presented Jesus in the temple as a young child. Greek or Roman money could not be used to purchase animals because of the graven images printed on the coins, so there were also money changers at the temple who would exchange the pilgrims’ coins for Jewish money.

Second, Jesus was confronting the sacrificial system. By eliminating the ability to buy animals, he was pointing forward to that moment in which he, himself, would be the final sacrifice. In Mark, he also commands that nobody carry anything through the temple. How could you make a sacrifice if you couldn’t take anything inside? It is important to note, however, that it was not simply that he would be the sacrifice that would replace the ritual sacrifices, but rather that his sacrifice would be accompanied by the advent of the Kingdom of God. His sacrifice would be marked by repentance and righteousness. Remember the words of the Psalmist: *“the sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit and a contrite heart...”*

This becomes all the more clear when we look at the Old Testament prophecies Jesus quotes. He says, *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples, but you have made it a den of robbers.”* This quotation is from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Both of these passages are strong passages condemning the corruption of the leaders of Israel and their focus on rituals and sacrifice rather than justice and righteousness.

For example, Isaiah 56 says this about those who were supposed to watch over Jerusalem:

*they have all turned to their own way,  
to their own gain, one and all.  
“Come,” they say, “let us get wine;  
let us fill ourselves with strong drink.  
And tomorrow will be like today,  
great beyond measure.”* (Isaiah 56:11b-12)

Jeremiah says

*For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.*

*Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, “We are safe!”—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?* (Jeremiah 7:5-11)

These are really strong words, echoes of prophecies to shake up the people of Israel, aiming at their reliance on ceremonial forgiveness rather than true righteousness.

At the end of that day, he left the city and went back to Bethany.

### **Day 3-4 (Tuesday and Wednesday)**

On the way into the city from Bethany, Jesus and the disciples pass by the fig tree, and discover it withered. Jesus uses that opportunity to tell them of the power they have in prayer.

### ***Teaching and Controversy in the Temple***

These days Jesus spent teaching in the temple. The “powers that be,” the Sadducees, Chief Priests, Pharisees, scribes, and Herodians all had interchanges with Jesus. There are times in which his teaching is so direct, right there in the temple, that you can almost see the seething of his opponents.

The Gospel of Luke summarizes these days as follows: *Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.* Here are some events of those days. Jesus:

- is questioned by the Chief Priests and Sadducees regarding by whose authority he is teaching and healing. He responds with his own question that demonstrates his authority is from God.
- teaches the Parable of the Two Sons – one son said he would go work in the vineyard but didn’t, and another who said he wouldn’t, but did.
- teaches the Parable of the Wicked Tenants – the tenants killed the servant of the vineyard owner, so the owner destroyed the tenants and gave the vineyard to others. Following this teaching, it

says that the chief priests and Pharisees tried to arrest him, but backed out because of the multitudes.

- teaches the Parable of the Marriage Feast (not in Gospel of Mark) – the king gave a feast, and those who were invited would not come and murdered his servant, so he sent his troops to destroy the ones invited and to gather in everyone they found, “both bad and good,” so the banquet hall would be filled.
- answers question from Herodians and Pharisees about paying taxes to Caesar: “Return to Caesar what belongs to him, and to God what belongs to God.”
- refutes the Sadducees who say there is no resurrection.
- refutes the Pharisees with the great commandment as the keystone of all the law.
- tells the Pharisees that the Christ is the Son of God, not simply the Son of David.
- condemns the scribes and Pharisees directly with “the woes.” “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees...”
- laments over Jerusalem again, wishing that they would be gathered under his wings, but they would not be until they say, “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”
- praises the widow who gave out of her poverty rather than the rich who gave out of their abundance.

#### **Day 4: Wednesday evening**

##### ***The Little Apocalypse, or the Olivet Discourse***

When Jesus leaves the temple on Wednesday, he stops on his way to Bethany somewhere on the Mount of Olives “opposite the temple,” and the disciples come to him and ask him about when will be the sign that “these things will be accomplished.”

Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 all include a number of passages that use apocalyptic language. The word “apocalypse” literally means “unveiling.” It is language that refers to predictions or glimpses of a great tribulation and persecution that is to come, of a great battle between good and evil, and of the ultimate triumph of good over evil on “the Day of the Lord.” The disciples are told to watch for signs, but that they will not know the day or the time. Rather, they are to remain watchful, prepared, and faithful.

Following the description of this Day of the Lord, Jesus tells them additional parables to challenge them to remain watchful and faithful in the coming days:

- The Parable of the Watchful Householder – we are to be like homeowners watching for a thief at night.
- The Parable of the Wise and Faithful Servant – the servant watches over the house faithfully while the master is gone on a trip, even if the master is delayed.
- The Parable of the Ten Maidens – keeping their lamps burning waiting for the bridegroom
- The Parable of the Talents – investing your resources so that you have something to show for the master’s return.
- The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats – treating the least of these as Christ himself.

##### ***The Anointing at Bethany***

Jesus is staying at the home of Simon the Leper. While he is there, a woman takes a jar of expensive oil, “pure nard,” and pours it on Jesus’ head. The woman is a follower of Jesus, and the disciples are angry at

her because she has taken a valuable resource that could have been used for the poor and “wasted” it. Jesus rebukes them, acknowledging that she has served to prepare his body ahead of time for burial. The anointing is already looking forward to the women who go to anoint Jesus after the resurrection, but are not able to do so because he is risen.

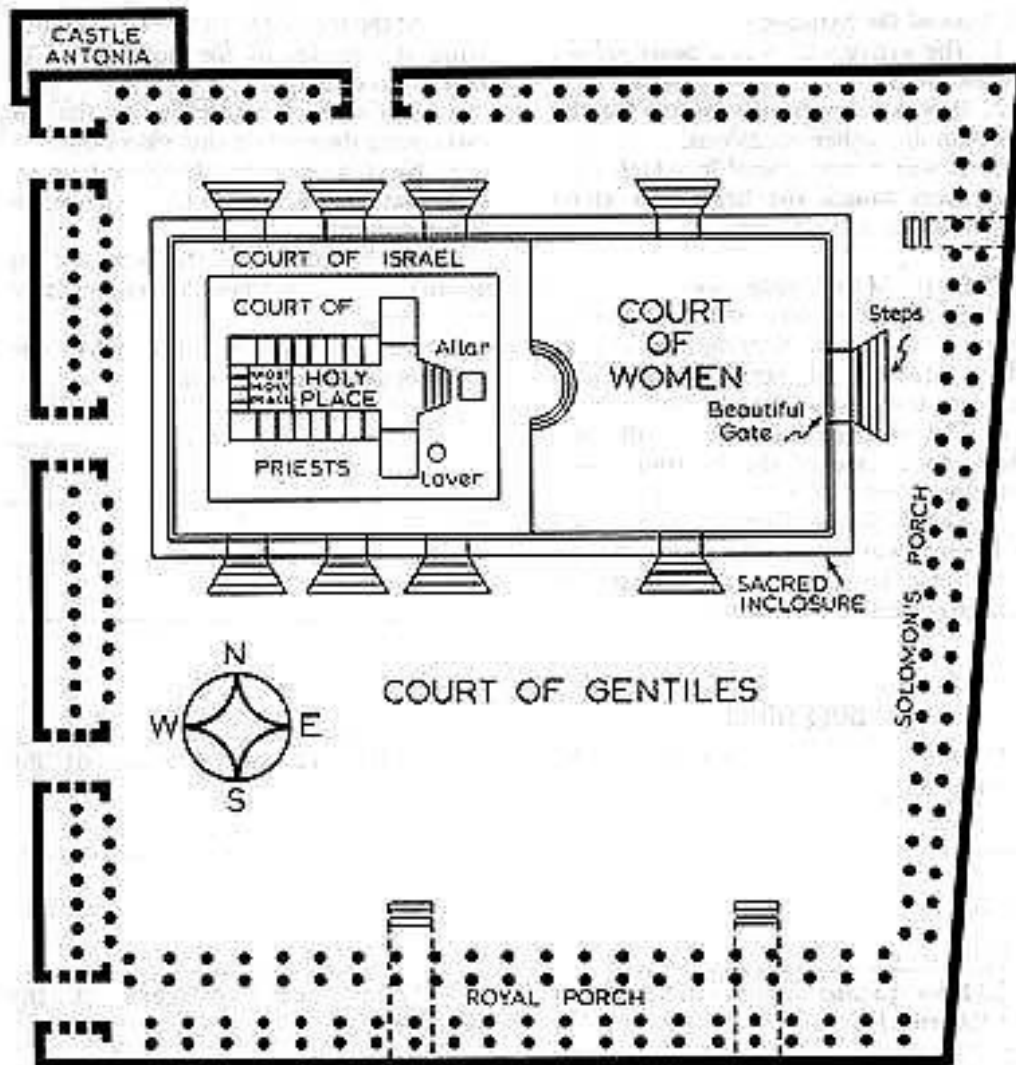
Her act of love and Jesus’ rebuke is a demonstration that our love for Christ is the foundation, the motivation for our ongoing care for the poor. Our service grows out of our love for Christ, and his love for us, demonstrated in the cross.

### ***The Betrayal by Judas***

It is on this Wednesday night that Judas goes to the chief priests and agrees with them that he will betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

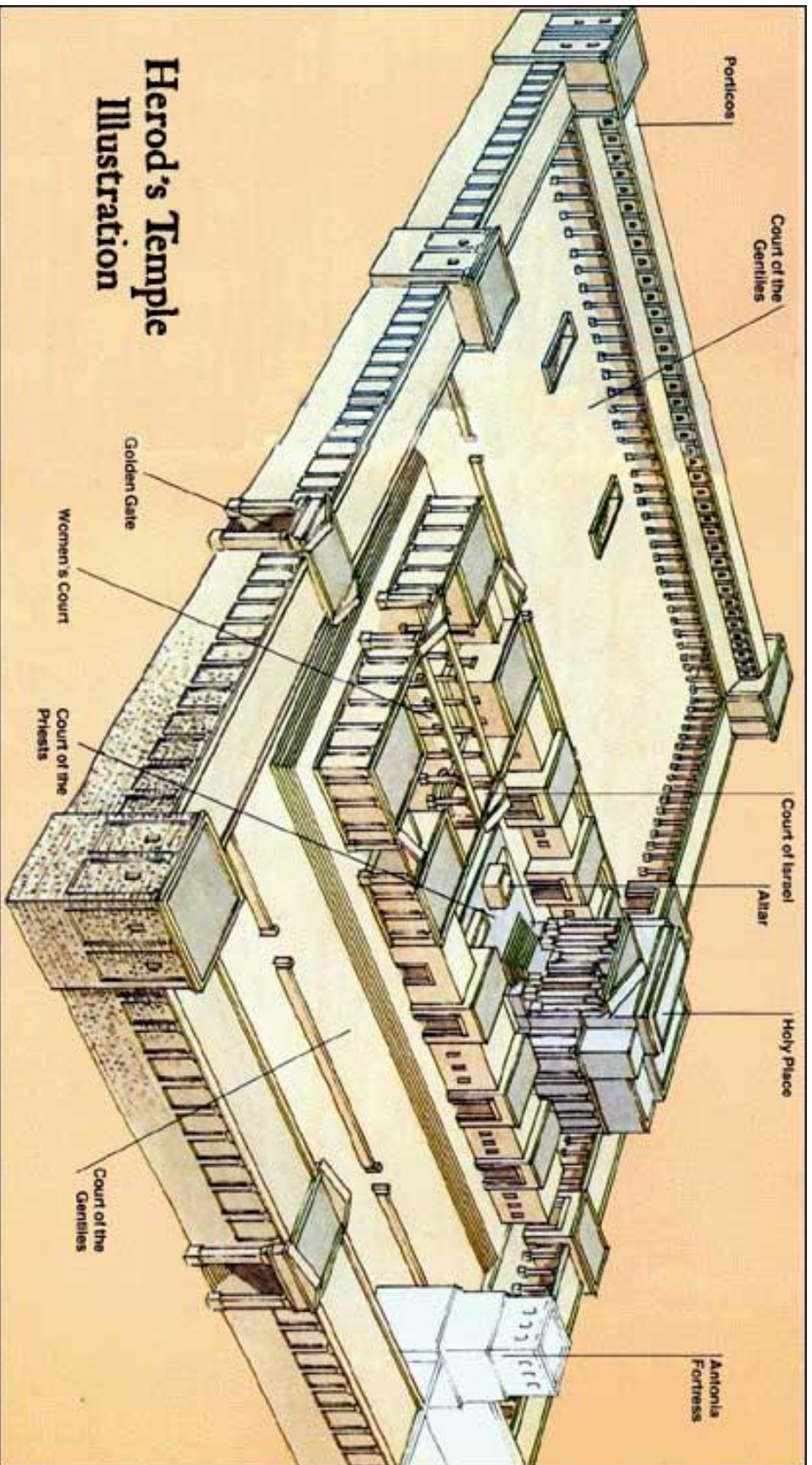
### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. When the people of the crowds cried, “hosanna!” or “save me!,” what did they think they needed to be saved from? From what do you need to be saved?
2. Do we identify with Jesus (who is enraged by the practices in the temple), with the crowd (who are numbed and weary), or the merchants (who benefit from unfair practices)?
3. How often do we observe and participate in practices that exploit the poor and never become angered by it?
4. Jesus seems genuinely moved when he weeps over Jerusalem and its destruction. He doesn’t seem as compassionate when he is turning over the tables. What do you think is different?
5. Do you think we have replaced the sacrificial system of Israel with our own rituals to atone for our sin? Is communion such a ritual? Is coming to church on Sundays? Tithing?
6. The Pharisees were defending the moral and religious orthodoxy of the law. The Sadducees were defending the religious orthodoxy and practices of the temple, as well as their economic interests. The Herodians were defending their institutional and political interests against Jesus. In what way does the church today look like the Pharisees, Sadducees, or Herodians? In what way are we different?
7. If Jesus were to come to your home or life today, what would he drive out or turn over? What about our churches?



**HEROD'S TEMPLE**





**Herod's Temple  
Illustration**



## **Daily Readings**

### **Week 8: The Entry into Jerusalem and the Cleansing of the Temple**

#### **Week 8, Day 1**

##### **Entry into Jerusalem - Matthew 21:1-11**

##### **Commentary:**

Jesus is entering the gates of Jerusalem to the rousing cheers and songs of praise of the crowds who proclaimed him as the prophet and Son of David. But just a few days later, these voices turn against him when they reject him and call for his death. There is an echo of Matthew 7:21 here – one must not just know and proclaim the truth, but must act accordingly.

##### **Reflection Question:**

What were the crowds seeking? Do you, like the crowds, praise Jesus on Sundays then turn your back on him later in the week? Reflect on what it is you are seeking in Jesus and what you believe he came to accomplish.

#### **Week 8, Day 2**

##### **Temple cleansing - Mark 11:15-19**

##### **Commentary:**

Because many people traveled great distances for the Passover celebration, it was challenging to bring with them animals for sacrifice. Additionally, the animals had to be judged as clean by the high priest, and people were worried about bringing animals that may be deemed unworthy of sacrifice. For this reason, merchants sold “approved” doves and other livestock at the temple so that people could buy their sacrificial animals on site. However, they could not use Greek or Roman money to purchase these animals because of the graven images printed on the coins, so there were also money changers at the temple who would exchange the pilgrims’ coins for Jewish and Tyrian money. Jesus’ actions imply that he would abolish the sacrificial system that was in place, as he would ultimately become the sacrificial lamb.

**Reflection Question:**

What does it mean to you that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb?

**Week 8, Day 3****Paying taxes - Matthew 22:15-22****Commentary:**

The tax in question here is the census tax, which was instituted in 6CE when Judea became a Roman province. The Pharisees were opposed to paying Caesar's tax on the basis of Jewish law, while the Herodians were loyal to Herod Antipas and would have supported the tax. These two groups would have no reason to partner together in their questioning of Jesus, except to undermine him and give cause to removing him. This was a "lose-lose" proposition for Jesus. If he answered that it was lawful to pay taxes, he would have been challenging the beliefs of the religious elite, and if he advised not paying the tax, then he would be accused of sedition. Jesus widens the original question so that it is not just related to what belongs to Caesar, but instead to also identifying what belongs to God. While acknowledging that people must live under the law and give to Caesar what is Caesar's, he is essentially telling everyone that they have to also decide what belongs to God.

**Reflection Question:**

What have you been "giving to Caesar" that actually belongs to God?

**Week 8, Day 4****Wicked tenants - Luke 20:9-19****Commentary:**

The vineyard owner's decision to send his "beloved son" is an allusion to God sending Jesus, whom God refers to as God's "beloved son" at Jesus' baptism and "chosen son" at the transfiguration. The servants that were sent before the son are representative of God's prophets, who were ignored or killed, such as John the Baptist. Just like the tenant owners who wanted to claim the land for themselves, the chief priests, scribes and elders were hopeful they could retain authority in the temple. Through his commentary on the cornerstone, Jesus implies that through the resurrection God will overturn Jesus' rejection by the religious leaders.

**Reflection Question:**

Have you ever rejected Jesus in favor of protecting "your" assets? Take a few minutes to write a prayer of confession below.

**Week 8, Day 5****Destruction of the temple - Luke 21:5-19****Commentary:**

Jesus earlier predicted suffering, imprisonment, and persecution for himself (Luke 18:31-34) and is now predicting the same for his disciples. Along with the prediction of the destruction of the temple (which would have been shocking to those who heard it, for the temple was already destroyed once before), this would be devastating news for Jesus' followers. Yet, he offers good news of God's faithfulness: "I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict." No matter how challenging discipleship is, you are not forsaken by God.

**Reflection Question:**

Reflect on a time when God gave you the words to say in a challenging or frightening situation.