

## Lesson Nine

(Mark 10:32 - 12:12)

### He Came to Serve

(Mark 10:32-45)

*32 They were now on the road going up to Jerusalem. Jesus was going ahead of the disciples, who were filled with alarm; the people who followed behind were afraid. Once again Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and spoke of the things that were going to happen to him.*

*33 "Listen," he told them, "we are going up to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and then hand him over to the Gentiles. 34 These will make fun of him, spit on him, whip him, and kill him. And after three days he will rise to life."*

*35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "there is something we want you to do for us."*

*36 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked them.*

*37 They answered, "When you sit on your throne in the glorious Kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left."*

*38 Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?"*

*39 "We can," they answered.*

*Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup I must drink and be baptized in the way I must be baptized. 40 But I do not have the right to choose who will sit at my right and my left. It is God who will give these places to those for whom he has prepared them."*

*41 When the other ten disciples heard about this they became angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them all together to him and said, "You know that the men who are considered rulers have power over the people, and their leaders rule over them. 43 This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; "and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people."*

How very human is the picture which Mark shows us of the Twelve. Still thinking in political terms, they compete with each other over the question of rank in the coming Kingdom. The context of this passage is a prediction of the crucifixion. The key verse is 45. Compare Matt. 20:20-28.

This is the third formal prediction of Christ's impending death. The disciples may have understood what Jesus said in terms of a "messianic battle" to seize control of the country. This they would be willing and ready to fight for, and they could see themselves winning glory and honor. Yet the time does not seem right just yet. The Jewish leaders intend to kill Jesus, and this they can understand. But why is he placing himself in such danger by going to Jerusalem at this time? They are afraid of what might happen! Mark shows Jesus leading the way, the disciples filled with alarm, and the people who follow are afraid!

Jesus takes the Twelve aside to give explicit details of what is about to happen. The language seems too plain to misunderstand. Yet as we have already seen, understanding correctly doesn't depend upon the plainness of the language, but on the principles of interpretation. If they were thinking in mystical or figurative terms, they would distort the meaning to fit their preconceived ideas. Since the disciples seemed to be convinced that Jesus was building a political organization, it would be natural to think of position, authority, rank, etc. This, then, would make them interpret the things Jesus was saying, in the wrong way.

The "cup of suffering" and the "baptism" of the cross were figures of speech rooted in the Old Testament. ("Cup of suffering" symbolizes wrath and retribution. See Psalm 75:8; Isa. 51:17; 22; compare Mark 14:36; Rev. 14:10; 16:19. "Baptism" symbolizes being overwhelmed by calamity. See Psalm 69:1-3; compare Luke 12:50) James and John, obviously thinking of the glory of battle, answer, "We can," to the Lord's question in verse 38. They thought they were able to share in the Lord's suffering, but they had no idea what it involved. Notice they would indeed share in the "cup" and the "baptism," not just now, but later. They would experience much suffering during their ministry and in their death. Compare what Paul says in 2 Cor. 11:23-33. All the apostles died violently, with the sole exception of John.

Kings and rulers command people and receive service. This is the normal routine of life. But the kingdom of God is different. Leaders serve! This is not a formula for success -- it is a command from our Lord. We are to serve *instead of* being served, and to love *instead of* commanding. This does not mean there is no discipline, but rather that it is done in a different way. Compare 1 Peter 5:1-7. Peter shows the example of Christian living in the suffering of Christ, "*so that you would follow in his steps*" (1 Peter 2:18-25).

Christ emphasizes *result* in verse 45. What we could never achieve for ourselves has been done through One who loved us and gave himself for us! His greatest act of service was to give his life to redeem many people! In Jewish usage, "many" means "all." This shows that salvation is universally available to all who will reach out through faith to seize what is offered to them.

## **The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

*(Mark 10:46 - 11:11)*

*46 They came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind man named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road, begging.*

*47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me!"*

*48 Many scolded him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly. "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

*49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, "Cheer up!" they said. "Get up, he is calling you."*

*50 He threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.*

*51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. "Teacher," the blind man answered, "I want to see again."*

52 “Go,” Jesus told him, “your faith has made you well.” At once he was able to see, and followed Jesus on the road.

**11** As they came near Jerusalem, at the towns of Bethphage and Bethany they came to the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead **2** with these instructions, “Go to the village there ahead of you. As soon as you get there you will find a colt tied up that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **3** And if someone asks you, ‘Why are you doing that?’ tell him, ‘The Master needs it and will send it back here at once.’”

**4** So they went and found a colt out in the street, tied to the door of a house. As they were untying it, **5** some of the bystanders asked them, “What are you doing, untying that colt?”

**6** They answered just as Jesus had told them, so the men let them go. **7** They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the animal, and Jesus got on. **8** Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches in the fields and spread them on the road. **9** The people who were in front and those who followed behind began to shout, “Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! **10** God bless the coming kingdom of our father David! Praise be to God!”

**11** Jesus entered Jerusalem, went into the temple, and looked around at everything. But since it was already late in the day, he went out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

Mark’s account explains the apparent contradiction between Matthew and Luke on this miracle. Jesus was ahead of the crowd and went into Jericho. The noise of the crowd disturbed the blind men (Mark and Luke mention only Bartimaeus and say nothing of the other man); and as Jesus is coming out of Jericho, this healing takes place; and then the meeting with Zacchaeus (Luke 19).

Bartimaeus was deeply aware of his personal need, and he would not take “no” for an answer! His actions show that he knows something of Jesus, and “Son of David” is a messianic title (see Isa. 11:1-5; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24; Mark 12:35). He continues to shout until Jesus stops and calls him (calls them). Bartimaeus jumps up and comes to Jesus (contrast John 5:6-7). Probably the other blind man did this as well, and Jesus healed both of them. At once they were able to see; and both of them joined the group that was following Jesus to Jerusalem.

From Jericho the road rises 3000 feet in 18 miles to reach Jerusalem. Coming up the mountain pass to Jerusalem, he stopped at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, stayed there during the Sabbath (Saturday), and on Sunday morning, made his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem (see John 12:12-19). As they come near to Bethphage, Jesus makes his plans for the symbolic entry into Jerusalem. Certainly the detail given shows supernatural knowledge in sending the two into Bethphage to get the colt. The owner was likely a disciple of Jesus. Note that every Jew expected the Messiah to come riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey (Zech. 9:9). Only animals that had never been ridden were thought of as being proper for holy uses (Num. 19:2; 1 Sam. 6:7).

The Law required Jewish people to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. From what Josephus says, more than three million people were probably there at this time. Some thousands of Galileans who had seen Jesus perform miracles were there, and they thought of Jesus as the Messiah-King. (If Jesus had wished to be a political king, this

would have been the opportunity to seize power, and the Jewish leaders would have been helpless.) As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the people shout: *“Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God!”* (“Hosanna” literally means, “Save, I pray,; but was used in the sense of *praise*. Many say “Hallelujah” without knowing they are saying, “Sing praise to Jehovah.” What these people are saying comes partly from Psalm 118:25-26, which was commonly used to speak of the Messiah.)

John 12:16 shows that even the disciples did not understand the meaning of this Triumphant Entry. Jesus’ mission as Messiah was quite different from the popular idea of the Jewish people. He came to die as our “sin-offering” (John 9:31; Heb. 9:15); and his kingdom was spiritual (Luke 19:11; John 18:36). Jesus had given a clear, understandable sign to the Jewish nation. When he went into the temple (verse 11), he was the Passover Lamb, presenting himself as the law required (that the sacrifice should be set apart four days before the day of Passover). As far as we know, Jesus spent each night in Bethany during this last week, except for Thursday night. This could have been to avoid the Jewish leaders, but certainly to be with his loving friends who lived there, and to be with the Twelve.

### **The Second Cleansing of the Temple**

*(Mark 11:12-19)*

*12 The next day, as they were coming back from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 He saw in the distance a fig tree covered with leaves, so he went to it to see if he could find any figs on it; but when he came to it he found only leaves, because it was not the right time for figs. 14 Jesus said to the fig tree, “No one shall ever eat figs from you again!”*

*And his disciples heard him.*

*15 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple and began to drive out all those who bought and sold in the temple. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the stools of those who sold pigeons, 16 and would not let anyone carry anything through the temple courts. 17 He then taught the people, “It is written in the Scriptures that God said, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all people.’ But you have turned it into a hideout for thieves!”*

*18 The chief priests and the teachers of the Law heard of this, so they began looking for some way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.*

*19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples left the city.*

During festival times the city of Jerusalem would be crowded with people. Jewish people from all over the world would come to Jerusalem for Passover and remain for Pentecost before returning home. Practically the whole Jewish nation were on the scene for these last days of Jesus, for his death and resurrection, and for the birth of the church on Pentecost. God was acting in history for all to see plainly!

Jesus cursing the fig tree is a parable against the Jewish nation. The fig tree bears its main crop in April to June, but bears small edible knobs before sprouting leaves. Although it was too early for figs, it was too early for leaves also, and the leaves should

have been evidence of edible fruit. However, Jesus acted in this strange way to call attention not only to the power of prayer, but to indict the Jewish nation for failing to produce the fruit it should have produced. (Compare Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10-17; Micah 7:1-6; Luke 13:6-9.)

This parable of the fig tree links closely with what Jesus does in the temple. Many think of Jesus as meek, mild, and colorless, but here we see something of the more radical side of his personality. Cleansing the temple is a symbolic act -- much like the Triumphant Entry. (The first cleansing is found in John 2:13-22.) It is an act of authority. The priests had made a monopoly out of the Temple worship. They had set up business in the Courts of the Gentiles and were selling all the various needs for sacrifices (this in itself would not be wrong), and exchanging the Greek and Roman money for the authorized Jewish coins which the temple required. Certainly this gave opportunity for corruption and graft, and was making a fortune for those involved in it. (Many think that religion is a way to become rich. See 1 Tim. 6:5.) What Jesus did here was aimed directly at the priests. (Only Mark adds the information in verse 16. This apparently results from Jesus' feeling of the sacredness of the Jewish temple. Dr. South says: "We must know that the least degree of contempt weakens religion; because it is absolutely contrary to the nature of it; religion properly consisting of reverence for things sacred." Compare Mal. 3:1-5. God's true temple is the flesh and blood body of the believer, 1 Cor. 3:16-17.)

Jesus was saying: 1) The Jewish temple was not to be made into a hideout for thieves (Jer. 7:11); 2) The Jewish temple was to be a "house of prayer for the people of all nations," obviously including the Gentiles (Isaiah 56:7); 3) This was Jesus' claim to Messiahship (compare Mal. 3:1-5; Ezek. 45:16-17; Hos. 9:15; Hos. 11:10-11; Zech. 14:21). It was not the Jewish religion itself which was being condemned ("*the Law itself is holy*" Rom. 7:12-13), but only the abuses of it (Rom. 10:1-4). Jesus used the language and imagery of the prophets to express his anger and his claims. Perhaps the most impressive fact is that he was so much one of the prophetic tradition. However Jesus' warnings were not taken seriously by the Jewish leaders and the prophecy of chapter 13 followed inevitably.

Mark tells in verse 18 that the leaders were "*afraid of him.*" Their fear was linked to the fact that his teaching strongly influenced the people. (This fact was mentioned as early as Mark 1:22.) The leaders saw in Jesus a serious threat to their own security. Not surprisingly, they struck out in fear and anger to destroy Jesus (compare Mark 3:6).

### **The Question About Jesus' Authority**

*(Mark 11:20-33)*

**20** Early next morning, as they walked along the road, they saw the fig tree. It was dead all the way down to its roots. **21** Peter remembered what had happened and said to Jesus, "Look, Teacher, the fig tree you cursed has died!"

**22** Jesus answered them, "Remember this! If you have faith in God, **23** you can say to this hill, 'Get up and throw yourself in the sea.' If you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. **24** For this reason I tell you: When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for. **25** And when you stand praying, forgive anything

*you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins. [26 If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your sins.]”*

*27 They came back to Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders came to him 28 and asked him, “What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you the right to do them?”*

*29 Jesus answered them, “I will ask you just one question, and if you give me an answer I will tell you what right I have to do these things. 30 Tell me, where did John’s right to baptize come from: from God or from men?”*

*31 They started to argue among themselves, “What shall we say? If we answer, ‘From God,’ he will say, ‘Why, then, did you not believe John?’ 32 But if we say, ‘From men. . .’” (They were afraid of the people, because everyone was convinced that John had been a prophet.) 33 So their answer to Jesus was, “We don’t know.”*

*Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you, then, by what right I do these things.”*

The next day after Jesus cursed the fig tree, it was “dead all the way down to the roots.” This surprises Peter. (Matthew gives the words of the others: “How did the fig tree dry up so quickly?”) Jesus responds with the command: “Have faith in God.” Faith is the summary of Christ’s ministry. His entire life was devoted to creating faith in God in those who followed him. Faith grows out of the facts of the Incarnation (compare John 20:30-31).

If the barren fig tree and the cleansing of the temple are to be interpreted in terms of each other, how will we view the symbolism? The key is certainly Jesus’ words about faith and prayer. Chadwick writes: “And Jesus drove the lesson home. He pointed to ‘this mountain’ in front of them, with the gold and marble of the Temple sparkling, and declared that faith is not only able to smite barrenness with death, but to remove it into the midst of the sea; to plant among the wild and storm-swept races of the pagan world, the glory and privilege of the presence of the Lord . . . One who truly relies on God, whose mind and will are attuned to those of the Eternal, cannot be selfish, or vindictive, or presumptuous.” Like the fig tree, the Jewish nation had made grandiose claims of fruit-bearing, but without actually producing anything. They claimed to be holy, but they had defiled their temple. Some of the saddest words in the Bible are those of Christ in Matt. 23:37-39.

In a sense, we *command* God by our prayer (but of course we cannot obligate him). The key to this is in verse 24: “*believe that you have received it.*” Compare James 1:6-8. Confidence is evidence of faith. However, belief and prayer cannot be used for selfish purposes (compare James 4:1-5). Power in prayer depends upon our own attitude, since God deals with us in much the same way we relate to others (see Matt. 7:1-6). We are obligated to love our “brothers,” since it is impossible to hate them and still love God (1 John 4:20).

Cleansing the temple had been an act of authority. Matthew tells us that during the cleansing, the blind and the crippled came to Jesus and he healed them (Matt. 21:14). This also showed authority. Therefore the religious leaders challenge Jesus: “*What right do you have to do these things?*” But of course they had already made up their minds that He had no right to do these things. The conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities flared up in a series of incidents which lead to their decision to do away with

Him. (This had been their plan for some time, but now they were becoming so determined that they were forgetting their fears.)

As he so often did, Jesus turns the question into a dilemma for the challengers. “*Where did John’s right to baptize come from?*” (Jewish custom often substituted “heaven” for “God.” “God” is the correct meaning: “*God or from man?*”) Note how Jesus places himself in the same classification with John the Baptizer. They were not rivals but co-workers. The religious leaders had refused to believe John, but the people considered him to be a great Prophet. They knew public opinion would judge their answer, and they were afraid of the consequences. These leaders can neither admit John’s authority nor deny his words. Since they refuse to decide John’s authority, Jesus will not allow them to decide the question of His authority. Yet Jesus does not allow them to drop the whole matter. Matthew records the parable of the Two Sons, which contrasts the Jewish people (who did accept John) with the Jewish leaders (who refused to accept John). Then in Mark 12:35-37, Jesus again raises the question of who he is.

### **Tenants in the Vineyard**

*(Mark 12:1-12)*

*12 Then Jesus spoke to them in parables, “There was a man who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to tenants and left home on a trip. 2 When the time came for gathering the grapes, he sent a slave to the tenants to receive from them his share of the harvest. 3 The tenants grabbed the slave, beat him, and sent him back without a thing. 4 Then the owner sent another slave; the tenants beat him over the head and treated him shamefully. 5 The owner sent another slave, and they killed him; and they treated many others the same way, beating some and killing others. 6 The only one left to send was the man’s own dear son. Last of all, then, he sent his son to the tenants. ‘I am sure they will respect my son,’ he said. 7 But those tenants said to one another. ‘This is the owner’s son. Come on, let us kill him, and his property will be ours!’ 8 So they took the son and killed him, and threw his body out of the vineyard.*

*9 “What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do?” asked Jesus. “He will come and kill those men and turn over the vineyard to other tenants. 10 Surely you have read the scripture?*

*‘The very stone which the builders rejected turned out to be the most important stone.*

*11 This was done by the Lord; how wonderful it is!’”*

*12 The Jewish leaders tried to arrest Jesus, because they knew that he had told this parable against them. They were afraid of the crowd, however, so they left him and went away.*

Under Jewish Law there were cases in which the property of a foreigner or Gentile converted to Judaism could pass to anyone who would occupy it. These tenants seem determined to be the ones who benefit from it. Yet there is no doubt that this is a parable about the way Israel had treated God’s messengers and would treat God’s Son. Both love and hate influenced the history of Israel (as it does us ourselves). Perfect love drives out all fear (1 John 4:18); so ultimately does “perfect” hate. The Jewish leaders

were determined to kill Jesus, yet fear of public opinion held them back -- until their hate reached such an intensity that they were no longer afraid of the consequences. The doom which they brought on themselves is a dire warning about trying to “get even with someone,” or to take revenge. “Returning good for evil” is the way of Christ.

When Jesus began to teach this parable, the Jewish leaders would immediately think of Isaiah’s parable about the Lord’s vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7). Isaiah was clearly speaking about the nation of Israel, and the Jewish leaders did not have to guess that Jesus was speaking about them (verse 12), or at least they knew it after the parable was finished. Whether they understood the implications of the “son” in the parable is not important (although we can easily see that Jesus meant himself). His main purpose was to show the consequences of continually rejecting God’s messengers, and of rejecting God’s last Messenger (compare Heb. 1:1-2).

The details of the parable show how God had worked with Israel. He had placed them in the rich and fertile land of Palestine, given them the law which preserved their identity, and protected them. The “tenants” are the Jewish leaders, who should have managed the vineyard and produced a profit for the Owner. The Owner sent representatives to receive his share of the harvest, but the tenants did violent things to them. The central idea is that the Jewish leadership rejected everyone whom God sent to them. Some of the prophets they did murder (compare Matt. 23:29-36). Over the centuries, God sent many prophets, kings, and holy men in his name. Compare the list in Hebrews 11:35-38. The climax was God’s final offer of mercy to them. (But note that mercy was offered through *Christ’s death* -- Heb. 9:15. This is the greatest of heaven’s wealth; it is the fullness of their sin -- Matt. 23:35-36; 1 Thess. 2:14-16.) The leaders made their plans to kill Jesus (John 11:53), because they saw him as a threat to their ownership of the vineyard.

At the climax of the parable, Jesus asks what the owner will do with the tenants. Matthew shows the Jewish leaders answering, “He will certainly kill those evil men, etc.” Mark shows Jesus repeating their words. Luke shows that as they suddenly realize the full meaning of what Jesus has repeated, they say, “Surely not!” Jesus confirms what He has just said by quoting Psalm 118:22-23. This speaks of a stone being thrown aside by the builders, who then discover it to be the most important stone. The rejected Son is God’s Messenger and will be given the highest honor by God himself (compare the song of praise in Phil. 2:6-11). Matthew records these words of doom: “And so I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people who will produce the proper fruits.” Compare Heb. 8:7-13.

The Owner of the vineyard did come and kill those tenants in the siege of Jerusalem, 70 A.D. Over a million people died, and it was far more terrible than the flood, because these people killed each other! While the Romans surrounded the city, the Jews inside fought and killed each other and destroyed their food supplies. Women killed and ate their own children (compare Deut. 28:49-57). But note that *no Christian Jews were lost* -- they all left the city when they saw the things which Christ had prophesied (Luke 21:20-22).

### **Questions for Discussion**

(Mark 10:32-12:12)



1. How was it possible for Jesus to be so plain in what He said about His coming death and still be misunderstood by His disciples?
  
2. James and John wanted to sit at His right and left in His “glorious Kingdom.” What type of glory were they thinking of?
  
3. What was the “cup” and “baptism” of verse 38?
  
4. When did James and John drink the “cup” and experience the “baptism?”
  
5. Why does Jesus call Himself the “Son of Man”?
  
6. In what sense was Jesus’ life “to redeem many people”?
  
7. How can we reconcile the three different accounts of the healing at Jericho of Blind Bartimaeus and the other man?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Why does he call Jesus, “Son of David”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Why would the colt’s owner be so willing to comply with Jesus’ request?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What was the symbolism of spreading the cloaks and branches on the road?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. Why would Jesus permit such a public demonstration?

12. In what sense did Jesus restore the kingdom of David? (Compare Acts 15:12-18.)

13. In what way are leaves an indication of fruit on a fig tree?

14. In what sense are baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church attendance "nothing but leaves"?

15. Is the cleansing of Mark 11 the same cleansing as the one recorded in John 2:13-22? Why?

16. Was it completely wrong to buy and sell in the temple? (Compare Jer. 7:1-15.)

17. How could the Jewish temple be a "house of prayer for the people of all nations"?

18. Why would Jesus' words and actions especially anger the chief priests and teachers of the law? (Verse 18)

19. Was there a special need for faith at this time (when they saw the fig tree was dead)?

20. Compare the faith which Jesus talks about, with the special power which the apostles used during their ministry.

21. Why were Jesus and His disciples in the temple when he was challenged by the religious authorities?

22. Why did Jesus ask the question about John the Baptizer?

23. Show how their answer sealed the doom of their influence as leaders of the people.

24. Why did Jesus refuse to answer the question of his authority -- or did he refuse?

25. Show how the parable of the vineyard fit in with the people and general conditions.

26. Why was the owner of the vineyard so extremely patient with the tenants?

27. Who were the "other tenants" to whom the vineyard was to be given?

28. If they wanted to seize and kill Jesus, why didn't they do it immediately?

29. In what one act are all the resources of heaven's love exhausted and all the measures of a person's sin filled up?

30. When did the owner of the vineyard come and destroy the tenants?