BCM Bible Study— Oct. 20/21, 2021

Mark 11:12-12:12

**Getting started**

In these chapters of Mark, we are given parables reflecting the spiritual state of Israel. We see how God has prepared them to be spiritually fruitful and yet they are spiritually fruitless. Here we see this in the temple and we see it in the religious leaders. We are more like the Israelites than we think. Therefore, by looking at Israel’s spiritual fruitlessness, we can begin to reflect on our own spiritual health. We can use these parables and lessons to the Jewish people as a mirror to reveal our own spiritual state.

**Read Mark 11:12-12:12**

* **After reading these passages of scripture, what are your initial thoughts?**
* **What is the significance of how Mark 11:12-26 is structured (A fig tree sandwich)? Why do you think Luke chose to place the story of the temple between the parable of the fig tree?** 
  + By structuring it this way, it puts in the reader’s mind that these two things are related. You know that the lesson taught by the fig tree is connected to what occurred in the temple.
  + The temple in verses 15-19, is a direct example of Israel’s fruitlessness, which is what the parable of the fig tree is, in part, referring to. It had the appearance of being fruitful, but had no fruit at all. It had a full coverage of leaves and it’s foliage suggested early figs. Like the fig tree in this text, the Israelites gave an outward appearance of being spiritually healthy, but they were actually fruitless. The temple grew big and impressive, but it was all a show.

**Mark 11: 12-19**

* **Can you think of a time when you might have tried to put on the outward appearance of being spiritually fruitful, but in reality you were spiritually bare? If so, please share.**
  + **How did Jesus reveal to you, your spiritual fruitlessness? What “tables” in your life did he flip? What sin did he cause to wither away?**
* **Are there any areas currently in your life that you might be putting on the outward appearance of fruitfulness? How is God revealing those to you?**

Now, let’s dive deeper into the lesson from the fig tree (11:20-25).

* **How is this lesson from the fig tree relevant to what was happening in the temple and with the Jewish people overall?**
* **What does this passage tell us we should do in prayer?**
* **How does verse 24 fit into what this passage is saying as a whole? How does looking at it alone, versus in the context of the entire passage, change it’s meaning?**
* **Compare how this passage says we should approach prayer, to how you often approach prayer.** 
  + Where in prayer do you tend to be most doubtful?
  + What focus do you have in prayer? (self focused, focused on others, or God focused)
* **How can you plan to apply verses 20-25 to your own prayer life?**
* **How can prayer be a tool to increase our spiritual fruitfulness? Why is it important for our spiritual health?**

**Mark 11:27-12:12**

After Jesus cleansed the temple and taught and healed the people, he was faced by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. They began to question him in hopes of tripping him up in his talk. (Mark 11: 27-33)

* **Why do you think Jesus chose to share this parable with the chief priests instead of directly answering their question?**
  + This parable was intended to reach their hearts, and it did. It touched them and they knew it was about them. It served as a convicting summary of how God deals with his people. In this single parable, Jesus described God’s hope for his people, God’s kindness towards his people, God’s severity, and God’s triumph. **He knew they were trying to trip him up by asking that question. Jesus didn’t fall for it.**
* **What are your initial thoughts on this parable?** 
  + **What is Jesus trying to say to the spiritual leaders through this parable?**

God’s hope for Israel is compared to the hope of a man who built a vineyard and waited expectantly for it to produce. From this the chief priests listening to this could also gather that the owner of the vineyard (God) had gone through great lengths to keep the vineyard healthy, productive, and fruitful. In this parable, the tenants are intended to be the spiritual leadership of Israel, and the vineyard represents Israel as a whole. God’s expectations were that Israel would be fruitful with all of the advantages and preparations that they were given, and the spiritual leadership was intended to help “the vineyard” grow, and produce fruit. Instead of being thankful for God’s provision in their lives, **Israel as a whole as well as their spiritual leaders became dominated by anger, jealousy, covetousness, and rebellion,** much like the tenants in this parable.

* **In what ways are you like the tenants of this parable?**
* **How can you change your attitude from one of…**
  + **Anger to one of Love?**
  + **Jealousy and covetousness to one of contentment?**
  + **rebellion to one submission?**
* **How can you be a better “tenant” of God’s will and provisions in your life?**
* **Reflecting back to the questions about the parable of the fig tree, as a believer in Christ, what spiritual fruit are you producing? What fruit are you lacking?**

**Extra Notes and Questions**

**Mark 11: 12-26**

My Initial thoughts- Why did Jesus curse a fig tree just because it had no fruit to eat? Was he just throwing a tantrum? If it clearly says it was not the season for figs, so why would Jesus curse the tree for not having fruit if it wasn’t in season? It had the appearance of being fruitful, but had no fruit at all. The foliage suggested it was an early bloomer. It had a full coverage of leaves and it’s foliage suggested early figs.

This temple sat on holy ground. It was the same site of Solomon’s original temple where he prayed his prayer of dedication and the Lord filled the entire place (2 Chronicles 6-7), and it’s the same ground where Isaiah was caught up in vision of the Lord throned above him in perfect holiness and he was commissioned by the Lord (Isaiah 6). All of this took place in this same place and now it was being used for extortion, greed, and dishonesty. Again, this wasn’t just Jesus throwing a temper tantrum. This was Jesus showing his authority and bringing justice to a place that was being misused and mistreated.

Mark 11: 24

People often like to focus on verse 24. However, just looking at this verse alone, it is taken out of the context of the passage as a whole. We are not promised to receive everything we ask for, but God is listening and does offer an answer, and sometimes it’s not the answer we were expecting. Looking at that verse out of context, it is a self-centered approach to prayer. Looking at the entire passage we see a selfless-approach to prayer.

**Contrast Mark 11:12-26 with Matthew 21:18-22**

This can be applied to the first question of the importance of how the author chose to structure this text.

* **Compare and contrast each account. In what ways are they similar? What do they both point out? How are they different?**
* **How might these similarities and differences be important when studying scripture?** 
  + A way in which a book of the Bible is written is primarily termed by the author’s purpose and intended audience.
    - Matthew’s account is primarily aimed at the Jew, a person familiar with the Old Testament. He starts off with the genealogy of Jesus. He does this in order to establish Jesus as the Messiah, the King of the Jews. The genealogy demonstrates that Jesus is the rightful heir to the kingdom that was promised to David and his descendants.
    - Mark is not primarily writing to a Jewish audience. The account is more directed toward the gentile, or those not familiar with old testament teachings. Mark focuses more on the actions of Jesus. This account focuses more on Jesus as a servant of the Lord, doing the job that God sent him to do. Instead of starting with the birth of Jesus, it starts with the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Mark’s account records more of the miracles.
  + One thing that stands out initially is the order in which it’s written in Mark. The fig tree is meant to be a visual parable about the spiritual state of Israel. When reading about it in Mark, you initially read it without full understanding of the meaning or why Jesus did what he did. Then, in verses 15-19, it gives a direct, correlating example of what Israel had become…fruitless. All show and no substance. Then it comes back to the fig tree and completes the parable. The lesson being about faith, prayer, and forgiveness. Keeping in mind the audience and purpose of Mark, this structure makes sense in that it focuses more on how the temple relates to the fig tree, and not how the fig tree relates to the temple.
  + In Matthew’s account it is more concise and to the point. While Luke’s account is written more chronologically, Matthew’s account is written in a more topical manner. Keeping in mind that Matthew is written to the Jew, it makes sense that he would focus more on the events that took place in the temple, versus what took place at the fig tree.