

Gospel of Mark—21 Day Challenge

Healdsburg SDA Church, March 10-30, 2024

Week 2

Date: March 17

Repentance: Isaiah 55:6-7

Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

Reading: Read Scripture First: Mark 10:46-52

For Jesus the end of the road was not far away. Jericho was only about fifteen miles from Jerusalem. We must try to visualize the scene. The main road ran right through Jericho. Jesus was on his way to the Passover. When a distinguished Rabbi or teacher was on such a journey it was the custom that he was surrounded by a crowd of people, disciples and learners, who listened to him as he discoursed while he walked.

At the northern gate sat a beggar, Bartimaeus by name. He heard the tramp of feet. He asked what was happening and who was passing. He was told that it was Jesus. There and then he set up an uproar to attract Jesus' attention to him. To those listening to Jesus' teaching as he walked, the uproar was an offense. They tried to silence Bartimaeus, but no one was going to take from him his chance to escape from his world of darkness, and he cried with such violence and persistence that the procession stopped, and he was brought to Jesus.

This is a most illuminating story. In it we can see many of the things which we might call the conditions of miracle. First, There is the sheer persistence of Bartimaeus. Nothing would stop his clamor to come face to face with Jesus. In the mind of Bartimaeus there was not just a vague, wistful, sentimental wish to see Jesus. It was a desperate desire, and it is that desperate desire that gets things done.

Second, his response to the call of Jesus was immediate and eager, so eager that he cast off his hindering cloak to run to Jesus the more quickly. Many people hear the call of Jesus, but say in effect, 'Wait until I have done this,' or 'Wait until I have finished that.' Bartimaeus came like a shot when Jesus called.

Third, there is a precious touch. Bartimaeus may have been a beggar by the wayside but he was a man of gratitude. Having received his sight, he followed Jesus. He did not selfishly go on his way when his need was met. He began with need, went on to gratitude, and finished with loyalty. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Reflection:

Instead of "going on his way," Bartimaeus followed after Jesus. What is your response to Christ's intervention in your life? Will you follow Christ wherever he may lead you?

Date: March 18

Repentance: Psalm 32:1-5

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Reading: Read Mark 11:1-19

We have come to the last stage of the journey. There had been the time of withdrawal around Caesarea Philippi in the far north. There had been the time in Galilee. There had been the stay in the hill country of Judaea and in the regions beyond Jordan. There had been the road through Jericho. Now comes Jerusalem

In Palestine the donkey was not a despised animal, but a noble one. When a king went to war he rode on a horse, when he came in peace he rode on a donkey. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day, he claimed to be king, but he claimed to be King of peace.

No incident so shows the sheer courage of Jesus as this does. In the circumstances one might have expected him to enter Jerusalem secretly and to keep hidden from the authorities who were out to destroy him. Instead he entered in such a way that the attention of every eye was focused upon him. Here we see Jesus making the last appeal of love and making it with a courage that is heroic.

This incident of Jesus cleansing the Temple took place in the Court of the Gentiles. Bit by bit the Court of the Gentiles had become almost entirely secularized. It had been meant to be a place of prayer and preparation, but there was in the time of Jesus a commercialized atmosphere of buying and selling which made prayer and meditation impossible. What made it worse was that the business which went on there was sheer exploitation of the pilgrims.

What moved Jesus to such wrath? (1) He was angry at the exploitation of the pilgrims. The Temple authorities were treating them not as worshippers, not even as human beings, but as things to be exploited for their own ends. The exploitation of one human being by another always provokes the wrath of God, and doubly so when it is made under the cloak of religion. (2) He was angry at the desecration of God's holy place. The sense of the presence of God in the house of God had been lost. Commercialization of the sacred was violating it. (3) Is it possible that Jesus had an even deeper anger? He quoted Isaiah 56:7, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.' Yet in that very same house there was a wall beyond which to pass was, for the Gentile, death. It may well be that Jesus was moved to anger by the exclusiveness of Jewish worship and that he wished to remind them that God loved not the Jews but *the world*. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Reflection:

The people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus into the city with shouts and praise because they believed He was going to be a political savior. Do you turn to God only in times of personal crisis or when you need something from Him?

Date: March 19

Repentance: Ezekiel 36:25-27

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Reading: Read Mark 11:22-33

This passage gives us three rules for prayer: First, it must be the prayer of faith. The phrase about removing mountains was a quite common Jewish phrase. It was a regular, vivid phrase for *removing difficulties*. It was specially used of wise teachers. A good teacher who could remove the difficulties which the minds of his scholars encountered was called a *mountain-remover*. So the phrase means that if we have real faith, prayer is a power which can solve any problem and make us able to deal with any difficulty. That sounds very simple, but it requires us to be willing to take our problems and our difficulties to God *and* be ready to accept God's guidance when he gives it.

Second, it must be the prayer of expectation. It is the universal fact that anything tried in the spirit of confident expectation has a more than double chance of success. The patient who goes to a doctor and has no confidence in the prescribed remedies has far less chance of recovery than the patient who is confident that the doctor can provide a cure. When we pray, it must never be a mere formality. It must never be a ritual without hope. For many people prayer is either a pious ritual or a forlorn hope. It should be a thing of burning expectation. Maybe our trouble is that what we want from God is *our* answer, and we do not recognize *his* answer when it comes.

Third, it must be the prayer of charity. The prayers of bitter people cannot penetrate the wall of their own bitterness. Why? If we are to speak with God there must be some bond between us and God. There can never be any intimacy between two people who have nothing in common. The principle of God is love, for he *is* love. If the ruling principle of our hearts is bitterness, we have erected a barrier between ourselves and God. In such circumstances, if our prayers are to be answered we must first ask God to cleanse our hearts from the bitter spirit and put into them the spirit of love. Then we can speak to God and God can speak to us. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Reflection:

The exchange between the Pharisees and Jesus in Mark 11:26–33 shows both the Pharisees' unwillingness to believe in Jesus and their unwillingness to state their beliefs publicly (because of their fear of the crowds). Is there a time in your life when you responded to the gospel in the same way?

Date: March 20

Repentance: 2 Chronicles 7:17

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Reading: Read Mark 12:1-12

The owner of the vineyard is God; the vineyard itself is the people of Israel. This was a picture with which the Jews were perfectly familiar. In the Old Testament it is vividly used in Isaiah 5:1–7, a passage from which some of the details and the language of this passage are taken. *The cultivators* stand for *the rulers of Israel* throughout the history of the nation. *The servants* whom the owner sent stand for the *prophets*. *The son* is *Jesus himself*. Even on the spur of the moment the hearers could have made these identifications because the thoughts and the pictures were all so familiar to them.

The parable tells us certain things about God: (1) It tells us of *the generosity* of God. The vineyard was equipped with everything that was necessary to make the work of the cultivators easy and profitable. God is generous in the life and in the world that he gives to men and women. (2) It tells us of *the trust* of God. The owner went away and left the cultivators to run the vineyard themselves. God trusts us enough to give us freedom to run life as we choose. (3) It tells us of *the patience* of God. Not once or twice but many times the master gave the cultivators the chance to pay the debt they owed. He treated them with a patience they little deserved. (4) It tells us of the ultimate triumph of *the justice* of God. We might take advantage of the patience of God, but in the end come judgment and justice. God may bear disobedience and rebellion for a long time, but in the end he acts.

This parable tells us something about Jesus: (1) It tells us that Jesus regarded himself *not as a servant but as a son*. He deliberately removes himself from the succession of the prophets. They were servants. He was son. In him God's last and final word was being spoken. This parable was a deliberate challenge to the Jewish authorities because it contains the unmistakable claim of Jesus to be the Messiah. (2) It tells us that *Jesus knew that he was to die*. The cross did not come to him as a surprise. He knew that the way he had chosen could have no other ending. It is the greatness of his courage that he knew that and still went on. (3) It tells us that *Jesus was sure of his ultimate triumph*. He also knew that he would be maltreated and killed, but he also knew that would not be the end, that after the rejection would come the glory.

The parable closes with an Old Testament quotation which became very dear to the Church. The quotation about the stone that was rejected is from Psalm 118:22–3. The rejected stone had become the stone that bound the corners of the building together, the keystone of the arch, the most important stone of all. This passage is quoted or referred to in Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:4, 7; Romans 9:32–3; Ephesians 2:20. The Christian writers saw in the psalmist's dream something which was perfectly fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Reflection:

Has there been a time in your life when you were tempted to reject Jesus? What ultimately helped you choose Jesus and believe the gospel?

Date: March 21

Repentance: Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

Reading: Read Mark 12:28-44

The profession of the scribes was to interpret the law in all its many rules and regulations. Their trade was to know and to apply the oral law. This scribe came to Jesus with a question which was often a matter of debate in the Rabbinic schools. In Judaism there was the tendency to try to gather up the law into one sentence, one general statement which would be a compendium of its whole message. Moses received 613 precepts on Mount Sinai. David reduced them to 11 in Psalm 15. Isaiah reduced them to six in Isaiah 33:15. Micah reduced the six to three (Micah 6:8).

For answer Jesus took two great commandments and put them together. First, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.' That passage in Deuteronomy 6:4 is called the Shema. The Shema is the sentence with which the service of the synagogue always began and still begins. It is the declaration that God is the only God, the foundation of Jewish monotheism. Second, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' That is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18. No one until Jesus put the two commandments together and made them one. Religion to him was loving God and loving one another. He would have said that the only way to prove love for God is by showing love for others.

Jesus' warning against the scribes is as stern as Jesus ever spoke, and warns against three things. First, it warns against the desire for prominence. It is still true that many accept office in the Church because they think they have earned it, rather than through any desire to render selfless service to the house and the people of God. Office in the Church may still be regarded by some as a privilege rather than a responsibility.

Second, it warns against the desire for deference. Almost everyone likes to be treated with respect. And yet a basic fact of Christianity is that it ought to produce the desire to obliterate self rather than to exalt it. There is a story of a monk in the old days, a very holy man, who was sent to take up office as abbot in a monastery. He looked so humble a person that, when he arrived, he was sent to work in the kitchen washing the dishes, because no one recognized him. Without a word of protest and with no attempt to take his position, he went and washed the dishes and did the most menial tasks. It was only when the bishop arrived a considerable time later that the mistake was discovered and the humble monk took up his true position. Those who enter upon office for the respect which will be given to them have begun in the wrong way, and cannot, unless they change, ever be in any sense *the servants* of Christ and of their neighbors.

Third, it warns against the attempt to make a traffic of religion. It is still possible to use religious connections for self-gain and self-advancement. But this is a warning to all who are in the Church for what they can get out of it and not for what they can put into it. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Reflection:

How does love for God and love for your neighbor sum up the Ten Commandments? Does your life demonstrate this love?

Date: March 22

Repentance: Ezekiel 33:11

Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Reading: Read Mark 13:1-23

We begin with the prophecies of Jesus which foretold the doom of Jerusalem. The Temple which Herod built was one of the wonders of the world. It was built on the top of Mount Moriah. Instead of leveling off the summit of the mountain, a kind of vast platform was formed by raising up walls of massive masonry and enclosing the whole area. On these walls a platform was laid, strengthened by piers which distributed the weight of the superstructure. Josephus tells us that some of these stones were 40 feet long by 12 feet high by 18 feet wide. It would be some of these vast stones that moved the Galilean disciples to such wondering amazement.

Of the actual Temple building itself, the holy place, Josephus writes, 'Now the outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it which were not gilt, they were exceeding white.

It was all this splendor that so impressed the disciples. The Temple seemed the summit of human art and achievement, and seemed so vast and solid that it would stand forever. But Jesus made the astonishing statement that the day was coming when not one of these stones would stand upon another. In less than fifty years his prophecy came tragically true. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish the world for their iniquity, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth's history. (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 628)

Reflection:

Mark 13:9-11 says Christians will be brought before kings for a testimony to them, that the gospel must be preached to all nations, and the Holy Spirit will give us words to speak when our life and faith is on the line. But you shouldn't wait until such a time to share your faith. How are you being an effective witness of Jesus today? Take a moment today to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you to others with whom you can share Christ.

Date: March 23

Repentance: Joel 2:12-17

Now, therefore, says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness... Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation... Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, Weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, "Spare Your people, O Lord, And do not give Your heritage to reproach."

Reading: Read Mark 13:24-37

The Saviour gives signs of His coming, and more than this, He fixes the time when the first of these signs shall appear: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

At the close of the great papal persecution, Christ declared, the sun should be darkened, and the moon should not give her light. Next, the stars should fall from heaven. Christ has given signs of His coming. He declares that we may know when He is near, even at the doors. He says of those who see these signs, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." These signs have appeared. Now we know of a surety that the Lord's coming is at hand. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," He says, "but My words shall not pass away."

Christ is coming with clouds and with great glory. A multitude of shining angels will attend Him. He will come to raise the dead, and to change the living saints from glory to glory. He will come to honor those who have loved Him, and kept His commandments, and to take them to Himself. He has not forgotten them nor His promise. There will be a relinking of the family chain. When we look upon our dead, we may think of the morning when the trump of God shall sound, when "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1 Corinthians 15:52. A little longer, and we shall see the King in His beauty. A little longer, and He will wipe all tears from our eyes. A little longer, and He will present us "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." Jude 1:24. Wherefore, when He gave the signs of His coming He said, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

But the day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. Had He been at liberty to reveal this, why need He have exhorted them to maintain an attitude of constant expectancy? There are those who claim to know the very day and hour of our Lord's appearing. Very earnest are they in mapping out the future. But the Lord has warned them off the ground they occupy. The exact time of the second coming of the Son of man is God's mystery. (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 631-632).

Reflection:

How can you live a life of alertness, ready for Christ's return? Is there anything that the Holy Spirit is impressing you to do to be ready for Christ's coming?