

Harmony Of The Gospels -- Lesson #11

The Last Public Ministry In Jerusalem

Matthew 21:1-23:39; Mark 11:1-12:44; Luke 19:29-21:4; John 11:55-12:50

- I. **Jesus Arrives At Bethany And Enters Into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11, 14-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 11:55-12:1, 9-19)**
 - A. The Jews went up before the passover so they would have time to purify themselves from ceremonial uncleanness before the feast. The decree of the Sanhedrin ordering the arrest of Jesus led the people to question as to whether He would dare to approach the city.
 - B. The supper is mentioned later by Matthew and Mark, but without any reference of time to show that it belongs specifically where they put it. John does give us a time reference. Vs. 12 tells us that it was the night before the triumphal entry.
 - C. The presence of Lazarus and Christ at one table greatly excited the curiosity of the multitudes who had come up to Jerusalem to attend the passover. When word of this supper spread among the people it was natural that they would go out to Bethany to see the sight.
 - D. The Roman military road from Jericho to Jerusalem was about seventeen miles long and climbed three thousand feet. It passed through Bethany and nearby Bethphage, which lay on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives, then crossed over the mount and the Kidron Valley and entered Jerusalem.
 - E. It is specifically stated that no man had ever sat upon this colt, for if the colt had been used by men it would have been unfit for sacred purposes (Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3; 1 Samuel 6:7).
 - F. The prophecy mentioned is a combination of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9. This is the only instance in the New Testament where Jesus rode. The apostles were not conscious that the prophecies were being fulfilled nor did they understand that Jesus was approaching a heavenly rather than an earthly coronation.
 - G. The phrase, "Hosanna in the highest," is taken to mean in the highest degree or highest strains or in the highest heavens. It is likely that they were calling upon heaven to participate in glorifying and to ratify their shouts of salvation.

II. *The Barren Fig Tree Cursed And The Second Cleansing Of The Temple (Matthew 21:12-13, 18-19; Mark 11:12-18; Luke 19:45-48)*

- A. The fruit usually appeared before the leaves so the leaves were a promise that fruit might be found, and the fruit, though not perfectly ripe, is considered edible when the leaves are developed. Though it was too early for fruit, it was also too early for leaves.
- B. The disciples did not pause to watch the effect of Christ's words upon the tree. From the degree to which it had shriveled when they saw it the next day it was evident to them that it had begun to wither as soon as Christ had finished uttering its sentence.
- C. Three years before, Jesus had cleansed the temple at the first passover of His ministry. The prophecy cited is a combination of Isaiah 61:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Overawed by the magnitude of the popular demonstration made on Sunday, the Jewish rulers feared to attempt any violent measures in dealing with Jesus.

III. *The Greeks Desire To See Jesus (John 12:20-50)*

- A. The likeness of the grain of wheat that is buried in the cold soil only to rise again multiplied for harvest is applicable to all Christians. Jesus recommends to His disciples that they follow Him in fruit-bearing self-sacrifice, promising them the joy of being with Him and the honor of the Father.
- B. Jesus admits that it was difficult for Him to live up to the principle of sacrifice which He had just enunciated. Having refused to ask for deliverance, Jesus prays that He would glorify the Father by suffering according to His original statement in vss. 23-24.
- C. The crucifixion of Jesus was the crisis in the contest between Satan and God. However, the kingdom of darkness recedes before the kingdom of light as the night withdraws before the rising sun.
- D. Jesus did not reply to their questions because they were asked contemptuously and not seriously, and because any effect to make their carnal mind grasp the idea that He could be lifted up, and yet still abide, would have resulted in more contempt.
- E. God hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes by the manner in which He approached them through the person of His son, Christ Jesus. Jesus came, lived and taught that those who hunger for godliness are drawn to Him and enlightened by Him, while those who despise the grace and love of God are repelled and blinded.
- F. The Father had sent the Son into the world to bring life and immortality to light in the gospel. Jesus therefore declared that men will be tried by the gospel and some will be saved and some condemned by it.

IV. *The Barren Fig Tree Is Found To Be Withered (Matthew 21:20-22; Mark 11:19-25; Luke 21:37-38)*

- A. The enthusiasm of the triumphal entry did not die out in a day. Jesus was still the center of observation several days later.
- B. When they approached the fig tree, Peter was surprised both at the suddenness and at the fullness of the judgment. Since the miracles of Jesus, up to this point, had been only those of mercy, Peter asked the Lord to discuss this miracle, hoping for more light on its meaning.
- C. Jesus lays down a broad rule which, in its application, we must be guided by other scriptures. The disciples were about to enter upon a task which would seem to them as difficult as the removal of mountains.
- D. The disciples needed to be assured that the power of faith was superior to all these adverse forces, and that the judgments of God could accomplish in a moment changes which apparently could not be wrought in the course of years.
- E. The Lord emphasizes the need of forgiveness because He had just performed a miracle of judgment, and He wanted His disciples to understand that they must not exercise their miraculous gifts with a vengeful, unforgiving spirit.

V. *The Sanhedrin Formally Challenge The Authority Of Jesus (Matthew 21:23-22:14; Mark 11:27-12:12; Luke 20:1-19)*

- A. The regulation of the temple affairs belonged to the priests and Levites. Knowing that Jesus had no authority from any priest or from any scribe, they boldly challenged His right to cleanse the temple or to teach in it, feeling sure that to defend Himself He would be forced to publicly declare Himself as the Messiah and therefore give them the accusation for which they had long sought.
- B. There was no way that the Sanhedrin could admit that the messenger was heaven-sent and yet deny his testimony. It is interesting to note that in their consultation there was no effort either to ascertain or to speak the truth. It was plain that these men could judge human credentials, but the divine testimonials of a prophet or of the Messiah were above their carnal minds.
- C. The rulers, though all the while professing to be very zealous for the will of God, utterly refused to enter the kingdom or to work therein as God bade them by the voice of John the Baptist. Therefore, it was pointless for Jesus to declare that He acted under the authority of the Father.
- D. Jesus frequently refers to the withdrawal of the visible presence of God from the world, always bringing out the point that the withdrawal tests faithfulness. The conduct of the husbandman was outrageous beyond

all expectation. In just two days the Jews would fulfill this detail by thrusting Jesus outside the walls of Jerusalem and crucifying Him.

- E. The Pharisees were eager in their desire to set up a Messianic kingdom, but were so blindly foolish that they did not see that this kingdom could not be set up unless it rested upon Christ Jesus, its cornerstone. Despite the parables and the warnings, the rulers persisted in their evil intention to take His life.
- F. The man in the final parable was speechless -- without excuse -- which shows that he could have had a garment from some source had he chosen to wear it. The parable suggests the impossibility of escaping from divine judgment. Many reject the invitation of the gospel because of neglect, some despise it and others cast dishonor upon the host by the self-willed and irreverent way in which they accept His invitation.

VI. *The Pharisees And Herodians Try To Ensnare Jesus (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26)*

- A. Perceiving that Jesus was too wise for them, the Pharisees spoke through their young disciples, whose youth and apparent desire to know the truth would, according to their calculation, take Jesus off His guard. Loyalty to the truth is one of the noblest attributes of man, but instead of honoring this admirable quality in Jesus, they were endeavoring to employ it as an instrument for His destruction.
- B. The Jews were required to pay a large sum of money annually to the Roman government as an acknowledgment of their subjection. About twenty years before this incident, Judas of Galilee had stirred up the people to resist this tribute, and the majority of the Jews were bitterly opposed to it. If Jesus would have judged in favor of this tribute, He would have lost His following in the temple.
- C. The first part of the answer of Jesus satisfied the Herodians and the second part of the answer satisfied the people. Jesus showed that paying the tribute was not inconsistent with maintaining complete allegiance to God. They were amazed to find how far His wisdom transcended that of the teachers in whom they had such great confidence.

VII. *The Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40)*

- A. Evidently, the scenario presented by the Sadducees was a favorite argument against the resurrection. On the assumption that the marital state is continued after the resurrection, the scenario makes the doctrine of a resurrection appear ridiculous, because it seemingly involves difficulties which brothers could not settle amicably, and which even God would have, in a sense, to settle arbitrarily.

- B. This argument of the Sadducees could not be successfully answered by the Pharisees because they could not refute the assumption that marriage is continued in the future existence, but Jesus does refute it by His own authority.
- C. Jesus proves that man has a spirit by a reference from the Pentateuch, the part of scripture which the Sadducees accepted as derived from God through Moses. The reference shows that God was spoken of and spoke of Himself as the God of those who were, humanly speaking, long since dead.
- D. The Sadducees could not have erred if they had known or understood the significance of this scripture, and they could not have doubted the resurrection if they had known the absolute power with which God deals with physical material.
- E. Some of the scribes with a less bitter spirit could not refrain from expressing their admiration at the ease with which Jesus answered an argument which their own wisdom could not refute.

VIII.A Lawyer Asks About The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34)

- A. According to Jewish writers, there was an old dispute among the rabbis as to which was the greatest commandment. Some held that it was the law which commanded sacrifices; others contended for the laws concerning purification; and others contended for the laws regulating the feasts.
- B. The law which Jesus quoted, taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, is first because it was the foundation of the entire law of God. It is greatest because, in a sense, it includes all the other laws.
- C. Love is the cure for sin, for we cannot sin against those whom we truly love. Where we love we desire to bless. Sin always carries with it a willingness to injure or to curse.
- D. The generic nature of the law of love is also noted by Paul (Romans 13:8-10), but love without law is not sufficient. Love begets a desire to bless, but the law guides the accomplishment of that desire. Perfect righteousness is the result of wisdom as well as affection. Love without law is power without direction, and law without love is machinery without a motor.
- E. The Pharisees found it expedient to keep silence when their questions only exposed their shallowness and demonstrated the supreme wisdom of Jesus.

IX. *Jesus Silences His Enemies By Discussing His Descent From David (Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)*

- A. The answer given by the Pharisees was true, but it was not the entire truth as the scriptures demonstrated. The additional truth was what the enemies of Jesus needed to learn.
- B. Psalm 110 speaks of the Messiah as the Lord of David, and other scriptures call Him David's son. The scriptures also describe Christ as conquering yet suffering, as divine yet human, as dying yet living and as judged yet judging.
- C. The Jewish leaders seemed able to only grasp one side of the character of Christ as revealed either in His life or in the scriptures, and therefore they stumbled.

X. *Jesus Denounces The Scribes And Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47)*

- A. As teachers of the law of Moses the scribes and Pharisees were the only religious guides whom the people had, so they were obliged to follow them as expounders of that law, but they were by no means to look to them as living exemplifications of that law.
- B. The law itself was a heavy burden (Acts 15:10), but these teachers added to the burden of it by a vast number of traditions. However, they did not keep these traditions. What laws and traditions they did keep were done so that they might secure a holy and righteous reputation.
- C. Jesus reproves those who make religion a matter of praise-seeking showiness, whether they do so by seeking position, or by peculiarity of dress or by assuming or accepting titles of honor or distinction.
- D. Jews converted to Phariseism became worse than their instructors because each generation drifted further from the law and became more zealously and completely devoted to traditions.
- E. The word "debtor" described one who owes it to himself and to God to keep his oath. The Pharisees graduated oaths according to their own conceptions of the sanctity of the object invoked, so that if the object by which a man swore was not sacred enough, he was not guilty if he did not keep his oath.
- F. Jesus compared the Pharisees to a woman who washed the outside of her dishes and left the inside unclean. They did this by appearing righteous on the outside but practiced extortion and self-indulgence. Men are contaminated by exposure to the Pharisees because the outside is rendered so white and beautiful that men are deceived into thinking that the inside is harmless.
- G. The very messengers who were beaten and killed for calling the people to repentance fill up the measure of the people's sins -- namely, shed-

ding righteous blood of God's messengers from Abel to Zechariah. Vss. 37-39 record Jesus' last recorded public words to Israel. Jesus longed to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks (cf. Deuteronomy 32:11; Psalm 91:4). The house would be left desolate when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

XI. ***Jesus Observes The Poor Widow's Contribution (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4)***

- A. In the court of the women there were cloisters or porticoes, and there were thirteen chests with trumpet-shaped mouths under this shelter into which offerings were dropped. The money was used for the benefit of the temple.
- B. We should always remember this scene when we are going to make an offering to His work. He is by no means indifferent to our actions.
- C. The mite (*lepton*) was worth one-fifth of a cent. It was a Greek coin, and the farthing (*kodrantes*) was a Roman coin.
- D. We often measure actions quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Moreover, we are better judges of actions than of motives, and can see the outward conduct much clearer than the inward character. God, therefore, in His word, constantly teaches us that He looks upon the inward rather than the outward.
- E. In this instance, the value of the woman's gift was measured, not by quantity, but by its quality; in quantity it was two mites, in quality it was the gift of all she had. From considering the corrupt character of the Pharisees, Jesus must have turned with great pleasure to look upon the beautiful heart of this devout widow.