

# HEALING INSIGHTS FROM *THE GOSPEL OF MARK*

## LESSON 6 – CHAPTERS 10 TO 12

### A. Context: The End of Israel's National Spiritual Destiny

1. By the time we reach Mark 11, the Jewish nation, in essence, has sealed its resolve to reject Jesus. Although it could still be argued that “probation” for the nation still lingered (i.e., mercy was yet available for the Jewish people to fulfill their heaven-ordained role as a chosen nation, blessing the whole earth), Jesus recognized the finality of their decision in the context of His “triumphal entry” on what many Christians call “Palm Sunday.” Listen to the words of the Master as recorded by Luke: “And when he [Jesus] drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’” (Luke 19:41–44, ESV).
2. Please realize we are speaking about the Hebrew race closing the doors on the fulfillment of their national destiny. We are not speaking about any individual Jew and his or her opportunity for salvation—or otherwise fulfilling God’s plan for his/her life. What Peter wrote regarding God’s dealings with humanity (regardless of race or ethnicity) has always been true: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9, ESV.)
3. As we will see later in this lesson, Mark 11 is clearly a turning point in Jesus’ dealings with the Jewish people. The remaining chapters leading up to His passion show Jesus’ emphasis on judgment of a lost Jewish nation. (As examples, note the cursing of the fig tree [in the context of Luke 13:6-9], the final cleansing of the temple, and the parable of the tenants in Mark 12.)

### B. Four Classes Revisited: A Parable Fulfilled (Mark 9 - 10).

1. **A Window into the Integrity of the Scriptures.** In view of the aforementioned context; namely, the Jewish nation sealing their destiny by the time we reach Mark chapter 11, it is interesting that the chapters immediately preceding (Mark 9 and 10) portray a striking fulfillment of a parable Jesus told early in His ministry.
  - a. In the parable of the sower (Mark 4) Jesus described four classes of people. We see these four classes strikingly illustrated in Mark 9 and 10.
  - b. Consequently, these chapters, in essence, represent the fulfillment of a prophecy. For, in Mark 4, Jesus indicated that despite His teaching, many would make no change in their life:

“And he [Jesus] said to them [the 12 disciples], ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”’” (Mark 4:11–12, ESV.)

2. **Medical Illustration.** This section of Mark’s gospel provides a medical illustration as well, for it demonstrates that even when given an authoritative diagnosis of a chronic, insidiously fatal condition, many will not make changes to alter their destiny.
3. **Think about it.** You would imagine that after Jesus’ parable of the sower (when he diagnosed most of the seeds as having a terminal condition—based on where they were sown), everyone would want to be one of those seeds planted on good soil. Why would anyone choose a destiny like the seeds sown on the path, the stony ground, or among tares? However, we just noted that Jesus indicated many who saw and heard would not repent.
4. Listen to some further insights from the Master: “And he said to them, ‘Do you not understand [from Greek, *oidate*] this parable? How then will you understand [from Greek, *ginosko*] all the parables?’” (Mark 4:13, ESV).
  - a. *oidate* refers to knowing with the connotation of realizing or perceiving by experience
  - b. *ginosko* refers to knowing with the connotation of grasping or perceiving in the sense of intelligent comprehension
5. **Could Jesus be saying...** If you have not known by experience the truth of the parable of the sower; i.e., if you have not turned from your wicked ways (i.e., of being hearers on the path, or stony-ground hearers, or hearers among the tares) to ones who allow the Word to have full fruit in you, then you will not be able to understand the parables—or anything else I say?
6. All this really begs the question: “who can really see—and who can really hear?” We see the answer at this juncture, the virtual end of Jesus’ ministry to the Jewish nation. We find there are still those same four groups of people described in the parable of the sower. Let’s review those four groups (Mark 4:14-20) in reverse order and see how each surfaces in Mark 9 and 10.
  - a. **Those sown on the good soil...** “hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”
    - i. The fulfillment of this blessed class is seen in two groups of heroes in this section of Mark. In fact, some have viewed the first group as serving as “bookends” for this entire section.
      - **Blind men who trust in Jesus for their sight** begin and end this section of Mark’s gospel. In an earlier lesson we looked at Mark 8:22-26 where Jesus healed a blind man in two stages. Immediately after this, we see one

of the themes of Mark 9 – 10; namely Jesus preparing His disciples for His death and resurrection. It is in this context that we see the four classes of the parable of the sower in special focus.

- **Why blind men?** In both the blind man of Mark 8, and the story of Blind Bartimaeus that concludes Mark 10, we see individuals who did not trust in themselves, but looked to Jesus as their only hope. Neither is rebuked (unlike most of the other classes we will examine). These are the fertile ground hearers who receive the working of “the seed,” the word of God, and allow it to powerfully change their lives.
- In the culture of the New Testament, blind men were generally nothing. They typically were of no value to society and were reduced to beggar status. In essence, they were often the homeless panhandlers of their day. The disdain for this class is seen poignantly in the case of Bartimaeus.
  - Bartimaeus not only was afflicted by blindness, he also bore a name that marginalized him. You see, *Bartimaeus* is derived from two Hebrew/Aramaic roots, *Bar* meaning “son of” and *Timaeus* which most scholars connect with the ancient root *tawmay*. [Strong, J. (2001). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.] This latter root means infamous, defiled, or unclean. Imagine what it would do for your self-esteem to walk around calling yourself “son of the infamous or defiled one”?
  - In essence, Bartimaeus is the personification of one who everything on a human level indicates is in a hopeless condition. Nevertheless, he is among those who are saved/healed. It appears the realization of his apparently hopeless state is the key to his healing. Do we realize how hopeless our condition is without Jesus?
  - As we will soon explore: while scribes and Pharisees cavil, while the rich young ruler calls Him merely a good teacher, and while the disciples waver in their confidence regarding His proclamations, Bartimaeus sees Jesus as the Messiah and expresses implicit confidence in His Word.
  - Note: Bartimaeus calls Jesus “Son of David.” This was the Messianic term for Jesus. Consider the following examples:
    - In Matthew 12:22-24 “all the people were amazed” when they saw Jesus heal a blind and dumb man. They are so impressed that they feel He must be the Messiah, “Is not this the son of David?” Underscoring the lofty significance

of that appellation is the demeaning retort of the Pharisees: “This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.”

- In Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus asks the Pharisees point blank: “What do you think about the Christ [the Messiah]? Whose son is he?” To which they reply, “The son of David.”

• **Children, the other group of fertile ground hearers in Mark 9 and 10:** children take their place next to blind men as the other class of heroes in this section of Mark.

- In Mark 10:14-15, Jesus speaks with endearment regarding this humble class: “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (ESV.)
- In the chapter preceding, when the disciples were arguing over which of them would be greatest, Jesus speaks about the principle of servanthood. To illustrate His point He take a child in His arms (see Mark 9:36-37). The full significance of Jesus’ actions is best seen in Matthew’s parallel account where our Lord says: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.” (v. 3-5, NKJV.)

b. **The ones sown among thorns...** “hear the word... but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19, ESV).

- i. The fulfillment of this class is also seen in Mark 10. In v. 17-22 we are introduced to a “rich young ruler,” one who—in contrast to the blind men we examined earlier—seems to be situated in the most favorable position socially and spiritually. Remember, the Jews viewed social status and wealth as signs of God’s blessings. Despite his apparently blessed status, this young man’s dialogue with Jesus reveals a void in his life. The seed of God’s word had taken root in the rich young ruler’s life, but when Jesus points to the plague spot in his character (“the deceitfulness of riches”), “he went away sorrowful.”
- ii. Note, too, Jesus was not trying to discourage this man; He was trying to save him. Like a kind surgeon, the Great Physician, “looking at him, loved him” (v. 21). But Jesus did more than feel for this prominent young adult, He

actually offered the indicated surgery. In effect, Jesus said, “allow me to tell you how to cut off the covetousness from your life.” Sadly, the young leader was unwilling.

- iii. To what extent am I like those among thorns? Is there anything in this life in which I am more invested than following Jesus wholeheartedly?
- c. **The ones sown on rocky ground...** “hear the word... with joy [but] have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.” Although, ultimately, most would be classed among those that fell on good soil, the disciples from Mark 9 through Jesus’ crucifixion look more like stony-ground hearers than the fully receptive good-ground recipients.
- i. See if you don’t think the following *Christ’s Object Lessons*’ description of the stony-ground hearers didn’t apply to the disciples at this stage in their experience:

“The seed sown upon stony ground finds little depth of soil. The plant springs up quickly, but the root cannot penetrate the rock to find nutriment to sustain its growth, and it soon perishes. Many who make a profession of religion are stony-ground hearers. Like the rock underlying the layer of earth, the selfishness of the natural heart underlies the soil of their good desires and aspirations. The love of self is not subdued...  
“...the stony-ground hearers depend upon self instead of Christ. They trust in their good works and good impulses, and are strong in their own righteousness. They are not strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Such a one ‘hath not root in himself’; for he is not connected with Christ... they faint beneath the fiery test of temptation. They cannot bear reproach for Christ’s sake.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons* page 46-7)
  - ii. Consider the following examples of the “stony,” less than fully converted, heart that the disciples manifested in the closing days of Jesus’ ministry:
    - After Jesus foretells His death and resurrection in Mark 8:31-32, Peter immediately objects to the path of suffering spelled out for Jesus and His followers. That sacrifice is required for the disciples too is implicit in Jesus’ rebuke: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mk 8:34–38, ESV). Ultimately, in the Garden of Gethsemane, all of the disciples would be ashamed of Jesus. They all forsake Him and flee (see Mark 14:27, 50).

- In the next chapter, Jesus again paints the picture of the rejection that awaits Him (Mark 9:30-31). The disciples' response is similar. They reject Jesus' words, focusing instead on illusions of kingly triumph. Consequently, their conversation degenerates to the point where they argue "with one another about who was the greatest" (v. 34, ESV).
  - In Mark 10:32-34, Jesus a third time predicts His passion, death, and resurrection. Immediately thereafter, James and John are seen jockeying for the highest rank (v. 35-45).
- iii. Do you notice a pattern here? It seems every time Jesus presented a less than glowing picture of His and the disciples' future, the 12 refused to listen. Instead their minds gravitated to selfishly-motivated pictures of reward and rulership. Not surprisingly, this line of thinking always seemed to provoke a question in their minds as to who would be the greatest.
  - iv. Of course, of all of the disciples but Judas ultimately allowed their hearts to be that good ground the bore abundant fruit. However, during this phase of Jesus' ministry, they more fully illustrated the dangers of being more focused on self than on the costs of true discipleship. An aversion to "tribulation or persecution" can undermine the ability of God's word to have full fruit in one's life.
- d. **The ones along the path...** "Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them." This class was aptly illustrated by the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Mark 10 opens with the Pharisees coming to "test" Jesus. The Greek word used in this context, a form of *peirazo*, indeed means "to put to the test," but often had the connotation of "a hostile sense" or "to try someone"... almost always in expression of distrust." (*Vol. 6: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed. 1964. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 23).
- i. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, the religious leaders most often appear as those in whom the gospel takes no root.
  - ii. However, although the parable of the sower is an expression of reality, God is working to bring each person to repentance: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9, ESV)."
  - iii. Although, as a class, the religious leaders bore no fruit to the gospel, there were notable exceptions even before Jesus' ascension.
    - Nicodemus was not only impressed enough by Jesus' early ministry to seek a private audience with Him, but he also seemed to accept the Master's counsel to "be born again." After all, Nicodemus later put his reputation on the line to speak in favor of Jesus (John 7:50). Realize this

was after those same leaders were focused on killing Christ (John 7:1). Furthermore, Nicodemus identified himself as one of the Savior's followers by caring for His body after the crucifixion (John 19:39).

- Another religious leader, Joseph of Arimathea, is identified as “a respected member of the [Jewish leadership] council” (Mark 15:43). He too, publicly connects himself with Jesus in the context of His crucifixion.
- Luke 7:36-50 speaks of Simon the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dine with him as his guest. From comparison with other accounts, it appears Jesus healed this Simon of leprosy. Although Simon was rebuked in this context, it seems he was genuinely moved by the ministry of Jesus and was willing to be identified as His follower. As one commentary put it, Simon “was one of the few Pharisees who had openly joined Christ's followers.”
- After Jesus returned to heaven, there was a great influx of religious leaders into the ranks of Christendom. In Acts 6:7 we read: “the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

e. Some of the key messages of Mark 9 and 10 in light of the parable of the sower:

- i. God's word comes to each one of us; however, we can only spiritually hear and see by faith (trusting in God and His word). In contrast to children and blind men who ultimately see, the rest of Mark 9 – 10 is permeated with stories of people who largely lack faith.
- ii. it is up to each of us “which type of soil” we will be. Thus the “bad news” (having a diagnosis of a fatal disease, sin with lack of faith, being of the wrong type of soil)—can be “good news” if we come to Jesus and ask Him to change us into receptive ground hearers.
- iii. Indeed, even if we find ourselves less than receptive, through the power of God we can be changed
  - disciples who are focused on self and “being the greatest” can become self-sacrificing martyrs who are wholly sold out on Christ
  - apparently unreceptive religious leaders can become disciples
- iv. In concluding this section, reflect on the following words from *The Desire of Ages*. These comments were originally written in the context of the hardness of heart of the Pharisees, but nicely summarize the entire topic, leaving us on a positive note: “When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we

do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not co-operate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place. The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 324)

### C. Another Critical Lesson from Mark 10

As we already noted, Mark 10 commences with another account of the Pharisees’ vain attempts to trap Jesus. This time they attempt to “test” him on the matter of divorce. However, Jesus answer to their question not only confounds the religious leaders, but also exposes us to another healing theme in the gospel of Mark.

1. **Happiness and the Gospel.** Some years ago, Michael E. Nielsen, Ph.D., of the Department of Psychology at Georgia Southern University summarized the medical research connecting religion and happiness (<http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/happy.htm>). He came to the conclusion that religious people were happier, quoting sources like Inglehart who studied over 160,000 Europeans and found that 85% of weekly churchgoers reported being "very satisfied" with life, compared to 77% of those who never went to church. Dr. Nielsen summarized, “This kind of pattern is typical -- religious involvement is associated with modest increases in happiness.”
2. **This may seem like a strange application...** After all, the Pharisees who were highly religious seem far from happy in most of their encounters with Jesus—or anyone else for that matter! However, Nielsen’s insights provide a window into this topic and connect it with the words of Jesus in Mark 10.
3. **Dr. Nielsen provided three reasons why there appears to be a connection between religion and greater levels of happiness:** social support, firm beliefs, and religion itself. The following is a distillation of Nielsen’s summary complemented with insights into the Pharisees’ situation:
  - a. *Social Support.* Social connectedness helps to foster happiness. Evidence of this is provided by “the overall pattern of religious people being happier is more pronounced among people who are single, elderly, or in poor health.” However, although the

Pharisees and other religious leaders like the Sadducees may have had some close social connections (typically within their own cliques), even then they did not seem highly supportive of one another. As a rule each seemed bent on fulfilling his own selfish agenda—and that often meant putting others down.

- b. *Firm Beliefs.* Nielsen sees evidence in the literature connecting “happiness and life satisfaction” to having “a sense of where we are going and what is important in life.” Jesus eroded any sense of this among the religious leaders of His day. If they thought they had firm beliefs before the Savior’s ministry, Jesus opened their eyes to the spiritual bankruptcy of their teachings.
  - c. *Religion Itself.* Nielsen points out how religious experiences “offer a person a feeling of being in contact with God (also known as ‘transcendence’)” as well as the social contact with others. Ironically, when God was in the midst of the Pharisees they largely rejected His ministry.
4. In Mark 10 Jesus offers the Pharisees all of these three keys to happiness.
- a. **Jesus endorses social support.** Furthermore in v.5-8, Jesus points these leaders back to God’s original design for mankind. He is quoting from both Genesis 1 and 2. His words call to mind the context of the original marriage. There we see that God shares His nature with humankind: “God created man in his own image... male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27.) Those chapters also reveal God is concerned about social support. Genesis 2:18 provides God’s assessment of a single Adam: “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”
  - b. **Jesus offers a platform for firm beliefs.** The words of Jesus in Mark 10 demonstrate the Bible can be trusted. Even that portion which is among the most assailed today, Jesus presents as historical fact. Did you know most Christians hold that Genesis chapters 1 -10 are not literal but just an allegory? They don’t believe in a literal Adam and Eve, a seven-literal-day creation, or a global flood. Still others quibble about “two conflicting creation accounts” opining that Genesis 1 and 2 are not in harmony, thus demonstrating the presence of different human authors with differing human agendas. However, Jesus in Mark 10 speaks with confidence regarding Genesis 1 and 2. He quotes from both chapters as authoritative accounts of God’s divine creation. Listen to words: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’” There is no room for a “gradual creation” spanning eons of evolutionary history. From the very beginning of creation, i.e., the creation week of Genesis 1 and 2, humankind is on the scene. Furthermore, Jesus’ deliberate quotation from both Genesis 1 (Mark 10:6) and from Genesis 2 (Mark 10:7-8) reveals that both chapters are inspired accounts of creation, providing complementary details from two different, yet equally authoritative perspectives.
  - c. **Religion itself and transcendence.** Jesus stepped down from heaven to make Himself physically accessible to humankind, and as we see in Mark 10, this includes

the Pharisees. The God of the universe offers to all a relationship with Him. Furthermore, Jesus demonstrates that His Word in the Bible is not just sterile print; He is committed to making it plain to humanity. Just as He, when in person, explained the Bible, so He promised the Holy Spirit to continue this work after His departure (see John 14:26).

5. Ironically, both the disciples and the Pharisees, instead of appreciating these “foundations for happiness,” looked at how Jesus’ counsel could interfere with their own selfish interests. Their thoughts gravitated toward how such an understanding of marriage might constrain their personal desires. The parallel passage in Matthew 19 presents this most clearly as the disciples respond: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (v. 10, ESV).

#### D. The Eschatological Foundations of Mark 10

Eschatology literally is concerned with “the study of last things.” It is a term applied to the study of the closing events in human history culminating with Christ’s return. This emphasis on closing events is at the heart of the Bible books of Daniel and Revelation. As we have seen earlier in our walk through the gospel of Mark, Jesus often roots His identity in these end-time books. For example, His common self-designation as “the son of man” is connected with Daniel 7:13-14 where this appellation is applied to Jesus in an end-of-time setting. At the outset of Mark 10, Jesus is focusing on another great eschatological theme.

1. Jesus’ implicit endorsement of the literal six-day Biblical creation account in Mark 10:5-9 underscores an important issue.
2. Many argue that it is of little import whether one believes in millions of years of evolutionary progress or whether one recognizes God as an omnipotent Creator who “spoke and it was.”
3. However, the end-time books of Daniel and Revelation indicate that recognizing God as Creator is an important issue at the close of earth’s history. Consider the following examples:
  - a. The identification of God the Father as the “Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7:9 connects Him with being the eternal Creator. (Compare Psalms 90:2 where the eternal, ancient-of-days God is identified as the one who “formed the earth and the world.”)
  - b. When it comes to Revelation, chapter 14 lies structurally at the heart of that book. There we read of three angels’ messages that are given to the whole world (v. 6). The first of those messages calls on humanity to “worship him [God] who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (v. 7).
  - c. Earlier in the book of Revelation, we have a symbolic depiction of God’s end-time people as “the church of Laodicea.” At the outset of His message to that church, Jesus, “the faithful witness” reveals Himself as the “beginning” (from the Greek *arche* meaning the “first cause” or “origin”) of God’s creation. (Note: if some of these connections to Bible prophecy are difficult to understand, ask those hosting this series on the gospel of Mark about the possibility of studying the book of Daniel once

your Mark series is completed. As we have been noting—and you will see even more in our remaining two lessons—the books of Daniel and Mark are intimately connected.)

4. How can God the Father and God the Son both be “the Creator”? Jesus’ quotations from Genesis 1 and 2 in Mark 10 help resolve the difficulty by reminding us of how God created humankind. You see, both the Father and the Son were involved as joint co-Creators. Thus they could say, “let *us* make man in *our* image” (Genesis 1:26) and mankind was created in duality, male and female (v. 27). Interestingly, the book of Colossians suggests that Jesus was the “hands on” agent when it came to the actual creative work (Col 1:13-17).
5. Conclusion for this section: the Bible presents the end-time significance of the Genesis creation account. Jesus provided His endorsement of the same at the outset of Mark 10.

#### **E. Jesus as Divine Leader. His Triumphal Entry (Mark 11:1-11)**

In this familiar account, Jesus demonstrates His divine character in a number of ways:

1. **His Foreknowledge.** A skeptic might suggest Jesus previously saw the donkey colt (see Matthew 21:2) at that specific location—or had some other human communication about this fact. (Granted, this would be a fairly tenuous scenario since Jesus had not been anywhere near Jerusalem for some time.) Such a doubter could also anticipate the response, ‘Why are you doing this?’ However, who would know that the reply “The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately” would be sufficient to convince anyone to part with such a valuable possession? Furthermore, it would take more than a casual observer to realize the donkey colt was unbroken (never before ridden). Clearly, this aspect of the story is stamped with evidences of Jesus’ divinity and/or supernatural connection with His Father.
2. **His Declaration of Kingship.** Jesus seemed to orchestrate the events to make it clear He saw Himself as a King.
  - a. The public response clearly shows the onlookers interpreted His entry as a declaration of His kingship—in John 12:13 and Luke 19:38 we read that many were explicitly calling Jesus “King” in this context.
  - b. In Matthew 21, the manner of Jesus’ entry is explicitly seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your King is coming to you;  
He *is* just and having salvation,  
Lowly and riding on a donkey,  
A colt, the foal of a donkey.” (NKJV)

- c. The Christian classic, *The Desire of Ages*, expresses it this way: “Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne.”
3. **His Power Over Nature.** It’s hard to imagine someone who was merely a “great teacher” asking to ride an unbroken colt into a throng of people. That would seem to be a recipe for disaster. By nature, horses and donkeys are very skittish, an inbred quality of creatures who are potential prey. Normally, it would take a great investment of time and training for a member of the equine family to be prepared to handle a crowd of exuberant people throwing branches in front of it. Consequently, Jesus reveals superhuman capacities and His rulership over nature as He rides this unbroken donkey through the city.
- a. Could this demonstration of dominion have been designed by Jesus to connect the minds of the disciples to one who, at the beginning, had dominion over the earth (see Genesis 1:28)? Regardless of whether or not this was His intent, Paul compares Jesus to Adam, the first man created.
    - i. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45 Paul refers to Jesus as the “last” or “second” Adam.
    - ii. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul argues that just as Adam’s sin affected the whole race and doomed us all to death, so Jesus’s sacrifice makes it possible for all of us to receive the gift of eternal life (v.17).
  - b. Perhaps there is a larger emphasis in Mark’s recounting of Jesus’ evidences of dominion over nature. Whether He is riding an unbroken colt, miraculously healing people, or stilling the storm on the sea (Mark 4:35-41) Jesus emerges as one whom nature obeys. All these examples can be seen as evidences of His creative and sustaining power.
    - i. As we have already observed in this lesson, creative power is a critical end-time issue and one of the reasons that God is worthy of worship. (Compare also Revelation 4:11 where heavenly beings declare: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” KJV.)
    - ii. However, in this story we are again reminded that God’s creative power is not something that only operated in the distant past. Indeed, the Bible does not present Him as the god of the deists who merely created the earth, then let it run on its own. Jesus here again reminds us that He is the

sustainer, one whose voice nature still obeys. (As to Jesus sustaining work consider Colossians 1:17, “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” [ESV] and Acts 17:28 “By his power we live and move and exist” [New Century Version]).

- F. **Jesus’ sense of timing in declaring His kingship.** Why is there such an abrupt change as we enter Mark 11? After all, until this point, Jesus seemed to have suppressed any discussion about His Messiahship, kingship, or—in many cases—even the miracles that suggested such. (For examples see: Mark 7:36, 8:30, 9:9; Luke 4:33-35; John 6:15.) Now He seems to embark on a path that publicly announces this fact.

Note: if there was any question about Jesus publicly declaring His kingship at this point, those doubts would be immediately dispelled less than a week later. When on trial for His life, Jesus was asked if He was King of the Jews. He could have said “No,” and paved the way for His release. But truth was more important to Jesus than life. (Note: the New American Standard Bible seems to capture the sense of the Greek accurately when it translates Mark 15:2, “Pilate questioned Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ And He [Jesus] answered him, ‘*It is as you say.*’” Compare Mathew 26:25 if you have questions about this somewhat circuitous way of saying, “Yes.”)

1. Jesus seemed to have some type of divine timeline on His mind, where He could talk about things happening or not happening “on time.” Perhaps most commonly He talked about the/His hour having come or not having come. Examples of this are as follows:
  - a. Jesus said “my hour has not yet come” (John 2:4, NKJV) when His mother asked Him to miraculously help meet the need for wine. (Note: “wine” in the Bible can refer to either unfermented grape juice or to the fermented beverage we call wine today. However, culturally it was the fresh grape juice that was served at weddings. Realize also, furnishing an abundance of fresh grape juice, still unfermented, toward the end of a multi-day wedding feast in a hot climate, would be miraculous; coming up with the fermented beverage would have been nowhere near as awe-inspiring.)
  - b. At the last supper John records, “Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father...” (John 13:1, KJV).
2. Jesus saw the timing of His death on a prophetic time line.
  - a. Of great contextual importance, John’s recounting of the triumphal entry is followed by Jesus speaking clearly of His death in terms of “the hour coming”:  
“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain... Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I

say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.” (John 12:23–28, NKJV)

- b. As He was expecting His betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said: “Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” (Mark 14:41, KJV)
  - c. Consider this: Jesus had been in Jerusalem before when the leaders were seeking His life and He did not meet His end. Why did He know at this point His death was imminent?
  - d. The evidence suggests that Jesus recognized the existence of a prophetic timeline. He was not the only one who was mindful a divine clock had struck in relation to His birth and ministry. In Luke 2:25-26, 38 we read of individuals like Simeon and Anna who were looking expectantly for consolation or redemption that was to come to Israel in their day. Paul later wrote of Jesus’ birth: “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son...” (Galatians 4:4).
3. What was this divine timeline toward which Jesus and others looked? The evidence points to one spelled out in the book of Daniel. Consider the following:
- a. Jesus connected Himself throughout His ministry with the book of Daniel. (Recall His frequent references to Himself as “the son of man” a term used particularly in the prophetic books of Ezekiel and Daniel.) There are other references to Daniel in the book of Mark (e.g., we’ll look in a future lesson at the connection between Mark 14:62 and Daniel 7:13). Shortly after the triumphal entry Jesus make another explicit connection to Daniel; this time it points us to a time prophecy.
  - b. In Mark 13:14 Jesus warned the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, pointing to one of Daniel’s prophecies: “But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains...” (KJV).
  - c. Jesus is referring to one of the Bible’s great time prophecies found in Daniel, chapter 9:24-27. Let’s look more carefully at the prophecy as it appears in the New King James version:

24       “Seventy weeks are determined  
For your people and for your holy city,  
To finish the transgression,  
To make an end of sins,  
To make reconciliation for iniquity,  
To bring in everlasting righteousness,  
To seal up vision and prophecy,

And to anoint the Most Holy.

25 “Know therefore and understand,  
*That* from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem  
Until Messiah the Prince,  
*There shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;  
The street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.

26 “And after the sixty-two weeks  
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;  
And the people of the prince who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it *shall be* with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week  
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.

- d. Although a detailed study of Bible prophecy is beyond the scope of this study, several points are worth noting:
- i. The prophecy of Daniel 9, speaks about a specific period of “70 weeks” being allotted to God’s people, the Jews.
  - ii. The Jews humanly could not fulfill the conditions of the prophecy, but Jesus did. Had the Jews accepted Him, they would have received the benefits of Christ’s fulfillment of the conditions in v. 24.
  - iii. In the symbolic structure of God’s time prophecies and proclamations, one day often represents a year. See Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:34. As a result, many Bible scholars believe this prophecy takes in 490 years. (70 weeks of 7 days each with each day representing a year.)
    - The starting date for this prophecy of 457 BC is also well accepted by many scholars. It was in that year that the pivotal decree was made to “restore and build Jerusalem,” a city that had been in various degrees of ruin and disarray since the three conquests of Nebuchadnezzar beginning in 605 BC.

- Using the date of 457 BC, there is a period of 69 weeks (“seven weeks and sixty two weeks” = 69 weeks) or 483 years. This takes us exactly to the time of “Messiah the Prince” (v. 25). You see, *Messiah* means anointed one (compare v. 24). Jesus was anointed at His baptism (see Acts 10:36-38). Consider some key observations relating to the timing of Jesus’ baptism:
  - When it comes to events described in the Bible, many cannot be pinpointed as to the exact time when they occurred. In other words, there may be a range of years in which certain events transpired. (For example, we may be told a king reigned for 40 years and fought in certain specific battles, but the Bible typically does not say specifically in which years of his reign those battles were fought.)
  - Consequently, when the Bible gives very specific details that allow us to pinpoint a date with great precision, there is often a critical reason why there is that level of detail. Sometimes that specificity is provided to link an event with a key Bible time prophecy. Such is the case with Jesus’ baptism in relation to Daniel 9.
  - In the third chapter of Luke, this gospel writer goes to great pains to give details that help us pinpoint the date when Christ was baptized, inaugurating His earthly ministry: “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Luke 3:1-3.
  - There was only a small window of time when all these individuals were in leadership. Historically, we can pinpoint the baptism of Jesus with a high level of confidence—and thus, precisely see the fulfillment of Daniel 9.
- At the end of the prophecy, the Messiah is “cut off” (a reference to the crucifixion) at which point the “sacrifice and offering” comes to an end. (Many see the rending of the temple veil in Mark 15:38 as a divine sign that the Jewish sacrificial system no longer had any relevance—more on this in a future lesson.)

iv. ***Important Note:*** Check with those who are hosting this study on the gospel of Mark. After completing these lessons, we recommend

individuals and groups to study the Bible book of Daniel (ideally in the context of the book of Revelation). These two prophetic books, provide further illumination into the gospel of Mark, and make its lessons even more applicable to our day. Indeed, we can only fully appreciate the gospels if we understand the prophetic context into which Jesus repeatedly set His ministry.

4. **What other practical lessons can we gain from Jesus' sense of timing relating to His death?**
  - a. Since Jesus always did the will of the Father, can we be called to a certain purpose in life, and have to wait for many years in relative obscurity before we fulfill that purpose?
  - b. What kind of faith do we need to sleep in a ship in the midst of a storm—or go into a situation where only trouble seems to await us?

### **G. Jesus Curses a Fig Tree and Cleanses the Temple (Mark 11:12-25)**

Although these stories (the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple) may seem unrelated, Mark connects them intimately in his gospel. Consider the following:

1. A modern “medical” illustration:
  - a. I find health marketing fascinating...
    - i. All kinds of claims are made for exercise equipment and other “fitness” products. Print and electronic media alike feature stunning models touting the latest body-building or health-enhancing products. Odds are, however, those models didn't get their good looks from the products they are advertising.
    - ii. Worse yet, consider the ads for products that public health has connected with ill health. For example, the cigarette ads of yesteryear featured rugged cowboys or vibrant young adults frolicking on the beach.
    - iii. Although these visual associations seem to promise great physical benefits, those who purchase such products typically conclude they were lured by empty promises.
    - iv. So it is with the “religion” that is commonly “marketed” in our world. It promises external or material benefits, but in the end it is seen as dispensing empty promises focused only on appearance. Such a religion does not minister to the heart; it does not feed the soul.
  - b. In this section of Mark's gospel, Jesus deals with the same issue. The Jewish people, with their impressive temple and sacrificial rites, have been proclaiming to the world that they had a “product”—“God's product,” if you will—to address the needs of the soul. But the evidence suggests those promises were empty. As a nation, they had no living relationship with the one true God.
  - c. How can we differentiate empty promises from the real thing? When it comes to food products we can read the ingredients and the “Nutrition Facts” labels.

- i. Once while on an extended speaking trip, I picked up a jar of “natural” almond butter from what I thought was a reputable natural foods brand. A few days later, a friend with whom I was staying became intrigued by the words “no stir” and “natural” on the product label. He took the time to read the ingredients (that I, out of character, had neglected). I was shocked to learn that my almond butter had been “improved” by the addition of “natural” sugar and palm oil!
- ii. How many of us would be spared from health-destroying foods, if we merely read the labels. Or are we more content with judging only by appearance or taste—perhaps to our own destruction? (The Centers for Disease Control estimates that tens of thousands of Americans die each year from poor food choices—particularly ones that contribute to the obesity epidemic.)
- iii. How can we avoid empty spiritual promises? Like the nutrition label on food products, the Bible is the standard of comparison when it comes to what is truly “spiritually nourishing.” Be like the Bereans of old who examined “the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Acts 17:11, ESV.

**2. A closer look at the fig tree.** As we observed earlier in this series of studies, the triumphal entry marked a dramatic turning point in Jesus’ ministry. From that point onward, Jesus shifts to a judgment focus in His dealings with the Hebrew nation and those who represent it. Consider the lesson from the fig tree:

- a. In the Middle East, this particular type of tree in full leaf would indicate at least partially, if not fully, ripened figs. Since both the ripe and unripe figs were suitable for consumption, the tree was announcing it had fruit on it even though “it was not the season for figs” (v.13).
- b. During the some 24 hours between His fig tree encounters, Jesus had seen another example of empty promises.
  - i. The temple promised to be a “house of prayer for all the nations” but the Jewish leadership had made it a “den of robbers.”
  - ii. Just as Jesus purged the temple of this lying testimony, so He purged the country of the lying fig tree.
- c. If the disciples were bewildered by Jesus’ cursing of the tree they didn’t have to wait long. The next morning the fig tree is withered up, and Jesus had several lessons for them.

- i. **The importance of faith.** A large portion of Mark's gospel has focused on the power of God's Word. Now, in the last week of Jesus' life, as they stand around the withered fig tree, the disciples seem surprised to see that Word accomplished just what Jesus said it would. Jesus again gives them a stern call to recognize the power of His Word.
  
- ii. **A connection with prayer.** It seems hardly coincidental that Jesus speaks about prayer in the context of the fig tree, especially in light of His charge against the Jewish leadership of their undermining His plan for the temple to be a "house of prayer for all the nations." Note, Jesus makes two specific observations about prayer; one obviously seems to flow from the context, the other is counterintuitive:
  - We can trust God to answer our prayers. "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (v. 24, ESV). This seems to be the main point Jesus wants to communicate.
  
  - The second point seems surprising at first, as Jesus commissions His followers to "forgive, if you have anything against anyone." The Master didn't seem to have much compassion toward the fig tree. However, on second glance, Jesus' motive seems to emerge. In cursing the tree and cleansing the temple, Jesus was performing acts of judgment which relate to what the Bible calls God's "strange work" in Isaiah 28:21.
    - Indeed, from very early in the Bible, God reveals His primary characteristics of love, mercy and forgiveness to the erring human race. This is seen graphically in His promise that the "seed" of the woman would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15) and in Exodus 34:6-7 where God reveals Himself as "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."
  
    - Jesus Himself said of His ministry: "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 9:56.) He had earlier expressed the same truth to Nicodemus, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:17.)
  
    - However, God also reveals His justice (e.g., Exodus 34:7 continues with God saying He "will by no means clear the guilty").
  
    - Those who overemphasize God's expressions of justice make Him out as an unloving tyrant. However, the Gospel of Mark, like the rest of Scripture, reveals God's primary roles of healing, cleansing and forgiving. He only curses and judges when there is no other option. From this vantage point, the cursing of the fig tree seems to be an

object lesson of the barren lives of the Jewish nation that required God's judgment. (Note: apparently around the same time in His ministry, in Luke 13:6-9, Jesus gave a parable about a similar fig tree. In that illustration, Jesus spoke of a tree that had borne no fruit for three years [apparently referring to the duration of His ministry], yet in the context of calls for judgment ["cut it down"] there is still evidence that mercy would yet linger a little while.)

- Clearly, God wants His people to be known as “forgivers.” Elsewhere God reminds us “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19, ESV, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35). And don't forget the prayer the Lord expected us to pray on a daily basis (where we ask Him for our “daily bread”): “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12, KJV).
- A number of times in this series we have alluded to Daniel chapter 9. Realize in that amazing prophecy, the Jewish nation was given 490 years to “to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy” (Daniel 9:24, KJV). It was only as this prophetic clock was about to strike its final peal that Jesus pronounced His sternest judgment messages.

d. Other applications from the account of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple...

- i. What do these accounts say about the importance of integrity? If we take the name of Christ, what kind of lives should we be living? Consider what we have been studying. Jesus called the fig tree [representing the Jewish nation] to integrity. Jesus called the Jews to integrity with respect to the temple services. Jesus Himself exemplified integrity, rather than compromising, by speaking the truth in the temple—and illustrating the same in cursing the fig tree.
  - As a culture how much do we value integrity? Or are we most concerned with how much we can get away with?
  - Many people seem to only value integrity when it comes to how they are treated. If someone takes advantage of them, they are infuriated by their lack of integrity.
  - Have you noticed that many people don't appear to demand integrity from their own children or themselves? In fact, they may even boast about acts of cheating or deception. Think about it. How many will cheat the tax man if they are sure they won't be caught?

- ii. Jesus words and acts of judgment further alienated the Jewish leaders. The account of the cleansing of the temple ends with the chief priests and scribes “seeking a way to destroy him” (v. 18) in spite of the fact—or because of the fact—that “they feared him.
- iii. How willing are we to do what is right—especially if we know that parties in power will likely turn against us?
- iv. Might Jesus have wanted us to connect the story of the cursing on the fig tree with another “tree story” in Genesis? Consider this:
  - In the Garden of Eden, the forbidden tree seemed to promise great blessing, but it really offered nothing that was spiritually nourishing
  - In the context of the crucial act in man’s fall, the first Adam ate from a tree and he was cursed
  - In the context of the crucial act in man’s redemption (Christ’s crucifixion), the second Adam could not eat from a tree and it was cursed.
- v. Final medical insights:
  - In the story of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple, we see Jesus acting in ways that some may not consider “loving.” But remember God’s character does not change (see Malachi 3:6). He is always the personification of love (1 John 4:8).
  - Consider some medical illustrations. Sometimes things are so awry in the body that the body must go to serious measures to help heal you. On the surface those measures may not seem to be in your interests; however, further insight reveals that serious, even painful measures are sometimes necessary.
    - Think about fever... If you can recall having a serious fever (perhaps 102° or 103° F) you probably felt miserable. But the fever was likely present to aid your body in cleansing you from an infectious disease. The fever appeared to be your enemy (and often we treat it that way by taking medications to lower our temperature), but it really is your friend. The higher temperatures speed up your body’s immune responses, aiding them in ridding you of infection.
    - So with the inflammatory process... You have a cut. The tissue around it becomes all red and swollen. This may hurt more than the cut itself. However those inflammatory processes aid in healing.
    - Then there’s the surgeon... The surgeon may actually put you through great pain and misery in order to remove diseased or damaged organs or tissues. She may even remove a cancer! That which an uneducated

observer (or a very young child) would think is “unloving” is actually performed with you in mind.

- So it is with Jesus... sometimes His cleansing/healing work involves the sterner aspects of His loving character. We see that in the temple. We see that with the fig tree.

**H. The Religious Leaders Further Question Jesus’ Authority (Mark 11:27-33).** The religious leaders (identified as “the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders”) again are on the offensive, this time publicly seeking to undermine Jesus’ authority. (After all, they confront Him in the very temple precincts.) Some observations are warranted.

1. Why does Jesus present them a question about the authority behind John the Baptist’s ministry? It is not a tangential question.
  - a. In essence, John formally gave Jesus His authority (see Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).
  - b. Realize that prior to commencing their formal duties, kings and prophets were anointed by a spiritual leader (see Exodus 29:1-7; 1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Samuel 16:13; 1 Kings 19:16).
  - c. This is the role John played in Jesus’ case.
  - d. Therefore, the question Jesus raised was vital. If John was a true prophet, then Jesus ministry was invested with heavenly authority.
2. Notice, in response to Jesus’ question, the leaders do not themselves give honest answers. They merely weigh what different answers would “cost” them. Once they weigh the cost, they refuse to answer.
3. Have you ever been disappointed by what Jesus seemed to do—or not do—in your life?
  - a. Jesus seems always willing to answer the honest seeker. If you are confused, why not go to Him and ask Him about that which perplexes you?
  - b. However, a price is involved when asking Jesus to be honest with us. Namely, we must approach Him with an open and honest heart.
4. One of my colleagues, theologian Skip Dodson (Administrative Dean of Weimar College), has shared how this particular incident impressed him that Jesus was more than a mere man.
  - a. Think about it. Here were the highly trained religious leaders collaborating to discredit a humble “uneducated” laborer. Yet, Jesus confounded them all.

- b. Other sincere observers, contemporaries of Jesus had the same reaction. In John 7:32, “the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him [Jesus]. However, after seeing Jesus in action, the officers come back without Jesus, bearing this testimony: “Never man spake like this man” (v. 46).

I. **The Religious Leaders Are Further Confounded (Mark 12:13-37).** Shortly after Jesus befuddles them in the context of their questioning His authority, the religious leaders come back again. This turns out to be the final round of their attempts to ensnare Jesus. Note how different factions of the Jewish leadership each attempt to put Jesus in a corner.

1. The Pharisees and Herodians step to the plate first. They pose a seemingly unanswerable question about taxes. Jesus shows His divinity as he astounds the top leaders. Their reaction: “they were amazed at him” (v. 17, NIV). Application questions:
  - a. Can we be so confident of our beliefs that we think our reasoning is superior to God’s?
  - b. If so, how could God show us our error as He did in this interchange with the Pharisees and Herodians?
2. Next the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection, think they have found a way to both trap Jesus and show the superiority of their doctrinal system. However, Jesus reveals their ignorance: “you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God... you are greatly mistaken” (v. 24, 27, NASB). Application questions:
  - a. How can we ensure we are not like the Sadducees who erred because they knew “neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (v. 24)?
  - b. Is it enough to read God’s word? Or must we have a relationship with God where we are continually applying what we learn?
3. Finally a scribe poses a difficult question that Jesus answers convincingly and unhesitatingly. His honest response, expressed publically, demonstrated his sincerity (see v. 32-34). Application questions:
  - a. What kind of response to God’s Word would we have in order for Jesus to say of us, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (v. 34)
  - b. Shouldn’t this be an important thing to ask if you want to be in God’s eternal kingdom?
4. The interrogation is concluded when Jesus poses His own question about the Messiah’s Davidic lineage. Their inability to respond to Jesus’ query, combined with Jesus’ flawless handling of their own conundrums, ends the sad chapter of the leaders trying to trap Jesus in His words. “After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions” (v. 34).

J. **The Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-12).** Sandwiched between these examples of attempts to undermine Jesus’ authority is the Master’s own attempt to desperately reach the religious leaders.

1. As we have already observed, up until chapter 11, the Gospel of Mark has been filled primarily with the record of Jesus’ gracious and compassionate acts. Now the gospel seems weighted especially with expressions of judgment.

2. There is no question that the parable of the tenants was spoken especially to the religious leaders; even they understood this (Mark 12:12).
3. What are the key elements in this story?
  - a. The parable of the tenants paints a picture of God providing everything for His people as He “planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower.”
  - b. After doing all this, He gives the privilege of caring for this vineyard to tenants who can share in the rewards of all He prepared. The relationship is sealed with a rental agreement or lease (Mark 12:1, compare NIV and ESV).
  - c. Instead of being grateful, the tenants repulse His messengers who are merely requesting on behalf of the owner a reasonable rental fee or dividend, “some of the fruit of the vineyard.”
  - d. Worse yet, they serially abuse and kill the representatives of the vineyard Owner. (On a spiritual note: multiple scriptures testify to the horrible treatment that God’s people often gave His messengers. Consider the following: 2 Chronicles 24:19; 36:15, 16; Nehemiah 9:26; Jeremiah 37:15; 38:6; Acts 7:52; Hebrews 11:36, 37.)
  - e. In the most sobering part of the story, the loving Owner “had still one other, a beloved son” whom He sends.
  - f. In a strange twist of logic, the tenants who have no right to anything in the vineyard, somehow think if they kill the son “the inheritance will be ours.” How could anyone in their right mind come to such a conclusion?
  - g. When they carry out their ill thought-out plan, the Owner does what logic and justice demand: He comes in judgment “to destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

**4. Medical insights... misappropriating God’s gifts.**

- a. Do we ever process things irrationally when it comes to the gifts of God? How about the gift of health? Have you ever thought about it: is health your personal possession or is it something lent to you by God—with expectations you will use it mindful of Who the Owner is?
- b. Perhaps the greatest motivation for taking care of our health is to realize our bodies are not our own. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20, NIV). When we live like the wicked tenants, acting as if God’s possessions (our bodies, in this case) are our own to do with as we please, we gravely err.

5. Does the judgment of God seem too harsh? In the medical world there are two crowning examples of disease processes that behave like these unruly tenants, diseases that attempt to commandeer our bodily processes without any reference as to what is best for the owner.
  - a. In viral illness, the virus commandeers the body's own machinery to work its dastardly work. The body, through the immune system, attempts to do exactly what the Lord did to the tenants—completely remove a faction who would not acknowledge rightful authority.
  - b. In cancer, the malignant tissue thinks of nothing but itself, hoarding the body's nutrition, creating its own blood supply, etc. Again the body's only successful strategy is to eliminate the cancer using Natural Killer cells and other cancer counterinsurgency forces. If the cancer is too large or powerful, we may require the help of a surgeon or other health professional to “judge” and remove the tumor.

**K. A Concluding Contrast: a Widow's Shining Example (Mark 12:41-44).**

1. After all the disappointment Jesus faced in the temple, why was Jesus so encouraged by the widow's act?
2. In what ways did the widow put in more than all the others?
3. How does the example of the widow help to answer some of the questions raised in the parable of the tenants?
4. What kind of faith does one have to have to give “everything she had, all she had to live on” (v.44)?