

CHRIST'S TEACHINGS AT THE BEGINNING OF PASSION WEEK

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 21:12-32
LESSON 196 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "My house shall be called the house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 21:12-32 (KJV)

¹² And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

¹³ And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

¹⁵ And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,

¹⁶ And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

¹⁷ And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

¹⁸ Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

¹⁹ And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

²⁰ And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Son of God in the House of God

- 1 Jesus, seeing again the prevalent abuses of God's house, vigorously casts out the evildoers, Matthew 21:12, 13;

Mark 11:15-17 (KJV)

¹⁵ And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves;

¹⁶ And would not suffer that any man should carry *any* vessel through the temple.

¹⁷ And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Isaiah 56:7 (KJV)

⁷ Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *shall be* accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

Jeremiah 7:11 (KJV)

¹¹ Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen *it*, saith the LORD.

- 2 He followed this action by doing other works of God there, Matthew 21:14;

Luke 19:47-48 (KJV)

⁴⁷ And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him,

⁴⁸ And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

Luke 20:1 (KJV)

¹ And it came to pass, *that* on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon *him* with the elders,

Luke 21:37 (KJV)

³⁷ And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives.

- 3 The unfaithful leaders were displeased at the assumption of His rightful authority, openly opposing Him, Matthew 21:15, 16;

Mark 11:18 (KJV)

¹⁸ And the scribes and chief priests heard *it*, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.

Luke 19:47-48 (KJV)

⁴⁷ And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him,

⁴⁸ And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

is the fig tree withered away!

²¹ Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

²² And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

²³ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

²⁴ And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

²⁵ The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

²⁶ But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

²⁷ And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

²⁸ But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

²⁹ He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

³⁰ And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir: and went not.

³¹ Whether of them twain did the

4 Jesus used the Word of God to answer them, Matthew 21:16, 17;

Psalms 8:2 (KJV)

² Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

II The Lesson from the Barren Fig Tree

1 Jesus, being hungry, looked for figs and found none, Matthew 21:18, 19;

Mark 11:13 (KJV)

¹³ And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*.

Psalms 1:1-6 (KJV)

¹ Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

³ And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

⁴ The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

⁵ Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

2 The barren tree is a type of unfruitful Israel and also of unproductive professors of religion, Matthew 13:22;

John 15:1-9 (KJV)

¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

² Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

⁸ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

⁹ As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

John 15:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

³² For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

3 The judgment was for unfruitfulness, Matthew 21:19, 20;
Matthew 3:10 (KJV)

¹⁰ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Luke 19:20-26 (KJV)

²⁰ And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:

²¹ For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

²² And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:

²³ Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?

²⁴ And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds.

²⁵ (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)

²⁶ For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

Romans 11:29 (KJV)

²⁹ For the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.

4 Faith's value, power, and necessity was shown, Matthew 21:21, 22;

Romans 14:23 (KJV)

²³ And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Habakkuk 2:4 (KJV)

⁴ Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

John 6:28-29 (KJV)

²⁸ Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

²⁹ Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

Ephesians 6:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:6 (KJV)

⁶ But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

James 1:5-6 (KJV)

⁵ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

⁶ But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

III Jesus' Tact and Sagacity

1 Christ's authority, divine commission, and Deity were again challenged, Matthew 21:23;

John 12:44-50 (KJV)

⁴⁴ Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.

⁴⁵ And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

⁴⁶ I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

⁴⁷ And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

⁴⁸ He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words,

hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

John 13:20 (KJV)

²⁰ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

2 Jesus' unanswerable reply was actually a statement of His authority, Matthew 21:24, 25

3 Being unable to answer correctly and still denying Christ's Messiah- ship, they evaded the question by lying, Matthew 21:25-27;

Luke 20:5-8 (KJV)

⁵ And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not?

⁶ But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet.

⁷ And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*.

⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

4 Deceit and insincerity robbed them of the truth, Matthew 21:27;

Matthew 13:4 (KJV)

⁴ And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Matthew 13:19 (KJV)

¹⁹ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (KJV)

¹⁰ And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

¹¹ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

¹² That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

IV The Father and His Sons

1 The first son, his refusal and subsequent repentance, was like a sinner who ultimately repents, Matthew 21:28, 29

2 The second son, his agreement and subsequent rebellion, was like a hypocrite, Matthew 21:30

3 The illustration was applied to Israel, chosen by God but disobedient to God, Matthew 21:31, 32;

Exodus 19:5-6 (KJV)

⁵ Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:

⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Exodus 19:8 (KJV)

⁸ And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:31-32 (KJV)

³¹ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will

make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

³² Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

NOTES:

Jesus, the Son of God

Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was past, as well as the day on which it occurred. The people had praised and worshiped Him as the Son **of** David, the One who came in the name of the Lord. They had praised God for all His mighty works, saying, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:37, 38). On the second day of the week, the day that corresponds to our Monday, Jesus again left the town of Bethany and was found in Jerusalem where, we understand, He spent the greater part of the week.

The home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was located at Bethany. Jesus often went there, for He found fellowship and Christian love in the home of these devout disciples. Bethany was a little city on the side of Mount Olivet, a quiet place where He could rest and find relief from the crowds that were in the busy city of Jerusalem.

Near the beginning of His ministry Jesus had gone into the Temple and had driven out the moneychangers and those that sold oxen, sheep, and doves. This abuse of the house of God was no doubt tolerated, or perhaps even instituted, by the Jewish rulers of that day under the pretext that it was necessary for the convenience of those who came from faraway places to worship in the Temple.

The Law of Moses had made a provision that those who came from long distances could change their offerings into money to facilitate their labor of bringing the actual offering to Jerusalem (**Deuteronomy 4:24-26** ²⁴ And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; *or* if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: ²⁵ Then shalt thou turn *it* into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: ²⁶ And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,). When they reached Jerusalem they were then to purchase the desired items necessary for their worship, and these would be accepted by God. But God did not mean that His house was to be made the trading place. His Temple was to be a place of prayer; but greed caused those who sold to come to the immediate precincts of what should have been God's dwelling place, that they might profit from the sale of animals and doves.

It is significant that Jesus, at the beginning of His earthly ministry and also as He neared its end, acted against this abuse of the house of God. He spoke strong words at the time of the first incident (**John 2:13-17** ¹³ And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: ¹⁵ And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; ¹⁶ And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. ¹⁷ And his

disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up), but He spoke in a still sharper manner at the final one. His whole ministry was to the end that God — and not the works of man — should be glorified; that the house of God should be sacred, a place of prayer where the pure Word of God could be heard, and should not be a "den of thieves" — a harbor of wicked men.

He had a right thus to assert Himself. He was **God the Son**, equal with **God the Father** and **God the Holy Ghost**. He was from the beginning! And since this Temple was the house of God, Jesus was actually master over it. His prerogative could not be rightfully questioned or challenged; and those who did question it were actually denying His Deity, His Messiahship, His authority, and His commission. In doing this, these unfaithful ones were denying God Himself and the words of all God's prophets from the very beginning. There was sufficient evidence in the things they saw during the years of His ministry, in the words of the prophets that spoke of His coming, and in the Spirit that attended His very presence, to show them without doubt that He was the Son of God. But they denied Him. And because of that, we may say they became the progenitors and first disciples of the Antichrist who is to assume power during the Tribulation (**1 John 2:18** ¹⁸ Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. **1 John 2:22** ²² Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. **1 John 4:2-3** ² Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: ³ And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.).

The Barren Fig Tree and Unfruitful Disciples

En route from Bethany to Jerusalem, Jesus became hungry. This was not the time for ripe figs, generally speaking; but while He was far away He saw a tree that had advanced to the stage when its fruit should have been ripe. But when He looked for fruit on it, He found none. We are told that there are several kinds of fig trees, and there are several crops a year on each. A peculiar habit of the fig tree is that the fruit comes before the leaves. When a tree is in full leaf the fruit is nearly ready for picking. The fact that this tree was seen by Christ a long way off tells us that the other trees were not yet in full leaf; it was not the harvest time for figs. But since this one tree was already in full leaf we know that it was an early variety, and Christ was therefore justified in looking for fruit on it.

God never asks anything that is unjust. He does not expect the unreasonable, or the impossible. It has been said that "God's commands are His enablings." Christ did not come to this fig tree looking for olives, dates, or grapes. He came looking for figs, and He had a right to do so since the full-leaf condition of the tree was an evidence that its figs should have been ripe.

God does not want us to imitate another person. To be accepted by God, we are required to abide in the same calling wherein we are called. (**1 Corinthians 7:20** ²⁰ Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called), since the "gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). God expects us to bear only our own fruit; but He does expect us to bear that fruit. We shall be held accountable to Him for that responsibility.

The judgment of God is perfectly just. He expects fruit from

us according to the measure of the Gospel that we have received. Some people have greater advantages, and therefore more is expected of them. Some have greater privileges, and they will be held accountable if they do not avail themselves of those glorious God-given opportunities. The fig tree was on the roadside, in a place where it could have blessed many — but it bore no fruit! Many today are also on the "roadsides" of life and have an incomparable privilege of working for God and bearing fruit for Him, but they are not doing so. The Israelites are an example of these, since it was God's plan that they should be the messengers of the Covenant, the custodians of the Holy Oracles, and the nation through which the Messiah would come. But we have already learned that they withdrew from the Covenant they made with God and, as a nation, bore but little fruit for God. The sacred Covenant-privileges were filled by individuals instead — both Jew and Gentile — who, during all dispensations, have willingly assumed the obligations of the Covenant.

How significant that the Holy Spirit has preserved for us an admonition of what is easily seen to be one of the most important kinds of fruit bearing — intercessory prayer. There are many avenues of service, but one of the greatest of these is prayer. Nothing can be successfully accomplished for God without it. And it, in itself, is valueless unless it is in accord with the will and promise of God. But, potent though each kind of service may be, it is powerless unless faith is exercised to bring the will of God into action. True faith insures the blessing that is being sought. The Lord used this miracle to strengthen and increase the faith of His disciples — and ours also — as well as to increase the fruitfulness of all of us.

The Challenge that Prompted a Challenge

The chief priests and elders of the people were seeking a means to overthrow Jesus. His assumption of real authority over the Temple, in casting out those who defiled the house of God, in teaching the Word of God there, and in doing miracles which attested His Deity and Messiahship, caused them vehemently to oppose Him. Seeking to trap Him, they directed a challenge to Him: "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" They sought their appointments from man; and, to them, no other appointment was as good. Jesus was divinely commissioned and authorized, but this fact meant little to these self-confident and self-glorying hypocrites.

He who was the Lord of the House of God answered their challenge with a challenge that they **would** not answer. They **could** have done so. They had the means of knowledge sufficient to have answered it completely. But to do so would have exposed their own hypocrisy and sin.

John's preaching was of Jesus. Every event of his *ministry* pointed to the Lamb of God. If they accepted John's message they would have to accept Jesus. But, specifically, it was at the baptism of *Jesus* that God the Father said, from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). It was there that the Holy Spirit descended upon the head of that holy, undefiled Son of Man as a witness to His authority. The answer to their question was in the question that Jesus put to them. He never received His authority from man; it came from God and, therefore, it superseded all man-given authority.

The Unwilling Sons

During the middle days of the week Jesus taught in the

Temple and there He told the assembled people of a man who had two sons who were called to work in a vineyard. If we accept the usual symbolism of the Bible that pictures a vineyard as God's harvest field, we can see some great truths here.

One son was like a willful sinner who is called into the Kingdom by the Spirit of God, who answers that he will not go, but afterward repents and goes to work for his Father. The other was like the Jewish nation who said they would go, but afterward did not do so. The one Who went did the will of the Father.

It is possible to say that Christ is a Prophet, and not submit to His teachings. It is possible to say that He is King, and not be loyal to Him. One can acknowledge His authority, and still not render faithful service. It is possible even to admit that He is the Son of God, and not worship Him. And there are some, sad to say, who agree that He is the only Savior, but who do not receive Him as their Savior. The one who does the will of the Father is the one who answers His call!

QUESTIONS

- 1 What great event had preceded our present lesson?
- 2 What events took place in the Temple that proved that Jesus was the Son of God?
- 3 What did the children do in the Temple?
- 4 Where did Jesus spend His quiet hours during this last week?
- 5 Tell the story of the barren fig tree.
- 6 What great lesson did Jesus give us from this incident?
- 7 Quote the great promise that is recorded in Matthew 21:22.
- 8 Why did the chief priests and elders challenge Jesus' authority?
- 9 What was His answer?
- 10 Apply the story of the man and his two sons to God's Covenant plan.