

Our faith is reflected in our prayers.

What we think that God is doing in the world, his purposes and his promises will be the bread and butter of the things that we pray about. Christianity is distinctive in valuing the individual. God loves each one of us, just the way we are. He has great plans for each one of us, to be more than we are at present. But that does not mean that everything in the bible or that all our prayers are going to be just about me!

We always need to ask and think and pray in terms of the kingdom of God.

Where do my plans and expectations fit in with the plans and purposes of the King in God's Kingdom? Jesus?

If we keep the theme of the Kingdom of God in view, it will be our guide to a better understanding of this passage.

1 JESUS IS WELCOMED Mark 11:1-11

- **The King of Peace**

Jesus has already told his disciples three times that, as the Messiah, he will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes to be killed and in three days rise again.

It must have been with some bewilderment that thy disciples saw such a positive response to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. He is welcomed as the King of Peace riding on a donkey.

This is fulfilling various prophecies, especially about the King who comes in the line of David, the king who will rule forever. He is the long expected anointed King, coming to rule over his people.

- **Temple inspection**

Jesus goes to the Temple, in verse 11 and looks around. It is a brief inspection tour. He already knows what has been going on. He is making his judgement on the leaders of the nation

2 JESUS PRONOUNCES CONDEMNATION Mark 11:12-14 and 20-21

The cursing of the fig tree should never be taken in isolation.

It is a picture of the judgement of God on the nation of the Jews.

Their faithlessness is the cause their condemnation.

- **Fig Tree Excellence**

The idea of happiness and blessing for the Jewish person was for the family to be sitting under the shade of their fig tree eating plenty of figs. That was the good life.

As Australians we might picture the ideal and being with the family in the back yard, having a BBQ while the children played backyard cricket.

- **Fruitless Failure**

When Jesus sees the leafy fig tree, he looks for fruit.

He would already know that it was not the season for fruit.

He is deliberately using it as an illustration for the nation.

- **National Condemnation**

The Temple, which is cleansed in verses 15-19 is a picture of the spiritual state of the nation. You could say that it was all show and no fruit. All the flurry of activity without true worship of the living God.

3 THE TEMPLE IS RENOVATED Mark 11:15-19

- **God's place**

There was only one Temple, and that was in Jerusalem.

All those who wanted to be faithful Jews, those who wanted to pay their dues and stay in the club, had to come to Temple. Many travelled a great distance. They could not bring their own sacrifices. They had to buy them there. They brought their own money and need to have it changed to the Temple Tyrian currency.

- **Meeting Place**

It was a place where people were meant to come and meet with God. They were to approach God through praise and worship and sacrifice. The whole process was meant to help people approach God, in spite of their sins. There was even a court for the Gentiles, so that they too could approach the God of the universe.

- **Barriers erected and removed**

But the chief priests had allowed buyers and sellers to set up markets and charge exorbitant prices in the court of the Gentiles. What were meant to be invitations to meet with God became barriers instead. The original purpose had become distorted. The system had been abused. People were even using the Temple area as a shortcut to the Mount of Olives.

- **Original purpose restored**

In cleansing the Temple of the markets and the racketeers, Jesus is helping people to see its original purpose. “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

Jesus is emphasizing that God wants people from every background and racial and cultural group to come to know and love God

- **Opposition renewed**

True to their character and just as Jesus had predicted the chief priests and scribes renew their opposition to Jesus. Verse 18. They hate the renovations. They want to get rid of the renovator. This fulfills the prophecy of Micah 7. Micah 7:1-2 (ESV)

There will come a time of great opposition to the things of God. It will be a time of bloodshed. But the faithful are called upon to keep trusting in God. Micah 7:7
Micah 7:7 (ESV)

But as for me, I will look to the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
my God will hear me.

4 THE COMING KINGDOM

- **Dreadful opposition**

Jesus is about to bring in the Kingdom of God, through his death on the cross and his resurrection. His ascension into heaven will bring about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. At this point he is bringing judgement on the false religion of his day. He knows that the times ahead will be difficult for his disciples.

As he explains that withering of the fig tree, showing the judgement of God, he encourages his disciples to remain firm in their convictions that he is the Messiah of God.

So he tells them in Mark 11:22 “Have faith in God”

The kingdom will certainly come. Don’t give in to the pressure. Don’t give up the faith.

- **Signs of prophecy**

To reinforce his call to firm faith in the face of opposition, Jesus directs their minds to the prophecy of Zechariah 14. To my mind this is one of the most difficult verses of the bible to fully comprehend.

Only a small part of the prophecy of Zechariah 14 is mentioned. We want to know about the other details mentioned there, but we only have a general impression of godlessness condemned by God. In particular we have references to the Mount of Olives being moved. We note that Jesus refers to “This mountain”, the Mount of Olives being moved into the sea. In Zechariah 14 the Mount of Olives is split in two and the half that is moved southward would end up in the Dead Sea. With Jesus’ coming the

Kingdom of God has come, and so, in symbolic terms, it is as if the Mount of Olives has already been moved. When Jesus is talking to his disciples he is encouraging them to keep on trusting that the Kingdom will come, even through his humiliation, and death.

- **Pray for the coming kingdom**

The disciples are the ones to whom Jesus addresses this call to believing prayer. They can pray for the Kingdom to come, fully believing that Jesus is able to bring it about.

This whole section is all about the kingdom coming through the judgement of God on the Jewish nation and the death of Jesus on the cross.

- **Sign of membership**

Interestingly, Jesus not only calls on his disciples to have a firm personal faith, that is expressed through believing prayer, he challenges them to make sure that their faith is genuine. He asks them to apply the litmus test of forgiveness.

He tells them that as they stand praying, whenever they pray, they must know that they need God's forgiveness, his mercy without which no-one can approach God. It is pictured for us all in the very Temple itself. But it must also follow that those who know they are truly forgiven by God, must be those who forgive others, especially those who have offended them personally.

How do we go about applying these verses to our own thinking and living.

- 1 We should thank God for fulfilling his promises to send his Messiah.
- 2 We should thank God, that even though there was great opposition, Jesus went through with his calling to suffer and die and rise again.
- 3 We must take notice that God does make judgements and evaluations, even on his own people. We must always trust in the grace of God in the face of our Lord Jesus. No amount of church ritual will impress God in terms of our ultimate salvation. But we need to seek to please the Lord in all we do.
- 4 We want to capture the big picture, that Jesus wants people from all over the world to be people of Christian faith and Christian prayer.
"My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations." We know that instead of the Temple in Jerusalem people not to meet with God in the person of the Lord Jesus.
- 5 In the face of opposition and pressure we too need to keep our faith in God. Jesus has brought about the start of the Kingdom of God. One day he will complete it, when he returns in all his glory and majesty, to establish the New Heavens and the New Earth.
- 6 Therefore, we can indeed pray with confidence, with believing prayer for God's Kingdom to come in all its fullness, in our lives and in the world. We can and should be praying constantly, for God's will to be done. We know that God can bring his kingdom will to pass through amazing answers to our prayers, sometimes through physical healing, sometimes through changing us from the inside out, at other times, through the gift of patient trust in his goodness.
- 7 Finally, if we are indeed his forgiven children, how can we not forgive those who sin against us? The more we can learn to forgive, the more we understand God's love for us in His forgiveness, and the more open to God's healing power in our lives.