

3-29-20 The Events, Teachings & Characters of Holy Week #1 Changing Times Require Changing Ways – Matthew 21:18-22

As 4 weeks of Advent messages prepared us and focused us upon the Christmas Celebration, we'll be focusing the next 4 week's messages considering the events, teachings, and characters of Holy Week **to help prepare us for the wonderful celebration of Resurrection Sunday.** After all, the ultimate significance and purpose of Christmas culminates in the life and work of Jesus the Christ at Easter.

TODAY'S TEXT: Matthew 21:18-22 -- Jesus Curses a Fig Tree

¹⁸ Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ***"May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.***

²⁰ When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.

²¹ Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

TEXT & CONTEXT:

1. Matthew devotes 8 of his 28 chapters (28.5%) to the events of Holy Week --- this must be VERY IMPORTANT! the culmination of Jesus' teaching and work!
2. The same incident is also shared in Mark 11:12-14 & 20-24
3. Occurs the Monday after Palm Sunday including the incident of Jesus' clearing the temple of money changers and unscrupulous businesses that took advantage of the poor who came to worship God.
4. Remember – Jerusalem and particularly the Temple was the Center of Israel's spiritual life and hope.
5. The 'normal' population of ancient Jerusalem was about 90,000 to 100,000. The population swelled to as many as 2,500,000 during Passover including the Diaspora & Gentile profiteers.

Consider the text immediately before today's text:

Matthew 21:12-17 ¹² Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"¹⁴

¹⁴ **The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.** ¹⁵ **But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law** saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," **they were indignant.**

¹⁶ "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"'From the lips of children and infants

you, Lord, have called forth your praise?'" (Ps. 8:2)

¹⁷ And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

1. JESUS' most dramatic demonstration and exercise of his MESSIANIC AUTHORITY

- Rejects & condemns the authority of the religious establishment; the commerce that took advantage of the poor; and the temple personnel focused more on money than the spiritual – prayer life of the people.

2. The religious leaders were not leading Israel to REPENTANCE & RESTORING RECONCILIATION with GOD

3. IN FACT --- the religious leaders were sabotaging the ministry of Jesus and they SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER --- THEY WERE IN DENIAL --- "JESUS IS FALSE NEWS" !!!!

4. Note Jesus' demonstration of the 'proper' role of the temple leaders – see verse 14 – Jesus healed the 'blind and the lame' (who incidentally were EXCLUDED from entry beyond the general courtyard because they were 'impure')

5. JESUS WAS EXERCISING HIS AUTHORITY AS KING; PRIEST (including authority over the sacrifice & intercessions of the people) AND PROPHET (speaking God's condemnation & word)

6. Verse 13, "den of robbers" Meant to extend BLESSING and SPIRITUAL RECONCILIATION WITH GOD --- "JOY" – but they were truly stealing the joy of vital spiritual life.

A PRAYER FOR OUR CHURCH

QUESTION:

- DO WE EVERY “ROB” PEOPLE OF THEIR SPIRITUAL JOY?
- DO WE EVER STEAL GOD’S MINISTRY OF DRAWING PEOPLE CLOSER TO JESUS RATHER THAN AWAY?

7. TRUSTING GOD – FAITHFULNESS IS CRITICAL --- TRUST IN GOD ACCOMPLISHES GOD’S WORK

- IF GOD DIRECTS US TO MOVE A MOUNTAIN, GOD WILL PROVIDE THE MEANS

UNDERSTANDING THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE:

HOSEA 9:10 “...*it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree...*”

A DRAMATIC REITERATION & EXPLANATION OF THE PRIOR DAY’S EVENT OF CLEARING THE TEMPLE COURTS --- GOD IS NOT MESSING AROUND --GOD’S CALL AND WORK ARE VERY IMPORTANT!!!!

A DRAMATIC DEMONSTRATION TO THE DISCIPLES THAT THEY BETTER REMEMBER GOD’S COMMISSION AND CALL TO BE FRUITFUL IN MINISTRY & LIFE --- FOR THE CHURCH TO ALWAYS MEASURE ITSELF AGAINST GOD’S ULTIMATE CALL UPON THE CHURCH.

“FRUITFULNESS” IS A SIGN of “FAITHFULNESS”

APPLICATION:

ARE YOU & I BEING FAITHFUL? & FRUITFUL?

IS SHUMC BEING FAITHFUL? & FRUITFUL?

WHILE SHUMC SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING SIGNS OF GOD’S BLESSING --- IS THERE MORE? SHOULD THERE BE MORE?

- Are we helping & encouraging **one another**?
- Are we ministering fruitfully to our **community**?
- Are we fostering & developing SHUMC as a people and place of **PRAYER & BIBLE understanding & application**?
- How do we ‘handle’ money & money matters?
 - + Proper perspective – Biblical perspective?
 - + Do we give to the church according to God’s direction?
 - + Do we treat the churches offerings frugally and prayerfully?

A Prayer for a hunger for the Bible (John 17:17):

Our Father, give our church – give me – an abiding delight in your WORD. Cause us to always hunger for the truth while being ever satisfied with the truth, make our church a BIBLE-SATURATED church. Amen

A Prayer for THANKFULNESS (Romans 1:21-23; Col. 3:15-17; Col. 1:9-14): Dear God, make us to be a church that is thankful to You and for You. May Your worth and work captivate our hearts, minds, and wills so that circumstances are transcended by the fact that you are for us in Christ Jesus. Amen

A Prayer for Disciples of Jesus to be made around the world – of all peoples, all nations, and all languages (Matthew 29:19-21): God, strengthen us in helping Your Holy Spirit to make Disciples of Jesus Christ. Draw us deeply into the glory of Christ. Make us more and more impressed with him this very day. Cause us to grow as Jesus Followers and to walk in a manner worthy of your ways in Jesus. Amen.

A Prayer for Holiness (1 Peter 1:15-19; Hebrews 12:14): Our Holy God, make us to prize and pursue Your holiness. Strengthen our burden, commitment, and endurance to strive daily after holiness in our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

A Prayer for Unity (Ephesians 4:2):

Jesus brings people together --- through the gospel, sinful people with various backgrounds (geographic, ethnic, economics, etc.) come to church and worship together --- Dear God, we thank you for the diversity and the unity that You have mended together here at South Harborcreek UMC ... *distinctive, yet one* --- *cause SHUMC to be united in and through the Trinity so that we might be united together, as a church, in Your love.* Amen.

A Prayer for SHUMC (Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 28:18-20): Dear God, we thank You for the people who gather together in the name of SHUMC – to honor You and to be a vital part of your Divine plan to share the love of Jesus with one another and the world. We pray that we are indeed like “salt and light” – drawing others to You. We pray that we might be spiritually fruitful and God honoring as we commit ourselves to making disciples of Jesus --- one with the other, our community and our world. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.