

Lake Cities Community Church
August 23, 2009
Series: On Your Mark
Pastor Craig Schill

“Open Confrontation”
Mark 11:1-26

421 years ago, this month, in August of 1588 the English navy defeated Spanish Armada. In this video clip Queen Elizabeth confronts the Spanish Ambassador. Let's watch. I don't know about you, but I am not a big fan of confrontations. They make me uncomfortable – emotions on edge, voices raised and anger... But sometimes confrontations are necessary, aren't they? Evil must be confronted.. Sometimes confrontation is the only path to repentance and peace.

We begin a new section this morning in our study through the Gospel of Mark – where Jesus enters into a period of open confrontation. Turn with me to Mark chapter 11 and as you turn there, let me set the context. Chapters 11-16 likely covers the period of one week, it could be more, but the fact that Mark devotes 1/3 of his book to a few days shows us their importance. Also, up to this point in the narrative, in chapters 1-10, Jesus has tried to keep a low profile. He has not sought out controversy. He has stayed in the countryside to keep the crowds to a minimum. He has commanded people to secrecy and healed people in private. But today we will see just the opposite – we see a side of Jesus we have not seen before. Let's begin with our first point: Jesus' confrontation of the crowds.

Confrontation of the Crowd

The story of the triumphal entry is familiar to us with its smiling crowds and waving palm branches. It is part of the Easter celebration. But in its familiarity we can easily forget

how out of character this is for Jesus. As mentioned, Jesus, who has tried to avoid the spotlight, now intentionally turns it on himself. In verses 1-7, Jesus plays the role of a skilled event planner, as he carefully orchestrates his entry into Jerusalem. The preparation is to fulfill Old Testament prophecy of Zech 9:9, Gen 49:11, Numbers 19:2, Deut 21:3, Psalm 118, 2 Kings 9:13. These texts tell us that the Messiah will come to Jerusalem on a colt that was unbroken and be enthusiastically received by the people. And the plan is executed without a hitch. The people cry; **“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest” (Mark 11:9-10).** I imagine Bartimaeus is leading the crowd with shouts of joy!

Question for us: Is the triumphal entry a time of worship for the Messiah? Yes. Is it glorious fulfillment of prophecy? Yes. Is it (as many frame it) an indictment on a fickle crowd with wrong expectations about the Messiah? Yes. But also consider that Jesus is confronting the crowds with the promise of a Messiah in order to set in motion all the remaining confrontations that will lead to his death. This story does not stand alone, but is the first in a series of events. Mark 11:32, 12:37, 14:2, 15:10 and 15:13 are verses that detail crowd's role in last week: the Pharisee's jealousy, Jesus' arrest, prosecution and death. And it starts here – at the triumphal entry.

Confronting the Temple – Part 1

After the shouting ceases, verse 11 **“Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, he left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.”** This verse may seem anticlimactic, but it actually builds the tension. As Jesus tours His Father's house – the temple – how do you think he feels? What does he see?

Lets take a moment to familiarize ourselves with the temple, which also plays a major role in this final week. As I talk, you can see on the screen a reproduction of the temple done by the UCLA school of Architecture. Herod's temple is Israel's third temple – as both Solomon's temple and Zerubbabel's have been destroyed. Construction was begun in 20 B.C. by Herod the Great and the temple was not finished until after Jesus' death. It was a project of enormous scale. I am reading now from James Edward's commentary:

In the enclosed porticoes of the temple, merchants sold sheep and doves for sacrifice and exchanged currency. The volume of trade that went on in the Court of the Gentiles was conducted on a scale commensurate with the Grandeur of the temple itself. When one of the festivals came round the multitude of sacrifices was so great that the priests could hardly cope with them. The enormity of the temple industry may be appreciated by a comment from Josephus (War 6.422-27) that in A.D. 66 the year the temple was completed, 255,600 lambs were sacrificed for Passover.

In terms of construction, the temple consisted of four divisions and was of immense proportions. The first and largest division was the Court of the Gentiles was enclosed by a portico supported by rows of columns. According to Josephus (Ant 15.391-425) the columns were thirty feet high and so massive that it took three persons with hands joined together to surround one of them at the base. The columns were crowned with Corinthian capitals, and the ceiling of the porticoes was ornamented with wood carvings. The Gentiles court was an open-air quadrangle measuring some 500 yards long by 325 yards wide." The whole structure filled an incredible 35 acres of land. Rabbinic sources proclaim that "no one has seen a truly beautiful building, until he has seen the temple."

The text tells us Jesus looked at what? Everything. It probably took Him all day. Hour after hour – every building. Every courtyard. But he is not inspecting the quality of the craftsmanship - He has eyes for different things – its moral and spiritual character. And there he saw commercialism, corruption, arrogance and greed. All things that must be confronted. But after his tour it is late – the confrontation will have to wait.

Confrontation of the Tree

Mark 11:12 And on the next day, when they had departed from Bethany, He became hungry. Mark 11:13 And seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. Mark 11:14 And He answered and said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples were listening. Jump to verse 20 Mark 11:20 And as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Mark 11:21 And being reminded, Peter said to Him, “Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” Before Jesus goes back to confront the temple, he confronts an unfortunate tree.

We have three fruit trees in our back yard, and they are about three years old. We have had fruit on two of them, but the third an Apricot tree has yet born no fruit. So verily the other day I went forth and cursed the tree. I brought laborers to the field and with saw and loppers they brought down the young tree cut it to the ground and left just a stump, as a testimony against it. The worthless tree was smote dead... What!? But Craig – you can’t blame the poor fruit tree – it was only three years old. It was too young to bear fruit. Don’t

you know that? Would you really cut down a perfectly good fruit tree just to make an illustration in a sermon? This is troubling!

Exactly! Do you see why this is a strange passage. Would Jesus really kill a tree just to make a point? Would he curse a tree for not having fruit when it was not the season for fruit¹? And this is the only time Jesus performs a miracle of destruction – which kills a living thing. Agnostic Bertram Russell loved to use this story to ridicule Christianity, he called it a “circus story.” What are we to make of this story? The answer is found in the context. Mark gives us a clue by using again his sandwich technique. The story of the figs does not stand alone, but it folded up around the story of Jesus cleansing the temple. The two must be interpreted together. The tree becomes an object lesson of the temple – that though it looks great from the outside it has no fruit, to spiritual benefit. Even trees in the spring would have some sign of fruit. Jesus is saying, it is not enough to look good – but you must accomplish the work of God.

Confrontation of the Temple - Part II

Mark 11:15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves; Mark 11:16 and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. Mark 11:17 And He *began* to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.” Mark 11:18 The

¹ It is possible that in the Spring the trees may have had immature fruit that would develop into figs, over time. Sometimes, the locals ate this hard fruit as well. Apparently this tree had no developing fruit at all.

chief priests and the scribes heard *this*, and *began seeking* how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. Mark 11:19 When evening came, they would go out of the city.

The confrontation is violent? He turns over the tables, and the chairs – causing the people and the merchandise to crash to the ground. John tells us actually used a whip. We can imagine people running to the Chief Priests saying, “You would not believe what Jesus is doing.” I love how Warren Wiersbe put it: “The court of the Gentiles should have been a place for praying, but it was instead a place for preying and paying.” Jesus confronts.

Summary: Jesus confronts the Temple. He confronts a tree, and the crowds with the promise of a Messiah. He has put himself on the 10:00 news – A public entrance into the city, the death of a tree, and an altercation in the Temple. We have seen this morning a Jesus who is not afraid to confront evil. A Lord who says – it is not enough to look like a Christian and shout praises. It is not enough to have religious activity and go through the motions. It not enough to have great leaves – there must be fruit. There must be something real in your life.

There must be faith. He ends this passage with a teaching session for his disciples on a familiar theme: “*And Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”* (Mark 11:22-24). Paul says without faith it is impossible to please God religious activities, shouting praises, doing good deeds – do not please God apart from faith.

Conclusion

Let me close with this story. Year after year England's Prime Minister Neville unlike Queen Elizabeth, sought to avoid direct confrontation with Adolf Hitler. He wanted to achieve peace without a fight. He influenced Austria, France and Italy to do the same. They had conferences with Hitler, they wrote letters and talked on the phone and all the while Hitler continued to invade and conquer peaceful nations. In 1938 Chamberlain returned from Munich with the "Munich Agreement" - a paper signed by Hitler declaring 'Peace in our time.' Appeasement was a great mistake. Washing Post Columnist George Will wrote recently: The lesson of Munich was: When it is necessary to confront an expansionist dictator, sooner is better than later."

In understanding Jesus' actions this morning, let me remind us that Satan is an expansionist dictator. And he had to be confronted and Jesus did just that. Our fight is ultimately not against flesh and blood, but the prince of the power of the air. Praise be to God, that Jesus fought Him on our behalf and has won the victory!

Winston Churchill took over for Chamberlain in 1940 and went on the offensive. As finally they begin to score victories against the enemy, Churchill wrote in 1942: "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." (Sir Winston Churchill, 1942). That is where end today - we are not yet at the end of the story - but the beginning of our story seems far behind us. We know there are going to be even more intense confrontations to come- but to you and I Jesus says - have faith - trust me, no matter where I lead, no matter what happens - and nothing will be impossible.