

Mark 11

by John Nelson Darby

Jesus enters Jerusalem, presenting Himself as the Son of David, and teaches about the power of faith and the importance of recognizing His divine authority.

Scripture: Psalm 8:2, Psalm 118:26, Daniel 7:14, Matthew 21:5, Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:22-24, Luke 13:8-9, John 1:12, John 12:23, Romans 5:8

Topics: "Jesus as King", "Faith and Fruitfulness"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Mark 11, emphasizing Jesus' dual identity as the Son of David and the Son of Man, highlighting His rightful claim to kingship and authority over all. He illustrates how Jesus' entry into Jerusalem fulfilled prophecy and demonstrated His acceptance as the Messiah, despite the impending rejection by the people. The sermon also discusses the significance of faith in God, the importance of bearing fruit in our lives, and the judgment on Israel for its unfruitfulness. Darby concludes by reflecting on the authority of Jesus in the temple and the failure of the religious leaders to recognize His divine mission. Ultimately, he underscores the grace of God that remains available to all who believe, despite human failure.

Transcript

We have already seen that the Lord assumes here the title of Son of David, a name which spoke of the accomplishment of the promises and constituted Him true king of Israel. The name which He took habitually and by preference was that of Son of man. This name had a much wider signification and announced the right to a power and a lordship much more extensive than those of the Son of David; it put Christ into strict relationship with all men, but asserted His right to all the glory that belonged to the Son of man according to the counsels of God. In Psalm 2 we find the two titles, of the Son of God - the one which was given to Jesus as born down here in this world, and that of King of Israel, though in rejection. Then in Psalm 8 (after shewing forth the state of His people in Psalms 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) we see His glory, the extent of His power, as Son of man, who is set over all things. In Daniel 7 we find again the Son of man brought before the Ancient of Days, from whose hand He receives dominion over all nations.

In chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel by John, Christ being rejected by man, God wills that a full testimony should be rendered to Him in the three characters of Son of God, Son of David, and Son of man. The first is the resurrection of Lazarus; the second at the entry into Jerusalem, seated upon the ass; the third when the Greeks come to ask to see Jesus: then the Lord says, "The hour is come that the Son of man should

be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fallen into the ground die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." In order to take possession of these titles, He must have His co-heirs with Him; - He must die.

296 In our chapter He takes the second title, and presents Himself to the Jewish nation for the last time upon earth according to the prophecy of Zechariah. He will present Himself later in the glory and take possession of the throne of His father David; but now all He does is to present Himself to His people as the One who fulfils all the promises made to them. He knew well what would be the result, and that He was about to take the larger title of Son of man; and this in order to have His co-heirs with Himself; when, according to His Father's counsels, He should take His great power and reign. But it was necessary that this last testimony should be rendered to the people on the one hand, and to the Lord on the other, on God's part; that is, by the mouth of little children and sucklings He would take His glory, anticipating thus the establishment of the kingdom in power.

Now this king was Emmanuel, the Lord Himself, and Jesus acts here in this character. He sends His disciples to bring an ass' colt from a neighbouring village, and when its owners asked what the disciples were doing in taking it, they answered according to the Lord's command: "The Lord hath need of him"; and the man sent him at once. All was done in order that the word of the prophet might be fulfilled; because in this Gospel we have always facts presented not only as the effects of sovereign grace, as indeed they were, but as the accomplishment of the promises made to His people. Notice that a part of the verse quoted is left out; that is, two expressions which have to do with the Lord's coming in power to take possession of His kingdom. These are the words, "just" and "having salvation"; as the "just," Christ will execute vengeance upon His enemies: as Saviour, He will deliver the remnant; it was not yet time for these two things.

The disciples therefore brought the colt to Him; and then the Lord Jesus entered into Jerusalem as king. A very great multitude, moved by the power of God, having also seen His miracles, and especially the resurrection of Lazarus, go before and surround Him, spreading their garments in the way, and cutting down branches from the trees in order to cast them upon His path, giving Him the place and glory of a king, and in fact recognising Him as the royal Messiah. An admirable scene in which it is not the cold reasoning of man's intellect which is in question - nor is it merely the effect of His miraculous deeds, although a fruit of this - but the mighty working of God upon the minds of the crowd, compelling it to give testimony for a short time to the despised Son of God. The testimony also of Psalm 118 is cited; a remarkable prophecy of the last days in Israel, often quoted. The Lord Himself spoke of the verses which precede those which God put into the mouth of the crowd, "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner."

297 There the crowd used the verse which announced the recognition of the Son of David by the remnant of the people Israel: "Hosannah!" (a Hebrew word meaning "Save now!" which becomes a kind of formula for asking the Lord's help when the true Christ or Messiah is recognised), "Hosannah to the Son of David: blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosannah in the highest." Now this cry recognised Jesus as the Son of David, the Messiah. Such was the will of God; that His Son should not be left without this testimony, without being honoured in this manner. Now He acts in Jerusalem according to this position.

All the city was moved, asking who this could be; and the crowds said that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the prophet who was to come. Jesus enters the temple, and purifies it with the actual authority of Jehovah,

driving out those who profaned it. He judges the nation and its rulers, saying, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves." But if He is Jehovah present in the temple, He is always Jehovah present in grace for all the needs of His people: He heals the blind and the lame. But no testimony is sufficient to penetrate the hard covering of unbelief which envelopes the hearts of the chief of the people, when they see the miracles. Hearing the children crying "Hosannah!" they become indignant. The Lord teaches here that the time for convincing them is past, and appeals to the testimony of Psalm 8 as to this. God had foreseen and foretold these things: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained praise." If the people refused Him, God took care that He should have the praise which became Him.

But all is over for the people, until the sovereign grace of God shall act to awaken a part of it in the midst of the tribulation which its unbelief will have brought upon it; and this remnant, awakened to repentance, will cry like the children, "Hosannah to the Son of David!" but then all will be grace. According to man's responsibility all was over, and the people judged: and this is what the Lord shews in the incident which follows. He will not stay in rebellious and unbelieving Jerusalem, but goes to Bethany where the power of the resurrection had been manifested; where He can find an object and a refuge for His heart amongst men, after that His people have rejected Him.

298 Then when He returns to the city, He is an hungered, and seeing a fig-tree upon the roadside, He seeks fruit but finds none at all upon it - nothing but leaves. He curses the tree, saying, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever"; and the fig-tree is dried up at once. This is Israel according to the old covenant, man according to the flesh; this is man in the place where God has spent all His care and employed all His means - man for whom God could give up even His only-begotten Son, in order to get some good from his heart, and to reach him to gain him over to that which is good, and to Himself. All was in vain; He had spared the tree this year also, upon the intercession of the dresser of the vineyard (Luke 13); He had digged about it and dunged it, but it had produced no fruit. What could He have done to His vineyard which He had not done? It is not all that we are sinners; we are still sinners after that God has done all that is possible to gain man's heart. This shews us the importance of Israel's history, and our history as told by God, and that of His patience and of all His ways, except that we have afterwards the supreme testimony of His love in the death of Christ, so that we are still more guilty. Plenty of leaves, but no fruit; pretence to piety - religious forms, but the true fruit according to God's heart, that which He seeks in His own, is not to be found in man.

Israel according to the old covenant, that is, man according to the flesh, cultivated by God's care and set aside for ever, will never bear fruit for God. It has shewn itself to be useless and to have been unable to repay all the care God bestowed upon it. Man, naturally, is condemned to everlasting barrenness. This miracle is all the more remarkable, as all Christ's miracles were not only signs of power but a witness of the love of God. Divine power was there, but to heal, to cure, to free from the power of Satan and from death, to destroy all the effects of sin in this world. But all this did not change man's heart; on the contrary, by the manifestation of God's presence, it awakened the enmity of his heart against Him - too often hid from man himself in the depths of his heart. Here only do we find a miracle which bears the character of judgment.

299 Now all is brought out clearly; man can be born again, can receive the life of the second Adam. Israel can be restored by grace according to the new covenant; but man in himself, man in the flesh who is judged, after all that has been done to bring forth fruit, is shewn to be incapable of bearing anything good. God saves men, God gives them eternal life. Man in receiving Christ receives a life which brings forth fruit;

the tree is grafted, and God seeks fruit on the grafted branch; but He has done with man in the flesh, except as concerns the judgment which must come upon him for his sins; and thanks be to God, He is free to liberate him from this state by grace, to save him by the blood of Jesus Christ, to beget him again, to reconcile him with Himself, to adopt him as His child, and make him the first-fruits of His creatures. Israel is left, and man judged; but the grace of God remains, and Christ is the Saviour of all those who believe in Him.

But what a scene is this in which Christ, the Messiah, the Son of David, Emmanuel upon earth, enters His house, there with His holy eyes looks upon all that which man does in it, and shews His indignation against the sacrilege which had made it a den of thieves. He vindicates the glory and the authority of Jehovah in driving out those who desecrate the temple. Then He finds Himself face to face with all His adversaries, who come, one set after another, to condemn Him: but they find the light and wisdom which shew clearly their position; so that, in wishing to condemn, they find themselves all condemned; and the Saviour is left free to follow up His work of grace and redemption in the presence of His adversaries now reduced to silence. But before judging them by His answers, each class of the people shews forth the fundamental principle which would give His disciples the power to overcome the obstacles which these condemned classes of Jews would bring up against them; since outwardly the power and established order were in their hands.

"Have faith in God," says the Saviour, when Peter wonders that the fig-tree is so soon dried up. All the power which presented itself to the weakness of the disciples would vanish before faith. A most important principle in a Christian's walk and service: only this faith must be exercised without any doubt at all, bringing God into the scene; and must not be the motion of the will, but the consciousness of the presence and of the intervention of God. Thus it happens that, where faith is found, and that requests are made by faith, the effect follows surely. Yet with all this, the presence of God is the presence of a God of love; and when we pray asking that our desire may be accomplished, we must be in communion with Him, and then we realise His power in answer to faith, and then the spirit of forgiveness towards others is found in the heart. For example, if I were to cherish revenge upon my enemies, I could not hope that my prayers should be answered; and even if I were heard, I should be punished. God would not intervene in this manner, for He would refuse such an evil desire; or even if He found it well to answer the prayer, we should draw down the chastisement upon ourselves. For God in His government always acts according to His character.*

{*As this thought may be a little obscure for some, it may be presented thus in other terms: "Faith, which finds an answer to its prayer, must have found God, and be in the enjoyment of communion with Him; but then God is love; and in order to realise His power to get the answer, one must know what it is to be in His presence, which faith has discovered; but this communion cannot be known if there is no love. Consequently, when we present ourselves in faith to ask for the fulfilment of our desire we must forgive our brother that which we may have against him; otherwise, we are in God's presence as regards His government and thus subject to the effect of our sins."}

300 Now He enters again into Jerusalem; He will not lodge in the city now given up by God. Here He begins to pass in review, to examine all the heads of the people, of which I have spoken; and first of all we find the examination of the authority which sets itself up against His own. He walks in the temple, where the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders come, and ask Him by what authority He does these things, and who has given Him this authority. Thus we see them set one against the other; the authority of either is questioned. The official authority, that which is outward, was in the hands of the priests; the truth and

obedience to God were in Jesus. If His power had been manifested already, it shewed no sign of avenging itself at present: it was useless to shew any more signs of power; they were already condemned; having seen sign after sign, and having hardened themselves in unbelief, it was now high time for judgment, not indeed of its execution, but of moral judgment; they were left without an answer.

301 The heads of the people ask by what authority He had purified the temple. There was no zeal for the holiness of God to be found in them, plenty of zeal for their own authority; and this is characteristic of prelates - they think about their own authority and not about God. The Lord Jesus thought only about the authority of God; and that which He did was the effect of it. If the conscience of the rulers had not been hardened, even though they had not been pleased with that which the Lord had done, they would have kept silence, ashamed of the state in which the temple was found to be whilst under their care. Having rejected the Lord, they could not recognise His authority; proofs were useless, from this time forth. But the Lord's divine wisdom makes them recognise their own incapacity to resolve questions relating to authority and divine testimony.

He asks if John the Baptist's mission were divine. If they said, Yes, then John had witnessed to Jesus; if no, their authority was compromised before the people. Where was their right to ask, "What is the truth?" They knew it; yet they were glad enough to have the honour, long lost, of having a prophet in the midst of Israel. To own their sins did not suit them; and so the light was soon put out for their hearts; but the people always accounted John to be a prophet. Thus they dared say neither Yes nor No. This was their confession, that they were not able to judge of the claims of a man who professed to have a mission from God; because they could not say whether John was a prophet or not. If this was the case, Jesus need not answer them, nor satisfy them about His mission, as persons armed with God's authority, to which one is bound to tell the truth.

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