

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL – CHAPTER ELEVEN

As usual there was a crowd hungry to know the truth and as so often before the religious people wanted to catch Jesus out in some inconsistency with the Law. This time it was the issue of divorce over which they had learned to bend the rules to suit themselves. Yes, said Jesus, the Law permitted divorce but this did not make it good. To understand God's best we must go back to the original plan in Gen.2:24 of leaving parents and cleaving to husband or wife in faithfulness. The Law made practical provision for hard hearts which look for an excuse to get out of a marriage when we have a more attractive alternative in mind. The disciples wanted to be sure they had heard Him right. If we divorce to be able to marry someone else, God knows the adultery of our hearts which to Him is the same as physical adultery.(Matt.5:27,28) The New Testament does not change the Old Testament Law but takes it to the deeper level of the heart. Jesus did not forbid the provision for remarriage after divorce made in Deut.24:1-6. He simply exposed the hypocrisy of making the Law an excuse to make lust look respectable. Transformed marriages are faithful and forgiving ones.(10:1-12)

Those most damaged by divorce are the children who will be pushed away from Jesus by the separation of their fighting parents. The Lord had already explained how important children were to Him and would be to transformed leaders.(9:35-37) He demonstrated this again by His indignation when the disciples wanted to exclude children from His circle. The simple faith of a child is the secret of transformation for all of us. A loving faithful Christian marriage is a very powerful force in bringing a child to Jesus.(10:13-16)

A rich young man attracted by the quality he saw in Jesus came asking what he might have failed to do that would secure him eternal life. Jesus began by explaining that His goodness was not His own but was from God living in and through Him in transformation. Jesus gently laid a trap for His questioner by listing 5 of the 10 commandments with which the young man thought he had no trouble. The trap was in what He left out, the first 4 summed up as loving God with all our hearts, and the final one about coveting what is our neighbour's. The man's problem was that he loved things more than God and therefore broke all of the remaining 5 commandments. Jesus exposed his problem by challenging him to let go of the possessions he coveted which prevented him loving God. Transformed living does not have a tight grasp of possessions.(10:17-22)

Like His teaching on divorce, this seemed too hard to the disciples most of whom were likely to have been poor. Jesus encouraged them that rich or poor we need to be like the camel, which had to be unburdened and down on its knees to enter the gate. This seems impossible until we realise how good God is and how precious it will be to follow Him. He reminded them that those who let go of possessions will not only enjoy eternal life one day but will actually experience the richness of generous practical Christian fellowship in the present. This is transformed friendship. When His followers realised that Jesus was moving towards Jerusalem they began to be scared. He spelled out again what would happen to Him there. Again they only heard about the cross and did not grasp the promise of the resurrection which would be the key to transformation.(10:23-34)

James and John continued their quest for status as leaders to which Jesus had responded in 9:33-37. Realising they had still not understood, He asked them if they were ready for the baptism which pictured our dying to ambition and receiving His risen life,(Lk.12:50; Rom.6:3-11) or the cup of suffering He was to drink.(Isa.51:17; Jer.49:12; Matt.26:39) Eventually both would learn the reality of His words in their martyrdom.(Acts:12:2) For the moment they could only see promotion to power over others. Once more Jesus explained that transformed leadership is about service not status. Bartimaeus provided a convenient illustration of the spiritual blindness of James and John and the response of faith towards Jesus' presence which alone could change this. When we truly see Him we want to follow Him.(10:35-52)

Again let me encourage you to review your themes or titles for the previous chapter and add your own notes of the most exciting things God has taught you. Always remember - observe first, then seek to interpret, now consider how the Lord will apply what you have discovered in your life, and finally look for every opportunity to pass on what you have found. My suggested titles for chapter 9 are as follows: - verses 1-8

transformed from heaven; 9-13 transformed through suffering; 14-29 transforming hell on earth; 30-32 transformed through death and resurrection; 33-37 transformed leadership; 38-50 transforming service. Take an overview of chapter 11; divide it into sections such as verses 1-11; 12-14; 15-19; 20-26; 27-33. Choose a title for each section that seems to sum up the whole section as fully as possible. Expect that there will be a flow of ideas from one part to the next.

**11:1-11 Q.1** What had previously happened at Bethany?(Jn.11:1; 12:1; Lk.10:38) With whom is Jesus likely to have lodged? We do not know the identity of the friend who lent Jesus his donkey. Why do you suppose he was willing to do so? What can we learn from his example? In what kind of circumstances does Jesus call on us for the use of something we value? What were the two disciples told to do when they came into the village? Does this mean we can borrow from another Christian without asking when we or someone we know has a need? Does Jesus take away what is precious to us without our permission?

**Q.2** What was special about this colt? What does the colt teach us about submission to Jesus and the place He wants to have in our lives? What did the colt know about Christian ministry that James and John apparently did not yet understand?(Mk.10:35) Do you remember another time in the Bible when a donkey had more understanding of the Lord than a so-called prophet? (Num.22:27-30)

**Q.3** As Jesus rode into the city what was the response of the crowd? Where did they get the idea of throwing down branches?(Lev.23:40) What did they suppose was about to happen? What scripture would they have seen being fulfilled?(Zech.9:9) How may they have missed the point of that prophecy? What scripture did they quote as they welcomed Jesus into their city?(Ps.118:26) If you look at that Psalm as a whole, what is its theme? For what occasion would it be especially appropriate? How does this also give a clue as to what the crowd thought Jesus might do when He reached Jerusalem? All Jesus does on this occasion is to look around the temple and go back to where He was lodging in Bethany? In the light of what happened the following day, what thoughts do you imagine Jesus had as He inspected the temple? Do you think He laid awake that night feeling angry?(Eph.4:26)

**11:12-14 Q.4** What is your first reaction to this story of Jesus cursing a fig tree which did not have figs at a time of year when fig trees are not meant to have figs? What could He be trying to teach His disciples? How were fig trees when they were first created?(Gen.2:9; Ezek.47:12) How will fig trees again be in eternity?(Rev.22:2) What went wrong in between?(Gen.3:17; Rom.8:20-22) How does Jesus intend those who abide in Him to be?(Gal.5:22,23, Jn.15:5,8-17) What difference would this make in, for example, the preaching of the gospel?(II Tim.4:2) What now in the light of this might be the message of the fig tree?

**11:15-19 Q.5** For the second time in one day Jesus seemed to be angry. What was the cause of His anger this time? What in His view was wrong with the activity of the money changers and traders in the temple? Were they necessarily trading dishonestly? What right did Jesus have to throw them out of the temple? This was apparently the second time Jesus had done this.(Jn.2:13-22) What differences are there between the two occasions? What clues does the previous episode give us as to why Jesus felt so strongly about this matter and what He wanted to teach people about His rightful place in our lives? How do the business attitudes of the world creep in to God's present day temple, our lives? Why were the chief priests and scribes so upset about what the Lord did? What was His action saying about them?

**11:20-26 Q.6** What did the disciples find had happened to the fig tree when they returned next day? If the tree is a picture of our relationship with God, what is the warning contained in what Jesus did to the tree?(Jn.15:2,6) What is He telling us about a lack of 'fruitfulness' in our lives? What according to verse 22 is the answer to fruitlessness? How would it make a difference? How in the following two verses did Jesus illustrate the consequences of real faith? If you check on a map you will see that to reach Bethany from Jerusalem it was necessary to pass the Mt of Olives. When Jesus talked of 'this mountain' what might He particularly have had in mind? What would happen to Him on 'this mountain' just a few days later?(Mk.14:26, 43-45) Having talked of praying in faith, what explanation of where all believing prayer must begin did Jesus use? Could this give a clue to the challenge which would face Him on 'this mountain' that very week? What then is the first and greatest barrier to constant fruitfulness in our lives?

**11:27-33 Q.7** On what issue did the chief priests criticise Jesus? Why was this so important to them? How did it reveal their view of leadership? How does the same problem occur so frequently in the church today? What does it show about our confusion over the true nature of spiritual leadership? What answer did Jesus give them to their question? Why was His question so difficult for them to answer honestly? Why did Jesus refuse finally to answer them? By what authority did He act? Do we need church authority for any Christian ministry?