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Monday – Day of Authority

Three Events: The Heart of Jesus' Ministry

Matthew 21:12-22
Mark 11:12-19

Introduction

Only three events occurred on Monday but each one is significant. Some have called Monday the day of controversy. Indeed, it was a day of antagonism from the priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, but it also was a day when Jesus asserted and established His authority over them, a point that did not add to His popularity among the religious establishment. The three events of Monday have a common connection. On Tuesday the chief priests and elders posed a double question to Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" "Authority" is the Greek *ἐξουσία*, *exousia*, which means "freedom to act," "strength," "might," or "absolute power," and so "authority." They understood the meaning of those things Jesus did on Monday, see Matt 21:23-37; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8.

This idea of His authority was the hallmark of Jesus' ministry as seen in the Sermon on the Mount, see Matt 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43. When He taught the Sermon on the Mount, the people were amazed because He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes who appealed to the authority of the rabbis with the argument won by the person who could quote the most and most authoritative rabbis, Matt 7:28-29. Note in Matt 21:24-25, Jesus answered their question with a question. When they refused to answer His question, He refused to answer theirs.

1. Cursed Fig Tree: Jesus' Authority Over Our Mission Matt 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14; 20-24

- Note that the order of events differs in Matthew (cleansing of Temple, fig tree, question of authority) and Mark (fig tree, cleansing of the Temple, fig tree lesson, question of authority). This lesson takes them in the chronological order as presented in the Gospel of Matthew.
- Mark's Gospel tells us the curse was on Monday, Mark 11:12-14, and the effect of the curse was observed on Tuesday morning, 11:20-24. Matthew 21:17-22 tells the story as if it were one event that occurred on Monday.
- Jesus was hungry and saw the fig tree. This particular fig tree was a special tree with leaves in full foliage out of season, so that it would be expected to have fruit (fig trees form the fruit first then the leaves). It is clear that here, Israel is the "fig tree" from which God expected fruit, see Jer 8:13;

Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7, 12; also, cf. Isa 5:1-7. Within twenty-four hours it withered and died.

- Jesus interprets His actions for us, see Matt 21:20-22; Mark 11:20-26. Israel's missionary mandate was ignored, Exod 19:1-8, because of their lack of faith. The Temple was full of activity. Sacrifices were offered in abundance twice daily. Priests and practitioners bustled about, but it all was without substance and devoid of any real meaning. Jesus gave a rebuke for the lack of substantive faith, 21:21. Genuine faith can move mountains ("this mountain" refers to the Mt. of Olives).
- Warning! This shows us God can do His work without us - Matt 21:33-46. The success of God's work is assured without you and me. It is our joy and privilege to share in His work, but we are expendable, note Matt 21:43-46.
- Warning! God expects us to bear fruit - Isa 5:1-7 is the "Song of the Vineyard" about Israel's fruitlessness. The verses that follow in Isa 5:8-30 present six "woes" that lead to the destruction of Israel with 5:24-30 describing the destruction that occurred in AD 70. Israel had a missionary mandate, Exod 19:6, but they ignored it, and became fruitless, read Matt. 7:15-20. Remember the church also has a missionary mandate, Matt 28:18-20.

Lesson: We have a missionary mandate at home & abroad. Let us fulfill our call to share the Gospel of salvation in Christ as a mandate with fasting and prayer. Like the tree with plentiful foliage but no fruit, insincere religion may be long on ritual but lacking in sincerity, truth, and righteous devotion to God.

2. Cleansed Temple: Jesus' Authority Over Sin, Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17

- This was a rejection of institutional religion and the administrative priesthood as sufficient for salvation. It compares to the experience of the prophet Amos whose ministry was called into question by the institutionalists, Amos 5:21-27; John 4:19-26.
- Jesus' actions were a rebuke to the administration of the priests and elders for allowing such activities in the Temple. In so doing he denounced fraud, graft, dishonesty, and racketeering done in the name of religion. He also was condemning the indifference of the vendors as well as the administration for those who came to worship God in Spirit and in truth and declared the Temple to be a house of prayer for all people.
- This then also is a rejection of works salvation, which was and became the Jewish interpretation of what God expects of us, but which is inconsistent with the message of the prophets, see Mic 6:6-8; Exod 34:6-7; Ps 51:1-19. It is clear that salvation was always by faith not works, see Heb 11:1-40.

The heroes of faith accomplished what they did because of their faith, not in order to obtain faith.

- This quote from Isaiah 56:7 is in the context of the prophecy that Gentiles also would come to God's "house of prayer" that will be open for all people of all nations, see also God's intention that salvation was for all nations of the Gentiles in Isa 11:1; 42:1, 6; 60:3, 5, 11, 16; 61:6, 9; 62:2; 66: 12, 19; Ezek 39:23; Amos 9:12; Micah 5:8; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23.
- This also is an affirmation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, an idea found in the Old Testament, Exod 19:6; Numb 6:1-27; also cf. 1 Pet 2:9-10, which includes the idea of accountability, Lev 10:1-7.
- By His actions Jesus glorified His heavenly Father for this indeed was His house and His Temple. God's plan always has been for salvation by grace through faith, but the Temple had become a venue for works salvation, see Ps 51:1ff; Eph 2:8-9
- Jesus, by virtue of the cross, exercised authority over ALL sin, 1 John 1:9 and was therefore qualified to rebuke sinners.

Lesson: We must guard against empty ritual as a substitute for genuine faith. We must guard against disingenuous or superficial righteousness that produces hypocritical worship. We must seek to share salvation by grace through faith as sin's only remedy for ALL people, the lost and the religious lost.

3. Healed Humanity: Jesus' Authority Over Sickness & Death (Physical/Spiritual), Matt 21:14-17; Mark 11:18-19

- Only Matthew reports the healing of the blind and the lame in the Temple, 21:14. This was significant. The priests and their accomplices, the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees could heal no one. Theirs was an empty and powerless religion full of pomp and circumstance signifying nothing. The blind and the lame were excluded from the Temple since they were considered to be impure and contact with them would defile the priests.
- Healing the blind and lame meant that the Messianic Secret no longer was secret. The Messianic Secret was Jesus' instruction that no one was to tell others He was the Messiah, see Matt 8:4; 16:10; 17:9; Mark 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; Luke 5:14; 8:56; 9:21; But now the Messianic identity of Jesus was no longer to be kept a secret, "Save us Son of David!" Matt 21:16; Mark 11:15.
- "Blind & lame" excluded as priests - Lev 21:18; care 19:14-15; healed Matt 21:14.
- David's Christ-like character in his care for Mephibosheth - 2 Sam 9:6-10
- Why did Jesus heal the blind and lame? Four reasons: (1) It was an authenticating sign Matt 11:3-6; (2) It was a demonstration of God's care for human need - Luke 5:31-32; 19:1-10; (3) It was a motivation to challenge us,

- greater works - Matt 17:20-21; John 14:12; and (4) It was an opportunity to bring God glory - John 9:3.
- Don't fear those who can kill the body - Matt 10:28; Rom 6:23, fear instead the loss of your eternal salvation. Following Satan and sin leads to spiritual death and eternal judgment, Rev 20:6, 14.
 - On Tuesday the chief priests and elders came and asked Jesus by what authority He had acted in cleansing the Temple and healing the blind and lame, Matt 21:23-27. He answered their question with a question, 21:24-25. He asked them about John's baptism, specifically was it of men or of God. They refused to answer His question because any answer would jeopardize their rebuke of Him. So Jesus shrewdly caught them in their own game and He refused to answer their question.

Lesson: Let us share the salvation of the Word of life and faith with those who are hurt by the wages of sin and seek to bring them God's forgiveness and healing. Let us do so with God's knowing that we pray and witness under God's authority and by His command, Acts 1:8; Jas 5:16; 1 Thess 5:17.