

Mark 11 - The Beginning of Passion Week

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“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” (ESV)

Wouldn't that have been fun to have been one of the two disciples who gets to go and steal a donkey and get away with it? I mean, they're going to give it back, but I just think that's really cool. This is the day when Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem on a colt, and by the way, that communicated something back in those days, it communicated that you were coming in peace opposed to coming in on a stallion which was an animal of war.

To come in riding on a colt said, I come in peace. It was yeah, I mean, I can't think of any other better way to say that, and that whole attitude fulfills well, the whole thing fulfills various prophecies, one of which is quite specific in the book of Zechariah. I'll put this on the screen for you so you can see it. Chapter nine, verse nine, it says,

Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, (and then here's that coming in peace part) humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

A beautiful fulfillment of what we're reading here in Mark chapter 11 there from Zechariah chapter 9. But this entrance of Jesus into the city did far more than fulfill one single prophecy here in Zechariah. And we're going to talk a

little bit more about some other elements or aspects of that fulfillment here in just a bit but let's look at some of these verses here as we go on.

Verse 4. *“And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields.*

⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

Which was just outside of the city. And in Mark's very common brevity of retelling these events, you'll notice that he doesn't record for us any of the conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders who were, as we know, were deeply offended by what the people were saying as Jesus came riding into the city. And the reason they were offended is, of course, because what they were saying heralded Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah who had now come.

And, of course, you remember the religious leaders told Jesus actually to say to His followers, tell Him to knock it off, and Jesus did nothing of the sort nor did He correct them for the things that they were saying, obviously, because what they were saying was true and because this was the time and when I say, what I mean when I say that you can tell I have a cold, can't you, I'm not thinking very well.

Is that now was the time for Jesus to be revealed in just this way. You remember up to this point, Jesus had essentially quieted anyone who knew who He was, and often it was demonic spirits who would rise up and start screaming, I know who you are, and He'd have to say, rebuke them and say, be quiet because it wasn't the time. It wasn't the time for that information to get out.

But now the time had come. This revelation of who He is. People, you need to know this is the very first time in His public ministry when He allowed Himself to be declared openly, publicly Messiah. This is it. This marks a huge epoch in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and it brings us back to a prophecy that took place some 600 years before this event that was actually given to us in the Book of Daniel where there was a time reference.

It's interesting. It's one thing for God to say in His Word this is going to happen. It's another thing for Him to say, here's what's going to happen, and here's when it's going to happen. Because when God commits Himself to a specific timeframe, now you're putting it on the line, aren't you?

I mean, if you imagine somebody standing up in church and giving a prophetic word and saying this is going to happen. Well, mostly people are going to forget. There might be a few that might write it down and say, oh a guy who claimed to have a gift of prophecy said this is going to happen.

It's a completely different thing for somebody to say, in one month, or in six months' time. You know what I'm saying? This is going to happen. Well, this is one of those prophecies when God laid it on the line in the specifics of a win. And let me show you the passage, first of all, just one verse from Daniel chapter 9, verse 25. I'm quoting this in the NIV. It says,

Daniel 9:25 (NIV84)

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be 'seven,' 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'

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All right, let's talk about this. First of all, there are 3 things that we learn from this prophecy. The first is, it is talking about Messiah and His coming. Let me highlight that in this verse.

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Notice it says, “*UNTIL THE ANOINTED ONE,*” those part in all caps that you're looking there on the screen, the ruler comes. So, we know that this prophecy is talking about Him and His coming.

Number 2, we learn from this prophecy when the clock begins to click or tick, I should say. Notice here. The part that's highlighted in the verse is from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

Daniel 9:25 (NIV)

*Know and understand this: **FROM THE ISSUING OF THE DECREE TO RESTORE AND REBUILD JERUSALEM** until the Anointed One, the ruler comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'*

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That's when the clock starts. That's when the timer begins until Messiah comes. All right. Now we know what decree is being talked about here because it's also given to us in Scripture. It's a decree that was issued by king Artaxerxes, and it's recorded in the second chapter of Nehemiah. And it talks about when the king said to Nehemiah, go back to your homeland and rebuild your city. Right? So we even, Nehemiah even dated that for us in Nehemiah chapter 2, so we know when that happened. We know right when the clock begins.

Finally, we know how long the time frame is between this decree that was given, and the Messiah coming and notice now here, that's that last part that's rather cryptic. There will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens.

Now, I don't have time to get into all of the specifics of this, but most Bible scholars and teachers believe that the reference to a seven here, and your Bible may say week, is actually a period of seven years, not days or weeks.

So, seven sevens would be seven, seven-year periods. And sixty-two sevens would be sixty-two seven year periods. Now you put all that together and you have 483 years. Alright?

The problem though with looking at the passage of time from the time of Daniel, or actually the time of Nehemiah is when the clock started, to the present day is that time has changed in the sense of how we view it. We've gone through several calendars. They were using the Babylonian calendar. We've gone through the Julian calendar.

Now we're in the Gregorian calendar, and so there have been a lot of changes. And then we've figured out through our own understanding of planets and this and that, there are leap years that are involved, and you have to add, here and

there and come up with things. So, suffice it to say, when people who are a lot smarter than me did all of the conversion and correction that needed to take place, adjusting for all those things, you basically take these years, and you bring it down to days. And here's what you end up with in terms of days.

173,880 days

All right. So, here's what the prophecy in Daniel said. That from the day of the issuing of the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem there will be, as far as our calendar is concerned, 173,880 days, which would bring us to the current calendar date of April 6th, A.D. 32.

April 6, 32 A.D.

All right? And that's a very important date, April 6th, A.D. 32, because we know, according to lunar charts, when all of the Passover's were celebrated because that was during the time of the full moon.

And we know that April 6th AD 32. is the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and when the people for the very first time were allowed to publicly declare Him as Messiah. And it was on that day that the Anointed One was revealed.

Now, remember, Anointed One is Mashiach, Messiah. So that reference is specifically to Messiah and His revelation and the promise of it. It's pretty amazing.

Now, we shouldn't be amazed at this necessarily. I mean, God knows when things are going to happen. He knows the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end. It shouldn't be a mystery to us, but it is interesting isn't it that God reveals ahead of time from the time this happens until this happens, there will be this much time, and you and I can go in and we can look at it and we can say, that is what happened until Jesus was revealed on that day. Moving on.

Look at verse 12 in your Bible. It says, *“On the following day, when they came from Bethany, (obviously that's where Jesus and His disciples had spent the night. It says) he was hungry. ¹³ And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.”*

Now stop there. This, again, is another event in this final week that we, by the way, call Passion Week. This last week leading up to the crucifixion that is deep with figurative meaning, and most people see in this cursing of the fig tree, a picture of something related to the nation of Israel and particularly a picture of judgment that was to come upon Israel for their rejection of the Messiah. You might say rejection of the Messiah, what are you talking about? People were just heralding Him as the Messiah the day before.

Yeah, but in just 6 more days down the road, they will yell crucify Him so, we know that fundamentally the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah and because of that rejection, and for that rejection, judgment would come upon the people. And so, this event that is recorded for us here in Mark chapter 11 becomes for us a living parable where we see a picture of God visiting His people, seeing leaves. Now, the fact that Jesus saw leaves is significant because leaves would suggest that this tree is fruitful and healthy.

And Israel had every outward sort of picture, if you would, of a relationship with their covenant God, righteousness, and all the things that go along with that. There was an outward picture of religiosity in the nation of Israel. But what God was looking for was fruit, right? And He found none, so this is the picture that we're getting here. God coming to visit His people to check for fruit. Or is there just a picture of a healthy life with no fruit in it and so forth. He finds none, so what happens? He curses the fig tree. May no one eat fruit from you ever again.

Now you might, some of you might be wondering about Jesus doing that in light of the fact that it tells us at the end of verse 13, that it wasn't the season for figs. And some of you might have caught that and thought, well, that seems unfair for Jesus to expect there to be figs on this tree when it wasn't the season for figs.

Well, here's the thing you need to understand. Fig trees in the Middle East begin to actually show a fruit, or the bud of fruit, the beginning of the growth, and they even would eat this fruit even before it was the time for figs.

That's a reference to the full ripe condition of the figs. But even before leaves would show up on the tree in the new season, they would begin to see this pre-fruit. This early fruit, if you will, and if you were a fig tree owner, you would go out in those early days and you'd look at that, even before the leaves showed up on and on the trees, and you'd see that early fruit and you'd say, okay, this is a good tree. This is a promise of a good harvest to come when the time of the ripeness comes to full fruition, right?

But prior to this time of ripeness, they would still eat this early fruit from time to time, and Jesus had every reason to expect this tree to be bearing fruit with a promise for a full harvest. But He found nothing, even though this tree had come out into full leaf, there was nothing that even was going to be eventually ripe fruit on this tree, and it should have shown it. So, we can see that He was within His rights to expect this early fruit but he found none. And again, the picture of Israel.

Now verse 15, *“And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷And he was teaching them and saying 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 den of robbers.”*

Stop there, please just for a moment. Let me explain this. It's very important for us to understand where this is taking place because this is not taking place in the temple, it's taking place in the outer courts of the temple. And this outer court area was a place that God had established for Gentiles who believed in Yahweh to come and pray. Because see, Gentiles couldn't go any further than the outer courts. They couldn't even go into beyond that point. So, this was it. This is as far as they could go. And it was meant to be a time or a place rather of prayer and reflection.

What had the Jews turned it into? A marketplace? It says they were buying and selling and moneychangers. What's all that about? People were coming for the feast of Passover as they came to many other feasts from a great distance. Some people even came from other countries and they came with their own country's currency. But see that money wouldn't spend in the temple or in Jerusalem. They had to change it. They had to convert it to temple currency, right? So, these people would bring their money, and they would go up to the money changers and say, I want to convert this to a temple currency and those money changers would do it for them.

Then they would take that money that they converted, and they would buy an animal for sacrifice because you see, again, they'd come up from a far distance and it was completely impractical, impractical for them to bring an animal all that way. So, it was much easier just to take the money, come to Jerusalem, buy an animal for sacrifice once they had exchanged their currency, their foreign currency for temple currency. This is what Jesus interrupted. This is what Jesus put a stop to.

And you might say, well, didn't the people need to exchange their money, and didn't they need to buy animals? Yes, but they were, first of all, it was wrong because they were doing it in the outer courts of the temple, which as I said before, was the only place the Gentiles could come and pray. So, they were literally turning a place of prayer into a market, right? And you'll notice that Jesus quoted that Old Testament passage saying, shouldn't this be a place, didn't God declare this should be a place of prayer for all the nations?

Notice, not for the Jews. For the nations, for the people who are not Jews. And yet you have turned it into, what did He say, a marketplace? No, this is the second thing that's wrong with this. He said, you've turned it into a den of robbers. In other words, you've turned it into a place of corruption where people are being cheated.

First of all, the money changers had corrupt scales, and they weren't giving people a proper exchange rate for their money, they were cheating them. And then secondly, they were selling them animals that they knew weren't going to get past the inspection process of the priests for sacrificial reasons.

And so, they would come all that way, exchange their money, not get a true exchange rate, and then they'd buy an animal that had some kind of a hidden blemish or defect. They'd get in to do their sacrifice and the priest would look it over and say, sorry, this animal has a defect. It won't, we can't sacrifice it to the Lord. Now what are you going to do? You're a long way from home. You've just got to go back and take more of your money and try to buy another animal that's going to, this time, be able to do what you came to do with it.

Notice the response of the religious leaders in verse 18, *“And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.”*

And by the way, this is the response of evil men when they are confronted with their evil. It's always the same. Rather than changing their lives they simply resort to violence to those who would expose their evil actions.

Verse 19, *“And when evening came they went out of the city.”*²⁰ *As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.*²¹ *And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”*²² *And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.”*²³ *Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it*

will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ”

Jesus takes this recognition by Peter of the withered condition of the fig tree as an opportunity to speak to them about faith, and He tells them to believe and to not doubt. And He ends this exhortation with a promise.

Look again in verse 24. This is a wonderful promise in God's Word. It says this. *“Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it. And it will be yours. ”* It's a great promise, isn't it? It's one of those promises you probably would put on your refrigerator and memorize and stand on. Right?

But like any promise in God's Word, it's very important that you and I don't take this promise out of context and try to hang onto it apart from the rest of God's Word, which I'm here to tell you, many people have done over the years. Many people have essentially looked at this promise in verse 24, and they believe that what Jesus is telling them is that if you pray hard enough and believe with all your heart, then God is obligated to respond to your faith, no matter what you've asked, because what they believe what they're being told here is you pray with enough faith, it's yours.

And if you only were to understand or read this single verse, as it relates to the promise of answered prayer, you might come away with that same conclusion. The problem is we can't do that. There are many other biblical passages that speak into these things that give us a more rounded understanding of what it means. One of them is 1 John 5:14. Let me put it on the screen for you. It says,

1 John 5:14 (ESV)

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, (God) that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Now, this is one of those passages people don't like to join with the promise in Mark chapter 11. They don't like to talk about it. He says, I don't want to think about that right now. I just want to put focus on the fact that God says, whatever you believe in without doubt, that God will give you. But John reminds us here that our prayers need to be according to the will of God. And he goes as far as to infer to us in this passage that He is not obligated to even hear a prayer that is outside of His will, let alone respond to it.

He's not, now that doesn't mean He doesn't hear it. I'm just saying He's not obligated. John says, this is the confidence we have, that when we pray according to His will, He hears us. And I'll be honest with you, I'm glad God doesn't give us everything we ask for. Most of us would probably be dead because somebody else would have prayed for our demise. People would be dropping like flies. You've probably prayed a couple of those prayers with faith. Aren't you glad now looking back that God didn't respond.

People, we don't look at faith as this supernatural coin. If we just put enough of it in the vending machine and hit the button out comes our prize. We don't think of it that way because that's not faith in God. That's faith in faith. We put our faith in God that He is going to do what's best even if we think we know what He ought to do but aren't really sure. And that's why we pray at the end of our prayers, Lord, not as I will, but your will be done. Right?

Now, before we move on, let me add something here about that passage we put up just a moment ago. Can we put that up one more time? 1 John 5:14.

1 John 5:14 (ESV)

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

This is the confidence that we have. What that passage does not say is that you have to know God's secret plan or hidden will somehow before you can pray and be effective in your prayer life. Listen, when we read the Bible, just about everywhere we turn we find God's will. It's not hidden. It's right there in the Scriptures.

To pray God's will or to pray according to His will is not some big mysterious thing. It's just, it's there, it's all throughout the Scriptures. And we tend to leapfrog, I've found, as believers over what God has revealed in the Bible to the things that God has not revealed, and then we get really upset and frustrated because we can't figure those things out.

People will say to me, pastor Paul, I just want to know what God's will is. Well, you know what it's not hard to know God's will. The Bible says, love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind. That's His will. But you see, we want to leapfrog over that. The Bible also says, love your neighbor as yourself. That's His will, right? But we just oh, I know all that stuff.

I want to know these specific little details about next Friday at 4 p.m. or whatever, and we're moving past what is just clearly revealed as the will of God

in Scripture so that we can zero in on these other things. So, what does it mean then to pray according to God's will? I think it just basically means to pray according to His Word.

Have you ever just read the Scripture and stopped every paragraph or so, and just prayed what you read? I think that's a marvelous exercise in learning to pray God's will. You might open your Bible to the Psalms, and you might read the first verse. *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners."*

Boy, I've got something to pray about right there, don't I? Lord, keep me from the counsel of those whose heart is not with you, and may I never stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers but Lord, let my delight always be in you because it goes on to say, *"but his delight is in the law of the LORD."*

Just to begin to pray. This is God's will. You see, I just read a couple of verses here in the Psalms and I've already uncovered God's will. And as we begin to pray it I know that I'm praying in a way that is very powerful and effective because I'm praying according to His will. You know what I mean? So it's a great exercise. I would encourage you to do that whenever you can.

Verse 25, look in your Bible, *"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."*

Oh, here's another thing related to the will of God and being able to pray and not have any hindrances to your prayers. What does Jesus say? He says, hey, if you're praying and you're thinking for a moment about somebody who has hurt you, or offended you, or said something mean about you, or talked about you to the boss and said something untrue and got you in trouble, or some family member that just seems to have it out for you, or whatever, whatever, whatever and you think about that and you're reminded of it Jesus says forgive them before you keep praying, lest there be a hindrance to your prayer and your Father in heaven not forgive you your trespasses.

By the way, a trespass is not a sin of ignorance. It's a sin of knowledge. It's stepping over a known barrier. And by the way, some of you have a verse 26 in your Bible. If you have a NASB or a New King James, you have verse 26 that says, *"But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

Which is just a negative tense of the positive tense given to us in verse 25 and the reason you guys who are reading along with me in the ESV, don't see that verse in your Bible is because it does not appear in some of the oldest Greek manuscripts. But what Jesus is talking about here is removing obstacles to the life of God and prayer and things being answered.

What's the first thing He says? What's the first obstacle we need to remove? Remove the obstacle of unbelief. So, when Jesus is remarking, or the men are going, wow, look at this tree that you cursed it's withered from the root.

He says, hey, the first thing that you need to do, remove the obstacle of unbelief. Pray. When you pray, believe, pray with faith, pray believing. But then the second thing about removing obstacles is make sure that you forgive, right? Forgive and remove that obstacle. When you're praying, the last thing you and I want is something standing in the way of our prayer. Jesus is making it very clear for us here that there are things can stand in the way of our prayers, unbelief and unforgiveness, and they're huge. It's interesting, when people aren't getting ready answers to prayer, they instantly get angry at God.

Or, if not angry, frustrated. And if not frustrated, annoyed. God, I prayed, you know. And people will sometimes say to me, pastor Paul, I prayed about this, prayed about it, and nothing happened. Nothing. As if it's all God's fault. What's interesting is that people never, they never seem to say, gee, I wonder if I've created some obstacles in my prayer life that have kept that answer from showing up. I wonder if maybe that was me. Maybe I've got unbelief in my heart, or maybe I have harbored unforgiveness toward my brother or my sister who hurt me.

Maybe that's what's going on. Huh. Maybe I need to go back and deal with those issues and then come back to the place of prayer. Isn't that funny that we Christians rarely, if ever, do that? We're always just railing at God. God, I've been praying, and you haven't been answering. Jesus is telling us here about some things that stand in the way of those prayers being answered. Now before we cover the last few verses here in the chapter, let me make one final point about this passage that we're looking at here.

Jesus says in verse 25 that you and I need to forgive others otherwise we're not going to be forgiven of our trespasses. But can I help you with that a little bit? Because some of you are reading that wrong. You're interpreting it in your brain wrong. And what you're hearing Jesus say is, unless you forgive other people, you won't be forgiven, and therefore the promise of heaven for you is nullified. That's what it says to some of you and I know that because I've had people

come up to me and ask me, looking at passages like this, I'll say well I've obviously got to forgive other people or God's not going to forgive me, and if God doesn't forgive me then I guess I'm not going to heaven.

People, can I just tell you that is not what Jesus is saying here in this passage and let me begin by reiterating something about how you get to heaven. Forgiveness of sins, the promise of heaven and eternal life that goes with it comes to you and I one way, and that is by faith when we believe what Jesus did for us on the cross in His work that was completed there for you and I, when He bore our sins. That is how you are saved. Okay? What Jesus is talking about here is not something that would threaten your eternal salvation.

He's talking about it would, how it would threaten your relationship with God and create a breach in that relationship so that your prayers are going to be hindered. I've likened this so many times with you guys with the idea of a married couple when they violate some idea of what it means to love, honor, respect, and so forth, one another. And believe me, in 38 plus years, I've done it many times with Sue, I've said things or done things that have hurt her sometimes deeply.

And when that happens, there's a breach in our relationship and the closeness and the intimacy that God intended marriage to be. But I want you to notice something. When I did those things against my wife, we suddenly weren't divorced. It wasn't like we're no longer husband and wife. That's the way people think of unforgiveness or committing some sin in their relationship with God. They think they commit a sin and suddenly they're no longer a child of God. Absolutely not. Sin doesn't make you less of a child of God.

It just makes you a born-again sinner. Just like when I do something and say something that somehow hurts my wife or offends my wife, it doesn't make me any less her husband. But again, it puts a wedge between us relationally and it's going to be a hindrance. It's going to be an obstacle until it gets removed. And the way it gets removed is I go to my wife and I say, Susie, that was awful of me to say that. I am so sorry, would you forgive me? And when she says, I forgive you. Now, the obstacle has been removed, right?

And the flow of intimacy, which God intended between a husband and a wife can now resume unhindered because that obstacle has been taken out of the way. It's the same thing in your walk with God. Listen, as Christians, we can be saved, born-again, going to heaven, and have all kinds of obstacles that are standing in the way of our intimacy with God and our relationship to Him. And until those things are moved away, gotten out of the way through repentance

and forgiveness, whether we're forgiving others or needing forgiveness from God for something we've done, there's going to be an obstacle in your path, and it doesn't mean you're not saved. It just means there's an obstacle that needs to be taken care of and your prayer life is going to stink. Pretty much.

And you're it's not going to be satisfying, and you know your walk with God is going to feel very stale, very lifeless, till you get those things taken care of, those your obstacles. I'm just not feeling intimacy with God. It's not like it's God's fault. He's not pouting off in a corner somewhere. He's waiting. He's waiting for you and I to return with all of our hearts. Say, Lord, whatever, I know there are things that I have done. I know that I've done things that have interrupted the intimacy that you and I should otherwise be having in our relationship.

And I confess to you this and even pray, Lord, show me areas if I have, if I've carried unforgiveness for a brother or a sister. If so, make me aware that I can bring that to the throne of grace and I can even just forgive that person, just let it go.

Verse 27. We'll finish the chapter here. *"And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him,²⁸ and they said to him, 'By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?'"²⁹ Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things."* In other words, did John just think it up to go and baptize people or was he sent from God? That's what He's asking.

"³⁰ Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."³¹ And they discussed it with one another, saying, (okay, here) "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"³² But shall we say, 'From man'?" (it says)—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.³³ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Don't you wish you could come up with answers like that when people are messing with you? I come up with all the best responses, about 4 hours later. When there's nobody around and I'm like laying in bed and it's dark and I think if I just would have said...I'd have had him. I never come up with stuff like that. The religious leaders wanted to know who had given Jesus His authority and I'm sure they're probably talking about Him going into the temple and chasing everybody out and putting a damper in their money-making efforts.

And you've got to love how Jesus answers this with a question of His own, but also a promise. Hey, you answer this and I'll answer you. And they discussed it and realized that they couldn't answer or wouldn't answer, and so, Jesus said, fine, you're not willing to be upfront. An honest, sincere exchange of ideas and understanding then I will withhold myself from you as well. And what Jesus is making very clear here to you and I, is that there are people from time to time who ask us questions about God, about the Bible, about church, about stuff, and they don't care about the answer.

They aren't interested really in the answer. They may be interested in arguing. They may very well be interested in making you look dumb, but they're not interested in truth. And Jesus had the discernment to know how to shortchange this sort of a discussion and to expose the fact that they weren't interested in truth. But this is an important thing for us to see and understand because these people still exist, by the way.

Every once in a while, I will get an email or a question from somebody and it becomes readily apparent that they're not really interested in the answer. They're not really asking because they want to know.

They're asking because they want to just, they want you to join with them in the debate process or again, they want to bring out their information so you look stupid or whatever the case might be. And it's important that you and I discern that because you see the person who really cares about the truth, they're worth talking to. It's worth spending your time, is probably a better way for me to say that, for you to share and talk about those things, but the person who is not interested in truth, it doesn't matter what you say, they're not going to be convinced anyway.

Had Jesus told them, had He just come out and answered their question and said, all right, I'll tell you. My authority comes from God. They would have gone, Pfft, does not. Right? It's not like they would have gone, Oh, okay, well in that case, we're going to change this whole thing up. They didn't care. They didn't care about the answer. They were just causing problems. Right? And people do that.

It's important for you and I to have the discernment that is necessary when we're talking to people to know and understand, does this person really care about knowing the truth or do they want to just argue for the sake of arguing? Because we're told to be careful where we throw our pearls because there are those who cannot appreciate the things that we say. Anyway, we're going to stop there. We'll pick it up in chapter 12 next time. Let's go ahead and stand together.