



Last week we saw Jesus' dramatic arrival in Jerusalem with crowds shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!", proclaiming him as God's chosen King and Saviour - and yet he arrived on a humble donkey. His arrival in full view of the whole city begs the question: "what is he going to do next?"

Matthew 21:10-22 gives us two related incidents which tell us more about what Jesus' kingdom and Jesus' kingship is like.

Firstly, Jesus condemns empty religion. He clears the temple courts of all the merchants and pilgrims gathered there. He says the temple is no longer a "house of prayer" (v13) - a place to meet with God and have a relationship with him. Instead it is a "den of robbers" (v13) - somewhere that evil-doers come to in order to feel safe. He condemns their religion as being empty and without faith, and points to himself as God's promised Rescuer King. He then curses a fig tree as an illustration of his judgment on the temple religion: the tree was leafy but without fruit, just as the Jewish leaders had lots of religious activities they could show off, but no spiritual fruit borne of a living faith.

Secondly, Jesus commends prayerful faith. In contrast to the empty religion of the Jewish leaders, Jesus gives an exaggerated example of how true faith is demonstrated. True faith focuses on him (v16), has

supernatural power (v21), and gives birth to prayer (v21-22). By contrast, the religion of the Jewish leaders focuses on rituals, has no power, and is self-reliant rather than prayerful.

Questions for your group

(questions in brackets are if your group needs more time on understanding before applying the passage):

Understanding

- (Why does Jesus clear out the temple?)
- (Why does Jesus curse the fig tree? What is he teaching us?)
- How does the cursing of the fig tree relate to the clearing of the temple?

Application

- Jesus condemns the empty religion of the Jewish leaders. In what ways could we be closer to them than we think? What would it look like to exercise prayerful faith instead?
- John Calvin described prayer as "the chief exercise of faith". Why is prayer so important to faith? What does it mean to have a prayerful faith?
- Where are we most self-reliant in our lives
 - a) as individuals, and
 - b) as a church? What would it take to make us more prayerful and dependent on God?