

Beloved saints, as we enter this week before Passover, I feel such a prompting from the Holy Spirit to re-release this word that I first published in September 2005. I sense that zeal to cleanse his Father's house is once again pulsing through the Slain lamb's veins

Mal 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*

Do You Want to live in the House of Dates or Figs?

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There is profound change coming to the church of Jesus Christ in these days. The Lord is coming to His temple! I would like to share some insights from Mark 11 in which Jesus comes into Jerusalem. Described in this chapter are three days in the journey of Jesus. On the first day He did not enter Jerusalem but went to the Mount of Olives:

Mar 11:1 And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples,

We have been crying out as the Church for the presence of God in our midst and I want to say to you that Jesus has 'come nigh', He is at the very door. We are on the brink of experiencing His presence as never before. However, it is important to note the route of His journey to us, His Church. He stops at the Mount of Olives, which is representative of the place which is the source of the anointing, the place of olives which, being pressed, release the oil of the anointing. This was one of His favorite places, from which He looked over Jerusalem and prayed for her. Here we are told there are two towns or two houses, Bethphage, meaning 'the House of Figs' and Bethany, 'the House of Dates'. Let us look deeper into Bethany first.

'House of Dates' in itself does not seem to speak of anything in particular, until we remember that when David brought the ark of the covenant back into Jerusalem (1 Chron 16:3), he gave everyone a date-cake, a loaf of bread and a raisin-cake (or flagon of wine, depending on the translation.)

This Hebrew word translated 'date-cake' is only used twice in the Word and actually means 'a measured portion, a good piece'. So what is this date-cake a type or shadow of? Is this not what Mary chose, the good portion, when she sat at Jesus' feet and received a continual revelation of who He was? The 'good portion' is abiding in His presence, before His face. To confirm this, Bethany, 'the house of dates', was where Mary lived, and she received the Lord's seal of approval when He said, "she has chosen the good portion and it will not be taken from

her". Bethany represents those who develop an intimate worship relationship with their Bridegroom.

Now let us look at Bethphage, the House of Figs. The word for 'fig' means 'torpid, crude or unripe'. I looked up 'torpid' and discovered it means 'having lost motion or power of exertion and feeling; dull, stupid, sluggish, inactive' and there was an addition in brackets which said 'unrepentant sinners remain in a state of torpid security!'. So Bethphage is a house where there is little sign of life, no movement or passion and certainly no intimacy! We will gain further insight into this House as we go along but for now let us concentrate on what Jesus dealt with as He surveyed these two towns from the Mount of Olives.

Mar 11:2 And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring *him*. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met; and they loosed him.

Before Jesus enters Jerusalem, He issues a command to loose a colt! Something is bound and it has to be loosed before He can move on to fulfill God's appointments. He could easily have walked into Jerusalem but there was a word to be fulfilled that had been prophesied many years before! God can continue to unfold His plan without you BUT there is a prophetic word that was spoken over you many years ago and it must be fulfilled. He wants to use you to carry His purposes into Jerusalem! This colt had never been ridden by man, but it was tied up with a rope. There are many of God's people who have never been used by man for his purposes or fleshly agendas, we have been waiting for the King's call because we have a sense of destiny within us, we are set-apart for His purposes. Yet we stand bound, tied up in this place of waiting for God's appointed time of release into what was written before the foundation of the world for our lives. Any attempt to free ourselves has proved fruitless and we have had to wait for the command to come from Jesus Himself. Joseph found himself in the same place. He was in prison through no fault of his own for many years and the Word of the Lord tried and tested him while he was imprisoned. He tried to open a door for release himself by asking the butler and baker to put in a good word for him when they left the prison, but it came to nothing. He remained in that place for another two years before the command came from the throne-room to release him. How he must have questioned the purpose of his extended stay! I believe the answer is found in psalm 105:19-22

Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; *even* the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his elders wisdom.

God had given him a promise and the preparation time was for the purpose of being tried and refined to produce a vessel fit to hold the fulfillment of the promise. This included being brought to a place of authority to wage warfare, binding principalities and powers and being schooled in the wisdom of God and not man. Joseph was hoping that the words of praise from

the ex-inmates in the right ear would open the door. He was engineering or trying to manipulate his advancement in God's plans for him. He still hadn't come to the place of understanding that only God opens doors that no man can shut! So two more years of training by the Spirit were necessary. It is one thing to be placed in a position of authority but quite another to rule in the spirit of righteousness and justice, free from the bribes and manipulations of men. We see from Joseph's subsequent handling of his brothers that the prison time had served its purpose well. He was devoid of bitterness and anger but understood that even the hard and ugly things which strike our lives become tools in the Lord's hand to fashion a weapon fit for its purpose!

Back to Mark 11 - the colt was discovered tied up outside the door at the place where two ways meet. Is this where you stand, bound outside the door to your destiny? You can see the door, have some idea what is beyond it but have been unable to enter it. People have come past you and gone in and yet you can only stand and wait. The significant thing is that you stand at the place where two ways meet -and you have a choice to make. Will you go your own way and follow your own desires or will you die to self and yield to the one who looses you and be led to the feet of Jesus to be used for His purpose and pleasure. This waiting time is for you to contemplate the cost of either path. The path to Jesus 'feet leads you to the place of pressing, of dying to self to bring forth His life, to the Mount of Olives. Paul said:

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death works in us, but life in you." (2 Cor 4:11)

This path is the path of death to self which leads to life. It is the path which will bring persecution and hardship for the sake of the gospel and the greatness of the power that comes forth from our earthen vessels will be seen to be of God. It is the path where one does not preach with persuasive words of men's wisdom but in a demonstration of the Spirit and power. It is not the popular path but the narrow way where one is called to die to one's reputation with the establishment of man and choose rather the approval of God. It is the path where you understand that anything you suffer in His Name causes the life of God to be released to others. The reason He has sent a command to loose you is because He has need of you!

The other way is the way of self, the way of comfort, the path where men will applaud your achievements. It is the path that leads to the best seats in the synagogues and position and power over men but it is also the way that leads to death

(Pro 16:25) There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

This path runs to and from Bethphage, House of Figs, where there is no passion for Jesus, because this house has been eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, where men clean the outside of the cup but the inside is full of dead men's bones; where long prayers are made to cover up the robbing of widow's houses. This is the House of Religion where one is made aware of one's nakedness and only participation in the various 'fig leaves' offered makes

one feel acceptable in God's sight. "Sign up for this course, participate in that group" is the cry that goes forth. There are many programs run in this house and much activity and busyness but little sign of life. There is a numbness, like a limb where the circulation has been cut off but it continues to walk on relentlessly in spite of the lack of feeling.

Jesus is presently standing on the Mount of Olives, surveying His people and weighing their hearts. It is almost a sheep and goats scenario and only He can see into the heart. Men judge by the outward appearance. This is why the Word does not tell us which House the colt was tied up at. There are colts with 'Bethany' hearts tied up and trapped at Bethphage and there are those who honor the Lord with their lips but their hearts are far from Him, going through the motions at Bethany. If we were to judge by the outward appearance we would choose the wrong candidates as vessels fit to carry the Lord's presence. Only Jesus knows those who are fully His but the day of loosing is coming and men will exclaim as in the Song of Solomon:

(Son 3:6) Who *is* this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

This is an exclamation of surprise as if it is someone unexpected, not a big name preacher or a world-famous evangelist - no, God is going to use the weak and the foolish and the despised things, the nameless and the faceless ones who have been patiently waiting and submitting to refinement after refinement in preparation of being a vessel of honor.

Mary was also a 'colt' who was released at God's appointed time to carry Jesus and bring Him forth in the earth. She took the path of death to self, death to her reputation and the approval of man. Her response was:

(Luk 1:38) Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.

She considered it a blessing to be persecuted for Jesus' sake. She looked beyond her own comfort to the bigger picture:

(Luk 1:54) He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

She did not consider her suffering to be compared to the glory that was about to be revealed through her. This is the attitude the Spirit of God is wanting to bring forth in us. He is looking for donkeys, humble and willing to only be vessels which carry Jesus' manifest presence into the earth but take no glory for themselves. No-one took any notice of the donkey - in fact they could hardly see it because it was covered with garments and was small. No-one shouted 'how wonderful this little donkey is, what a stunning entrance - impeccable delivery of God's message to us!' They only saw Jesus, only glorified Him. If we do not put to death the desire for the praise and approval of man that lurks within our hearts, we will find ourselves offended and bitter when we are not acknowledged or noticed as being the ones who have brought about the arrival of His manifest presence. In fact I very much doubt God will use a

colt who is continuously looking back towards Bethphage and the compliments of men! The need for men's approval comes from having been fed in the House of Figs where rejection is a very real prospect if one does not behave as expected. Sadly, one comes under a spirit that makes one a slave again to fear. Romans eight tells us that this is not the spirit that God has given; Through Him we can cry 'Abba Father!' - we are accepted in the Beloved.

(Mar 11:11) And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

So Jesus came into the temple, observed everything that was going on and then left. Interestingly, He didn't deal with the things that offended Him immediately.

Sometimes we can mistake the Lord's presence at our meetings for His approval of what is happening at them.

This, however, is not the case in this season. We are in the time of Revelation 11:1

(Rev 11:1) And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

The temple of God, His Body, is being measured and those that are worshipping are being weighed. This is a time, Beloved, to be very sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit of sin in our lives. It is not the time to put off dealing with issues until later. Your future is dependant on you aligning yourself with His purposes fully in this day - 'not my will but thine be done!'

We are told that once Jesus had surveyed the goings-on in the temple, He went to spend the night at Bethany. Although He may visit our meetings, He dwells with those who have chosen the good portion of intimacy with Him. Church, we need habitation, not visitation and the only way to get Him to stay is to deal with sin and worship Him in intimacy. He will not come and dwell in our programs or courses. He dwells with those who are of a humble heart:

(Psa 34:18) The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of a contrite spirit (crushed with sorrow for sin)AMP.

He and the Father dwell with those who keep His Word:

Joh 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, If a man loves Me, he will keep My Word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

He will visit but He will not stay if the temple needs cleaning out!

After a night of being refreshed by the love of His friends at Bethany, Jesus sets out on His Father's business. His first appointment is with the fig tree. This had nothing to do with his natural appetite. Jesus is hungry for worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. He dealt with the fig tree after looking at the state of things in the temple. Why does He react so angrily? The fig tree represents a system of religion which has developed from eating fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fig tree was covered in leaves, the very leaf Adam used to try and hide his nakedness. There was nothing nourishing on it but it gave the appearance of being healthy and attractive and full of life. This is exactly what Jesus saw in the temple the previous day. There was much activity and seemingly spiritual behavior going on. Yet these were only fig leaves to give an appearance of godliness. Programs and organization often are attempts to hide a feeling of nakedness and having nothing to offer. The Church has fallen into the trap of believing that the more meetings and courses on offer, the more spiritual we are becoming. However it is a spirit of fear that is behind all the religious programs and plans and frenzied activity; fear of not being acceptable to God; fear of being seen to be naked; fear of no-one coming to the meetings; fear of falling short of God's requirement. It is important to realize, Beloved, that the occurrence of these things is not only seen on the outside in the organized church, but on the inside, in our hearts. This is the place where we first become vulnerable to the doctrines of a religious spirit. We not only have to come out from a system of religion - the system of religion has to come out of us!

Jesus was disturbed by what He saw in His Father's house - organization and moneychangers, the sale of doves. Moneychangers were those who made sure that people from far-off places had the right currency to offer, only then was their offering of worship acceptable. The poor could not bring their own doves because invariably there would be found something wrong with them; only doves sold at the temple were acceptable currency for them to offer. God's righteous requirements were turned into a money-making exercise. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil produces a religious system of works to be acceptable to God. Those who come with their gifts to offer to the Lord are only allowed to exercise them in officially determined ways eg. only church-ordained prayer meetings under the control of appointed leaders. Heaven forbid anyone should start a meeting at home without the official sanction of the Pharisees!

When Jesus declared that the fig tree would no longer bear fruit, He was addressing Adam's sin and resulting fig-leaf religion, the system that laid heavy loads on men's backs and did not lift a finger to help them carry them. He proclaimed an end to this fruitless system and then went into the temple and began clearing it out.

(Mar 11:15) And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry *any* vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.

He overthrew and brought down every demonic table and seat in the temple; every area in which the religious spirit had influence, was cleansed. In this time, Jesus is coming to cleanse His temple. As Malachi 3 tells us, He is coming as a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap to deal with His priests. Everything that is of a religious spirit in us is to be overthrown and pulled down, that we may offer offerings in righteousness. Any doctrine or belief-system that has been taught us by a religious spirit needs to be dismantled and the Word of Truth is coming to do it in us. He is going to turn things upside down within us and drive out all that is of man and works. This is what the day of visitation will be like. It will not be a day of comfort and pleasant sensations of His presence. He is coming to challenge the rituals we have been going through for years, thinking this is what God requires of His people. Church as we know it is never going to be the same again and there are going to be some Pharisees who are very upset!

Jesus said that they had turned the temple into a den of thieves. This is a house indwelt by thieves who are the sons of the chief thief - their father, the devil - he who comes to steal, kill and destroy. It is a counterfeit, a system of religion set up in the place that should be a House of prayer. It robs people of a chance to experience the kingdom of God, which consists of righteousness, peace and joy. This is because there is always one more requirement to get to a place of being acceptable, one more course, one more meeting. The people of God are weary and heavy-laden and they need rest. The yoke of Jesus is easy and light - worship Him in spirit and in truth. The robe of righteousness purchased by the precious Blood is the only requirement which makes us acceptable to God.

It is interesting to note that the fig tree was cursed and the temple cleansed on the second day of His visit to Jerusalem; yet only on the third day was the evidence of this cleansing work seen in the fig tree which withered from the root up. Let this be an encouragement to you. Sometimes we deal with areas in our lives, make prophetic declarations, repent and re-consecrate ourselves yet we see no outward fruit immediately. Don't question that the work has been done. Rejoice in faith because on the third day, all that has been cut off will become apparent. The root starts to wither underground where no-one can see so it seems that our efforts have been ineffective - not so! Hosea 6:1-3 describes a process which takes place once we have repented and are wholehearted toward the Lord:

Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: **in the third day** he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter *and* former rain unto the earth.

Only on the third day are the results of the work of the second day seen. Don't waste time trying to deal with all the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The enemy will keep you busy forever, in what is another form of the religion of works. Deal with the root and the fruit will wither and fall off on its own.

There are two houses, two trees, two ways. There is one colt, waiting for its appointment with destiny, at a crossroads. There is one temple, which needs cleansing. There is one Lord, Who is coming as a refiner's fire. John the Baptist described Him like this:

(Luk 3:16) he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

Let us choose the good portion of sitting at His feet; choose to eat of the tree of Life and by so doing, choose the path which is narrow but leads to life. Let us choose the fear of God over the fear of man. Let us allow the Holy Spirit free access to every area of our temples and joyfully submit to His purging fire, knowing that as we do, there is a glorious afterward as all evidence of the root of religion withers up and the way is opened for the manifest presence of Jesus to come forth through our lives.