

“Untie the Colt” (Mark 11:1-10)

It's about 22 years ago, I was in Japan. At my second year as a pastor, I started to serve one small church in the country side. One Sunday in summer, after everyone has gone home, I noticed the electric fans were still on in the meeting room, all the lights were still on. As I turned them off one by one, I was feeling really frustrated.

At one occasion, I talked it over with one pastor who is my senior. He asked me “What is the problem?” I answered, “Well, it is the waste of electricity.” “Then you can turn them off.” “But.....” “What is the problem?”

On my way home, as I drove my car, the phrase “What is the problem” resounded in my head. I knew the problem was my pride. I am a pastor. Why should I turn off all the light? I didn't want to do that because of my pride. But I had to do it, so I did it, and I felt so annoyed.

In those days, I used to think like that. But just some years ago I realized that actually the real problem was even deeper. There was something that made me think and feel like that. That was “fear”.

In those days I felt I was pastor in name only. Actually I didn't know what to do. I felt, “If I show my inability, they might think I am disqualified as a pastor.” I feared nobody accept me as their pastor. By taking pride, unconsciously I tried to erase my feelings of fear from my mind. By acting kind of arrogantly, I tried to believe I was respected. So I was deceiving myself. But turning off fans and lights made me think no one respected me. That made me very uncomfortable.

No matter how hard I tried to overcome the pride, I was not successful. For a while it went well, but it came out in different forms at different occasions. Finally, I realized it came from the deeper issue, my fear. I accepted the fact that I was afraid, and brought the matter before God so that He can solve the problems in me. It took me time and effort. But when I was finally released, I became able to live as my true self. God's love, power and peace have become reality in much deeper inside of me. And I can more freely serve others.

Today we will start the new series, “Being Set Free.”

Perhaps many of you have the experience like you felt stuck in a season of your life or you hit a wall at one point or another. God invites us to be set free, to know who we are and not pretend to be like somebody else. God desires to communicate to us his true sweetness and love. He longs for us that we may fully

come to know real peace and rest in him. And in order for us to get there, he will take away false layers and unhealthy attachments inside of us.

So, let me invite you to take this journey of “Being Set Free.” And we will build a church that will transform not only our generation but also the generations that will follow.

1. A Colt

Mark 11:1-10

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "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!"

Just now, we read about the colt. In order to show that Jesus is the promised king, the colt was used. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, riding on the colt, people shouted, praising and welcoming him “Hosanna!” In order for Jesus to receive the praise, the colt was used.

There was one essential thing in order for the colt to be used. That was to untie the colt. The colt was tied there. Jesus couldn't ride on it to enter Jerusalem, if it was still tied. The colt had to be untied. It had to be set free.

God is calling each one of us for his glory. He will use us so that His Will be done on this earth. In order to follow the Word of God, live out the Word of God, we need to be set free.

This colt had the ability to walk, bringing Jesus on its back. But if it was still tied, it couldn't have walked into Jerusalem, bringing Jesus on its back. We are the same. We are saved and received the Holy Spirit. So we have the power to live the Word of God. Since we were born again, we are no longer the slave of sin. We are the beloved children of God, the salt of the earth and light of the world. But, while we are tied, bound, we are not able to freely live out the Word. We need to be set free so that we will be able to actively live out God's will.

Today and next Sunday, we will study the whole chapter of Mark 11. So they will be one message together. And this will be a kind of introduction for this series. We will look at that God will set us free so that He can show his glory through us. We are bound by so many things although we may not be aware of it. As we are freed from these bondages, we become able to freely live out the Word of God.

2. Disciples

Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" (2-3)

Let's imagine how the disciples felt when Jesus told them this. What would you think, if you were one of these disciples? I imagine I would think like this.

- Is there really a colt there?
- How do you know?
- You say "a colt", but there may be many of them and we may not know which one is the one you are talking about.
- For what?
- A donkey is an important possession. To bring it, how can I say "The Lord needs it."? It doesn't make any sense. They must think I am stealing the donkey. I would be in trouble.
- Why should I do such an unreasonable thing?
- Wait a minute, why those two? What about others? I didn't agree with it. First we must discuss this and decide.

- There are some colts right here as well. I can borrow it from here. It's more convenient.

Perhaps these thoughts all sounds reasonable. According to the common sense of this world, it may be natural to think like that. But, as long as they stay with these kind of ideas, the disciples couldn't have carried out Jesus' word.

In order for them to put Jesus' word into action, they had to be set free from the common sense of the world and human reason.

They accepted Jesus' word, and went out. Then what happened?

They went out and found the colt. They untie it. They told the people what Jesus told them to. Then what happened? They let them go with the colt. The disciples experienced the power of Jesus word, truth of his Word. They came to know that Jesus' word has power over the common sense of the world and human reason, and that his word is truth.

Not only that, but also one of the prophecies about the Messiah was fulfilled through them. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, riding on the colt, people blessed Jesus and praised him. So at that time, Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled. Not just they themselves experienced the power and the truth of His word, but the important prophesy about Messiah, which God promised long time ago was fulfilled. Without knowing, they were used for the fulfillment of God's prophesy.

3. The Fig Tree

12-14

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

20-21

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

Let's imagine again how disciples felt in this scene. How would you feel if you were there? What kind of ideas come to your mind? I think I would think like this.

- Jesus is quite hot-tempered. He made the fig tree withered just because it didn't have any fruit.
- Jesus not only blesses, but curses. How scary he is!
- I feel sorry for the fig tree. It didn't have any fruit because it was not the season for figs. So it is natural, but it was cursed and withered. So sorry for it.
- How can he do that? Jesus is selfish and oppressive.

What about you? I imagine perhaps many of you would think like this too.

How did these ideas come about? Why do we feel and think like that when we see this situation? It is because of our past experiences, including culture, tradition and education. Our viewpoints were cultivated by our experiences. These ideas and feelings are by-products of that. It also depends on our emotional maturity. A child looks at and understands things like a child. He cannot see things in the same way adults see. And he cannot respond to things like adults can. It is like a filter. We see, understand and perceive things through the filter. We do this habitually, unconsciously.

Now, this scene. Jesus was hungry. He saw the fig tree. But there was no fruit there. So he was angry. And because he was angry, he cursed the fig tree. By the past experiences, we see this scene like this.

You may feel sorry for the fig tree that was cursed and withered. You look at the fig tree through your filter, and you feel like that.

"How selfish Jesus is! He made the fig tree withered just because it doesn't have any fruit. He is oppressive. That's not fair!" Where does this kind of thought come from? You reflect your experience upon this scene and you have this kind of thought.

The Word of God is like a mirror. When we looked into it, we can see us.

Let's think about it. Did Jesus get angry as he couldn't find any fruit? "Well, but he cursed the fig tree. So he must be angry."

Jesus was hungry. He saw the fig tree. But there was no fruit there. So he was angry and cursed the fig tree. Our past experiences make us picture the scene like this.

Actually I don't have confidence if Jesus really cursed the fig tree because v.21 is Peter's word. That's his interpretation. And he said silly things sometimes,

then. What season was this? It wasn't the season for figs. Jesus didn't know it? I'm pretty sure he knew it very well. Then, why did he do that? He was hungry, and so he didn't care about the season? I don't think so. Jesus was trying to teach his disciples something through this.

Let's stop here for a while.

Some of you may think like this. "I don't want to misunderstand the Bible. So I must stop reading the Bible myself. I will just listen to the teaching of the pastor. It's hard for me to hear from God. I can't really understand the Bible. It's presumptuous for me to think I can have relationship with God who is the Word."

But unfortunately, this misses and obscures the main point. What we're talking about is not interpretation. Now we're dealing with the filters in us. The Word of God is like a mirror. When we looked into it, we can see us. It helps us to recognize what kind of filter we have.

For example, when we hear the word, "God the father," "the love of God the father", we unconsciously understand the word, based on how our own father related to us. A child who was abused by his father would picture God like his own father somewhere in his mind. Someone grew up in the circumstances where he was scolded if he didn't behave well before his father, or he couldn't receive snacks if he displeases his father, he feels God is also like that. Someone grew up thinking his father was having hard time because of him, his father was troubled and annoyed by him, he believes God also feels the same way about him. These are the filters in you. Now we're dealing with them.

No matter how correctly the word of God is explained, as long as we have the filters we cannot receive the Word as it says. We take it through the filters.

God wants to set us free from the filters. God can release you from the experiences which is preventing you from looking at God as he is, receiving the word as it says. God will nurture us to grow our emotional health so that we will be set free from undeveloped understanding and unbalanced actions. When we are set free, we will be able to hear the word and freely live out the word.

This fig tree didn't have any fruit. As it was useless, it was made withered. What do you think of this idea? Your experience may say, "Exactly!" Unless you do some activities and produce good results, you may feel you are useless. I used to follow this idea. The fig tree didn't bear fruit, so it was made withered. I also need to try hard so that I won't be made withered. It may be so at school, so

at work. It may be so even at home. But it's like revolution for me that it is not like that in the kingdom of God.

John 15:6 NASB

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

Why did the person, branch wither, dry up? Because it didn't abide in Jesus. It was not because it didn't bear fruit that it was thrown away and dried up. God prunes us so that we bear good fruit. I was confused with this, but they are two different things. It was not because it didn't bear fruit that it was cut off and withered. It withered because it was not connected with Jesus who is life. It is like a cut flower. It may be beautiful for a while, but it will wither eventually. Because it doesn't have roots, it cannot be connected with water, then it is going to wither. In the same way, if someone is not connected with Jesus who is life, he will wither. The withered branches are gathered and thrown into the fire. They are not cut off and thrown into fire because they are useless.

What matters is our relationship with Jesus. What matters is how we are connected with Jesus, not what kind of activities we did, nor what kind of results we produced.

Paul said this, "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phi 1:20). The fig tree withered, and that testified the power of Jesus' word. The fig tree would say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Let's summarize what we looked at today.

Certain experiences form a filter and it may hinder us from understanding the Word of God as it says. Through our experiences, certain way of thinking was formed, and it became a filter. And it twists the Word of God, make us receive the Word of God in different way. And while we are emotionally immature, our minds are covered by filters. When we are released from those filters, we will be able to freely live out the Word. God can set us free, and he will do it.

Next week, we will look at Mark 11 continuously, and study what kind of filters we have, from where God will set us free.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

1) Have you ever experienced the barrier of spiritual growth? What was it? If you have already break through that barrier, how did you do that?

2) Read Mark 11:2-3. If you were told this, what thought would come to your mind? What might hinder you from following this?

3) When disciples found the colt, they told the people as Jesus told them to and they let them go with the colt. Imagine how the disciples felt at that time.

4) Read Mark 11:12-14; 20-21. How did you feel about Jesus? Where is the feeling come from? What inside of you is causing this feeling?