

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 16: The King Enters Jerusalem -- Mark 11:1–33

Picture the road into Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives rises to the east. The city of David spreads below, its temple shining in the sun. Pilgrims have been arriving for Passover for days. Jesus sends two disciples ahead to a nearby village to fetch a colt that has never been ridden. He climbs onto it. The disciples throw their cloaks across its back. The crowd that has come up with Him spreads cloaks and leafy branches on the road. They shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (11:9–10).

The whole city is shaking by the time Jesus reaches the gates. He goes straight to the temple. Mark records the moment with restraint. “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” (11:11). The King has come to His house. He looks. He turns. He leaves. The reader is meant to feel the quiet ominousness of that pause. Something is about to happen.

The next morning, on the way back into the city, Jesus is hungry. He sees a fig tree in leaf and goes to find fruit. He finds none. He speaks a word over the tree. By the next morning it will have withered to the roots. Between those two encounters with the fig tree, He enters the temple, turns over the tables of the money-changers, drives out the buyers and sellers, refuses to let anyone carry anything through it, and says, “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” (11:17). The chief priests and the scribes hear, and they begin seeking a way to destroy Him.

Mark 11:1–33 is a chapter about the King taking His rightful place. He comes to His city. He inspects His temple. He acts in judgment against fruitlessness and corruption. He teaches His disciples about the kind of faith that is willing to ask God for what He has promised. And when the religious leaders demand to know by what authority He is doing all this, He answers them with a question about the authority of John the Baptist that they refuse to answer. The King has arrived. The question for every reader of Mark, and for every disciple sitting in this study, is whether we are recognizing His authority over us and bearing the fruit He has come looking for.

Group Discussion: The crowds welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna,” but most of them were imagining a different kind of kingdom than the one He had actually come to bring. Within a week some of those same voices would be calling for His crucifixion. Where do you see the same kind of “Hosanna today, Crucify Him tomorrow” instinct in our culture, in our own hearts, or in the way some forms of Christianity respond to the actual Christ of Scripture when He turns out to be more than they bargained for?

Personal Reflection: Jesus walked up to the fig tree expecting fruit and found only leaves. The Lord still walks toward His people looking for the fruit His own work in them should be producing. Where in your own life do you suspect there are leaves where there should be fruit, and what one specific kind of fruit (love, integrity, generosity, patience, witness, obedience) is the Lord asking to see in your life this season?

Read Mark 11:1–33

Study Questions

1. Jesus deliberately enters Jerusalem riding on a colt, and the crowds cry, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (11:7–10). Connecting this scene with Zechariah 9:9, Psalm 118:25–26, and Matthew 21:1–11, what is Jesus deliberately announcing about Himself as the long-promised King, and what kind of kingdom is He revealing by the way He comes?
2. The crowd welcomed Jesus with great noise and visible enthusiasm, but most did not understand the kingdom He was bringing. Where in your own walk are you tempted to “Hosanna”-style enthusiasm for Jesus on Sunday or in seasons of blessing, while quietly resisting Him when His kingdom turns out to be different from what you wanted, and what does steady, all-week loyalty to Him actually look like?
3. Jesus walks up to a fig tree in leaf, finds no fruit on it (though it was not the season for figs), and speaks a word that withers it (11:12–14, 20–21). What is Mark teaching by placing this judgment scene around the cleansing of the temple (the “Markan sandwich”), and how does the cursed fig tree picture God’s response to a religious people who carry the leaves of devotion without the fruit of faith?
4. Most disciples in long-tenured congregations look like the fig tree from a distance: full of religious foliage. The Lord still walks toward His people looking for fruit. What specific fruit is He looking for in your life this season (love, integrity, generosity, gentleness, witness, holiness, obedience), and what would it take to actually bear it?
5. In verses 15–19 Jesus enters the temple, drives out those buying and selling, overturns the tables of the money-changers, and quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11: “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.” What is Jesus teaching about His own authority over the temple, the proper purpose of God’s house, the danger of religious corruption, and the way this scene anticipates the church as God’s temple under the New Covenant (compare 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4–10)?
6. The church is now the temple of God, the place where His glory dwells in His people. Where in your own life or in the life of our congregation are you most prone to slip into the patterns Christ rebuked at the temple (commerce, distraction, lifelessness, exclusion of those Christ would welcome), and what would honest re-consecration of that area to Him look like this week?

7. When the disciples are amazed at the withered fig tree, Jesus says, “Have faith in God. 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. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (11:22–24). What is Jesus teaching about prayer and faith, what kind of prayer is He commending (and what kind is He not), and how does the call to forgive in verse 25 sit alongside this teaching?
8. Many believers struggle with prayer, either because they have prayed and not received what they asked, or because they suspect their faith is not strong enough. Where in your own prayer life have you grown thin or discouraged, what does Christ-shaped prayer actually look like (according to Mark 11:22–25 read in the context of the whole New Testament), and what would it look like to return to honest, persistent, forgiving prayer this week?
9. The chief priests, scribes, and elders confront Jesus in the temple and ask, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” (11:28). Jesus answers with a question about John the Baptist’s authority that they refuse to answer (11:29–33). What is Jesus revealing about His own authority, the way unbelief functions when it is exposed, the connection between recognizing John and recognizing Christ, and the way unrepentant religious leaders continue to operate today?
10. Mark 11 ends with religious leaders refusing to answer the question of whether John’s baptism was from heaven, because they are more concerned with how their answer will land politically than with what is actually true. Where in your own life are you in danger of refusing to answer a question Christ has put to you because the true answer would be costly, and what would it look like to give an honest answer this week, regardless of the cost?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Zechariah 9:9–10, the humble King coming on a donkey; Psalm 118:19–29, the stone the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone; Isaiah 56:6–8, the LORD’s house as a house of prayer for all the nations; 1 Peter 2:4–10, the church as a spiritual house and royal priesthood in Christ; Hebrews 10:19–25, the bold approach we now have to God through the new and living way Christ opened.