

# Mark 11

It's hard to believe we're almost done with Mark's gospel. It took us almost a whole year to get through John, but Mark takes noticeably less time when you're trying to read through the whole Bible in one year. This morning, we are going to focus on the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter, when Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem.

Notice how Jesus has been moving towards Jerusalem since he came out of the wilderness after being baptized by John. Now, he finally reaches Jerusalem. Let's see what happens next...

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## **11:1**

The area talked about here was very close to the city walls and was a place where Jesus was said to have frequently spent time. Bethany was the home town of Lazarus (and Mary and Martha). But since Mark does not mention them, we won't assume he wants us to call them to mind when the name of the town is given.

The sending of the two disciples is something that could mirror the sending of the spies from the wilderness wandering in the Old Testament, where Moses sent spies into the promised land to see what the inhabitants of the land were like. Two of the spies accurately reported what they saw, the others exaggerated the strength of the locals and failed to trust God's promise that they would inhabit the land.

## **11:2-3**

Commentators try to make sense of this command of Jesus. Without reading too much into what is written, I think it is safe to say that we can see Jesus being in control of the situation. He is from the north, visiting a city in the south... yet he operates as though the territory he is about to enter belongs to him. Guess what? It does.

## **11:4-6**

It turns out that Jesus knew what he was talking about. Everything goes just as he said it would. It's important that we keep this example of Jesus' sovereignty in mind when it looks like things do not go according to plan when he is arrested and killed. Sometimes the plan of God makes sense and looks like what God's plan should look like; sometimes God's plan is unintelligible; sometimes God's plan looks downright evil. This is where faith comes into play. And if faith can see the gruesome death of Jesus as the most significant victory over sin in human history, then it can also see God's hand on all the unpleasantness of life this side of the resurrection.

**11:7**

Jesus prepares to enter the city, appearing as a different kind of king.

**11:8-10**

We have already seen that Jesus is popular, with crowds following him everywhere he goes, sometimes numbering over 5,000. We just saw that everything is going according to plan (with the procurement of the colt). Now the two come together. God's plan is being accomplished as Jesus enters Jerusalem AND there's a large crowd ready for a coronation. It looks like Jesus will enter the city to rule it. Expectations are high. What will Jesus do?

**11:11**

Oh. Kind of disappointing. We don't know what Jesus did at the temple. We don't know what the reaction of the residents of Jerusalem was. Only that Jesus comes into Jerusalem, takes a look around, and then leaves with the twelve. It is almost as if Jesus is oblivious to the crowd hailing him as king. He doesn't speak to them. He doesn't perform a sign for them. He heals no one. No demons are driven out. This is new. This is different. This is uncomfortable. The "quickly" and "immediately" that have defined Mark's gospel up to this point have been replaced by Jesus going out to Bethany, waiting for the sun to rise. (Also interesting because Jesus has already done things under the cover of darkness: going out to pray, etc.)

**11:12-14**

These three verses are a set-up for Jesus' teaching in 11:20ff. Stay tuned!

**11:15**

The practice of buying and selling in the temple complex was carried out for practical reasons. Those on pilgrimage would not be able to bring the animals required for the sacrifices they were coming to Jerusalem to make. In providing these animals on-site, the residents of Jerusalem were providing a valuable service for the well-intentioned and faithful. There were also booths set-up in the temple complex where people could exchange their local (foreign) currency for the currency necessary to pay the temple tax. No doubt those who provided these services were looking out for their own interests and could make enough of a profit to make their ventures worthwhile. These are the people whose commerce Jesus upsets when he enters the temple.

**11:16**

Mark adds this detail that is missing in the other gospels. Not only did Jesus shut down commerce in the temple complex, he also shut down the proper operations of the temple. If no one could carry anything through the temple area, then no sacrifices could be made. Jesus effectively shut down the temple. The question is: WHY?

**11:17**

Jesus recognizes what the buyers and sellers have done to the temple. Notice that his condemnation cuts against all who are listening to him, it is not reserved for the sellers only. Robbers do more than take money from people; in Jesus' day, robbers would also rough their victims up and often either leave them for dead or actually commit murder in the process of the robbery. And while it is hard to overlook the damage that robbers could do to someone financially in a subsistence culture, the real harm that came from robbers was the violence they would do in the process of committing their crimes. The REAL danger of those in the temple complex isn't that they don't have a fair exchange rate, or are selling pigeons at too high a mark-up. The real danger is that they are harming those who would come to the temple. What is the real harm these people (buyers and sellers) are doing?

### **11:18**

Jesus' words are not popular. And those in power align themselves against Jesus, ironically, to do the work of a robber that Jesus has just likened them to.

### **11:19**

This is the second time Jesus will leave the city. The curtain closes on another scene.

### **11:20-21**

This scene begins where the previous scene began: with the fig tree, now withered, that Jesus had cursed. Not surprisingly, the role of Captain Obvious is played by Peter ☺ Jesus will now make an analogy...

### **11:22**

It is God who has worked through Jesus to wither the fig tree in one day.

### **11:23-24**

Jesus says, more or less, that we should expect to receive what we ask for in prayer. Christians have a hard time with this. We try to answer preemptively that... well... only if it is God's will. Or that if God doesn't give us what ask for that he knew better... or this... or that. But Jesus is not giving a comprehensive discourse on prayer. He makes several points here that guide us in our lives of prayer and could fundamentally alter how we view our communication with the Lord.

- It doesn't make sense to ask God for things you don't think he is going to give you.
- God has the ability to give you whatever you ask for.
- We should expect to receive that for which we pray.
- Faith is a necessary component of the kind of prayer Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.

### **11:25**

It's not the Lord's prayer, but it takes some of the principles from the Lord's prayer concerning forgiveness. It's interesting to me that right after Jesus gives a very encouraging, positive, view of the power of the one to whom we pray, he teaches his disciples to use this powerful tool to... forgive others.

### **11:27-28**

We are not told what the "these things" are that Jesus was doing that the scribes, chief priests and elders questioned him about. If we look at the context, Jesus has just given instructions about prayer and that his disciples should expect to receive what they ask for when they pray. If it's not this, they could have been questioning Jesus on his authority to drive out all who bought and sold and prevented anyone from carrying anything through the temple complex. In either case, Jesus is offering commentary, making promises and doing things that only God has the authority to do. This group of religious "experts" has every right to wonder why Jesus is doing what only God has the authority to do.

### **11:29-32**

Jesus answers in good apologetic fashion: with a question. The reader knows that John's baptism was from heaven and that John did things that only God had the authority to do (forgiveness of sins). And yet, he did them. Now, if John had authority from God to forgive sins as the forerunner of Christ (and would therefore be considered a true prophet) and he went on to identify Jesus as the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, then Jesus (as the "greater one") would have authority given to him to do all that he is doing. If this group of men does not believe that John's baptism was from heaven, but rather was something he devised on his own, then they would be able to maintain that Jesus did not have the authority to do what he was doing BUT they would also have to deal with a large group of people who believed that John was a true prophet. They don't have the guts to do that.

### **11:33**

Jesus will not answer them as they would not answer him... largely for the same reason. The scribes, chief priests and elders were afraid of what the crowd would do to them and how they would suffer (a loss of influence, respect, etc) if they denied John. So they do not answer. Jesus knows that if he answers their question he will suffer at their hands (which he will do eventually... just not yet). In pinning his opponents into a corner Jesus only delays what is coming.