

## DAY 7: O JERUSALEM

Mark 11:1-25

**JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM (MARK 11:1-11)** Mark now begins his record of the last week of Jesus' life; the events of chapters 11–16 occurred in that week which we now call Easter week. Jesus and His disciples are approaching Jerusalem from the east. From the Mount of Olives Jesus sends two disciples "*into the village in front of you*" to fetch a colt for Him to ride. "*Colt*" can mean either a young horse or donkey; donkeys were (and still are) more common in Israel. The details Mark gives us highlight Jesus' precise foreknowledge and command of the situation. A colt, according to Zechariah 9:9 and Genesis 49:11, would be the mount of the Messiah; Jesus knew where to find it and what to say to quell any opposition to taking it. His ability to ride an unbroken animal is also notable. Everything happens exactly as the prophets predicted in Zechariah 9:9: "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*"

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem is traditionally known as the Triumphal Entry. The spreading of cloaks and branches before Jesus recalls the recognition of a king long ago. The shouts of "*Hosanna*" (literally, *Save, I pray*) are an expression of praise thought to be an acclamation of devout Hebrews during pilgrimages. Although Jesus' entrance exactly fulfilled Messianic prophecies, it is doubtful whether the crowd completely grasped that. The words they shouted, "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David*" (Mark 11:10), come from Psalm 118, a praise psalm used at Passover. These words seem particularly appropriate here. Matthew comments in his account, "*The whole city was stirred up, saying, 'Who is this?'*" (21:10). Luke says the city was so emotionally charged that even "*the very stones would cry out*" (19:40). In Mark, however, there is no climax. The crowd disperses as mysteriously as it assembles; Jesus enters the temple, apparently alone, and then leaves for Bethany.

**THINK ABOUT** how one must count the cost of discipleship. The crowds that welcomed Christ had turned against Him by the end of the week. We should clearly communicate the cost of discipleship when proclaiming the gospel. We deceive people when we conceal the fact that there is a price to pay for following Jesus Christ. We deceive them when we appeal only to their emotions and their baser instincts by promising an "abundant life" that consists of health, wealth, and happiness. When the whole truth is presented—the costs as well as the benefits—decisions are made with the mind and heart, as well as the emotions.

**THE END OF THE TEMPLE (MARK 11:12-25)** The cursing of the fig tree has troubled readers from earliest times. It is the only miracle of destruction in the Gospels, and the blasting of a fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season seems out of character for Jesus. Victor of Antioch, 5<sup>th</sup>-century writer of the earliest commentary on the Gospel of Mark, understood the event to be an enacted parable in which the cursed fig tree symbolized the judgment to befall Jerusalem. Surely this is close to Mark's intention, for the clearing of the temple is recorded between the cursing and the withering of the fig tree. These events seem to interpret each other.

The scene is set on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem. Jesus is hungry and, seeing a fig tree in leaf, He approaches it, hoping to find something to eat. Disappointed at finding no figs, He condemns the tree. At least two points need to be made about this puzzling story. First, the prophets used references to figs or fig trees to teach about judgment. In a scathing denunciation of Judah, Jeremiah said, "*There are ... no figs on the tree; even the leaves are withered*" (8:13). Jesus told a parable with the same image and point (Luke 13:6-9). And second, the prophets sometimes acted out an especially piercing message. It appears that Jesus is doing something similar. The leafy fig tree, with all its promise of fruit, is as deceptive as the temple, which, with all its bustling activity, is really a den of thieves. The curse on the fig tree symbolizes the doom of the temple and perhaps even of the nation.



In Mark 11:15-18, Jesus acts out His judgment on the temple by driving out the money changers. In the Court of the Gentiles, in Herod's Temple, merchants sold sheep and doves for sacrifice and to

exchanged foreign currency for shekels. The Sadducees oversaw this trade and made an enormous profit from it. In righteous indignation Jesus enters the outer Court, swiftly ejecting the animal dealers and overturning the tables of the money changers. He interprets His action by reminding them what the Old Testament said, “*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*” (Mark 11:17). The first part of the quotation is from Isaiah 56:6-8. For Isaiah—and Jesus—the temple is not the exclusive property of the Jews but a witness to the nations, the place where anyone who loves the name of the Lord and worships Him may come. But the temple had been turned into “*a den of robbers.*” This phrase is quoted from Jeremiah 7:11, and the words are a biting attack on the excessive greed of the temple operation. Jesus’ action portends the temple’s doom. Like the fig tree, its function is now “*withered away to its roots*” (Mark 11:20).

The chief priests and scribes have seen and heard enough to declare war on Jesus. They “*were seeking a way to destroy Him*” says Mark (11:18), although their design is frustrated by His favor with the people. Mark abruptly concludes that “*when evening came they went out of the city,*” symbolizing Jesus’ break with Jerusalem and the leaders of Judaism.

The chapter ends with several sayings of Jesus about faith and prayer, which seem to emphasize that Jesus—and not the temple—is the focal point of faith and prayer. With simplicity and earnestness Jesus pleads, “*Have faith in God*” (11:22). What is more immovable than a mountain? Yet Jesus says by faith believers can do something just as impossible, figuratively speaking, as moving a mountain. Faith is the opposite of one who has “*doubt in his heart.*” It is a conviction that words uttered in trust to God are not mere vibrations of air in an empty universe, but that there is an actual relationship between a believer’s petition and God’s act. So certain are the results of faithful praying, says Mark, “*that you have [already] received it*” (11:24). This is not an invitation to pray for foolish things or things contrary to God’s nature. Faith and prayer must be consistent with God’s character and in conformity to His will. Mark 11:25 is a reminder that the thing closest to God’s will (and sometimes the furthest from ours) is forgiving others for their sins!

**PERSONALIZE** this lesson. As He approached Jerusalem for the last time, He knew exactly what would happen to Him there in just a few hours. However, He continued with His life while He prepared for His death. He stopped in Bethany and visited friends. He taught His disciples about God and faith and prayer. And He made careful plans for the short moment of triumph and adulation of the crowd that was to be the introduction to that long, bleak week. He was attentive to all the details that would give the people one last chance to recognize Him as their Messiah. He fulfilled the predictions of their own Old Testament prophets to the letter.

Everybody loves a parade, and the people of Jerusalem caught the mood and joined in the fun. But emotion and crowds soon dissipate. Many of the people who marched in His parade disavowed any connection with Him a few hours later. They no longer showed any love and respect for Him; they demanded His execution. How fickle the crowds! How feeble the will to stand by decisions made based on public opinion, not personal conviction!

“*Have faith in God*” (Mark 11:22), Jesus exhorted the crowds and His disciples. Are you facing significant challenges to your trust in God? Each of us is on a journey—all of us at different places along the way. No matter where you are, Jesus wants you to rest your heart in the sufficiency of the facts and be filled with a faith that is stable and growing—faith in Him!

### REVIEW: O JERUSALEM

10. What encouragement and/or challenge did you receive from your own study, Core Group discussion, the teaching, or Commentary concerning:
  - a. Jesus’ knowledge and authority?
  
  
  - b. powerful prayer?