

## **Mark 11.1-26 Three days – Sun, Mon, Tues**

If attend only on Sundays, Palm Sunday + Easter Day give wrong impression, omitting the cross and passion.

But also, Palm Sunday isn't the day of triumph often portrayed, esp. according to Mark. Jesus goes public, but not too far as controls timing of arrest.

Jesus no longer avoids crowds or recognition.

- Makes a statement: comes as King to his royal city, the City of David, and to the Temple, which in his case – as Son of God – is his royal palace/dwelling place.

### **1. The 'triumphal' humble entry (1-11)**

The first 7/10 verses = about the colt!

The instructions about the donkey:

- Stress his prophetic knowledge and
- Stress his authority as King – commandeer, but “return it immediately”

Allusion to Gen 49.10-11

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.  
Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he  
washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes.

And Zech 9.9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
Triumphant and victorious is he,  
Humble and riding on a donkey,  
On a colt, the foal of a donkey.

And 1 Kings 1.33, 38, 44 - Mule as bearer of new king (Solomon) being crowned

Significance of unriden = suitable for a sacred purpose and worthy of a king (Num 19.2; Deut 21.3), cf. *Mishnah m.Sanh.* 2.5, no one else may ride a king's horse (Garland)

Crowds strewing the way with garments recalls what officers did after Jehu anointed king (2 Kgs 9.10-12)

v.9 “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

last of the Hallel (thanksgiving) Psalms – 118.25-26. Refers to pilgrims – a call for God to bless them as they go up to the Temple sanctuary.

The pilgrims add:

“Blessed is the kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” – not part of the Psalm. Falls short of being unambiguously Messianic, as in Matthew and Luke (e.g. if had been called “The Son of David”). But overtones there, just too subtle for the crowds of authorities to have understood well enough. But a prophetic act: Jesus does ride in as Son of David, King.

The crowd hails the coming of David’s kingdom but misunderstand how it will come (via the cross) and what it will look like (spiritual, not temporal). Jesus has come to save Israel not from Roman rule but from self-rule (sin).

The reason he has come to Jerusalem is not to be crowned/enthroned, but – as he has forewarned 3x (in chs 8, 9 and 10) – to be given over to sinful men who will crucify him.

Garland: “Mark’s Gospel, more than any other, brings out Jesus’ suffering. The author bears witness to his terrible loneliness amid the deafening applause.”

Jesus goal/destination is not Jerusalem but the Temple: goes straight to temple, but only looks around (v.11). Somewhat anticlimactic.

- His looking around isn’t the gaze of a tourist but an inspection
- He does not visit out of pious reverence
- He offers no prayers or sacrifice.

Edwards: “Jesus is indeed the Messiah, but he is veiled and unrecognised. Even when he stands at the center of Israel’s faith, he stands alone.”

- The only ‘slowing down’ in Mark??

Unlike in Matthew and Luke, crowd strangely evaporates. No city electrified or children crying out. Nor the triumphalism of John’s account, in which there are palm branches and even Jesus’ opponents acknowledge “the world has gone after him” (Jn 12.12-19).

Jesus is not confessed here, but at the cross (15.39).

## 2. Jesus curses the fig tree

A FIG SANDWICH! Fig tree – temple - fig tree.

- What Jesus does to the fig tree and in the temple = the same thing!
- Jesus' actions in the Temple = to be interpreted through the lens of his cursing of the fig tree.

The only miracle of destruction Jesus performs. Could have made fig tree produce the fruit he was after! Cf. fish with temple tax

- Reasonable to expect something edible on the tree. After the main fig harvest (mid-August – mid-Oct), fig trees produce small green buds which remain undeveloped throughout the winter (Dec-Feb). These buds swell into green knops called *paggim*, in March-April. Then come the sprouting of leaf buds (in April). So, once a tree is in leaf, expect to find *paggim* on it in various stages of maturation. Though not ripened into mature figs, *paggim* are edible. This tree, having leaves, had the signs of *paggim*, but no *paggim*. It was not the season for ripe figs, but it was the season for *paggim*.

'season' = *Kairos* – which isn't the word expected. "It isn't the botanical word for the growing season, but the religious term found in 1.14-15 denoting the time of the kingdom of God" (Garland).

Bethany = house of figs

Bethphage = house of *unripe* figs

Must be understood for what it is: a *symbolic act* for what God will do to the Temple. This is no final warning, no call to reform; it is an act of judgment

It recalls 2 OT passages, both of which prophecy judgment, an end, not reformation/restoration/healing.

- Jer 8.13 Oracle against Judah for backsliding and "everyone turns to his own course... everyone is greedy for unjust gain... they did not know how to blush. Therefore *they shall fall*...  
When I would gather them, declares the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them."
- Hos 9.10, 16-17 Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame... Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will kill the cherished offspring of

their womb. Because they have not listened to him, my God will reject them; they shall become wanderers among the nations.

### **Jesus' prophetic judgment on the temple**

Recalls the crowds' celebration of Judas' Maccabeus' cleansing of the temple 200 years previously. After defeating Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes he went into the temple and cleansed it. The people waved ivy and palm branches and sang hymns of praise. 2 Macc 10.1-9, cf. 1 Macc 13.51

Jesus quotes two scriptures:

- Isa 56.7, all nations coming to the temple, a house of prayer for all peoples. Never intended to be a shrine for Israel, a means of keeping others out.
- Jer 7.11 – den of robbers.

NB. Robbers do not do their robbing in their den. The den is the place where robbers retreat after having committed their crimes. It is their hideout, a place of security and refuge... Jesus indirectly attacks them for allowing the temple to degenerate into a safe hiding place where people think that they find forgiveness and fellowship with God no matter how they act outside. Jesus' prophetic action and words attack a false trust in the efficacy of the temple sacrificial system.  
Garland

Temple precincts (Court of Gentiles) = run by the Sadducees, who also dominated the Sanhedrin. Trade in Court of Gentiles = major funding source.

Within Temple Sanctuary = Court of Women, Court of Israel and Holy of Holies.

“The Court of the Gentiles was a virtual stock market of animal dealers and money changers, all of whom were necessary to ensure proper sacrifices and offerings for the many pilgrims, especially at festivals, to the temple.” (Edwards)

Point is, Gentiles were effectively prevented from worshipping, and trading in its place = symptomatic of the corruption of the temple authorities.

Jesus symbolically stops 3 activities:

1. Changing of money = funding of temple
2. Sale of animals = end of sacrifices
3. the stopping of movement of 'vessels' = all cultic activity is stopped

Jesus' action = a symbolic protest which would have affected only a part of the court, but which was noticed by the Sanhedrin.

Fulfills but also exceeds the prophecy of Malachi 3.1-3:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; <sup>3</sup> he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.

Cf. Jesus' words to Samaritan woman in Jn 4: True worshippers will worship ...in Spirit and in truth"

Jesus' 'refining fire' does not reform the temple cult but brings judgment upon it, fulfilling and replacing it: Jesus himself is both the perfect sacrifice atoning for the sins of the world and the locus of worship. "At Golgotha the temple curtain is torn asunder (15.38) and Jesus is confessed as the Son of God, the object of saving faith (15.39)" (Edwards).

Jesus is not reforming but, by prophetic action, announcing the soon-to-come destruction of the temple, the end to corrupt temple worship (as explained to disciples in 13.1-2).

Garland: "In Jesus' day the temple had become a nationalistic symbol that served only to divide Israel from the nations."

What kind of reception did he receive?

- Hosannas - from Galilean pilgrims with him
- Astonishment/amazement - from crowds
- Opposition - from religious and temple leaders "to seek a way to destroy him, for they feared him"

## **Lesson from the withered fig tree**

The fig tree is dead “from the roots” – final!

Rather than explaining the significance of this to the disciples, Jesus goes on to teach about faith and prayer – what it means to offer true worship.

The new order is:

1. based on faith in God (22-24), in Jesus, not sacrifices in the Temple. Faith in God to do the impossible.
  - The exalted place (“this mountain” = Zion) will be thrown down into the sea. But also faith that God will replace the temple – which he does with Jesus. “The Holy place is wherever disciples preach Jesus’ gospel and wherever his people, Jews and Gentiles, gather <in worship>.” (Garland)
- 15.38 when Jesus died the curtain is torn in two – access for all – signified by the centurion’s profession of faith.
2. characterised by forgiveness (25-26), which emanates from Jesus’ forgiveness of us.

## **Conclusion**

1. Jesus announces his kingship and kingdom – triumphant but humble
2. Involves establishment of new order: Temple and priesthood out, along with exclusion of Gentiles, hypocrisy, false religion; faith, prayer, forgiveness without sacrifice in – for all people/nations.

## **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. How important are the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services for giving us a full understanding of what Easter is about? How do the events of those days reveal the humility and righteousness of Jesus’ kingship, as well as the full extent of his saving work?
2. Jesus resisted any political understanding of his kingship. E.g. he did not deal to the Romans as was expected of the Messiah. Are we guilty of wrongly politicising God’s work and purposes in the world today? If so, how?
3. Jesus is clearly angered by what he finds in the temple. What do you think troubled him most?

4. What do you think Jesus would criticise about the Church today? Are there ways in which we wrongly exclude, whether consciously or unconsciously?
5. When Jesus taught about the new order he was establishing, he focuses on faith and forgiveness, esp. in relation to prayer. The latter (forgiveness) may not be what one might have expected. Why do you think he gave forgiveness such priority?