

## Jesus and Jerusalem

- Mark 11:1-11
- Jesus and the disciples have made the climb, all the way up to the Mount of Olives, which as you can see from this map is east of the city of Jerusalem. It rises above Jerusalem by 300 feet, and it is from there that Jesus will send two disciples to go fetch a donkey. I have to wonder if he sent the Thunder boys to go get a beast of burden just to give them a way to put into practice what he had taught: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” It is here, on the Mount of Olives, that Jesus will continue to disciple his disciples in chapter 13 when he tells them of things to come. Things in their lifetime, and things yet to happen, at the end of the age.
- As I said last week, this chapter begins the final part of Jesus’ journey. He will not go back to Galilee, and most of what happens next takes place in Jerusalem. But as we go through these final 6 chapters, you may wonder how all of this took place in 8 days. In between the triumphal entry in this chapter and the resurrection in the final chapter, there is a lot. John’s gospel places Jesus in Judea or Jerusalem for four months or longer before his crucifixion. So, most scholars believe Mark arranged more than a week’s events in these final chapters for two reasons. First, it is possible that Mark did that for the Roman Christians to have a liturgy and a series of readings for Passion Week. We get books every year that are designed to be read over a 40-day period leading up to the cross and the empty tomb. Well, Mark may have been doing the same!
- Second, and the most important reason for Mark to do this, some believe was “to show that Jesus supersedes the temple as the *locus Dei*.” The “place of God.” Jesus came to Jerusalem to die for our sins because he and only he can provide “substitutionary atonement.” But Jesus also came to Jerusalem to replace the temple as the center of worship. It was the desire of every Jew to go to Jerusalem for the Passover, and a series of 15 Psalms were written to be sung on the way. The songs of ascent, Psalm 120-134. “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion (Jerusalem), which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people.” (Psalm 125:1-2) The last one is the shortest: “Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!” (Psalm 134). We don’t lift our hands to a holy place, we lift them to Jesus. We go to Jesus to meet God, not to the temple in Jerusalem. Oh, we still gather in a place, but when we say, “I am going to church,” we should not mean we are going to a place. No, we are gathering as a people, the church, to worship the risen Savior. We can do that in the parking lot or in the side yard, or in here, and for a season, we can even gather virtually. But that is only to be temporary, under the most extreme circumstances. It cannot and should not ever take the place of the physical gathering of the people of God. When Peter and John were told not to preach in Jesus’ name anymore in Jerusalem, they went first to their friends, Acts 4 tells us, to the church, to tell them what they had been told and to pray for boldness. Where were they? We don’t know, and it doesn’t matter. Acts 4 says, “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31) “They were gathered.” That’s the church, gathered to Jesus as one body.

- Notice that Jesus did not come to reform the temple as a place where atonement happens—he came to replace it. The culminating event happens in chapter 15, when Jesus “uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.” At that moment, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (Mark 15:37-38) Jesus was broken and poured out and the temple was replaced by the Son of God.
- All that is written by Mark in this chapter and in the ones to follow is preparing the reader for that moment, when Jesus, the perfect sacrifice and the final atonement for sins is glorified and the centurion at the cross confesses, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” And we would say, “He is the Son of God,” and we would sing with the Psalmist as we stand in the darkness at 3pm before the crucified Lord, “Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For He is our God.” That is what Mark is leading us to. Let’s look briefly then at this familiar story of the triumphal entry, under two main points: The colt and the crowd.

- **The colt (verses 1-7)**

- Jesus instructs his disciples to go into the next village and see a man about a donkey. In fact, they are to go into the village, find a colt tied up there that no one has ever sat on, and they are to begin to untie it. Jesus tells them there may be an interruption as someone comes out to ask what they think they are doing untying the colt. They are to tell the man, “the Lord has need of it.” It is interesting and no mistake that Mark uses the word for Lord, *kyrios*, “The LORD has need of it.” Tell the people who ask you why you’re taking their colt that the Lord of all of creation has need of this colt that has been entrusted to you for a while. Two things, here. First, again Jesus states plainly his divine authority when he says this. He could have said, “Tell them Jesus of Nazareth needs it, or the Son of Man needs it.” No, he says, “Tell them the LORD needs it.” Second, this reminds us that what we have is not our own, including our schedules and even our bodies. As Paul said, “we were bought with a price.” The schedules we have and the bodies we are moving around in belong to the Lord, and the “Lord has need of them.” Now, let’s keep this in balance. The overarching truth is that God needs nothing, and Jesus could have bent down, spit in the dust, rolled it around in his fingers and created a donkey colt right there out of dirt. In the same way, God does not NEED you and me. But the amazing truth is that God has chosen to use his people to accomplish his purposes. The Lord has need of you, and your time, and your resources and your intellect and your very life.
- Why a colt? Probably a donkey colt. To fulfill what has been written by the prophet Zechariah. “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.” (Zechariah 9:9) What does the crowd do? They shout. They cry out.

- **The crowd (verses 8-10)**

- In John 11, we read that many had come from all over to Jerusalem by this time, to purify themselves for the Passover. And “they were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, ‘What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?’” (John 11:55-56) Orders had been given by the Chief Priest and the

Pharisees that if anyone knew where Jesus was, to let them know so they could arrest him. After that, the crowd hears that Jesus is in Bethany, and that he has raised Lazarus from the dead, so they go to see him, and to see Lazarus! So, you get this picture from John's account of a great crowd coming with Jesus from Bethany, and others coming out of Jerusalem to see the Lord coming down the western slope of the Mt. of Olives, and they come together and begin to shout! All that they do, from spreading their outer garments on the road, to laying down branches they have cut from the field, to following Jesus and shouting praises to God... all of that was a dramatic re-enactment, if you will, of what Israel in the Old Testament would have done for a new king. As they did in 2 Kings 9, when they laid down garments, blew a trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!" Remember, many people in the crowd saw Jesus as the conquering King who would lead them to the overthrow of the Roman government. They were shouting, Hosanna, which means, "Save now!" There were others in the crowd who were shouting, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" This was from Psalm 118 as well, and the main point of this song was to welcome the deliverer into the open gates of the holy city. Others were shouting, "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David!" James Edwards writes, "This reveals a confusion on the part of the crowd about his true mission...Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, not the 'the kingdom of our father David.'"

- Notice what Jesus does not do. He does not stop and address the crowd. He does not teach or heal or do miracles. He does not muster an army and bivouac for a month with them for military training. He simply rides on, intent on getting to his destination. Intent on doing what the people needed most for him to do. John writes in his account of the triumphal entry, "His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him." (John 12:16). In other words, then they understood the colt and the crowd and the cries of "save now!" as fulfillment of prophecy of the gentle and lowly servant come to die for the sins of his people.
- Look at verse 11. The crowds have vanished, the excitement is over. Jesus enters the temple alone, and he stands in the center of faith and worship in Israel, alone, just as he will go to the cross alone. He looks around, and then leaves for Bethany with the 12.
- Prayer
- **Communion**