

Days that changed the world

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[0:00] We're going to look together at this passage in Mark's Gospel. So if you've got a Bible or you can look across at a Bible please feel free to open that up.

And before we do so we'll pray. Lord help each one of us to grasp and to be grasped by the power and significance of the day we're remembering Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Please come and teach us and move us and impress these things on us by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen. There are some days that change the world. Change the course of history. We might call them defining moments.

Today I brushed my teeth and got on the bus to go to work is not a defining moment. It doesn't really change the world particularly. That's an ordinary day. But there are some days that are special and go down in history. For example 9-11. Changed the course of history didn't it? Awful, destructive, just taking a matter of hours to change the course of history. To change everything. It was in a sense a declaration of war and from it flowed more wars.

[1:31] And it changed everything. It changed how we go on holiday, didn't it? Because now when we go on holiday, if we go on an airplane we've got to queue up and have our shoes examined or our belts examined and we can't take more than 100 millilitres of something or other.

It's changed everything. That was a day that changed the world. Here's another day that changed the world. When this little chap burst in on the world. Wikipedia says coronavirus disease 2019 is a contagious disease caused by a virus.

The first known case was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. And this one little thing changed everything, didn't it? Whatever exact day that was, that was a day that changed the world. And it's affected everything from how people look at you when you cough to what you wear when you go shopping. And it's produced at least two years of isolation, anxiety, fatalities.

Still the busy street, emptied the office and curtailed human normality. And my memory of this is sort of all blurry, but there was a day, wasn't there, when you could step out into Preston Circus instead of it being thronged with traffic and going to and fro, it was just silent.

[2:55] Changed the world. A defining moment in world history. And I want to try and persuade us this morning that the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey was a defining moment in world history.

It's up there with these dramatic days. I would say it exceeds those dramatic days that I just mentioned. There are other days that perhaps even rank above it, like the Good Friday when Jesus died on the cross.

The day that the sky went dark and the earth shook. That day is a momentous day. And the day, three days later, when the dead Jesus became the risen Jesus.

That's a momentous day. As C.S. Lewis put it, when death went into reverse. But we'll look at those days in due course. The day we're looking at today is the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

There it is, the city set on a hill. The city of the great king. God's headquarters on earth. And he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. That's a donkey, in case you didn't know what a donkey was.

[4:09] And crowds cheered and waved branches and put their cloaks on the ground. And shouted, Hosanna. And the day a fig tree was cursed.

That's what we're going to look at. And I'd like to persuade you that this is a world-changing day in three ways. One, to say it is a defining moment. I'll just say a little bit more about that.

And they'll say, number two, it is a day of judgment. And number three, it is a day of salvation. So, those three things. I just want to explain a little bit more about what I mean about a defining

moment.

And enlarge on that. And say, it is in particular a day of judgment. And a day of salvation. Okay, let's go with that. So, why do I say it is so special and so significant?

Well, if you've got your Bible there, you'll see that this day was deliberately engineered by Jesus. We shouldn't think this was a random thing or a lucky thing or an unlucky thing.

[5:16] In Mark 10, 32, Jesus has his mind set on this journey. They were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way.

And the disciples were astonished. They were amazed. They were dumbstruck. They were gobsmacked. Because Jesus is going to Jerusalem. And there's something about this journey that they say, this is no ordinary journey.

The Master has something in mind here. And we're not sure whether we like it, really. They're just amazed at Jesus leading the way. And you get this, the matter of the donkey.

Donkey. So, it seems to me pretty clear that Jesus, on a previous visit to Jerusalem, took somebody on one side and said, You've got a donkey, haven't you? And they said, Yes, Jesus, I have.

He said, I'm going to need that later. I won't tell you any more, but some of my guys will come and take that donkey.

[6:16] And the code word is, if you ask, the Master needs it. Can you spare the donkey if they do that? Yeah, of course I can. It looks as though that's been set up beforehand. And so, Jesus does send two of his disciples, chapter 11, verse 1, saying, Go to the village ahead of you.

As you enter it, you'll find a colt tied there, which no one's ever ridden. Untie it. Bring it here. If anyone asks you, why are you doing this? Tell him, the Lord needs it, and we'll send it back shortly. Jesus has arranged this. Jesus has staged this. And if you think of the mind of Osama bin Laden plotting 9-11 and getting all the pieces in order, there's a mind at work here behind the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

And there's more than I've just said. Let's just look a little bit more. So, we can enlarge on this pre-planning by thinking that it isn't just something that starts with Jesus.

It goes way back into the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament, as we would call it. There are ancient prophecies which are all being drawn together and focused on this time when Jesus enters Jerusalem.

[7:31] So, let's remind ourselves, Jesus isn't triumphantly entering Worthing or triumphantly entering Brussels. He's triumphantly entering Jerusalem.

And that's deliberate because Jerusalem is a special city. It is the city of King David. It is, as we learn, God's headquarters on earth through all that era of what we call the Old Testament.

It's a special city. The city of the great king, as Jesus himself said. When we say Jerusalem and we say Zion, same thing, because it's going to refer to Zion in a moment.

This is the city of which the prophet Isaiah said, this city will be raised above all the other cities and all the other mountains and all the nations will stream to it.

It's a sort of international headquarters. That's what God has in mind for this city. And the city isn't random. And the idea of David is not trivial.

[8:35] David is the Old Testament king. He is the ruler of not just his own nation, but the ruler of all nations.

This is what is said about the king in the style of David, the Davidic king. He has this as his manifesto.

I'm just going to turn up Psalm 2, where it's said of the Davidic king, the king like David.

In other words, the Messiah, which translated into Greek is Christ, Messiah, Christ, king. All in the same area of which God says, ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

You will rule them with an iron scepter. You will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise. You be warned, you rulers of the earth. Kiss this king. Kiss this king.

[9:47] King David is the king of everywhere, all nations, including us here. So as Jesus deliberately enters Jerusalem, he is entering this city, the king of which is to be the king of everybody and everywhere.

And on top of that, there is a prophecy, which is not a vague prophecy. It very specifically says, rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, meaning citizen of Jerusalem. Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Your king comes to you. And the prophecy says, he is gentle and riding on a donkey.

Jesus knows that. The people there know that. They know that prophecy. And Jesus is deliberately setting it up. This is me. So it is a significant moment.

Jesus, who knew his scriptures backwards, was aligning himself with these expectations of his own scriptures. And it isn't just Jesus. Let's put it this way.

[10:58] The people there got that. That's why they were so excited. That's why they were saying Hosanna with such energy. There were lots of people there getting very excited.

Now, generally speaking, English people don't get very excited, do they? No. This is an English person getting excited. Wow. I'm being facetious, obviously.

But football crowds get excited. Sometimes we see pictures on the TV of other cultures protesting, being jubilant, and getting excited.

And I think we need to have that sort of picture in our mind of these crowds in Jerusalem. We see demonstrations of things on TV. And that's the sort of excitement that I think we should envisage. So they spread their cloaks on the ground. We don't often do that, do we? They spread their cloaks on the ground. They wave branches. They cut down and wave branches. That's just what it says, isn't it?

[12:02] It says in chapter 11, verse 6, So there's a big sort of crowd thing going on.

And they shout out, 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. And these are all quotations from scriptures, like Psalm 118 about the king coming. And the coming kingdom of our father David.

And so the crowds get that this is significant. And how did they get that? How did they get that idea? It's quite interesting what possessed them to all of a sudden say, Yes, cloaks off.

Cut some branches. You know, they just seemed to do it, didn't they? There's no sort of instruction. No dress rehearsal. No, let's get together. This is how we... We're going to do this tomorrow. So cutting branches.

[13:11] Got a knife with you? Anybody? Oh, come on. You know, they didn't sort of prepare it. It just seemed to happen. And how did they know to do this? And you think that if it was happening wrong, Jesus, who was a very confident person, he would have said, hold on, guys.

Now you've got this completely wrong. Please put down those branches. Put your cloaks back on. Come on. But he didn't, did he? I mean, Jesus endorses what's happening.

He says, you've got this right. This is right. And we have, you know, later on, this is the Matthew version. Rebuke the little children. And Jesus says, have you not read in the scriptures out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have ordained praise?

You know, this is right. And in Luke's gospel, the Pharisees say, shut them all up. And Jesus says, if they were shut up, then the stones would cry out because this is right. This is big.

This is a right response to this defining moment. And even the ragtag people picked up on it correctly. And as I, I've got ahead of myself a little bit, even the cosmos would have agreed.

[14:23] Rebuke your disciples. If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. This is a big day. And somebody needs to make a big noise about it. And even if the disciples don't, the stones would step up and make the deficiency.

It is a big day, a decisive moment, a defining moment, a cosmic moment when Jesus enters Jerusalem. Right, I hope I persuaded you that that is, there is significance to it.

And don't let it pass you by. I don't know everybody in this room. I don't know who might be watching. But I want to say there's something going on here.

And you need to factor it into your life. There is something here of cosmic, eternal significance, historic significance.

Don't ignore it. Don't brush it out of the way. You need to grasp this because this is real. Okay. A defining moment.

[15:23] Number two. What sort of moment is it? It is a day of judgment. It is a day of judgment. God's messianic king comes to be enthroned in his city, the city from which he rules the world.

The king who reigns on Zion's hill shall all the world command. Isaac Watts' paraphrase says. It's a defining moment. It's a moment of judgment. Now let's just have a look at this.

Thinking of Jesus entering Jerusalem. Mark 11, 12 to 14. This strange thing goes on.

He enters Jerusalem. And the next day on his way back to continue his visit. Jesus was hungry. Verse 13. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves because it was not the season for figs.

[16:33] So the disciples were thinking, Jesus, it's not the season for figs. Why are you looking for fruit? Jesus obviously had something in mind, didn't he? And he said to the tree, may no one ever eat fruit from you again.

And his disciples heard him say it. It's a strange thing. It's very uncharacteristic of Jesus to be putting anything down. This goes, people say that he cursed the fig tree.

He said bad words about this fig tree. Now what's going on here? What's going on here? He sees this fig tree and it's got leaves. So there's the fig tree.

And he was looking for figs. So I drew a fig. Jesus knew there wouldn't be any, but he still gave the tree the chance to provide some fruit.

It was very, very unlikely, but he still gave it the chance. No fruit.

[17:42] And having looked at this fruitless tree, he effectively judges it, curses it.

May no one eat fruit from you again. And it goes on to, the story goes on to say it withers. That's there in verse 20. It's cursed.

So the fig tree withers. And it's removed from the list of fruitful trees. It's a waste of space now. Dig it up.

Take it to the dump. It's a waste of space. What's going on here? It's a parable.

It's an action with meaning. And it ties up with his visit to Jerusalem. He's coming to Jerusalem to look for fruit.

[18:39] He's coming to this city to see whether after all the promises that God has made, after all the sort of planting and pruning and fertilizing and looking after that God has done for this people, whether there's going to be any fruit.

And he knows there won't be any. Well, at least not much. But he's going to give them a chance. And if there is no fruit, God's going to say, this whole chapter of history, in which Jerusalem has been my capital city, and I've put so much effort into it, this chapter is going to close.

And Jerusalem will no longer be my capital city. And actually, there's an upside to that, because God's going to say, I'm no longer going to limit myself to one people.

I'm going to spread my invitation and my arms to all the nations. An explosive gospel expansion. But he said of this city, enough is enough. And this is a big thing. Throughout the Old Testament, the city is God's headquarters.

[20:03] There are privileges and promises, but these people are no different from us. This is human nature. The privileges were despised, and the promises were not believed.

And God is a patient God. He is long-suffering. That doesn't mean that his patience is infinite. The point of patience is it comes to an end.

It might be long, but there's a point at which you say, that's it. I'm sorry. I've tried enough. I've looked enough for fruit. Given you enough chances. And what was he looking for?

The fruit of gratitude. The fruit of honor, given to God. Praise, given to God from the heart.

God's respect, worship, service, lives changed, lives given to him, lives offered to him. That's what he was looking for.

[21:08] You know, those of you who've had children, you have this about bringing up children, don't you? You lavish care on them. And that ought

to be greeted with respect and gratitude and appreciation.

But there is such a thing. I know there's such a thing as bad parenting. But I also know there's such a thing as disrespectful children. Thankless children.

And this is what God says about this people. You're a thankless people. You're a self-centered people. You turn your back on me.

for the last time. And I think in a parallel for our own society, we've received many good gifts from God.

And I mean this. Here in the West, we have so much. We have so much order and security.

[22:13] normality. We can hardly believe it if that ever gets threatened. We think it's just normality. But for many people in the world, it isn't. We have our standards of living.

We have running water. We have electricity. We can pretty much depend on. We have medical advances. You can find a doctor. You can find a hospital. We have all our vaccinations.

And as a society, God has given us these things. Is there gratitude to God? Are we finding people in Brighton lining up to go to church on a Sunday to thank God for his blessings?

Not really. Is there a humility before God? A respect for God? God looks for fruit. And please, we should not be surprised if as a society, if we have been so ungrateful and so fruitless.

And if God were to say to us, well, if you don't want me, I shall withdraw the benefits that I've given you. We shouldn't be surprised at that.

[23:20] And on a personal level, where are you and I on the response sheet, as it were, to God's blessings to us? Here is the survey from Trustpilot.

I am keen to respond rightly to the God who has given me so much. Number one is not at all.

Number five, I give my whole life. There you are. You can fill in the tick where we're at on that.

And I want to say that the only proper response is number five. He gives us life and breath and everything else. Christ has died for the sins of his people and washes us completely clean.

And the only proper response is to say, I give you my soul, my heart, my life, my all. That's right, isn't it? That is the only proper response to such a great God.

And may we respond in fruitfulness to him. Well, that was a day of judgment 2,000 years ago.

[24:28] It took a long time coming but prophecies were fulfilled and the king did come to look for fruit in his city and to judge it. But of course, that is in itself really a dress rehearsal because Jesus is not only Lord of Jerusalem but he's Lord of the whole earth.

And it's a sort of dress rehearsal for the day when he will come back and judge every man and woman and boy and girl that's ever lived. Whether they've believed in him or not, with or without their permission, he will come one day as he did those years ago, he will come one day and judge the world.

And we will all meet him, believers or unbelievers, whether you rated him here in this life or not. And we should remember that day and we should live in the light of that day.

We should believe what Jesus has said concerning that day and we should live in the light of it. Because that is the day when our eternal destiny will be fixed.

If you see what I mean. He'll either say come you blessed of my father. Here is the inheritance prepared for you from before the foundation of the world. Or he'll say depart from me.

[25:51] I never knew you. And that's too awful to think about. That's why this third point is important. A day of salvation.

Let's look again at the scene. The entry of the coming king. What do they shout? Save now.

Hosanna. Save please. The David style king for sure is the king who rules with power and authority but he is also the king who comes to save with mercy and compassion.

He doesn't just come simply to put people down and kick people out and take away the good things from their lives like a nasty tyrannical king. But this king comes to restore and to remedy and to fill and to bless.

And you get a little bit of that in what happened on his way to Jerusalem which is what I read at the beginning. So he's on his way to Jerusalem and this blind beggar Bartimaeus sits by the side of the road and he says the king is coming.

If it's the king he's a saving king and he gets this and he shouts out son of David have mercy on me. And you'd think if Jesus wasn't interested in mercy he'd just say shut up.

[27:17] I'm on my way to Jerusalem to look for fruit and I won't find any. But actually he stops. There's somebody asking for mercy. I'm in the business of showing mercy.

Son of David have mercy on me. And Jesus stops to deal with this guy and he says what do you want? Well I'm blind. I'm a beggar.

Give me my sight. Show mercy to me. And Jesus says of course. Yes. It's done.

Your faith has healed you. And I'd like to put ourselves by the side of the road there and say doesn't that sort of fit us that we would say Jesus have mercy on me.

Don't you and I need mercy? Don't you and I need forgiveness? Don't you and I need him to open our eyes?

[28:19] Him to change our hearts? Him to wash us clean? Him to change our lives? And couldn't we put ourselves with that beggar and say son of David king save me?

I'd be glad of such a saviour wouldn't you? We've lost our spiritual capital. We're all adrift in a fog of uncertainty and guilty at the bar of justice.

We need mercy and he gives mercy. He comes to show mercy. That's what we need. And that's the person who gives it. It's a day of salvation. And think also of how he comes.

Remember the donkey which he got in the village. He didn't go to the Dubai sponsored horse breeders to get a massive charger or race horse.

He went to the village and here's a guy who's got a village animal which he borrows incidentally.

And this seemed to me to speak about his humility. His gentleness.

[29:21] That's the sort of king he is. Rejoice greatly your king comes to you. Gentle humble riding on a donkey. And just to draw the thread of his humility in Philippians Paul is going to draw this out and say this is his humility.

He humbled himself. He became human. He humbled himself. He became a servant. He humbled himself to die on the cross.

That's how far he humbled himself. himself. And he humbled himself to die on the cross to wash my sins away. He's a saving king.

Even death on the cross. And in Luke's gospel Jesus bemoans this. If only you'd known what was coming when I came. If only you'd known what would bring you peace says Jesus in the Luke's gospel.

I came and if you'd just asked me for mercy I would have given it. If you'd just asked me for redemption I would have given it.

[30:33] If you'd just asked me for peace I would have given it. And here's an opportunity for us this morning. I know many of us here have already asked. But if you haven't here's an opportunity to ask.

In a sense Jesus draws close here and now. And if only here's the opportunity to say to Jesus that's me I need that I need that mercy and I need it today.

And Jesus I want to assure you from his previous behaviour will not say no to that if you ask him.

An opportunity for redemption for salvation to peace don't let that pass you by.

On this great day. You know when I say don't let it pass you by I mean here is an opportunity don't put it off.

I for me Covid has taught me that some opportunities are precious and may not come again. Some of you remember Sue Jones who was a church member here and then she went over to Southern Cross then she moved up to North Wales she's almost exactly the same age as me except she was born on February the 29th so she was a quarter of my age if you see what I mean and I thought I'd really like to see Sue again I'd really like to catch up with her and when I was in last time we were sort of near North Wales I thought I can't really fit this visit in there will always be another time but Sue died a year ago two years ago to my great shock and sadness so I never got the opportunity to see her perhaps I should have taken the opportunity

[32:36] I had we don't always get opportunities again and I don't want to say here is an opportunity you've heard about the the warning of judgment

and we've heard about Jesus is capacity to show mercy and here's an opportunity to ask him and say make that me make that me make your peace and your mercy the thing in my life take the opportunity it might not come again he's in the business of showing mercy he won't always be son of David have mercy on me so here's the day which I'm trying to persuade you is a world changing day a decisive day a defining day engineered by Jesus himself bursting into time and space and history propelled by the promises of God in the

Hebrew scriptures as the king who is to rule the world comes to his city I hope that's impressed us I hope we've got something of why they shouted Hosanna it's a dress rehearsal for his coming on the day of judgment so I've said it was a day of judgment he came to find fruit he came to see whether his city would receive him and then I say if he was looking for fruit in our lives does he find any because he's still looking for fruit a fruitless Christian is a contradiction in terms may he produce the fruit of the spirit in us may he find on that final day that we really did believe him we really had committed our lives to him and it wasn't just words it was real a day of salvation an offer of peace while he passes by and an offer which I hope in your heart you are even at this moment accepting redemption forgiveness purpose eyesight for the blind this is the day don't miss out