

Mark 11:1–25

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[0:00] Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethpage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, why are you doing this? Say, the Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately. And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it.

And some of those standing there said to them, What are you doing, untying the colt? And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.

And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, 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 he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

[1:17] And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

And he said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And the disciples heard it. And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered the temple, and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, 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.

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came, they went out of the city.

[2:31] As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

And Jesus answered them, Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive. If you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Welcome. Welcome to Christ Church Chicago.

Again, it's good to see you this morning as we continue in our series and mark following Jesus. It was normally about 530 in the evening every day growing up.

[3:51] You're the key in the lock. The door would open. And there was my dad coming home from work. We used to love when he got home from work, loved hearing about his day, and also we couldn't eat until he got there.

But we loved every day he would come home, except Fridays. Fridays was what we called inspection day.

I mentioned before, those of you that have been around for a minute, that I grew up as a military kid, and as such, I learned early that there was a big difference between cleaning your room and getting your room ready for inspection.

I hated inspection. I hated inspection. I hated inspection. Every other child in the civilized world could just clean up the appearance of their room, but not me.

Not at my house. I hated inspection. My father had been trained by the U.S. military, and apparently that meant he felt it was his patriotic duty to inspect my bedroom.

[5:06] He would come in on Friday after exchanging some pleasantries and ask me if my room was ready. I said, yes, sir.

He said, well, let's go take a look. Look, now still in full uniform. He didn't just stand in the door and say, that looks good.

No. He came in looking under things, behind things, in closets. He came looking in places I didn't know were technically even a part of the room.

He'd run his finger across the top of the door looking for dust. Who looks up there? Whenever I failed inspection and asked why I had to go through this exercise with my room anyway, I was quickly reminded that my room was in his house.

And as his son, he had full authority and every right to come looking and every right to hold me accountable for what he found. I thought I had mastered the childhood art of making a room look clean without actually being clean.

[6:23] I could push a few things under the bed, which in my opinion is still one of the great childhood storage innovations. I thought the goal was appearance.

My dad was looking for proof. And whatever things weren't right, he expected them to be made straight.

A lot of that is reflected in our passage this morning from Mark 11. Now, I know you heard the scripture reading about the waving branches, the shouts of Hosanna in verses 1 through 10.

And you might be tempted to stop there at Palm Sunday. Great place to stop. But Mark wants us to know that so much more is happening.

Jesus, with full authority, has come home to inspect his house and confront what is out of order.

[7:32] While everybody else is admiring the parade, Jesus is inspecting the city. While everybody else sees fig leaves, Jesus is looking for fruit. While everybody else sees a busy, active temple, Jesus is examining its worship.

Because the one riding into Jerusalem is not merely another guest coming in town. He is the king. And when the king comes, he doesn't just come to be celebrated.

He comes looking. That's my thought for our time this morning. When the king comes looking. Here, starting in chapter 11, we have really arrived at what we might call the third and final act of Mark's gospel.

The first part of the gospel introduces us to Jesus and his ministry in Galilee. He does that through his preaching, his teaching, his miracles, and authority.

The second movement turns towards the journey to Jerusalem as Jesus begins preparing his disciples for what awaits him there. But now in chapter 11, the journey is over.

[8:51] Jesus has arrived. And Mark spends his final six chapters dealing essentially with one decisive week. Ten chapters have carried us through years of ministry.

But six chapters slow us down to walk through the final days of Jesus' earthly life. This is the week toward which everything has been moving.

The cross is getting closer. The opposition is getting stronger. The stakes are getting higher. And Jesus is no longer merely passing through towns.

He has come to Jerusalem to set things in order. Before Mark tells us what Jesus is looking for, he wants to make sure we understand who it is that's doing the looking.

This begins with verses 1 through 10 as the king comes looking with authority. Many of you will recognize these verses as reflecting what is referred to as Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

[10:10] But really, everything about these opening verses establishes the king's authority. As he prepares to enter the city, he dispatches his advanced team of two disciples and tells them where to go, go into the village, what they will find, a colt tied, what to do, untie it, and even what to say when somebody asks what they are doing.

They should say the Lord has need of it. And sure enough, everything happens exactly the way Jesus says it would. Don't move past that point too quickly because Jesus is not reacting to events as they unfold.

Jesus is divinely directing events that will unfold. He knows where he's going. He knows what he's doing. He knows what awaits him at the end of the week.

He knows betrayal, denial, opposition, suffering, and ultimately the cross are ahead of him. And he keeps coming anyway.

This is not a victim stumbling toward tragedy. This is a king marching toward his mission. Now, as he deliberately chooses to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, no security detail, no advanced threat assessments, no chariots, no horses.

[11:44] This can't be for a king's processional. This can't be the triumphant entry we've all been talking about. But that's exactly what it was.

Why? Well, I could tell you that this was unmistakably presenting the picture of Israel's promised king prophesied from Zechariah chapter 9.

Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he. Humble and mounted on a donkey. This was true. But there's something interesting about Mark's telling of the story.

Matthew tells you explicitly that this happened to fulfill the prophecy. John quotes the prophecy. But Mark doesn't. Mark gives us the picture and then keeps the story moving.

It's almost as though Mark says, you know what this means. You know who this is. Now keep up because Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem just to have a parade.

[12:48] He came to handle business. Now Jerusalem does certainly give him a parade.

Though they don't fully understand, they spread their cloaks on the road. Others spread leafy branches they've cut from the fields. The crowd in front of him and the crowd behind him begin shouting, Hosanna!

Quoting Psalm 118, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna in the highest.

But Jesus is about to deal with the temple. They think he has come to overthrow their enemies. But Jesus has come first to confront what has gone wrong among his own people.

[14:08] The king has come looking. He has come to the temple. We get then to verse 11. And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

And when he had looked around at everything, I think you can see from where I lifted today's sermon title, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Now, if you don't understand what Mark is doing, verse 11 can seem anticlimactic. It can feel like one of the strangest endings to a Palm Sunday parade you've ever seen.

After all that excitement, after all that shouting, after all those hosannas, Jesus quietly walks into the temple, looks around, and leaves.

That's it. No sermon. No miracle. No confrontation. He just looks around. But church, don't confuse silence with inactivity.

[15:13] Because while Jesus isn't saying anything, Jesus is seeing everything. He sees the tables with all the merchandise. He sees the marketplace that has invaded sacred space.

He sees religious activity that has drifted from its purpose. He sees what everybody else has gotten used to. It's quiet tonight.

But it won't be quiet tomorrow. He's ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey rather than a war horse because he has not come as a political warrior that everybody expected.

But make no mistake about it, a battle is about to begin. For most of Mark's gospel, Jesus has been telling people not to broadcast his identity.

He heals somebody, don't tell anybody. He reveals something, keep it quiet. His time had not yet come. But now the time is here.

[16:17] And he is about to interrupt business as usual. Verse 11 is not anticlimactic. No, it's actually masterful storytelling.

Verse 11 is the calm before the storm. Because the king has walked through his house. He's completed his inspection.

He has seen what needs to be addressed. And tomorrow he's coming back. So clearly after establishing who is doing the looking, beginning in verse 12, Mark shows us what the king is looking

for.

Just three areas I'd like to lift before you. He looks at a tree looking for fruit. He looks at the temple looking for worship. And then he looks at his disciples looking for faith.

Verse 12 says, Jesus was hungry. Jesus was hungry. Jesus was hungry. Jesus was hungry.

[17:19] Jesus was hungry. And in the distance he sees a fig tree in full leaf. He approaches the tree to see whether he might find something on it.

But when he gets there, nothing. Leaves everywhere. Fruit nowhere. And he curses the tree.

Now Mark gives us an additional detail that we can initially make of Jesus' response and make it seem strange. He says, For it was not the season for figs.

And you might read that and say, Well, Jesus, if it wasn't fig season, what were you looking for? But the issue is not simply that the tree had no mature figs.

The issue is that the leaves were making a promise that the tree didn't keep. This kind of foliage could reasonably suggest the presence of early fruit.

[18:21] It looked productive from a distance. It advertised fruitfulness. But when Jesus got close, it was all leaves and no fruit.

Now, perhaps you can get a glimpse why Mark puts this story where he does and creates this literary Fig Newton sandwich.

Because the fig tree is not just about the fig tree. The tree is a picture and illustration of the temple and what he was about to do to it.

There are leaves everywhere in Jerusalem. Religious leaves. Ceremonial leaves. Sacrificial leaves. Temple leaves. People coming and going. Sacrifices being offered.

Money changing hands. Songs being sung. Prayers being prayed. Plenty of leaves. When the king comes close looking for fruit, there is nothing there.

[19:29] Now, before we point our finger too quickly at Jerusalem, we should acknowledge that it is still possible for us to have leaves with no fruit.

You can have church attendance without transformation. You can have Bible knowledge without obedience. You can have ministry activity without spiritual maturity.

You can know when to sit, when to stand, when to sing, when to say amen, and still not be becoming more like Jesus. Leaves. No fruit.

Jesus is not impressed merely because something looks alive from the distance. He comes close. That's the uncomfortable part about inspection.

From the doorway, my room looked clean. But the problem was, my dad never stayed at the doorway. And Jesus also comes close enough to see whether we profess publicly what is being produced privately.

[20:46] Galatians chapter 5 says, The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So perhaps the question is, not simply am I at church?

The better question is, church producing fruit in me? Am I becoming more loving, more patient, more forgiving?

Am I becoming more like Jesus? Because the king is not just looking for leaves. He's looking for fruit. So now Mark takes us from this tree in verse 14 on to the temple.

Because Jesus is also looking for something else. Verse 15 says, And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered the temple. Wait. Entered the temple?

He was just there last night. Exactly. Yesterday, he inspected it. Today, he addresses it. Yesterday, he looked.

[21:53] Today, he acts. And suddenly, suddenly, church, for just a few verses, Mark goes from Bible story to Hollywood action movie.

Cue the music. In a world where worship has become business, where sacred space has become marketplace, one man walks into the temple, and business as usual is about to come to an end.

Jesus is driving people out, Jesus is driving people out, flipping tables, turning over chairs, shutting down traffic through the temple. This wasn't Sunday school, Jesus.

This was don't play in my daddy's house, Jesus. Now, understand, the problem was not simply that somebody was selling something at church.

Pilgrims traveling great distances needed access to animals for sacrifice. Currency exchange had a legitimate purpose. The problem was that what had been intended to facilitate worship had begun

to interfere with worship in his house.

[23 : 13] It reminds me of a teenager whose parents go out of town for the weekend and give them very clear instructions. We'll be back Sunday evening.

Take care of the house. And don't have anybody over. Well, yeah, that teenager was me. And you already know where this story is going.

Saturday night comes, and somehow, one or two friends stopping by turns into 20 people in the living room. The furniture has been moved.

And then, Gat Van, Earth, Wind & Fire, Chaka Khan, and Run DMC are all shaking the windows.

There are people eating food they didn't buy, drinking out of glasses they're not going to wash, and somebody I don't even know has locked themselves in the bathroom.

Then out of nowhere came a sound. It was a sound that instantly struck terror in everyone in the room.

[24 : 22] It was the sound of a garage door opening and a car pulling in. My mom and dad were home early.

Suddenly, the music stops. People start running. Somebody's climbing out the window. And my dad walks through the door, looks around at the crowd, the furniture, the mess, and says, I know I don't see what I think I am seeing in my house.

He turns and looks at me and says, oh, so you want to party? Yeah. Well, let's just say, as I reflect back on that time, I much better understand what Jesus was doing in the temple.

Jesus was not some visitor who walked in and decided to rearrange the furniture. This is his house.

He tells us exactly what is wrong in verse 17.

He quotes Isaiah 56. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers. Jesus is saying you have taken what's supposed to help people encounter God and turned it into something else.

[25 : 49] The place that should have facilitated prayer had become cluttered with commerce. The place that should have welcomed the nations has become consumed with business.

Jesus was looking for worship. So when he starts driving people out and turning tables over, he's not losing control. He's taking it.

Here's a word for the church. Because it's possible for a church to become so busy doing church that we forget why the church exists.

We can have full calendars, active ministries, pretty good music, organized programs, staff meetings, committee meetings, meetings to discuss why are we having so many meetings, and still miss the thing that Jesus says ought to characterize his house.

Jesus is not against organization, programs, excellence, or planning. But every now and then, we need to stop and ask, is all of this helping people get to God?

[27 : 01] Because anything that becomes more important than the purpose for which Jesus established his church may be a table that needs turning over.

Sometimes the king comes into his house and exposes an attitude that needs changing, a tradition that has outlived its purpose, a preference that has become all too important, a division that needs healing.

Jesus loves his church too much to leave his church out of order. He wants his house to be what his house was designed to be, a place where people can meet God, sinners can hear good news, and broken people can find grace.

It's a place where every nation, every generation, every culture and background can come and say, surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

So when the king comes looking, he comes looking for fruit. He comes looking for true worship. And finally, he comes looking faith.

[28 : 11] The next morning, verse 20, they pass that same fig tree again, the one that was cursed back in verse 14.

And Peter notices that it has withered from the roots. There's a message there I don't have time to flesh out. Jesus deals with roots while we're still messing around with leaves.

But that's a whole other sermon. He says, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered.

Isn't that cool? Jesus responds, have faith in God.

Wait, okay. That initially feels like an abrupt change of subject there, Jesus. But Jesus hasn't really changed the subject at all.

Peter is fascinated by the result. And Jesus is trying to redirect him to the source. Peter says, look at the tree. Jesus says, look at God.

[29 : 16] Peter is amazed by what happened. But Jesus wants him to understand the power and the authority of the one who made it happen. The lesson is not merely that Jesus can make a fig tree wither.

The lesson is that God is amazing and can be trusted with everything. And that's where the inspection begins to become a little more personal.

Because up to this point, the disciples have watched Jesus look at Jerusalem, look at the temple, look for fruit on the fig tree. But now Jesus starts to turn his attention toward them. He's saying, yeah, I've been looking for fruit, but now I'm looking for faith.

Not faith in your ability. Not faith in your resources. Not faith in your experience. Not even faith in your faith. Have faith in God. Jesus knows they are about to enter a week when everything they will see will tell them that God has lost control.

Jesus will be arrested. Their teacher will be beaten. Their Messiah will be condemned. The Lord will be crucified. And they're going to need a faith that can trust God when what they see does not make sense.

[30 : 35] And that church is where our faith gets tested as well. It's one thing to trust God when prayers are being answered. The family is doing well. Money is right.

Doors are opening. But can you trust God when Friday comes and it looks like everything has gone wrong? Jesus says, have faith in God.

He presses further in verses 23 and 24, talking about the ability to move mountains into the sea and prayers being answered. Church, we have sometimes turned this particular part of the passage into a blank check.

As though faith means we can demand whatever we want from God if we just believe hard enough. And God is somehow obligated to do whatever it is we ask.

But biblical faith is not confidence that God will do whatever I say. Biblical faith is confidence that God is capable of doing whatever he says.

[31 : 46] Prayer, church, is not trying to twist God's arm. Prayer is placing our lives in God's hands and trusting his will for our lives.

Lastly, Jesus connects that faith to forgiveness. It is the character that accompanies faith.

Verse 25, when you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone. Genuine faith does not just affect how you talk to God.

It affects how you treat people. You can't celebrate the forgiveness you have received while refusing to extend forgiveness to somebody else.

Jesus is looking for faith. So Jesus is looking for faith that prays boldly, trusts deeply, and forgives freely. When Jesus comes looking for faith.

[32 : 52] When Jesus comes looking at your life, brothers and sisters, does he find faith? Faith, not perfect faith. Not perfect faith. Not perfect faith. Not faith that understands everything or has all the answers or never gets scared or nervous.

But faith that says, God, I don't know how you're going to do it, but I trust you. I don't know when you're going to do it, but I trust you.

I can't see around this mountain, but I trust you. Have faith in God. So Mark 11 begins with a parade, but underneath the parade is an inspection.

Because the king has come home and the king has come looking. 2,000 years later, church, the king is still looking.

He walks through his church looking for fruit. He walks through our worship looking for hearts that genuinely seek him. He walks through our lives looking for faith.

[33 : 57] The danger is, church, that we can try to fool everybody else, even ourselves at times. Because from the doorway, the room can look clean.

From the road, the tree can look fruitful. From the courtyard, the temple can look worshipful. But the king does not inspect from the doorway.

He comes in the room. He looks under some things. He looks behind some things. He looks into some places we just hope he wouldn't inspect.

Because he's not impressed with appearances. He's looking proof. Let me leave you, though, with some good news.

The good news, I love that about the gospel. The same king that comes looking is the same king that is able to make right whatever he's found wrong.

[34:57] Help me, Jesus. Because the goal of inspection is not merely to expose what is wrong. It's to put things right. That's why Jesus came to Jerusalem.

You'll see this further as we move in this series that before this week over, this week is over, he will do what no temple, no sacrifice, no religious system could ever accomplish.

He will give himself for sinners and open a way for us to be made right with God. Yeah, Mark isn't quite finished telling the story.

Today, Mark simply leaves us standing under the searching gaze of the king. And maybe that's where this sermon ought to leave us.

Not looking at Jerusalem. Not looking at the temple. Not looking at the person sitting next to you. But saying, Lord, look at me.

[36:02] Look at my heart. Look at my motives. Look at my worship. Look at the way I treat people. Look at what my life is producing. And whatever you find that isn't right, Lord, set it in order.

Church, the prevailing question is not whether he is looking. He is. The only question is, when the king comes looking, will he find in us what he's looking for?

Let's pray. Father, thank you. Thank you for sending your son. Thank you for the king that not only comes looking, but the king that comes to make things right.

Thank you that in spite of our frailties, in spite of our sin, in spite of our inconsistencies, the king has mercy and grace for all of us.

And that he has a remedy for what he expects. God, thank you for sending your son to be that remedy. God, make us people who are willing to be what God has called us to be.

[37:20] Make us a church that is willing to be what God has called us to be. So when he comes looking, he finds in us exactly what he's looking for.

We give you praise and thanks in your son's name we do pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.