

What Is It You Want Me to Do for You?

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 18th of March 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, What is it you want me to do for you? And is from Mark chapters 9 to 12. Amen. There used to be a program on television when I was growing up called I Dream of Jeannie. I think it's still on. It's very dated now. I have a feeling it was one of the first times that a woman's navel was ever shown on television. I might be wrong, but I think Barbara Eden was the star of that. And that was a bit scandalous at the time. Anyway, the fascination about I Dream of Jeannie was thinking up, what would I get a genie to do?

[1 : 27] You know, the typical thing, hello, I'm a genie, I've got three wishes, what would you like to wish for? And I would fascinate about the different sorts of things that I would ask a genie for.

Lots of money, good health, holidays, get away from home. There's a birthday card that I bought for my nephew the other day that's got a picture of a genie with a boy.

And the boy is saying, you mean I've got a third wish? And already behind him on the ledge are two bottles, one of which has his father in it and one of which has his mother in it. And now he's got a third wish.

Well, what wish would you make if a genie or somebody with all power said to you, what would you like me to do for you? At the very northern tip of Israel, the northernmost point, Peter, as we saw last week, the chief disciple of Jesus' followers, declared at last, you are the Messiah.

You are the Christ. And Mark's gospel to that point has been building up and up and up to that confession by Peter, you are the Christ. And leading up to it have been a string of rather spectacular miracles, some opposition, some resentment, bits of teaching of Jesus and journeying here and there and around and over a lake.

[2 : 46] But it culminates, as we saw last week, with Peter's confession, you are the Christ. You're the Messiah. Now, the issue is, what sort of Messiah?

What's this Messiah, this Christ, come to do? What would you have me do for you? Is a question he asks twice in these chapters of different people.

Now, for many in Jesus' day, the main thing, the top of their list would be to overthrow the Romans, who had oppressed the people of Israel or Palestine for about 90 years to the time of Jesus' life.

And indeed, their reign had become more and more oppressive, especially in Judea around Jerusalem. For others, perhaps their wish would be that they would be full of honour and glory, to have pride of place over all the other citizens.

We certainly see glimpses of that sort of wish in these chapters too. Indeed, also expressed by Jesus' own disciples. For a blind man whom Jesus asks, what would you like me to do for you?

[3 : 56] He says, I'd like to see. And he does. But in the end, the answer to the question, not so much the question, what would you like me to do for you, but rather what I am going to do for you, is surprising.

It's shocking. Indeed, it's scandalous. Because this Messiah, this Christ, is going to die. And that's what these chapters, above all, are anticipating.

Immediately after, Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus says the words we heard in the very first reading. He began to teach them that the Son of Man, that's himself, must undergo great suffering.

Messiahs don't normally suffer, surely. And be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes. We've already seen hints of that rejection in the first eight chapters. And be killed, he says. And that's where the scandal hits. You don't expect a Messiah to be killed. You don't expect a Messiah to die. The Messiah of the Old Testament was going to come and usher in God's eternal

reign of glory and triumph and vindication for God's people and defeat for God's enemies.
[5 : 13] It was going to be an everlasting reign. Though Jesus does then say, And after three days rise again. What an extraordinary words.

It wouldn't have taken Jesus much cleverness to predict that he would be killed. We've seen plenty of hints of his rejection and opposition and indeed plots to kill him already. But it takes something else to predict that after three days you're going to rise from the dead. Especially when, of course, he does. Now Peter is scandalised by these words of Jesus. Having just declared, You are the Messiah, the last thing he expects Jesus to say is, I'm going to be killed. And rise again from the dead. But it's the killing that scandalises Peter. And so he rebukes Jesus. He tells him off for saying such things. Can you imagine it? Peter telling Jesus off. And Jesus then turned. He looked at all his disciples as though he's a pregnant pause as he looks around the group of twelve to see what they're thinking.
[6 : 22] And then he rebuked Peter. And he said, Get behind me, Satan. Now Jesus is not calling Peter Satan here.

But rather Peter's words of rebuke have been telling Jesus, You're not going to die. The Messiah doesn't die. And the reason Jesus responds to him by saying, Get behind me, Satan. Satan is that Peter's words are a temptation to Jesus not to die, not to go to the cross. And from the beginning of Mark's gospel, that's been what Satan's on about. There have been a few times where Satan's reared his ugly head. And each time he's trying to deflect Jesus from going to the cross to die. Because Satan knows, as we'll see more clearly next week, that on the cross, Satan is defeated once for all. We see glimpses of Jesus triumphing over Satan by casting out evil spirits.
[7 : 21] We saw that last week. There's another couple of instances like that this week. But it's at the cross that the final victory is won. And Satan is doing everything possible to stop Jesus getting there.

So speaking through Peter, scandalised by Jesus saying, I'm going to be killed, Jesus is tempted to avoid dying. And he says, Get behind me, Satan. For you're setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things. Jesus' words, when he said that he's going to be killed, had an important little word that's so easy to overlook. In verse 31 of chapter 8, Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo suffering, etc., leading to death. Not that he chose it, not that it was option A, and there was a whole range of options he could have done, but that Jesus must be killed. Jesus must die. Because it's God's plan. It's God's purpose. There's no way out of it. Jesus could escape death, but he would fail God and fail the purpose for which God had sent him to this earth.
[8 : 34] And yet again, he resists Satan. And then he follows that with a little bit of teaching about discipleship. And that's one of the things that begins to come in to Mark's Gospel here. How are we meant to follow this Messiah?

And his words pick up in effect the words that he's just said about him going to die. If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. To take up your cross meant going to die. The only person who carried a cross in Jesus' day was a sentenced prisoner on their way outside a city under Roman rule to die as a prisoner. I remember when I was in Jerusalem one time, seeing a man just walking down a street. It was very early in the morning. There was hardly anybody on one of these little cobbled streets in old Jerusalem.

And he was carrying a cross. I must say it looked a bizarre sort of thing to just be walking along carrying a cross on his back. I'm sure he wasn't going to die. There weren't any soldiers there. It was probably part of some stage play or something.
[9 : 38] But there he was walking along the road carrying a cross. You didn't do that in Jesus' day. The only time you'd carry a cross then would be on your way out to be executed by the Roman governors and government.

So when Jesus says, if you want to follow me, you take up your cross, he is saying, if you want to be my disciple, then you must be prepared to die as I am going to die. That's a fairly demanding thing to say of a person who might want to be the disciple or follower of Jesus. But then he goes on to explain it. For those who want to save their life will lose it. That is, those who do everything they can to save their physical life now, one day you'll die and you'll lose it all.

And those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, notice how Jesus' sake and the gospel's sake are the same thing. They'll save it. That is, people who are prepared to lose their physical life for the sake of Jesus will actually gain eternal life with him in heaven.

And then he goes on to say, for what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? And you look around our world and there are people trying to do that. They're trying to gain the whole world, riches and health and security and family and every little mod, con and comfort that they can accumulate.

[11 : 03] But they're forfeiting their soul or their life. Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? The answer to that is nothing. We can't give anything in return for our life. And then Jesus says, those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of them, the son of man, will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.

If you're ashamed of Jesus now, he's saying, then when Jesus returns in judgment, he will be ashamed of you then. And he said to them, truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.

He's talking there about his own resurrection. That's when the kingdom of God comes with power, when death is defeated. Oh, it'll come with final power when Jesus returns to the earth. But Jesus is not saying there'll be some there then who would be alive when Jesus returns for his second coming.

He's talking about the coming of the kingdom with power at the time of his resurrection. It's to underscore the certainty. You lose your life now for Jesus' sake as he's about to lose his life for our sake.

You'll gain it for eternity. It's an odd scale of values. It's the reverse of what our world thinks. But it's Jesus' truth.

[12 : 24] These words have been spoken in the far north. Caesarea Philippi, which is where these words of Peter's confession about Jesus being the Messiah were spoken, is one of the most northern towns in Israel of Jesus' day.

And it lies in the foothills of Mount Hermon, a tall mountain, taller than anything in Australia, snow-capped even in the Middle East for most of the year. And today it forms the corner point where the countries of Syria, Lebanon and Israel all converge.

There was one time when I was fortunate enough to fly into Damascus and out of the clouds, even though it was warm weather down in the bottom, there was this towering mountain, snow-capped Mount Hermon, coming out of the clouds.

Six days after this confession, Jesus took with him some of his disciples, three of them, and led them up a high mountain, not named, but quite possibly it's Mount Hermon, the tallest of the mountains.

There are various traditions that it's others of them, but we know it's got to be six days' walk at most from Caesarea Philippi. So Mount Hermon is quite a likely possibility. And there the disciples get a vision, or they see Jesus suddenly almost glowing white, dazzling white, transfigured is the word, up on the mountain, something they've never seen before.

[13 : 43] A hint perhaps of the glory of Old Testament, in the Old Testament, of the glory of the Lord shining. And when they see Jesus dazzling white, they also see with him Elijah and Moses, two of the great heroes of the Old Testament.

Moses was the one who traditionally, well, through him, God spoke the words of the law, and traditionally it's regarded, he wrote down the first five books of the Old Testament, commonly called the Torah or the law.

And Elijah was one of the great prophets. So to see Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus is perhaps in some way to say, here is the law and the prophets, a summary for the Old Testament, with Jesus there with them.

And then at the end, they're gone, and Jesus remains. As though the Old Testament is now superseded or fulfilled by Jesus. But of course, Moses died on top of a mountain and nobody ever knew where his grave was.

There was a lot of mystery about his death. And Elijah didn't die. He was rather carried up to heaven in chariots of fire in the beginning of the second book of Kings. So both of them had sort of mystery associated with their death.

[14:53] So there was a sense in which there was some expectation that they might return, that Elijah would come back, and especially that a prophet like Moses would come back. Now we saw last week a couple of times people asking, who is Jesus?

And some of them thought that he was Elijah. Some thought that he was the prophet, meaning a prophet like Moses because that's predicted in Deuteronomy. Some thought that he was John the Baptist. Now when the disciples here see Moses and Elijah and Jesus, and then Moses and Elijah gone with Jesus remaining, it's actually underscoring the answer to the question earlier on. Who do people say that I am? I'm not Elijah. He's somebody else and he's gone. I'm not Moses or the prophet. He's gone. Indeed he goes on to say in the next paragraph, chapter 9, verses 9 to 13, that Elijah's already come in the form of John the Baptist who's been beheaded as we saw last week.

He's gone. That is, Jesus is none of those people. He's somebody far greater than Moses, than Elijah, than John the Baptist as he's transfigured on this mountain.

But perhaps the most important thing is not what the disciples saw but what they heard. And they heard a voice from heaven saying, this is my son, the beloved.

[16:12] Listen to him. Now they are extraordinary words. One, it's a declaration of who Jesus is. He's not just the Messiah but he's God's own son.

The same thing that was said at his baptism back in chapter 1 and the same thing that will be said at his crucifixion by a Roman centurion which we'll see next week. So at the beginning, the middle and the end of Mark's gospel come very clear statements, this is God's son.

More than even the Messiah. But then comes the statement, listen to him. You see, that's what's important. All through the Old Testament, the prophets would say, this is God's word, listen to it.

But now comes the statement, not listen to God or God's voice from heaven saying, listen to me but rather listen to him. That is putting Jesus on a par with God.

For all through the Old Testament, it is God whom we're meant to listen to. But now God himself says, listen to Jesus. Jesus, never was that said of a prophet in the Old Testament.

[17:17] Never was that said of Moses who gave the law. But really only of Jesus who is divine. To the extent that others were to listen to Moses or other prophets were purely because they spoke the words of God.

But now comes an authority for Jesus that is different and greater than anything we've ever seen in the Old Testament. Well, when Jesus comes down the mountain with these three disciples and meets the other disciples, there's a bit of a debate and difficulty about trying to cast out evil spirits, a particularly difficult one the disciples are unable to do and Jesus casts out this evil spirit as he's done so on other occasions.

Evil spirits are seeking to bring about death. Jesus rescues the boy from the point of death. They think he's dead and he brings him back to life again in verses 14 through to 29 of chapter 9.

And then we come to the second reading tonight. They went on from there and passed through Galilee. So from the very north of the country they've now come back down still in the north but around the Sea of Galilee where so much of what we saw last week happened.

And there now Jesus says these words to his disciples. The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands and they will kill him. And three days after being killed he'll rise again.

[18:38] It's pretty much what we've already heard in chapter 8 saying it again although adding here the emphasis that Jesus will be betrayed this time. A slightly more sinister edge to the fact that he's going to be killed because as we know all too well it's one of his 12 inner disciples Judas Iscariot who betrays him.

And the disciples are still confused. They don't understand what he's talking about even though it's the second time that he's predicted his death and his resurrection. Now how do they respond this time to this prediction of his death and resurrection?

The first time Peter rebuked him and then in turn was rebuked by Jesus. He failed to understand what was going on and what this Messiah was like. Well the same sort of thing happens this time as well.

This time they come now to Capernaum right on the side of the Sea of Galilee the home base for Jesus' adult ministry as we saw over the last two weeks. and he's in the house maybe again Peter's mother-in-law's house we're not quite sure which house it is and he asked them what were you arguing about on the way?

They were silent they were embarrassed because on the way they'd argued with one another who was the greatest. It's almost childish isn't it? I'm greater than you now I'm greater than you.

[19 : 55] Who's the greatest? Who's going to have the pride of place in glory? That's the sort of statement that they're probably asking and debating about amongst them. Three of the disciples had gone up the mountain the rest were left behind.

Who knows maybe it's the three who've been up the mountain and seen the transfiguration who's saying look we're greater than you guys you nine we're greater we've been up there up to the mountain we've seen the view. That's what they're debating.

And Jesus sits down as a rabbi would do to teach and he called the twelve and he said to them whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.

He gets a child then to illustrate the point that he's making. But Jesus is teaching here what true greatness is. True greatness is being last is being a servant of all.

The greatest is the last and that is the value of the kingdom of God. God it's not the world's values but it's the kingdom of God's values. But Jesus doesn't explain it anymore here.

[21 : 08] We've got to wait a little bit longer for that. After this he heads further south from Galilee and we're told at the beginning of chapter 10 he left that place and went to the region of Judea the southern area around Jerusalem.

We're not told anything he did in Judea because immediately we're told and then he went beyond the Jordan. But probably fitting this together with other gospels he's probably actually gone up to Jerusalem for the feast of tabernacles in John chapter 7 he does that and then he goes beyond the Jordan where he is when Lazarus dies in John's gospel.

But Mark is restrained and only tells us things that he wants to tell us so that the sense of Mark's gospel is Jesus has not yet got to Jerusalem in this gospel. He's come close now he's crossed the far side of the Jordan what would be modern day kingdom of Jordan and there in the area called in those days Perea he spends some time.

The crowds are gathering around him and as was his custom he again taught them. The Pharisees came probably down from Jerusalem and they came to test him as we saw last week and the week before there was opposition from the Jewish leaders that was growing and here now they deliberately come to test Jesus and the issue they test him on is the question in verse 2 of chapter 10 is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Now I don't want to go into the issues of divorce here it's too big an issue to deal with in this sermon but it's probably significant that the area where Jesus is is the area where John the Baptist was when he was beheaded and he was beheaded because he took a stand against Herod for marrying for divorcing and remarrying the sister of his brother so Jesus being tested about this issue is probably a bit sinister it's not Pharisees coming look Jesus we've got a difficult problem here can you sort it out for us?

[23 : 09] They're trying to trap him as they trapped or Herod had trapped John the Baptist earlier on as we saw last week now for the Pharisees they had rather easy divorce they interpreted the Old Testament laws about divorce to give great freedom to have divorce Jesus pushes them all the way back to Genesis chapter 2 where the creation of male and female would lead to marriage that would be long lasting one flesh permanent and so on now this incident leads to further tension with the Jewish leaders and it's part of this growing sinister thread through these chapters of Mark's gospel in verse 17 of chapter 10 Jesus sets out again he's going on a journey maybe it's his journey up to Jerusalem maybe it's just a day trip somewhere and a man ran up to him and knelt before him and asked him good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life now this isn't a trap it's a genuine question from a genuine inquirer a good man though rich

Jesus says you know the commandments he lists some of the ten commandments the man says I've done them all since my youth Jesus looked at him loved him he knew the man was being sincere not boastful or arrogant and Jesus said to him in verse 21 you lack one thing go sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven then come follow me and the man was sad he went away sad having run up to Jesus with eagerness he goes off sad he goes off sad because he's a wealthy man and he had many possessions now Jesus words here are not telling each one of us to go and sell everything we have and give it all to the poor otherwise we'd all be disobeying a very clear command of Jesus Jesus words were to this man in particular to give away his possessions because Jesus knew that the thing that was holding him back spiritually was his love of wealth and his possessions possessions it's not just that he's rich but that he's rich

and he loves his possessions and he found it too hard to give them away to the poor now the point of all this incident then is his words to the disciples in verse 23 how hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God and then he says words which are fairly well known to us it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who's rich to enter the kingdom of God now people have tried to dismiss those words over the years by saying there was a gate in Jerusalem called the camel gate and it's talking about a rich person entering this smallish gate called the camel gate well that's nonsense there's no one's ever found a camel gate it's talking about getting a camel through an eye of a needle now I have trouble getting a thread of cotton through an eye of a needle every time I try and sew a button back on my shirts I think why isn't my mother here to do it for me or why don't I have a sewing machine or maybe

I'll just pay somebody to go and do it for me I can't get a thread of cotton through well have you ever tried to get a camel through an eye of a needle it's an absurd picture but of course it's absurd that's what Jesus is saying it is very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God because wealth and possessions is such an attractive idol and God that we love the disciples then say well who can be saved see they realize the absurdity of Jesus statement who can be saved then if it's so hard to be saved and Jesus says for mortals it's impossible but not for God for God all things are possible now what Jesus is saying there to his disciples about salvation is simply this none of us will qualify for salvation by anything that we do it is only God who makes salvation possible doesn't matter what we do doesn't matter how many possessions we give away to the poor we cannot earn our salvation it is only possible because of

God and then comes the third prediction they're on the road they're going up to Jerusalem they're probably around the Jordan River they've come from the far side of the Jordan they're heading over the Jordan again to Jericho and then from Jericho which they'll leave a bit later on they'll head up into the hills to Jerusalem they're on the road Jesus is walking ahead of them as a shepherd would lead sheep in those days ahead of the sheep people were amazed some were afraid and he took the twelve aside out of earshot of the crowds crowds no doubt going up for the feast of Passover great pilgrim feast and he began to tell them what was to happen to him saying and here he says it for the third time see we're going up to Jerusalem the first time that he's actually mentioned the destination and the son of man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes and they'll condemn him to death then they'll hand him over to the Gentiles that's the first time they've been mentioned in these predictions the Gentiles and the non-Jews in this case the Roman authorities and they'll mock him and spit upon him and flog him as in fact they did and they'll kill him and after three days he'll rise again now let me just say by way of passing here that sometimes

Christians over the centuries have fallen into an anti-Semitic trap that is an anti-Jewish trap of saying in effect you Jews killed the Messiah Jesus now there's some truth in that I think in our politically correct age we mustn't lose the truth that yes Jews condemned Jesus to death but it's also true that the Gentiles put Jesus to death they were actually the ones who nailed the nails in so it's not a racial thing about Jesus being executed Jew and Gentile combined put Jesus to death these words of prediction here and what happens of course in a few days time makes that very clear now how do his disciples respond have they learned what this Messiah is on about or not well no they haven't because now it's James and John the sons of Zebedee they're brothers and they're talking about where they want to sit in heaven one wants the right one wants the left that is they're talking about who's the greatest in effect the greatest spot would be on the right and the second greatest would be on the left so they haven't learned anything since the last prediction when Jesus told them who the greatest would be that would be the servant of all so that follows in verses 35 of chapter 10 through to verse 45 again they've got it wrong and this time

[30 : 04] Jesus asked them a rather cryptic question by way of response you don't know what you're asking he says are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I'm being baptized with now those words which pick up Old Testament allusions are talking about his death are you going to die like me see that's real service when Jesus says the last shall be first and the first shall be last the greatest shall be the least and the servant of all in effect he's talking about himself and he's saying I'm putting myself last by dying can you do that well they don't know what they're talking about and they say yeah we're able to do that and then comes an odd word from Jesus he says well the cup that I drink you will drink and with the baptism with which I'm baptized you will be baptized I suspect there are either two things he means either he means that they'll be martyred later on which is probably true we certainly know it of James or possibly he's saying in my death you will die but it's a bit hard to know because we'd expect Jesus to say no you

won't you can't the cup that I drink is the cup of wrath of God of judgment against sin on this world that's the Old Testament background now when the other disciples heard all this they got angry at James and John for trying to get the right and the left hand seats so Jesus got them all together yet again he said you know that among the Gentiles the nations that is the non-Jews those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them but it's not so among you for whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant reiterating what he said in the previous chapter and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all again what he said in the previous chapter but now comes the explanation for the descriptions of Jesus dying chapter 8 chapter 9 and chapter 10 three predictions three times the disciples get it wrong three times they think that they know better three times it seems they're seeking greatness and so on and now Jesus explains what it's all about in verse 45 here in chapter 10 for the son of man that's Jesus name for himself came not to be served but to serve and how will he serve by giving his life as a ransom for many what do you want me to do for you he's asked oh we want the best seats in heaven I'll tell you what I'll do for you I'll die oh messiahs don't die but that's what Jesus is going to do that's not a death of defeat it's not a futile act he's not an unwilling helpless victim of Roman and Jewish authorities combined that nail him to a cross his death serves the world his death serves

God's purpose for the world because he dies to give his life as a ransom now you know what a ransom is if you hijack a plane the last time you hijacked a plane you probably wrote to some government somewhere and said I want lots of money and a few nice chocolate cakes as well the money and the chocolate cakes are the ransom so the government writes you a big check and sends you along a few Sarah Lee chocolate cakes and the ransom's paid and so if you're a good hijacker you set all your hijacked victims free I presume that's what most of you have done when you've hijacked planes and trains and so on Jesus is saying that his death is the ransom price that's what has to be paid for our sakes for the sakes of the world why so that we can be set free not from a plane or a train or from a kidnapper but in the context of Mark's gospel from sin for us to be set free from sin a ransom price has to be paid and it's Jesus life and that's what he's come to do he's come to give his life as a ransom for many for any that is and though it's true that many have seen a seeking to kill

Jesus notice that he said he came to give his life not to have it taken from him unwillingly but for him in fact willingly to offer his life after all he's heading to Jerusalem he knows what's going to happen he's predicted it three times he knows he's going to die he knows he's going to die from Jewish and Roman hands combined but he's come to give his life to them so that he can die as a ransom for the world what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their life Jesus forfeits his life so that we can save ours what can a person give in return for their life nothing Jesus death has returned our life to us forever Jesus heads up to Jerusalem passes through Jericho where he heals a blind man who acknowledges him as the son of David the Messiah that is the one who's descended from David whom the

Old Testament anticipates what do you want me to do for you Jesus says to him give me my sight he does and he follows him he doesn't stay in Jericho enjoying looking around the view but he follows Jesus up the hill and now at last in chapter 11 the king arrives in his capital the Messiah comes to Jerusalem he comes not as people would expect with troops and military might riding on a war horse but on a donkey but it's all that the Old Testament expected of the Messiah here is the Old Testament Messiah coming as predicted in Zechariah 9 on a donkey riding over the Mount of Olives again as the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would enter Jerusalem from the east and the Galilean pilgrims who are coming with him who've seen his miracles and heard his teaching some of them no doubt healed like blind Bartimaeus from Jericho they're coming up for the Passover festival with Jesus and they throw down their palm branches and they sing Hosanna to the son of

[36 : 21] David this is the Messiah here he comes Jerusalem welcome your king they sing and they quote from Psalm 118 one of the standard psalms that the pilgrims would sing as they entered Jerusalem for any of the major feasts and for now for them now it is being fulfilled by this man this Messiah on a donkey but despite this triumphant welcome and arrival all is not well in the capital of Jerusalem the next day as he goes back into the city because he's staying out a couple of kilometers away on the other side of the Mount of Olives maybe with Mary and Martha two of his friends he comes back and he curses a fig tree it's one of those incidents in Mark's gospel that

every time somebody reads it for the first time they ponder this what is going on here why does he curse a fig tree in spring because it hasn't got fruit but you don't expect fruit on a fig tree till summer anyway and what he's doing there is a sort of acted illustration of what he goes and does in the temple by turning over the tables of the money changes in the temple it's a statement a parable if you like an acted parable of doom and judgment coming on Israel which in some places in the Old Testament is likened to a fig tree he comes into the temple the heart of Jerusalem turns over the tables of the money changers there was some legitimacy about them because if you came for a sacrifice you were allowed to sell your lamb back up in Galilee take the money bring it to the temple and then buy a decent lamb and offer the sacrifice because it's easier if you come from a long distance the Old Testament allowed that to happen but of course the practice was corrupted because of the extortion you had to of course use proper Jewish money and not the standard currency and the exchange rates were fixed by chief priests and scribes and so on Jesus is condemning the temple and its practices but the words and the actions resonate with Old Testament prophets with Jeremiah and Isaiah in particular with Malachi as well who predicted that the Lord would come to the temple the temple would be destroyed people have got false trust in the standing of the temple and now indeed the king the Messiah has come long awaited for hundreds of years in the Old Testament and he's come to judge oh he's just said I've come to give my life as a ransom for salvation for many but the flip side of the same deed is he's come to judge and here he's doing that and then what follows in the rest of chapter 11 and into chapter 12 a series of tests traps they're not innocent tests Jesus I've got a difficult problem can you solve it for me like sewing on a button on my shirt but rather they're sinister tests of Jesus they say to him in chapter 11 verse 27 onwards by what authority John baptizing Jesus evades their test because if he says one thing then he's trapped in that way if he says another he's trapped in a different way the chief priest the scribes and elders had combined for that test and then the next one in beginning of chapter 12 he teaches them a parable a parable against them which they detect but it's the clearest statement of Jesus that he is the son of God God's own son in this parable it's a prediction of his own death it's told against the Jewish leaders in effect he's calling their bluff the next test comes from Pharisees and Herodians joining together and unlikely mixes we've already seen in Mark's gospel should we pay taxes was the issue if Jesus says yes you pay taxes then he's not clearly rightly Jewish he's treasonable he's siding with the Romans if he says no you shouldn't pay taxes because they've got Caesar's head on it and so on then that's treason against the Roman Empire you can't win with that question they're trying to trap him of course Jesus fantastic response says look at the coin whose heads on it render to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's he evades their trap and then come the Sadducees another of the leading groups the wealthy landowners and chief priests came from the Sadducees they didn't believe in the resurrection they tried to trick Jesus on the resurrection here's a case Jesus there's a man who's married wife dies marries a oh no he dies she marries the brother which is sort of standard practice in the Old Testament he dies and that keeps going through seven brothers well who's going to be a husband in in the resurrection life see resurrection silly when you get a case like that isn't it can't be true Jesus exposes their false understanding of scripture that God is the God of the living not the dead then comes a genuine question it's surprising really but a man who says what's the greatest commandment yes Jesus says it's love God and love your neighbor two of them the man agrees in effect Jesus says you're very close to the kingdom of God but what's missing is Jesus himself following the Messiah the king finally at the end of chapter 12 Jesus himself himself then takes the initiative he throws them a riddle about David how can the descendant of David be the Lord of David because in Jewish thinking if you're a descendant of somebody you always lower down the scale than your ancestor ancestors were held very highly well if a descendant of David is going to be the Messiah how can he actually be the Lord of David and yet a descendant well they have no answer for that and Jesus doesn't give them one but he's talking about himself then he denounces the scribes arrogance they're the ones who want to be first they're the ones who lord it over others it's not a kingdom value and then finally he praises someone at the very end of chapter 12 a widow the lowest of all the least of all you'd say in society landless poor a widow who gives a small coin into the collection in the treasury of the temple and Jesus in effect says of her there is the one person who has rendered to God what is

[42 : 27] God's Jesus overturns more than tables in the temple in these chapters he overturns the values of our world the values of ourselves as well he overturns human pride and self-seeking the ones who are trying to be the first to be the top dog but in the kingdom of God the first shall be last and what's more important is that Jesus has demonstrated that himself he is the first he's the top he's the Messiah he's the son of God but he put himself at the bottom to die on a cross as a ransom for many his death isn't a futile exhibition of self-denial it's a ransom for many because it accomplishes our salvation it overthrows Satan and it brings us eternal life that's what this Messiah is on about that's what he's come to offer not to overthrow Romans not to pat us on the back and stroke our egos he's come to overthrow this world and Satan and evil he's come to bring about the kingdom of God in power the kingdom of God in power and