

Mark 11:1-25

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- [0:00] I met a traveler from an antique land who said, Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert.
- Near them, on the sand, half sunk, a shattered visage lies, Whose frown and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command Tell that its sculptor well those passions read, which yet survive, Stamped on these lifeless things.
- The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed. And on the pedestal, these words appear. My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.
- Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair. Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, The lone and level sands stretch far away.
- I wrote that myself. No, I didn't. That's Percy Shelley's poem, Ozymandias. Some of you will know it. It tells the story of a titanic, colossal, ruined statue.
- [1:09] Now, just two legs sticking up in the desert. A statue of some long-forgotten king. My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair.
- But today, nobody even remembers the name of this once great emperor. There are no works to see and despair over, just sand stretching away as far as the eye can see.
- Now, the poet who wrote this was inspired by the discovery of a great statue of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh named Ramses II. But it could have been any king.
- I mean, just think how many great empires have risen and fallen in human history. How many great statues are there that have sunk into the sand and been forgotten? More than we can count.
- Power and glory. Human achievement. Renown and fame. These things slip away in time. So what does any of it actually mean?
- [2:13] I wonder which accomplishments you're most proud of. Think about yourself for just a moment. Maybe it's an academic or a professional achievement.
- Maybe it's a moral accomplishment. Something relational. Something you've built with your hands. An award you've received. How do you think God views that accomplishment?
- You're a true king. Do you think he's as impressed with it as you are? Well, this evening we're going to talk about what our king, our true king wants from us.
- And this king, King Jesus, doesn't call us to look on his works in despair. He calls us to hope. And to faith. But he does demand things from us.
- If you have a Bible, turn with me to Mark chapter 11. Mark chapter 11. In the evening service here at Trinity, we've been preaching through the gospel of Mark. And we've come to Mark 11. This wonderful story called the triumphal entry.
- [3:13] If you're using one of the Bibles provided with you on the pew, I believe it's on page 847. Mark 11. And we'll be looking at verses 1 through 25. The large numbers in your Bible are the chapter numbers.

The small numbers are the verse numbers. Mark chapter 11, verses 1 through 25. Listen as I read. Now when they, that's Jesus and his disciples, drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethpage and to 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 the street, and they untied it.

And some of those standing there said to them, what are you doing untying the colt? And they said to 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!

[4 : 30] Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, 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 his 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.

[5 : 29] And they 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. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

And Peter remembered and said to them, 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.

Well, we're going to look at the coming of the King, Jesus Christ, And what is traditionally called the triumphal entry.

And then after that, we're going to look at what Jesus wants from us. We'll see his warning on one hand against fruitlessness, And his call to authentic faith on the other hand. So first, the coming of the King.

[6 : 38] Second, Jesus' warning against fruitfulness. And third, Jesus' call to authentic faith. Let's begin with the triumphal entry. The coming of the King.

Jesus and his disciples are making their way to Jerusalem for a religious festival. And they're not the only ones. There's a busy road, a lot of pilgrims making the same trip. But they seem to recognize that Jesus is somehow different.

Look at verse 8. And many spread their cloaks on the road, And others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. The people spread their cloaks on the road for Jesus to ride on.

That's sort of their way of laying out the red carpet. Laying down your cloak for someone to walk on was a way of showing submission and honor. The people also spread out leafy palm branches.

Palms that signified victory over Israel's enemies. And they shouted, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna means save us. Or even just hallelujah.

[7:39] The message is clear. Here comes the King, like David. The one who will save us. Recognize and honor him. Welcome him. What are they thinking?

What is it that they think Jesus is going to do? Well, we can speculate. Perhaps they're thinking that at long last they have their deliverer. The political deliverer.

The King who's going to free them from their oppressors. Our warrior King is here at last. Like David. Hosanna. Hosanna. Of course, there's something a little bit strange about this scene.

Now, we don't see a lot of royal processions anymore. Maybe when there's a royal wedding we watch on TV. I think probably the closest we experience is a presidential motorcade. Years ago, I used to live in Washington, D.C.

And a presidential motorcade was about the most inconvenient thing imaginable. The Secret Service would shut down major streets always during rush hour. And you couldn't go anywhere until the president had come by in his armored limousine with flags flying and a police escort with sirens blaring.

[8:46] Well, that's not really how Jesus comes into Jerusalem, is it? There are some pom-poms being waved around and some cloaks thrown on the road, but not an armed escort. Notice he doesn't even ride in on a dashing white horse or a caravan of camels.

He comes on a donkey. That's really the strangest thing about this story, if you think about it. Not only that Jesus rides in on a lowly donkey, but that Mark thinks we need to know all the details about how the donkey was procured.

And what the bystanders said when they saw it being untied. And how old this donkey was. Go and untie the colt and say these words and then bring it to me. Why so much about the donkey?

Well, if we read a little more carefully, we'll see that Jesus is actually making a statement. And a statement that's every bit as clear as a presidential motorcade.

The Old Testament book of Zechariah had prophesied that one day the righteous king would come to Jerusalem on the back of a colt. Zechariah 9.9 says, Well, Jesus knew the Bible.

[10:11] And so he mounts a colt and he says as he does it, I am the righteous king bringing salvation. Here I am. The very one you've been waiting for.

But maybe not the one you've expected. Because like Zechariah says, Jesus comes humble. He comes humbly. Now kings are a lot of things.

But they're typically not humble. They wear crowns. They force people to bow before them. They collect titles.

They refer to themselves in the first person plural. We are not amused. But Jesus is the humble king. Now I don't want to minimize Jesus' authority here.

He says it to us in all kinds of ways. The very thing that I say to my children. You are not the boss. Even of our own lives. Jesus tells us we're not the boss.

[11:10] He claims the right to rule. But he is a humble king. The donkey is really just one little sign of this humility. And it's not even the most important sign.

His whole existence as a man is evidence of his humanity. He was God eternal when he decided to become a lowly human being. Paul's letter to the Philippians tells us that Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

By taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself. By becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Now that is humility. Forget the limousine and the secret service detail. It's trading eternal glory in heaven to hang naked on a cross.

And this is the most astounding and important part of a Christian message. That the Son of God himself would come and live a human life, a perfect human life, on our behalf.

[12:17] And then die in our place on the cross. So that through faith, we might have our sins forgiven and be adopted into God's family. That's the message of the gospel. And that's the greatest example of humility that ever has been known or ever could be known.

Jesus is the humble king. I wonder, what part of you resist the idea of God ruling in your life?

I think you're lying to yourself if you say there's no part of you. All of us want to resist God's authority in some way or another. When Christ comes to us and he says, I am the king, we say, yes, yes, you're the king, but not of this.

What's the this for you? Is it how you use your time and money? Is it your sexual conduct? Your big life plans?

Relationships? I mean, really ask yourself that question. And now think again about Christ's humility. His unpretentious love.

[13:29] His willingness to ride on a young donkey. To trade heaven for a cross. Because he doesn't think he's too good for you. He doesn't think he's too good to suffer all the things we suffer and more.

Do you think you can let this humble king rule in your life? Well, that is the man and the king and the God who rides into Jerusalem.

Now he tells us what he wants from us. He says he wants fruitfulness and faith. Look at verse 12. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he, Jesus, 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 his disciples heard it. And if we look down in verse 20, we see what happened the next day.

They walked by the same tree. And they see that it had withered all the way to the roots. Now this is Jesus' only destructive miracle. And it has troubled some people. I mean, what did the poor fig tree ever really do?

[14:39] I mean, a lot of us get short-tempered when we're hungry. But he's supposed to be the sinless son of God. It's supposed to be different. Well, Jesus is not flying off the handle.

That's not what's happening here. We have to pay careful attention to how this story is written down. Notice that right in between this story of the cursing of the fig tree is the account of Jesus clearing the temple in Jerusalem of corruption.

We see that the cursing of the fig tree is actually a kind of living parable. It's a story meant to teach us what happens to fruitless people, not fruitless trees. God wanted his people to bring forth good fruit in their lives.

Honesty, compassion, worship. But instead, they'd been greedy and corrupt. That's what we see in verse 15.

When Jesus entered the temple, he 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.

[15:41] 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. Jesus quotes another Old Testament text from Isaiah 56.

For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. The temple was supposed to be a place for the Jewish nation to assemble and worship. Yes, but also for all the other people in the world who love the Lord.

But that's not how Jesus found it. It wasn't a place for the nations to come and pray and worship. It was a place of exploitation and greed. A den of robbers.

Now the people who ran the temple had organized a very lucrative racket. In order to go and fulfill your obligations according to the law, You had to first go and you had to change your ordinary money into special money.

And then you had to use that special money and buy a special animal to sacrifice. It's a little bit like going to a dishonest used car dealership where they get you on the financing and the purchase price of the car.

[16:46] They're cleaning up. Except it's worse than that. Because this wasn't supposed to be a place of business at all. It was supposed to be something better. This is what that text in Isaiah 56 says in full.

It says, And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be His servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. More than any other place in the world, God's temple was to be a place of joy and prayer and unity.

A place where all peoples could come together and know the Lord. So it's not a surprise that Jesus decides to clean house. Well, now it's back to the fig tree.

When Jesus went to examine it, it didn't have any fruit at all. When He went and looked at the temple, see verse 11, He found the same thing. None of the fruit that God wanted it.

[18:00] And so He cursed the tree and it withered. This miracle of the fig tree is not actually out of Jesus' character. In fact, this is at the very center of His message. He makes this same point, using even the same imagery, again and again and again.

Just to pick one example almost at random, in John 15, He says, I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. Jesus meant this as a warning for us.

This isn't just a lesson for the tree or a lesson for the temple. It's for all people. God calls for us to bring forth the right fruit. So friend, what kind of fruit are you bringing forth now?

Is it prayer and joy? Is it selfishness and strife? All of us must feel the weight of Jesus' words.

- [19:03] Several years ago, the radio host Don Imus made a racist remark on his broadcast. You may remember this scandal. He ended up apologizing, but he still defended himself.
- And he said, look, I'm not a bad person. I'm a good person, but I said a bad thing. Doesn't that sound familiar? I mean, how many times have you basically said the same thing?
- I'm not a bad person. I just did a bad thing. Well, Jesus and the New Testament have a little bit different view on human nature. And it's pretty simple.
- So you can tell a good person and a good tree by the good fruit it produces. And you can tell a bad tree by the bad fruit or the total absence of fruit that it produces.
- Jesus warns us before it's too late. Turn away from this fruitless life of sin. Jesus also tells us what to do.
- [20:05] So what do you think it would be? What is it? Have a plan. Get some structure into your life. Do some random acts of kindness. Organize a 10K for charity. Actually, let's make it a 5K because that sounds a little strenuous.
- He doesn't say any of these things. He says to have faith. That's what the king commands. If you have faith, the rest will follow. Although it will take some work. But faith is essential.
- Look back down to verse 21. And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered. And it's kind of odd because it seems like Jesus kind of suddenly changes the subject.
- 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.
- [21:07] Now Jesus' point here is not just that God can do miracles through faith, although he can. And we need to be careful not to misinterpret what Jesus is saying about prayer.
- He's not saying that we should expect anything at all as long as we can work up enough faith in ourselves. And if for some reason we think our prayer hasn't been answered, that it's because we lack faith in some profound way.
- No, we want to read this in the context of the whole New Testament. And the whole New Testament, prayer is always meant to be according to and dependent on God's will. I mean, just later on in this very book in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus will himself will pray, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.
- Remove this cup, his death from me, yet not what I will, but what you will. That's the model of prayer. That's what it means to pray in faith. And it's prayer in faith that Jesus calls us to.
- It's exactly what was not happening in the temple. And this is a faith that allows us to forgive others, the opposite of the chief priests who are seeking to destroy Jesus. So the tree withered and perished.
- [22:16] The temple followed suit pretty shortly. But here, Jesus says, here is how you can be a fruitful tree. Have faith.
- Simple trust in God. A belief in his power and his goodness. Have the kind of faith that results in real prayer. The kind of faith that allows you to forgive others. Have faith in Jesus, the Son of God, who came to save sinners.
- I think you can all fill in the application. Jesus is coming as King. He's come once and he's already, and he's coming again. And at this very moment, at every moment, he comes to us.

He comes to us in his glorious humility. He calls for repentance, for our fruitlessness. He calls for us to produce the fruit of true faith in him.

How will he find you tonight? Let's pray. Father, we want to pray with real faith.

[23 : 27] The kind of faith that Jesus himself showed. But we have to confess our lack. We fall short in so many ways. So we pray that you would strengthen our faith. We want to trust you.

Pray that you'd help all of us, Lord, to recognize Christ's right to rule over us. Pray that you would help us to bring forth the good fruit that pleases you. The fruit of worship and faith.

And we pray all these things according to your will. And in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.