

Week 43
“A Misunderstood King”
Mark 11:1-26
October 26/27

Summary & Goal:

We are currently working through The Gospel Era, and this week, we will be looking at the Triumphal Entry of Jesus which recounts the moment in Jesus’ life and ministry where He officially ‘cast His ballot’ as the messianic candidate for the Jews—and more than that, to all of mankind. However, in the passage following, we will observe a reversal of expectation, all for the good purpose of Jesus lovingly reorienting us and realigning us to seeing who He truly is, who we truly are, and how He has come to truly save us.

Main Passages:

Mark 11:1-26

Session Outline:

1. The Jesus We Categorize
2. The Jesus Who Breaks Our Categories
3. The Jesus We Truly Want

Session in a Sentence:

God is bigger and more glorious than we can imagine, yet our pride makes us delusional and our expectations keep us enslaved; only His plan can set us free.

Kingdom Connection:

The Kingdom of God does not come in strength and power, but rather, in meekness and weakness. Jesus does not come to Israel with status and title, but rather, with commonness and ubiquity. In this sense, Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (when He publicly announces His messianic call) fits the pattern of Jesus’ Virgin Birth into the earth (when He incarnates into our human context). Both entries significantly communicate that God has come to seek and save the lost; He has not come for those who think they are strong and righteous on their own. His Kingdom is a kingdom marked by humility and humble dependence on God. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear—they will see and hear a Messiah for whom God has given them. But those who consider themselves categorically strong and righteous will miss the strength and righteousness of Jesus and His Kingdom.

Missional Connection:

Jesus Christ proclaims that all people have a common problem of sin; all people have a common need for salvation, and all people are offered a common Savior in Jesus. He has come to take our place, to live the life we should have lived, to die the death we should have died, and to give each of us His righteousness by faith to all who trust and believe.

Introduction:

I'm a huge NBA basketball fan, and there's been somewhat of a recent phenomenon in the NBA culture and media where star players are beginning to 'enshrine' or 'brand' their entry season and final season. To be sure, it is certainly nostalgic and bittersweet whenever legendary players who have been in the league for many, many seasons finally have to exit. 'Hello tours' make sense in terms of the excitement of new all-stars making their entryway into the league. And 'farewell tours' make sense in terms of honoring the veteran all-stars whose terms are almost completed.

Kobe Bryant was the first one I remember to truly go on a 'farewell tour' where every regular-season game at an opposing arena would be immediately considered, "Kobe's last game in [opponent's city]." The whole season became about Kobe Bryant. As you can imagine, for non-Lakers fans, the 'farewell tour' seemed like a superfluous glory-grab.

LeBron James seemed to be the first rookie to truly 'make an entry tour' into the NBA. As the most anticipated player coming out of high school in decades, the expectations were high—but he truly met them from game 1. But what's so interesting is that LeBron's entry season would be seen by many as a "Make Way for the King" tour, whereby brands, media, and marketing agencies would now refer to LeBron James—the 18-year-old kid from Akron, OH—as 'King James.' Nike's marketed and branded their main slogan, "We are all witnesses."

Whether these 'hello tours' or 'farewell tours' have been started out of self-interest or launched by marketing companies (or both), people either love them or hate them. The branding of these 'hello' or 'farewell' tours is either met with open arms and admiration or reticence and skepticism. But there is one commonality regardless: people *always* notice and it *always* elicits a response.

In the passage we will be studying today—Mark 11—Jesus makes His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the official starting place where He is publicly declaring His messianic calling. However, as we will see, His entry comes with both reversal and irony as He does not come in the way we would think. And as a result, people miss the whole point. Yet, the reversal and irony is precisely the point that Jesus aims to communicate.

Let's take a look at Mark 11, starting in verse 1.

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; ² and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. ³ And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."⁴ So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. ⁵ But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"⁶ And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

*“Hosanna!
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’
¹⁰ Blessed is the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!”*

¹¹ And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.. (Mark 11:1-11, Chronological Bible, October 23rd, p. 1375-76).

Geographical Significance:

Before we dive into the main narration, there is an important detail that we cannot overlook. Look back at verse 1, and note where Jesus begins this triumphal entry. Where is Jesus, geographically? He is at the Mount of Olives.

This is not a coincidence nor is it arbitrary.

The Mount of Olives is a highly significant site in the Bible. Many important events in the Bible take place at the Mount of Olives, and it will also be the site of a yet-future fulfillment of prophecy as well. For example, the Gospel of Luke recounts that Jesus made many visits to the Mount of Olives (Lk. 21:37; Lk. 22:39) and that it was His place of prayer and communion with God.

It is also important to note that the Mount of Olives also geographically encompasses the Garden of Gethsemane (literally, ‘Garden of the Oil-press’) where Jesus prayed before He was taken to be crucified. More specifically, the Garden of Gethsemane was located at the foot of the Mount of Olives on the western slope.

Additionally, the Mount of Olives would also be the very place where Jesus would ascend into heaven after His resurrection, and—according to the prophet Zechariah—it will also be the very place where Jesus returns in His second coming to establish the new heavens and new earth (Zech. 14:4).¹

It is highly significant that Jesus began His Triumphal Entry at the Mount of Olives. Why? Because this ultimately means **Jesus had the end in view when He began**. He had the crucifixion in view; He had the resurrection in view; He had the ascension in view; He had the second-coming in view, and He had the new heavens and new earth in view—all at once—all before He started down the path to Jerusalem.

The path Jesus would take would not just be a ‘Triumphal Entry’ that would last for a moment’s time. Rather, it was a path that would victoriously lead to eternity’s triumph. Jesus had more than just Israel’s circumstantial difficulty and immediate welfare in mind. He had the welfare of the entire cosmos for all time in mind.

¹ Got Questions: *Your Questions, Biblical Answers*. “What happened on the Mount of Olives?”
<https://www.gotquestions.org/Mount-of-Olives.html>.

But Jesus' perspective on the Mount of Olives was not just cosmic in scale. It was also personal in nature. When Jesus looked out at Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, He was also taking that path with you and me in mind—our sin, our punishment, our salvation, and our eternity. When Jesus stood on the Mount Olives, He would, “for the joy set before Him endure the cross, scorning its shame, and sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Irony & Reversal:

The Triumphal Entry was also somewhat paradoxical. Most people think that whenever Jesus entered Jerusalem, it was a celebratory experience about His messianic reign. However, it was not. Biblical scholars posit that Israelites cried and sang Hallel Psalms to welcome *any* pilgrim every year as they came for the Passover.

Therefore, whenever Jesus ‘made the pilgrimage’ into Jerusalem as it were, the Jews simply perceived Him and welcomed Him as they would to anyone else. The Jews welcome any pilgrim, “who was coming in the name of the Lord!” within the celebratory context of “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” And they were also chanting, “Hosanna!” which literally means “Save us” (v. 9-10).

In other words, these chants were not given to Jesus *specifically* but extended to everyone *ubiquitously*. Therefore, it was highly ironic that Jesus—the one to whom the Jews’ chants were ultimately about—passed by them without them even realizing He was the fulfillment of their very cries and cheers.

Jesus is the one, truly, who “comes in the name of the Lord”—as He Himself is the fullest expression and embodiment of the personal, covenant name of God, Yahweh (v. 9). And Jesus is the one, truly, who is the fulfillment and manifestation of the “the kingdom of our father David” and “Hosanna” (‘Save us!’), who has come to save people from their sins (v. 10). Jesus’ entry was significant and true, but people did not perceive it or receive it as such.

In fact, the commonness of Jesus’ entry is further highlighted by the story’s anticlimactic result, which we see in verse 11: “And He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.” Meaning, it seems as though Jesus showed up to the party, but it was already over. No one was around to further celebrate or fellowship. However, that is precisely what is so ironic: it was not that Jesus missed the party; everyone else did.

Nevertheless, people still thought that Jesus might be the one to restore the political power and independence of the Davidic kingdom from the oppression of the Roman Empire. And Jews thought this about Jesus because of His many signs and miracles. However, biblical scholars point out the entry is not triumphal at all, even though it is often referred to as the ‘Triumphal Entry.’ They say, “Jesus does not enter Jerusalem on a white charger. He does not brandish a

series of war trophies, and a train of captives does not trail behind Him. In fact, within a week, Roman guards will lead Him out of the city as a defeated captive.”²

The Jesus We Categorize

The Israelites expected their Messiah to come in triumph and victory, in strength and power, and in political motivation and agenda. People wanted a savior to rescue them from their immediate circumstances; namely, oppression from the Roman Empire. However, Jesus did not arrive in that way nor did He come for that purpose. He came in an even greater way. He came in weakness and humility, looking into the eyes of crucifixion and betrayal. He came not for one people group, but for all people groups.

This way was greater because by coming in humility, He would be able to relate to the weak and meek. And by coming in commonness and ubiquity, He could relate to all people. Jesus would literally walk our same, troubled pilgrim’s path into the city of God’s presence; He would die in our place for our sin, and He would secure the triumph we would need for eternity.

See, the Israelites missed the real Jesus because their view of God was too small. Their God was one who they had created in their own image and for their own circumstances. They wanted Jesus to fit their political needs. But Jesus wanted to be so much more for them than that.

We struggle with the same dilemma in our culture today. We limit God to who we want Him to be and what we want Him to do for us versus who He actually is and what His wisdom and plan is for our lives. And therefore, our circumstance becomes disoriented into being too big for the small, limited God we have created in our own minds.

We can see how and why people miss the real Jesus. I’m sure you have often heard, “Well, I could never believe in a God who would _____.” Or “I don’t think God should ever _____.” These statements show that we have not relinquished our own authority, and are still following our own logic as the benchmark for reality—not God or His authority. This is the biblical definition of sin.

Sadly, we want a god small enough to be understood and submissive enough to abide by our own terms and conditions—so that we can stay in control. Theologian J.I. Packer writes,

“A God whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of Himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a God in man's image and therefore an imaginary God, not the God of the Bible at all.”³

The Jesus Who Breaks Our Categories

We know and see God through the image of Jesus Christ. So, Jesus’ immediate next actions are fascinating. Although He enters Jerusalem as a king in commonness when He should have come

² *NIV Application Commentary: Mark. 429.*

³ J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God.*

in uniqueness, the very next scene spotlights Jesus acting in uniqueness in a context where people would have expected Him to act as a commoner.

But this unique scene is structurally sandwiched by a peculiar happening with a fig tree first:

¹² Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. ¹³ And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ In response, Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.”

And His disciples heard it. (Mark 11:12-14, Chronological Bible, October 24th, pg.1379)

To summarize, Jesus encounters a fig tree that was not bearing fruit, and Jesus curses the fig tree to never bear fruit again. This might seem like it is out of left field, but we will see why it is not.

Immediately next, we see Jesus acting uniquely in a context where people would not have expected it. Look at verse 15:

¹⁵ So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹⁶ And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. ¹⁷ Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” ¹⁸ And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city. (Mark 11:15-18, Chronological Bible, October 24th, pg.1379)

Essentially, Jesus comes into an area in the Temple during Passover week, and He challenges the establishment. He overturns the moneychangers because He knew they were ripping off the Gentiles. They were making a lot of money off the process as well.

The Passover to the Israelites is socially akin to the Super Bowl to us Americans. It is a time of fellowship, food, and family. And it is perhaps the biggest ‘event’ of the year. And instead of reinforcing tradition, reaffirming preferences, or even going with the flow—Jesus wreaks havoc on the establishment and literally overturns their paradigms of social and religious currency.

In looking at both scenes, from the entry to the Passover, Jesus does not fit the mold of their king (positively) and then He does not fit the mold of their traditionalism (negatively). Ultimately, Jesus shatters the Israelites’ categories—about who He is, about what He has come to do, and about how we are to approach Him.

And this is why the fig tree passage is so peculiar and profound. Look at the rest of the story:

²⁰ Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

²¹ And Peter, remembering, said to Him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.”

²² So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. ²³ For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. ²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” ²⁵ “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:20-25, Chronological Bible, October 24th, pg.1380).

After they leave the Passover on rather controversial terms, they come by the fig tree once more. And behold, it is dead—just as Jesus said would happen. This is significant, not only on its own but also in the context of the Passover and moneychangers. It is first helpful to know that the nation of Israel and its spiritual health is often compared to a fig tree many times throughout the Bible. As one biblical resource notes,

“The presence of a fruitful fig tree was considered to be a symbol of blessing and prosperity for the nation of Israel. Likewise, the absence or death of a fig tree would symbolize judgment and rejection. Symbolically, the fig tree represented the spiritual deadness of Israel, who while very religious outwardly with all the sacrifices and ceremonies, were spiritually barren because of their sins. By cleansing the Temple and cursing the fig tree, causing it to wither and die, Jesus was pronouncing His coming judgment of Israel and demonstrating His power to carry it out.”⁴

In other words, Jesus is forging a concrete connection between the spiritual health of the Temple and Passover in Israel and the fruitlessness of the fig tree. From afar, both the fig tree and the Passover look as though they are healthy and fruitful. But upon closer look, they are not.

Perhaps the reason why Jesus comes to break our categories is because “the categories” are the problem after all. Our categories have made us dead and are functions of being spiritually dead. And so, Jesus does not kill our categories as much as He reveals that our categories already give the stench of having been dead.

The Jesus We Truly Want

The Jesus we want is a Jesus bigger than our categories and bigger than our expectations. We need a Jesus who supersedes our preferences and immediate circumstantial quandaries, and God in Jesus Christ provides that for us. He gives us a view of Himself who exceeds what we immediately need in our circumstantial context.

⁴ Got Questions: *Your Questions, Biblical Answers*. “Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?” <https://www.gotquestions.org/curse-fig-tree.html>.

Instead of a political leader who might last for only a decade for only one people group, Jesus provided Himself as a cosmic, eternal Savior for all people.

Instead of a leader who would come in strength and status, Jesus provided Himself as a man who entered into commonness, weakness, and meekness.

Instead of an immediate king, Jesus provided Himself as a substitute for the least of these.

Overall, the Triumphal Entry is essentially communicating that Jesus is not coming primarily to meet our earthly hopes and dreams. Rather, He is coming in our stead and is finally here to take our place.

God gives us a bigger view and a better view than what we want. What we wanted was far too small. So what do we learn about Jesus from this passage? What do we learn about who God is through Jesus in this passage? I think there are several things we can glean from this Scripture that are immediately practical to our lives today.

Here are a handful of questions that the Scripture forces us to consider and confront personally:

Are you missing the way God is active and working in your life, simply because you've already decided how He is supposed to work?

Pride in our own wisdom of how God should work and preconceptions in our own perspective of how God should work will keep us blind to the ways that God is truly at work.

And more than that, our pride and preconceptions will entrench us into bitterness about what we do see; it will strike us with anxiety about what we have yet to see, and it will feed our self-righteous appetite along the way.

Trust that God is, in fact, working in your life. And believe that He often does so in ways that are not immediately sensible to us. If God is God after all, wouldn't He operate like that anyways? Surely we can trust that He has our best interest at heart. And just because we cannot see how He is working does not mean that He abandoned or disappointed us.

Are you shrinking and flattening God into your own image... or are you accepting God in His own image?

When we shrink and flatten God into our own image, it will feed every problem in our lives. Every practical problem in our lives has to do with our view of God. Perhaps you are upset and disappointed in your life right now because you have held tightly to a view of God that is not true. You have prolonged bitterness because you thought God would do _____ or that he would not let _____ happen. And it seems as though God failed you. But maybe God did not fail you. Only the god in your own image failed you.

Based on this story, we see some encouragement to our disappointment. But even if we cannot understand what is going on exactly, we can know that God is doing something bigger and

grander through our disappointment than we could imagine. So, we need to demonstrate a humble faith and trust that God knows what He is doing, and that we should not fear.

Would you define your Christian life as fruitful?

Jesus reframes the concept of ‘fruitfulness’ with a sobering emphasis. Jesus looks straight into the eyes of all the ‘religious’ programs, events, and rituals that were going on in His day—and called them ‘spiritually dead.’ To be sure, He did not call them wrong, as there is nothing wrong with the Passover or the Temple, those were God-ordained mediums of obedience and worship! But Jesus saw *through* the external indications of spiritual health and exposed it as truly spiritually dead.

This means, quite literally, that programs, events, and rituals should not be and cannot be mistaken for fruit itself. It is an indictment for our modern church—to not mistakenly look to rituals, attendance, and popularity of events as the primary indicator of the spiritual life of its people. Israel had no problem honoring rituals, events, and traditions. But they did have a problem following and trusting the authority of Jesus.

What about you? Jesus does not care that you participate in a million church programs if you are not bearing fruit in a relationship with Himself.

As one scholar remarks,

“[This passage] teaches the principle that religious profession and observance are not enough to guarantee salvation unless there is the fruit of genuine salvation evidenced in the life of the person. James would later echo this truth when he wrote that ‘faith without works is dead’ (James 2:26). The lesson of the fig tree is that we should bear spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23), not just give an appearance of religiosity. God judges fruitlessness and expects that those who have a relationship with Him will ‘bear much fruit’” (John 15:5-8).⁵

Truly, if we abide in the vine of Jesus and His authority, not following our own authority and our own categories of how God ought to be in our life, we will see much fruit.

How do you perceive trials?

When Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives, looking at Jerusalem and the path ahead of Him, He chose to look through the events that would come—such as the cross and the difficulties—through the lens of God’s greater sovereignty, wisdom, and love.

The disciples did not do that. They viewed the greatness of God’s sovereignty, wisdom, and love through the small, distorted lens of their circumstance and immediate need instead.

This is precisely why they were disappointed when God acted differently than they expected, and then assumed God wasn’t working and active. Many times, our disappointment can stem from

⁵ Got Questions, Ibid.

believing that God should have worked differently in our life. Tim Keller has once said, “Anxiety is believing God will get it wrong. And bitterness is believing that God got it wrong.” Our current emotional mood and response to the circumstances in our life tell more about our view of God than it does about the actual circumstance we are walking through.