

Week 15: Mark 11:1-33: The Leadership of Jesus

Hook



Main Point: Jesus is prophet, priest and king.

Teacher, provide your LifeGroup members with a sheet of paper and pen (or ask them to use the “notes” app on their phone). Allow two minutes to jot down every “hat” they wear – every role they have whether it’s recognized on a payroll or not.

At the conclusion of the allotted time, ask them to count the number of jobs they wrote down and share with the group.

Transition: In today’s lesson, we will see how Jesus fulfills these three leadership roles in the kingdom of God – prophet, priest and king.

RECAP: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books; they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark’s focus on Jesus’ action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw that every part of Jesus’ ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but in a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

In lessons 5 through 7, we saw Jesus behaving differently than the typical religious leaders of His day and flipping their social systems upside down. Some people reacted positively to Him, and others reacted negatively, especially those who didn’t want their world turned upside down, because the status quo was working in their favor.

In lessons 8 through 10, Jesus performed three God-sized miracles that show us He is not only sent from God, He is God. Most responded negatively to Him,

misunderstanding who He was and what He was trying to teach them, even His disciples.

In lesson 11, we saw see how God's heart, and our mission, is not just for the children of Israel but the whole world. In lessons 12 and 13, we saw that the Jewish people and even the disciples didn't know who Jesus really was or why He came. In lesson 14, we saw how the kingdom of God values marriage, children, humility and faith.

In this lesson, we will see how Jesus fulfills these leadership roles in the kingdom of God – prophet, priest and king. In ancient Israel, sometimes a single person could have two different roles, but Jesus is the only One who ever filled all three at once. In this section, when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem to fulfill His destiny, Mark shows us that 1) Jesus is the king of the upside-down kingdom of God, 2) Jesus is the true High Priest who is the only mediator between God and man, and 3) Jesus is the true prophet, the One who speaks for God.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus is prophet, priest and king.

Mark 11:1–11 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus is the upside-down king of the kingdom of God.

Q: What does riding on a donkey tell us about Jesus as king?

Q: Why did the people call Jesus blessed?

This is the story of Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Jesus was crucified. We have quickly entered what we call “Passion Week,” the last week of Jesus’ life on earth. The other Gospels describe Jesus’ going from Galilee to Jerusalem and back again several times in His three-year ministry, but Mark kept the progression of the story simple – Jesus’ preparation for ministry (1:1–13) → His ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:14–9:50) → His ministry on the way to Jerusalem (10) → His ministry in Jerusalem (11:1–13:37) → the Passion (14:1–16:20). Mark’s Gospel is fast-paced; everything happens *immediately*. We cover three years of ministry relatively quickly ... until we get to the Passion, where the story slows down significantly. Mark took three chapters to cover just a few days. This was done intentionally to point to the death and Resurrection of Jesus as the climax of the story and the main point of the Gospel.

This section covers the few days leading up to the Passion of Christ. Jesus would go to trial late Thursday night and be crucified Friday morning. What is described in the Palm Sunday account is somewhat similar to a Roman ceremony called a “triumph,” but is also intentionally very different to create a stark contrast between the kings of the world and the kind of king Jesus is. A triumph was a civil and religious ceremony that happened after a general was successful in war, in which he was made “king for a day.” The general wore a crown of laurel and a gold-embroidered purple robe and rode on a chariot pulled by war horses through the streets of Rome, followed by his army, captives, and the spoils of his war. All the most noble and powerful people were there to honor him.

Jesus rode through the streets on a donkey, not a chariot – a sign of humility but also a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, publicly declaring He was the Messiah. The prophecy describes Messiah king as both “righteous and victorious” but also “humble,” not bragging about His victory like the Roman triumph. Instead of celebrating after His victory like a triumph, Jesus was on the way to His victory on the cross, a victory that

would come through sacrifice, not war. Jesus rode through Jerusalem, not Rome. Rome was the capital of the superpower empire at the time, but Jerusalem was the city of God. No powerful people were there to celebrate Him, just the ordinary crowds; the powerful people were plotting to kill Him.

The way the crowd celebrated at Jesus' triumphal entry was also like the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*), which is interesting, because the festival going on at the time was Passover (in the spring), not Sukkoth (in the fall). Sukkoth is a seven-day celebration of God's provision and protection during the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness, when His presence dwelled in His tent among His people; Jesus came to earth and pitched His tent among the people (John 1:14). During Sukkoth, they waved the *lulav* (palm branch), which was actually four plants but called lulav because the palm was the largest. Palms were a symbol of uprightness, flourishing, victory, peace and eternal life. They represented God's enduring faithfulness (Leviticus 23:40). In the celebration of Sukkoth, as they waved the lulav, they recited the *Hallel* ("praise" – Psalms 113–118) and processed around the altar. This is called *Hoshanot* because of the refrain "*Hosha na*" ("save us now"). This is the same thing the crowd shouted on Palm Sunday, from Psalm 118. They were declaring Jesus as Messiah (Son of David), calling for His kingdom to come, and asking Him to save them now.

Jesus was upside-down from the kings of this world. Instead of exhibiting a domineering leadership, He was a humble servant of His people (Mark 10:42-45). His victory did not come by war but by sacrificing His life. He was the Messiah king, the Son of David promised in the Old Testament, but He was not the conquering hero most Jews at the time expected. He did come to save them, not from the physical oppression of Rome but from slavery to sin. His kingdom is not of this world. It's so much bigger than they could have even imagined.

Q: How did Jesus exemplify humility and servanthood? What does this tell us about what our church leaders are to be like?

Q: In what ways does your life reflect submission to Jesus as king?

Mark 11:12–26 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus is the true high priest, the only mediator between us and God.

Q: Why did Jesus drive the moneychangers and sellers out of the temple?

Both these stories (Monday and Tuesday of Passion week) relate to Jesus as the true high priest, the one mediator between God and humanity. The fig tree showed the

disciples that true faith results in real spiritual fruit, not just the appearance of fruit. From a distance, the fig tree looked to be “in leaf.” In late spring, early figs would have sprouted but would not be ripe enough to eat for about six more weeks. The main crop of late figs came in the fall. If only leaves appeared, with no early fruit, that tree would bear no fruit at all that year, early or late. This tree had a full covering of leaves. It looked good. But when they came closer, there was no fruit. Jesus cursed the tree, making it wither from its roots, never to yield fruit again. This may seem shocking, out of character for the compassionate healer Jesus. But there was a theological point to it.

Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree signifies God’s judgement on the fruitless Jewish people.¹ In the Old Testament, the fig tree was often used to symbolize Israel’s spiritual health or sickness. A flourishing fig tree symbolized prosperity and peace, blessing and favor from God (1 Kings 4:25; Hosea 9:10), while a barren fig tree represented judgment and desolation (Jeremiah 8:13). Jesus cursed the fig tree as a lesson that fruitlessness will lead to judgment. Not because our works can get us to heaven, but because a lack of spiritual fruit reveals what is really in our hearts (Matthew 23). The Pharisees did all the religious things, but the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) was not blooming in their lives.

Jesus also used the fig tree to challenge His disciples. When the disciples saw the tree withered the next morning, Jesus responded by encouraging them to have faith in prayer. The Pharisees were the leaders of the Jewish people, but the disciples would become the leaders of this new movement called the Church, fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit through fervent, united prayer. They would do amazing things that seemed impossible (v. 23), but these miracles would only come by the power of the Spirit. We cannot manufacture them on our own. The fig tree serves as a warning to His disciples, including us today. Our lives may look “spiritual” – church attendance, tithing, moral living, etc. – but are we really bearing spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace? The fruit comes not from trying harder to be “good Christians,” but from abiding in Christ (John 15). As our High Priest, Jesus calls us to true faith, not empty words and rituals as the Pharisees showed.

Jesus encouraged His disciples that when they put their faith in God, whatever they asked for in prayer would be theirs. This doesn’t mean that if we ask God for a Lamborghini and then just believe really hard, we will get it. Faith is putting your trust in God, trusting God to give you what you need, not what you might think you want. When you put your trust in God, you are asking for God’s will to be done in your life, so you will always receive what you ask. Jesus also urged them to forgive others so that they might experience God’s forgiveness; the focus here is on maintaining a healthy

fellowship with God, not on salvation. Our relationship with God and our relationships with others are interconnected. We cannot say we love God, but hate other people (1 John 4:20). For the same reason, we cannot expect God to forgive us when we hold unforgiveness for others in our hearts. We who have experienced the forgiveness of Christ are compelled to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).²

Jesus also showed Himself to be the true High Priest when He drove the sellers and moneychangers out of the temple. Because Jews came from many foreign nations during the annual feasts, moneychangers changed their foreign currency into temple shekels so they could pay the half-shekel temple tax required of every Jewish male over the age of 20. The sellers sold sacrificial animals in the temple court so they didn't have to bring animals on the long journey with them. Not only had this turned God's holy temple into a marketplace, but they were also charging exorbitant prices. Mark specifically mentioned selling pigeons, which was the option for the poor who could not afford larger animals. God gave varying options so all could participate in worship, regardless of their economic status, but these sellers were intentionally taking advantage of the poor.

Jesus quoted Jeremiah, when God condemned the Israelites for their empty, fake worship while they broke the Ten Commandments, oppressed the poor, and worshipped false gods. They had made His temple a "den of robbers" (Jeremiah 7:1–11). He also quoted Isaiah, when God described the true worshippers who kept His covenant, that because of them, His temple would be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:1–7). These "robbers" were in the Court of the Gentiles – all nations. As with the symbolism of the fig tree, Jesus was condemning empty, false worship and calling His true worshippers from any nation, Jew or Gentile, to follow Him in authentic faith.

Q: How have you seen empty false religion in the world around you? What kind of impact does it have on the Church? The world around us?

Q: How can we put ourselves in a position for the Holy Spirit to grow more fruit in us?

Mark 11:27–33 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus is the ultimate prophet, who speaks with the authority of God.

Q: What did the Jewish leaders question about Jesus?

Q: Why do you think Jesus responded to the question the way He did?

This story shows us that Jesus is the ultimate prophet (spokesperson for God) because He is God Himself. The Jewish religious leaders were constantly questioning Jesus, always trying to trap Him with His words. This was a typical honor challenge in their honor/shame culture, called “challenge and riposte.” *Riposte* is a term used in the sport of fencing, meaning a quick return thrust following a parry. In a verbal honor challenge, it is a quick, clever reply to an insult, criticism or challenge.

In the ancient world, honor was extremely important; it was like currency. Your level of honor determined with whom you could associate. Everyone started life with a certain level of ascribed honor based on family status, but a person could gain or lose honor based on things he did or even things that happened to him through no fault of his own. A common form of trying to gain honor was to offer a verbal challenge to a person. If he responded poorly, he lost honor, and you gained it. If he responded well, he gained honor, and you lost it. The religious leaders constantly offered these challenges to Jesus, and He always came out on top.

In this case, they weren’t just asking Him a hard question to try to trap Him; they were directly challenging His authority to drive the robbers out of the temple. They explicitly asked, “Who gave you this authority?” Instead of answering directly, Jesus answered their question with a question, a common tactic of His. If they answered the question correctly, He would tell them by whose authority He acted. The question was also related to authority – was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? The implication was that Jesus’ authority came from the same source as John’s.

This put the religious leaders in a bind, because the people believed John really was a prophet sent from God. If they said from man, the people would turn on them. If they said from heaven, Jesus would ask why they didn’t believe John. And if they acknowledged John’s divine authority, they would also have to accept Jesus, whom John pointed to as Messiah. So, they simply answered that they didn’t know. Technically, this was their withdrawal from the debate, so He didn’t have to answer their question. But whether He explicitly answered them or not, the implication is clear – just as John was sent from God, so was Jesus.

It’s crazy that the religious leaders saw Jesus as a threat to their religious establishment, because He *is* the God they claimed to serve. But they continually failed to recognize Him as God because they didn’t really know who God is. They studied the Scriptures incessantly and yet missed the very character of God. Their religion was empty and worthless because they did not actually know the Father (John 8:14–20). This implores us to ask the same question of ourselves – do we really know God? If Jesus were to appear in our world today (not as He will at His Second Coming but just walking the

earth as He did the first time), would we recognize Him in the things He said and did or would we see Him as a radical? Do we know the real Jesus, or have we created our own version of Him that is more palatable in our modern American culture? Do we really know Jesus, or are we just following a religion?

Jesus was the image of the invisible God, a perfect representation of God in human form. He was the ultimate spokesperson for God because He *is* God. To know Jesus is to know the Father. Jesus calls His followers to come to know Him, who He really is, and follow His ways to find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28–30).

Q: How is the way of Jesus countercultural today?

Q: How can we know Jesus more? How can we grow in our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus today?

Q: What are some false “Jesus’s” that we believe today? Why is it important to replace those fakes with the real?

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Took

Main Point: Jesus is prophet, priest and king.

Today's passage is an inflection point in Mark's Gospel as Jesus enters the Passion Week. Believers today have the privilege of understanding Jesus' identity, roles, mission and heart in a better way than those who welcomed Him into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. However, knowing who Jesus is isn't enough. Have you made Him functioning king over every area of your life or are you holding back on something? Forgiving, tithing, engaging with your family, repenting of a sin, whatever needs to be handed over to the Lord, do it! One of Mark's favorite words is "immediately"; make the decision to be fully obedient to King Jesus "immediately."

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on who Jesus was – how He lived, how He loved, what He taught, the miracles He did and why, to whom He showed mercy and compassion and whom He condemned. What does this tell us about the nature of God? What does it tell us about the kingdom of God? What does it tell us about our identity as His people? What does it tell us about our mission as the Church? How can you commit yourself to knowing and following the *real* Jesus, not a caricature human beings have created?

PRAY for boldness to live in the upside-down ways of Jesus. Pray for wisdom to see how Jesus is calling you to be countercultural, not just for the sake of being different but because this is what it looks like to follow Him. Pray for the Church across the world to walk in the ways of Jesus, to live as He lived and love as He loved.

ACT: Read the red letters. Take time this week to read the Gospel of Mark and focus on the "red letters." If you have a Bible that has the words of Jesus in red, you can do this easily, but if not, you can still read the words of Jesus. Read them out loud, meditate on them, and reflect on what they tell us – who He is and how to live in His ways.

¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1918.

² Most English Bibles have Mark 11:26 listed in a footnote or in brackets, not in the regular text. This is because while this verse is included in most manuscripts we have of the Bible, it is not included in the *oldest* manuscripts we have, so the scholars who translated the ESV, NIV, NASB and other more modern English translations believe it was not original to the text but was added by a scribe and then was copied in subsequent manuscripts. The earliest manuscript we have with v. 26 included is from the 5th century; earlier ones do not include it.

Even if Mark does not include Jesus saying this statement, Matthew does (Matthew 6:15). So even if every manuscript doesn't agree whether Mark put these words at this point in his gospel, all translations agree that *Jesus said these words* at least one of the times when He taught about forgiveness in His ministry.