

3 The authority of the king (Mark 11:1–12:27)

Last time we accompanied Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem. We listened to Jesus' responses to questions about divorce, wealth, and eternal life. We heard his third explanation of the cross. He warned us not to be like the rulers of the nations, but to serve as he served us by giving his life for us. Even a blind person could see this was the Christ, the son of David.

Were there things in Mark 10 we need to discuss before moving on to Mark 11 tonight?

Tonight we join the celebration as God's anointed arrives in the capital. The crowds welcome him, but the temple leaders do not recognize his authority. Jesus repeatedly warns the leaders that God will overthrow the temple, exile them from his vineyard, and still raise him up as king even if they murder him.

3.1 The capital celebrates her king (11:1-11)

It was 616 years since a son of David had ridden into Jerusalem as king. Zedekiah was the final king of Judah when Babylon captured Jerusalem in 586 BC. To ensure his sons would never reign, *they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon* (2 Kings 25:7).

Now, the *son of David* was on his way to the capital (Mark 10:47-48) to free his people from foreign powers and restore them as a kingdom of God. His mission is dangerous, with uncertainty at every step:

Mark 11:1-6 (NIV)

¹ As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

This king has no war horse, or even a war budget to re-establish the kingdom. What he's doing sounds as crazy as trying to push a camel through the eye of a needle (Mark 10:21-27). All he has is what his people will give him. A donkey colt will do.

Mark 11:7-11 (NIV)

⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

¹⁰ “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The people treat Jesus as their king. They celebrate him by placing their coats on the donkey and on the road, giving him a gentle entry to the city. They cut branches to wave in celebration of the king returning after all this time. They applaud Jesus as the king who has divine authority to save them:

- *Hosanna* is a celebratory cry meaning, “LORD save us.”
- *The one who comes in the name of the Lord* is the LORD’S anointed, the king who represents heaven’s authority on earth.
- *Hosanna in the highest heaven* recognizes Jesus is coming to save them with the authority of the Lord, the name above all names.

These are the hopes Jerusalem celebrated every Passover. They sang the Psalms, especially Psalms 113–118. They declare this hope is fulfilled in Jesus this Passover:

Psalm 118:22-27 (NIV)

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ **LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!**

²⁶ **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.**

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

This is Jesus’ enthronement ceremony, as the king leads the festival procession to the temple for his coronation—assuming the temple recognizes his authority.

But it’s late in the day. The crowd must wait until tomorrow.

3.2 Conflict between temple and Messiah (11:12-26)

Next morning Jesus skips breakfast to make the 20-minute walk back to Jerusalem. On the way, he does something the disciples do not understand:

Mark 11:12-14 (NIV)

¹² The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it

was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.

Did you get that? It's not fig season, but Jesus curses the fig tree that has no fruit! Can you make any sense of that? Let's read on. Is the temple ready for the coronation of the king?

Mark 11:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? [Isaiah 56:7] But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” [Jeremiah 7:11]

Why is Jesus overturning the temple's operations? As diaspora Jews arrived from all over Europe and Asia for Passover, *the money changers* provided the local coinage required for the temple tax, and *those selling doves* provided the sacrifices needed for the poor who could not afford a lamb or a goat. Everyone needed these gifts, for the LORD had said, “*No one is to appear before me empty-handed*” (Exodus 23:15).

Jesus' critique is deeper. The temple was the house Israel provided for the King of the Universe to live among them and lead them as the nation that revealed God to the world. They were meant to be praying for the nations to know God in them. Instead, the house built to represent the LORD's authority had been taken over by bandits—thugs who take authority that does not belong to them.

A den of robbers is Jeremiah's phrase. The leaders of the first temple told Jeremiah it could not fall to Babylon because the LORD was there. God said, “*Will you steal and murder ... and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?*” (Jeremiah 7:11).

Seventy years after Babylon destroyed Solomon's temple, they built another. Jesus is now overturning this second temple as a sign that it too will fall. It's no longer a house where God is welcome. It is occupied by thugs who serve their own interests. They are robbers who will murder the Messiah to take his authority for themselves. God has rejected this temple. It will fall. As Jesus goes on to say, “*Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down*” (Mark 13:2). As Jerusalem fell to Babylon, Jesus said it would fall to Rome because it rejected the authority of the LORD in his anointed. That's the warning Jesus enacted as he overturned the temple.¹¹

Did the robbers in the temple listen? As Jeremiah asked, “*Will you steal and murder?*”

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (SPCK, 1996), 413–428.

Mark 11:18 (NIV)

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

Oh, dear. This rejection by those in authority is just as Jesus anticipated (8:31; 10:33). Will his popularity with the crowds prevent their evil intentions?

Mark 11:18-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

²⁰ In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

In the space of a single day, the fruitless fig tree had begun to wither. In light of what just went down at the temple, we can recognize Jesus' declaration about the fig tree as another enacted prophecy, a sign that God will not tolerate the leafy show of a temple that produces no fruit (compare Isaiah 5; Psalm 80).

Jesus explains that prophetic declarations work by declaring what God is doing:

Mark 11:22-23 (NIV)

²² “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.

²³ “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.”

What is *this mountain*? (verse 23) On the journey eastward from Jerusalem towards Bethany through the Kidron Valley, only one significant mountain is in view. They're looking back towards the Temple Mount. This mountain—the one under the control of the bandits who are plotting to kill the Messiah and steal his authority—this mountain will be brought down. That was the point of Jesus' prophetic action in overturning the temple. That was the point of Jesus' prophetic action in cursing the fruitless fig tree.

This mountain will fall, yet God will raise him up. It's what Jesus believes, and he's betting his life on it.

There will be times when we also will be called to take up our cross, suffering at the hands of those who reject God's authority and force their will on us. When that happens, Jesus wants us to do as he did, praying, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

Mark 11:24-26 (NIV)

²⁴ “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

This is how the Babylons of this world fall and the kingdom of God comes on earth: through the cross of the Messiah and the kingdom that comes to life in him.

3.3 Rejecting the Messiah's authority (11:27-33)

Two anointed leaders represented the Lord's authority in ancient Israel: the high priest (Leviticus 8:12) and the king (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13). Ideally, the two anointed leaders worked together, though that didn't always happen.

Both roles ceased during the 70 years of exile to Babylon. In 515 BC, the returning Jews built a second temple and anointed a high priest named Joshua. Since they were still ruled by foreigners, they could not anoint a king. Zerubbabel (descendant of David) was told to wait until the Spirit of the LORD anointed a king (Zechariah 4:6). One day they would see the king riding into Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9-11), but in the meantime the high priest bore the responsibility of the Branch from David's line and wear the crown (Zechariah 6:11-13).

After centuries of carrying that authority alone, the temple was not about to recognize the authority of the king:

Mark 11:27-28 (NIV)

²⁷ They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”

What they're implying is that Jesus has claimed authority for himself. A true king is proclaimed by a prophet who recognizes the LORD's anointed (e.g. 1 Samuel 16:12). What prophet named Jesus as the king to represent God's reign after all these years?

Mark 11:29-33 (NIV)

²⁹ Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.
³⁰ John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”
³¹ They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’
³² But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)
³³ So they answered Jesus, “We don't know.”

Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

John the Baptist was the prophet who announced the restoration of the LORD's reign through the one he had chosen, “*the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worth to stoop down and untie*” (Mark 1:7). If John was speaking for God (a prophet), then the authority given to Jesus as God's anointed was from God. That would make the temple leaders rebels against God's authority, a den of robbers.

But the high priest and his family were Sadducees. They regarded the Torah as the important part of Scriptures. The Prophets were merely calling people back to the Torah. It was okay for John to do that, but they did not regard him as speaking for God. If they said that out loud, though, it could start a riot, since most of the people thought it was amazing to have a prophet speaking for God in their own time.

The temple leaders do not accept that God has anointed a king. They'd prefer to see him dead rather than recognize his authority. So how does Jesus use his God-given authority? He confronts them not with violence but with stories.

3.4 The Son and the tenants in God's vineyard (12:1-12)

In Galilee, Jesus used parables of the kingdom to teach a people who were “*ever seeing but never perceiving*” who God had appointed as king (Mark 4:11-12). Now he takes the same approach in Jerusalem:

Mark 12:1-8 (NIV)

¹ Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

⁶ “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

⁷ “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

Who do you think are the tenants in God's vineyard?

Who are the servants God sent over the years to call them to fruitfulness?

Who is the beloved Son whom God has now sent?

The main point of the story is that, just as they abused the prophets God sent them, the temple leaders will not hesitate to kill the heir to whom God has given authority, the Son whom God has chosen as king. (For more detail, see Matthew 23:27-39.)

This is not very subtle. Jesus calls them out as murderers for what they will do to him, and *they knew he had spoken this parable against them* (verse 12).

Jesus' question is whether the landowner would accept this from his servants, or call them to account as expected in the Law:

Mark 12:9 (NIV)

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do?

He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

Jesus does not fight these murderous leaders. He warns them that God will deal with them. They may kill him to keep their power, but they will not keep their power. The house that has become *a den of robbers* (11:18) will fall and they will lose their tenancy. *The mountain of the house of the LORD will be cast into the depths* (11:23). As God did in Jeremiah's day, God will evict them from the land, *giving the vineyard to others* (verse 9). On the temple mount, *not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down* (13:2). As war comes to Jerusalem, he advises *those who are in Judea to flee to the mountains* (13:14).

But Jesus' main message is not just that God will remove the robbers from his house.

Mark 12:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ “Haven't you read this passage of Scripture [Psalm 118:22-23]:

‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”

Jesus was not merely proof-texting a verse about rejection. Psalm 118 describes how God would restore a son of David to reign over his people after the exile.

It begins with a call to worship the LORD for his enduring faithful love (verses 1-5). Then this leader speaks of his suffering: “*The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies*” (verses 6-7). He declares, “*I will not die but live. ... He has not given me over to death*” (verses 17-18). Because the LORD saved him (verse 21), *the stone the builders rejected become the cornerstone*, the foundation for the restoration of God's reign as a new covenant and temple where God lives among his people (verse 22). The Messiah does not bring down the builders who threatened his life, for God does: *the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes* (verse 23).

The rest of the Psalm contains the words the crowds were singing as Jesus rode into the capital: “*Hosanna ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. ... With boughs in hand, join the festal procession up to the horns of the altar*” (verses 25-27).

So do Jerusalem's leaders repent, turning to recognize the king God has sent them?

Mark 12:12 (NIV)

¹² Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

The conflict between king and temple is not over.

3.5 Paying dues to Caesar or to God? (12:13-17)

The Sinai covenant established Israel as the nation under God's rule after he freed them from Pharaoh. But for half their life they've been serving human rulers again. In Jesus' time that was Caesar. So were they dishonouring the name of the LORD when they recognized Caesar as Lord by paying him taxes?

That's the trap question they ask Jesus. If he's the Messiah sent to restore God's reign, he cannot say, "Yes, pay taxes to Caesar." If he says, "No, give tribute to God alone," the Romans will arrest him and hang him for treason. Either way, Jesus loses.

Mark 12:13-17 (NIV)

¹³ Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴ They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶ They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

Jesus asks them to bring the common coin they trade with. He asks whose image is on the coin, and whose name. Since it has Caesar's image and name, it seems you have Caesar's coins, give it back to him. That's Jesus' advice.

Then Jesus adds the clanger: "As you return Caesar's currency to him, give God what belongs to him." What creature bears God's image? (Genesis 1:27) What nation bore God's name? (Numbers 6:27). "No other gods, no other image, and no other name" were the foundational laws of the Sinai covenant (Exodus 20:3-7).

Jesus left them holding the blasphemous coin with the image of the emperor who claimed to rule the world. The inscription on the front proclaimed Augustus to be the son of a god, and the inscription on the back named him as the high priest. "Give this blasphemous coin back, and give yourselves to the sovereign whose image and name you bear," the anointed king told his people.

3.6 Relying on God to undo death (12:18-27)

Resurrection is central to Jesus' rescue operation for the earth. This is how he expects to receive the throne after Jerusalem's leaders kill him (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34).

But resurrection is not prominent in the Hebrew Scriptures. You may find a reference in the Prophets (Isaiah 26:19) or later post-exilic Writings (Daniel 12:2), but you don't find it in the Torah so it's not something the Sadducees believed.

They told vulnerable people that the hope of meeting your loved one in the next life was misguided:

Mark 12:18-23 (NIV)

¹⁸ Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹ “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

If your partner marries again after you die, who gets to be with them in the next life? Sadducean teaching relied on the Torah, so they based this story on the law that required a man to marry his brother’s widow to ensure she was cared for and the family line didn’t die out (Deuteronomy 25:5).

Mark 12:24-27 (NIV)

²⁴ Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵ When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶ Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

Jesus approached the Scriptures differently. The Sadducees treated the Law as instruction on what was permissible and what was not. Jesus treated the Scriptures as *the power of God*, the revelation of who God is and what God is doing to save the world (verse 24). How God uses his power reveals the character of God. Whatever text you’re reading the crucial question is, “What does this reveal about God and how God relates to us?”

Verse 25 then deals with the question of who gets the partner who was married more than once. Marriage is part of this creation. Relationships in eternity are different. Angels don’t have sexual union, and neither will we.

So will we still recognize each other in the life to come? Of course we will. I can’t imagine the angel having to visit a lot of people to ask, “Who are you?” until he finally finds Mary. The angel knew things about Mary that she doesn’t know about herself, like that she was the most *highly favoured* woman (Luke 1:28).

The relationships we will have in eternity involve a depth of love greater than anything we can imagine now: *Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see*

face to face. Now I know only in part; then I shall know fully as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The text Jesus uses to prove that God's relationships with us last forever is an odd one. Instead of quoting Isaiah or Daniel, he quotes from the Torah, the passage where God reveals his identity. Moses is living among the Midianites who think he's Egyptian (Exodus 2:19). He's *a foreigner in a foreign land* (2:22), not a Hebrew.

But there in the land of Midian, the God of the Hebrews reveals himself to Moses. The LORD's attendant appears like flames in a bush. Moses goes to see what this means and finds himself in the presence of the heavenly ruler who tells Moses: "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.*" (Exodus 3:6).

It's more than 400 years since Abraham's time. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all deceased. But God does not say, "I was the God of Abraham." The LORD is still in relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Death is not the end. As Jesus puts it, "*He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*"

Jesus is relying on the God of the living to raise him when the Sadducees who run the temple think they can be rid of him by handing him over to death. Jesus warns them, "*You are badly mistaken!*" (verse 27)

If you read Exodus 3 just for information, you would not reach the conclusion Jesus did. He read Scripture relationally: it's the revelation of God and God's faithfulness in relation to us. This relational hermeneutic changes how we read. Without this reading like this, we *know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God* (verse 24).

How does what Jesus' relational hermeneutic affect the way you read Scripture?

3.7 Conclusion

Jesus faced two very different responses as he arrived at the capital to save his people:

- Crowds welcomed *the son of David* arriving *in the name of the Lord* to save them (*hosanna*). Can their words and actions help our prayer and worship?
- Leaders saw Jesus' authority as a threat to their autonomy. How does Jesus' response help us speak to those who don't want Jesus' authority today?

Jesus is a polarizing figure. The gospel calls us to recognize Jesus as our God-anointed king. That's the confrontation point we can't avoid: his identity as the Christ, and his mission to restore the reign of heaven to earth. But we can learn from Jesus how to respond creatively: with stories, not swords.

In preparation for next week, **read Mark 12:28 –13:37**. It's all about Jesus' kingship.