

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Jesus Is Better
March 4th, 2018
Mark 11:1-33
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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 11:1; that’s on page 847 in your pew Bibles. We are going to do something very different this morning. Normally we deal with a paragraph sized unit of the text but this morning I want to try and deal with the entire chapter – and there is a reason for that. You remember way back when we first started this series I read to you a quote from the early church about the Gospel of Mark. I quoted a person named Papias who said around AD 130 that:

Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord.¹

Not indeed in order.

Meaning that Mark sometimes presented things in a thematic rather than a strictly chronological order. Let me unpack that. From Mark 11:1 onwards the setting is Jerusalem and the time frame is the last week of Jesus’ life. So everything that happens after Mark 11:1 happens in that week but Papias is saying that Mark presents these various episodes with a certain literary intention. So hear me carefully. This stuff really happened – and it all happened in the last week of Jesus’ life,

¹James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 3.

but Mark has told the story in a certain way in order to make a certain point. This is a very Jewish way of telling a story. Placement is part of the art. You put certain things side by side in order to help people notice the things you want them to notice and chapter 11 is one of the places where it really does that seem that Mark is doing that and we will miss that if we chop this chapter up into iddy bitty pieces. This is a story you have to tell from the 10,000 foot perspective.

I want you to look at your Bibles. Your actual Bibles, not your phone Bibles. This will not work on your phone Bibles. You need a page for this to work. Look at it. Now if this won't totally freak you out, take a pen or a pencil and put a tiny little "A" beside 11:1-11. That is the first paragraph unit. Then put a little "B" beside 11:12-14. Then put a little "C" beside 11:15-19. That is the thematic centre – that is the main focus of this chapter. Then put a little "B" beside 11:20-26. Now notice that I said "B" and not "D". There is a non-linear pattern to this chapter and you will see it in just a second. Now, finally, put a little "A" by verses 27-33.

This is a type of chiasm, which is a very common form of Hebrew literary structure. The outside pieces correspond to each other; the next inside pieces correspond to each other and they all work together to focus your attention on the centre.

So look at the two paragraphs you have marked with an A. They both have to do with authority. In the first A (1-11) Jesus is engaged in a little bit of prophetic theatre. He has arranged for a donkey – a colt of a donkey – on which he will ride into Jerusalem. This is not an accident, this prophetic theatre. Jesus is intentionally fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy. The prophecy is from Zechariah 9:9-10 which says:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9 ESV)

So Jesus is declaring his Kingship to Jerusalem by intentionally fulfilling this Old Testament prophecy. That is a declaration of authority. Behold your king is COMING TO YOU. Now look at the other paragraph that you have marked with an A. That paragraph too is about authority – it is about the authority of Jesus questioned and denied.

"By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" (Mark 11:28 ESV)

The leaders in Jerusalem do not believe or will not accept that Jesus is who he says that he is. They reject his claims of authority. So the second A answers the first A.

Alright now look at the two paragraphs that you have marked with a B. They are both about fig trees. In the first story, in verses 12-14, Jesus walks over to a fig tree to see if there is any fruit on it. Now, here is what you need to know about fig trees. Fig trees are found in Israel beside all the pilgrim roads. They are the perfect tree for pilgrim roads because they produce fruit twice a year – they have two growing seasons – and so for much of the year they provide free food for poor travellers making their way up to Jerusalem for the festivals. They didn't have Tim Hortons in those days, so they planted fig trees on the side of the road. But this fig tree doesn't have any fruit on it and so Jesus curses it and Mark says:

And his disciples heard it. (Mark 11:14 ESV)

That tells us that this is important. That tells us that Jesus isn't having a temper tantrum; he is communicating.

Now look at the second story you have marked with a B, Mark 11:20-26. In this story Jesus explains the withered fig tree. On their way back into the heart of the city the next morning they pass by the same tree and it has withered away under the curse of Jesus. In answering their questions about this Jesus says some things about powerful prayer – the very sort of prayer that was impossible and impermissible in the temple because it had become a den of robbers.

Now look at the passage that you labeled with a C. This is the CENTRE of the passage. This is the point of focus that Mark has been driving our attention towards. That is what chiasmic structure is supposed to do. It is supposed to function like a funnel or a set of orange cones driving us like cattle towards the main point. This is the main point – and the main point is best understood by reflecting on everything we have passed by on our way to this place. We remember that the human authorities in Jerusalem are deeply corrupted – so corrupted that they cannot even recognize their own King – when he comes RIDING TO THEM ON A DONKEY. When he clothes himself in Old Testament prophecy they still refuse to see him. The whole leadership structure in Jerusalem is broken and corrupted. And the temple structure which was supposed to feed and nourish and shelter WEARY PILGRIMS making their way through this dry

and dusty world is completely bankrupt! It is like the fig tree. Barren and disappointing. It was supposed to help but it has become a hindrance. Therefore it is cursed. Therefore it is condemned. Therefore it will be replaced.

That is the point of this story.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples 2 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. 3 If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” 4 And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. 5 And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” 6 And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. 7 And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 8 And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. 9 And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “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!”

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.

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And seeing in the distance a fig tree in 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. 14 And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.

15 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. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 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.” 18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. 19 And when evening came they went out of the city. 20 As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” 22 And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. 23 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. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 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.”

27 And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, 28 and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” 29 Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.” 31 And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 32 But shall we say, ‘From man?’”—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” (Mark 11:1–33 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now listen, just in case you are struggling here; just in case you feel like you’ve been forcibly enrolled in English Composition course at the local community college let me just assure you that

we are being fancy with the text. John says the same thing Mark says here but he says it in a much more straight forward manner. In John's Gospel he records Jesus saying something right after he drives everybody out of the temple. He says:

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:19-22 ESV)

So in John's Gospel the same point is made in a more straight forward manner. Jesus will replace the temple. Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days – but he doesn't replace the temple with a new physical temple, he replaces the temple with himself. The disciples didn't understand that until after Jesus rose from the dead – then they understood that the Body of Jesus is the new temple – it is the new centre of religious life in the Kingdom of God. Mark makes that point very creatively – John makes that point very simply. They are both saying the same thing but Mark is saying a little more. Mark is saying, Jesus is the new temple and Jesus is our the new leader. He is the heart, centre and substance of the rightly religious life.

That is the point of this passage.

Now as I said I think this is a story we need to deal with from the 10,000 foot level. I don't want to get lost in the details this morning I want to be focused where Mark wants us to be focused. And so I just want to ask 2 questions this morning – 2 questions that are informed by the 2 part outer frame. Mark led us here by a specific path and so I want to attend to that in our reflections. The first question I want to ask is this:

Why Is Jesus The Better Temple?

Right? That's the focus of Mark's presentation. The temple isn't working. The temple is like a barren fig tree. The temple isn't helping weary travellers. Therefore the temple has to go. It is cursed, it is condemned and it will be replaced by the person of Jesus Christ and it will be better. Mark sounds a little bit like the Book of Hebrews here. The entire Book of Hebrews is organized around the theme "Jesus Is Better". He is the better High Priest, he is the Better Sacrifice, he builds a Better House and includes us in a Better Covenant. Jesus is better.

That's what Mark is saying here. Jesus is the better temple. How so? In what way is Jesus the better temple? Let me suggest two things; first of all; Jesus is the better temple:

1. Because he helps us with our prayers

As I said, I'm pulling these observations out of the framing. In the second B paragraph Jesus explains the withered fig tree by talking about powerful prayer. He says:

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. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 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." (Mark 11:23–25 ESV)

Jesus is promising his disciples here that they will become great people of prayer. They will face serious obstacles and they will literally move mountains through prayer. You will become world shakers through prayer! Now, he is not giving them magic powers here – he is promising that they will serve as vessels and channels for HIS POWER – that's why they have to keep their pipes clean. If they allow their pipes to clog up with bitterness and unforgiveness then the power will no longer flow. That's why he says:

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." (Mark 11:23–25 ESV)

Keep those pipes clear and you will do great things through the power of prayer.

Jesus said this sort of stuff all the time. He said:

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13 ESV)

So if you ask for things IN JESUS' NAME – that is to say if you ask for things that accord with God's character, nature and purpose – then those things will be given you SO THAT the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask for things that will show God to be good and that will result in people praising the name of Jesus – then you can expect great help from Jesus in securing an answer to your prayers. That's what he is saying and that's how prayer works. When

we pray we pray to the Father through the Son. Our prayers go up and they are received by Jesus and taken to the Father on our behalf if they accord with Christ's character and purpose and if the answering of those prayers would glorify the Father in the Son.

That is what the temple was supposed to be. The temple was the place you went to pray and ask God for help. But that didn't happen. The prayer place got all filled up with the booths of the money changers. The temple became a place of commerce and business and noise and corruption. So it is condemned, it was cursed and it has been replaced. And that's a good thing. Because now, Jesus:

is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25 ESV)

Jesus never closes! He is up all night ready to go, ready to take your requests to God and to present them to God as if they were his own. He is on CALL for you! As a weary traveller in a fallen and hostile world it just doesn't get any better than that.

Jesus is better, because he helps us with our prayers.

Secondly, Jesus is the better the temple:

2. Because he feeds us with his flesh

The fig tree was cursed because it didn't have any fruit on it for the nourishment of weary travellers. The temple was cursed because it was no longer feeding hungry men and women. But Jesus, on the other hand, never disappoints.

In John 6 he said:

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35 ESV)

My fruit is always in season. You will never come to me and go away hungry. He went on to say:

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. (John 6:54–55 ESV)

Now, Jesus is obviously speaking in a spiritual sense here. He is saying that if you feed on all of who he is – and all of what he’s done – his life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection and his Spirit – if you are FEEDING ON THOSE THINGS – believing in those things, meditating on those things, pursuing those things – then you will never be disappointed. You will never go away empty handed. You will eat and be satisfied. You will drink and thirst no more. You will be well be refreshed and sustained in your spiritual pilgrimage.

Thanks be to God! Jesus is the better temple.

And, moving out a frame, Jesus is the better leader. Let’s talk about why that is.

Why Is Jesus The Better Leader?

First of all he is the better leader:

1. Because he came from heaven

That’s the issue at the very end of this story. The chief priests and the scribes come to him and ask him who gave him his authority and Jesus says well I’ll answer your question if you answer mine. Where did John the Baptist get his authority? From men or from heaven? And they won’t answer because the people are convinced that John got his authority from heaven and they know that Jesus will follow that up by asking why then they didn’t listen to him and they know that from there Jesus is going to say and a Greater Than John is talking to you now.

So they just won’t go there.

The Apostle John makes this point in his Gospel as well. In John 3 Jesus says to Nicodemus, one of those Jerusalem leader types:

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly

things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:11–13 ESV)

I have unique authority, Nicodemus, and I can speak about things you couldn't possibly understand for the simple reason that I am the only person who has descended from heaven.

Do you understand how unique that is?

Moses didn't descend from heaven.

Mohammed didn't descend from heaven – Mohammed had dreams in a cave and his wife thought he was possessed of a demon.

But Jesus claims to have descended from heaven. So who you going to listen? A prophet? A dreamer? Or a guy who's been there. A guy who is from there and who knows the way home?

That's the second thing. Jesus is the better leader:

2. Because he knows the way home

At the end of the day, that's what a leader is. A leader is the person who knows the way. A leader is a person that other people follow and therefore a good leader is by definition a person who knows the way. And Jesus is the guy who knows the way. Hebrews 12 says that Jesus is:

the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2 NRSV)

Pioneer means trail blazer. Pioneer means the one who goes first. Perfecter means the one who does it right.

That's who Jesus is.

He is the one who goes first. He is the one who makes a way. He is the one in front of us, hacking a path through the jungle of brokenness and sin. You just settle in behind. You just keep your hand on his coat tails. You just follow Jesus. Because he knows the way home.

He is the better temple.

He is the better leader.

He is our Lord and Savior.

And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.