

There is only Jesus
Mark 11

2 Kings 22:14-20, 23:26-27

Isaiah 51:17-23

Responsive Psalm 96

Today we are going to be starting out in chapter 11 which is the beginning of the end of the book of Mark. This gospel record can be split up into 3 sections, Jesus begins his ministry and gathers his disciples, the 2nd part is Jesus ministry, and teaching his disciples, and lastly is his arrival in Jerusalem and his subsequent death and resurrection. This last part of the book of Mark makes up a full 3rd of the entire book itself so it is obvious the importance of this last part of the book for not only does Mark dedicate the majority of his writing to the record of Jesus final moments on earth, it is also the culmination of Jesus ministry here on earth and it is where he had been heading since the beginning.

In much of the same way that Mark wrote all the rest of this book it is seemed to have been done in an accelerated manner as well. Some scholars believe that what Mark records here in chapters 11-16 has been compressed, and while it seems to be a record of the week of the passover there are a few things that are included that make it seem that this rather took place over the period of a few months and not just one week. But before we start diving into any of this let us read this morning starting in verse 1 of chapter 11, and read to verse 11.

So first off one of the evidences that it appears that Marks record here has been truncated is in this practice of cutting branches, waving them and shouting out hosanna. According to the Mishnah this was actually the practice of the fall festival known as the Feast of the Tabernacles and was not really associated with the Passover which occurs in the spring. So this points the possibility that Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem was not a cannonball run to the crucifixion as it may seem, but rather spanned a period from sometime in the late fall, to the spring to which he ministered and taught in and around Jerusalem. Another aspect that points to this as a possibility is in some of the wording that Mark uses at times in chapters 11, and 14. IN chapter 11, verse 19 there is a mention of Jesus leaving the city in the evening and in verse 27 it says that he returned again to Jerusalem. There is no record of how long this little journey was, but it seems to suggest that Jesus and his disciples traveled around to places outside of Jerusalem as well during this time.

In chapter 14, verse 49 when Jesus is betrayed to the chief priests and elders he answers them and says, "Daily I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But scriptures must be fulfilled. This also suggests that there has been a period of time that Jesus ministered there in Jerusalem before he had been betrayed and turned over to the authorities. So these both stand as some evidences here in the book of Mark that these last 5 chapters are covering more then just the final week of Jesus ministry but rather are likely a truncated record of his ministry around Jerusalem. But as we know, Marks record of Jesus' time in Jerusalem is not the only record for there are other gospel accounts written by some of the disciples who were there with him at this time. For instance the Gospel of John gives a much more detailed account of Jesus arrival and ministry around Jerusalem.

In chapter 10, verse 22 we see Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Dedication, and John notes, that it was winter and Jesus was walking on Solomon's porch which was a part of the temple area in Jerusalem. This Feast of Dedication is a feast that was observed around mid December, so that puts Jesus in Jerusalem at least 4 months before the Passover.

And if we were to continue through the book of John we would see other accounts of Jesus coming and going between Jerusalem, and Judea for at least 4 months before his crucifixion. So with this evidence that we see also from the Book of John it seems to be rather apparent that Mark did indeed condense these events into what appears to be a shorter time period. But then arise the question, why would he do this? Well before we can answer that we must remember that Mark an understudy of Peters. As Papias' work the Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles which was composed sometime before ad 130 he wrote, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he had remembered, not, indeed, in order of the things said or done by the Lord. For Mark had no heard the Lord, nor had he followed him but later on, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, and arrangement of the Lords oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in writing down single points as he remembered them.

So this is another reason why the timing of events may seem to be slightly off in this account of the gospel compared to the others. It is that Mark is writing down the events as he remembers he has been taught by Peter who did not necessarily teach in order of Jesus teaching but taught the lessons as they became necessary. Scholars believe that Mark arranged this account in such a way for his own teaching design for at least 2 reasons. One reason for this condensed version to a one week passion narrative serves the purpose by reducing it down and focusing on the all important events of Jesus time in Jerusalem and put it into a block of material that can be read and celebrated during the Easter week. The second reason and more importantly is that the passion narrative in Mark is oriented around the temple, and it is presented in such a way to show that Jesus supersedes the temple. All of Marks writing in chapter 11, 12, and 13 is either set either in the temple itself or is directly related to it.

In our reading this morning in 2nd Kings, and in Isaiah prophesied God's judgment upon Jerusalem and Mark's writing here shows that Jesus is not a reformer of the temple, he did not come to establish his kingdom on earth at this time and his teachings were not about changes and improvements to the temple ministry but rather He is the fulfillment and replacement of the temple. For his death on the cross is the perfect atonement for Sin, and not the temple traditions and rituals. And as we will see throughout this chapter, and through to chapter 13 it becomes apparent that Jesus ministry is at odd's with the Jewish temple worship and practices. If we just look at our passage this morning with Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with people greating him by laying their cloaks and branches before him shouting Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, but as we will see as we continue through the next few chapters that Jesus triumphal entry was not mirrored by the religeous leaders of the temple.

And in fact over the next few months of ministry as we know these leaders plot against him to ultimately have him arrested and executed. But for today we are focusing on Jesus arrival into Jerusalem, and verse 1 says that they had arrived at the Mount of Olives to which Jesus sends his disciples to gather a donkey for him to ride as they enter Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is located on the East side of Jerusalem extends some 300' or so higher then the city. It would appear that the mention of the Mount of Olives here is rather significant, for throughout the bible it has been a place of worship. 2 Sam 15:30 mentions David ascending the Mount of Olives "So David went up by the ascent of the mount of olives, and wept as he went up, and he had his head covered and went barefoot. Adn all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up."

At the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC Ezekiel had a vision of the glory of the lord departing Jerusalem and settling on the mountain to the east, or the Mount of Olives. Ezek 11:23 “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city” Also in Zechariah, chapter 14 the Mount of Olives is mentioned in the judgement against Jerusalem, to which many of the Rabbi's believed was associated with the coming of the Messiah. Verse 1.” Behold the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth an dfight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle, and in that day his feet will stand on the mount of olives which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the mount of Olives shall be split in two, from the east to west making a very large valley half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through my mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah King of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with you. It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light, the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the Lord neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea, in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth, in that day it shall be, the lord is one and his name is one.”

Can you see the significance of Jesus being here, now, on the mount of Olives looking down into the city of Jerusalem which will ultimately be the death that he had told his disciples about, but in that death will be the culmination of his ministry here on earth, and the coronation and the rise of his holy kingdom. We can see in the gospel accounts of Jesus death, that it was what Zechariah prophesied, it was both a prophesy of the fall of Jerusalem, and of the crucifixion of the Messiah. He mentions that “it shall come to pass in that day that there will no light, the lights will diminish.” In Mark's account of the crucifixion he wrote, chapter 15, verse 33 “Now when the six hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. Matthew says the same thing, Chapter 27 verse 45, Now from the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness all over the land.” And again in Luke 23:44 “ Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.”

Also Zechariahs mention of the living water that flows from Jerusalem , half toward the east, and half toward the west. Christ's blood was shed for the world, not just for the Jews, not just for those in Jerusalem but for all peoples who will repent and believe. The living waters flow from his death and resurrection to the east and to the west. So as we can see, this mention of Jesus here at the Mount of Olives has a very significant meaning and purpose, and as we have seen this has been prophesied, and Jesus is here, now fulfilling this prophesy. And in fact these first 6 verses here in chapter 11 serve to point to Jesus sovereignty and foreknowledge over the upcoming events. You might ask, why did Jesus request his disciples to go and get this young donkey. Well once again it is a fulfilment of prophesy, pointing again to Jesus being the Messiah. Zechariah 9:9 “ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Furthermore the practice of commandeering a beast of burden for a king was a common practice at that time, and a young, unbridled, unbroken beast of burden was considered sacred. It was often the young bulls, and young rams who without blemish who and yet to be bridled that were offered as sacrifices. So when people in Jerusalem saw him riding upon a young donkey, it is very possible that they recognized this as the fulfillment of this prophesy, for it seemed that they treated him as a King entering the city laying down their cloaks and branches before him, but it is more probably that they may have just thought him another pilgrim on a journey to the temple. For they were shouting Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord. We tend to understand the exclamation of Hosanna to be one of praise, but the transliterated meaning in Hebrew is Save, I pray. So it would seem that while Jesus coming as he did was a fulfillment of Zechariah, the people of Jerusalem understood him not as the messiah and king, but as a pilgrim coming to the temple, Save, I pray this one who is coming in the name of the Lord. Also the mention of the blessed is the kingdom of our father David, was not a reference to Jesus arrival, for it is true that he was the promised messiah, the coming Son of David, but that is not what they said, they said blessings upon the kingdom of our father David, upon Jerusalem, its temple, and those who would come to her. In fact if that was the meaning of their cries, it is likely that the Roman authorities would have swooped in and arrested Jesus on the spot, for if he had come to set up the kingdom of David once again in Jerusalem it would have been a call to arms against the Roman occupation.

So we, on this side of history see Jesus entry on this young donkey as the fulfillment of the prophesy, and we see him as the sovereign mighty King who has come to establish his kingdom which he does through his death, it is likely that the crowds there, and the religious authorities just saw him as another pilgrim coming to the temple. Verse 11 even further alludes to this fact because when Jesus reached the temple it would seem it was with little fan fair, and the crowds are no longer mentioned and seemed to have dispersed. It says in verse 11. “ And Jesus went into the temple, and when he had looked around at all things as the hour was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

This was it, this was the moment, the triumphal arrival of the Messiah to the temple, but it is anti-climatic. The crowds disappear, He goes to the temple, observes the operations, and leaves. He doesn't even stop to teach as was often his practice when he entered into a new town he would go to the temple worship and teach, but here he comes to the temple, looks around, and departs back to Bethany.

This scene echos back to the parable of the sower, the crowds gather, another pilgrim has arrived, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord, and then they vanish, the excitement is over, it is like the seed that was sown on the stony ground, it sprang up but had no root and quickly faded. Mark in his writing even here is alluding to the difference between the true, and the false disciples, between those who are on the inside and those who are on the outside of God's chosen. Just like the parable of the sower, it is not about how enthusiastic one is, or how popular or excited one becomes about the faith, and about God but it is about those who calmly and quietly follow and who are by his side. We must be careful to not mistaken such excitement and enthusiasm with true faith. It seems that more and more this is becoming the message of the bible today, it has become about how you feel, and not about what God has done.

The focus of ministry anymore seems to be more about making those who are claiming faith, feel enthusiastic, to feel excited, it is a way to bring them in week after week to get their fix of holy adrenaline. The worship services, the songs that are sung are written with this intention, to draw out an emotional feeling, to create this spiritual high. It seems that much of what we see in the churches today is like these in Jerusalem, excited for a new pilgrim has come! Look something new, something interesting, praise God! But when the newness wears off, when the excitement is gone, they disperse. How often do we see that? It has gotten so bad here in the United States that it is a known fact that people come and go, church shopping is now a thing, where people go to a church not because of the fellowship or the preaching, but because of the programs, and amenities that are offered. And what have we done about it? We compete by having better music, better programs, we plan, we strategize how we can make ourselves appealing to new people, what can we do different and exciting to lure them away from their current church to join ours? Problem is, they will only leave when what you are offering becomes boring or is not as good and as exciting as the new hip church that just opened up.

I don't need to tell you guys everything that is wrong with this, for you all already know it, and it is for this very reason why we are small, and we remain small because we do not, in fact we refuse to bow to this modern ministry system and instead focus on what truly matters and that is the word of God. We are seeking to be like, and create disciples and followers of Christ more like his 12 disciples who quietly followed him into Jerusalem. We are not seeking to create anything flashy to draw in the crowds who will only scatter, but we seek those who are faithful, who are dedicated, and whose motive is to worship and praise God, not for an emotional high, but because of our genuine love for our savior. So there you have it.... we have been asked many times what is our mission statement, what is our plans and goals to grow...it is to be faithful, to preach God's word, to stand on truth of the bible. And it is by this that we differentiate ourselves from many of the other fellowships around us, there is no bait and switch, there is no hook, there is only Jesus.

Just like the significance of Jesus arrival was lost on the enthusiastic crowds, misunderstood, and drowned out by the excitement of the arrival of another pilgrim, it is the same in the churches today. The gospel is drowned out by the noise, by the excitement, and I wonder how many of these churches today Jesus would react to in the same way as he does the temple in Jerusalem...he walks in, looks around, and leaves...for it is not God's house, it is a building with his name on it, but it has become an empty shadow, or merely an echo of the true kingdom of God, having all the appearance, but no true substance just as the temple in Jerusalem. For they have turned away from the gospel in favor of becoming more interesting and exciting, whose mission is about numerical numbers and filling the seats in the house. IF you don't believe me, and think I am being judgmental and overly harsh, then let me ask you this...what do you think will happen if one of these congregations exchanges there 45 minutes of worship time and 15 minutes of preaching with 15 minutes of music, and 45 minutes of sound biblical preaching? They will lose people, and all that will be left are those who are dedicated to the gospel, and those seeking to be entertained and looking for a spiritual high, will go find somewhere else that will serve that desire.

So to wrap it all up this morning I want to pose a challenge to any church leaders who maybe listening to this today, It is high time that the church stops trying to appeal to the nameless multitudes, and focus on the word of God, seeking to make, real and true disciples who are seek to follow only Jesus,

