

# Mark 1:1-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] So I want to preach tonight from Mark chapter 11. If you've got it in front of you. And it is Palm Sunday. And the first thing that I want to say to you is, despite the fact that Jesus had a large crowd around him, nobody was really with him.

He was on his own. I don't know how you find it, but sometimes when I'm talking with people who are going through really difficult times, and like some of you are, and I can't identify myself with what is being said and what has happened, I find myself thinking and saying to them, there's no one who will understand this except Jesus Christ.

And the great thing about Jesus is not only will he understand what you're going through, but he will be able to help you. The second thing I want you to notice as we begin, as we read these verses about the walk into Jerusalem, is that everything's upside down.

All the things that are meant to be impressive are not impressive. And the things that you think are not impressive are very impressive, as we'll see.

I read of two students in Aberdeen who went to an art show in an art gallery, and they took with them a one-pound pineapple they'd bought in the supermarket.

[ 1 : 23 ] They left the pineapple on an empty stand in the art show, and they were delighted a few days later when they went back to see that the pineapple had been given its own glass case and had been made part of the art show.

That's the world that we live in, isn't it? So suddenly things that are really stupid become serious, and things that are really serious get treated stupidly.

And so if you've got the passage open for you, there's two headings for tonight. One is The Lonely Road, and secondly, The Loving Word. Okay? The Lonely Road and The Loving Word.

And my hope is that this sermon will help us be anchored, that this week we won't be like a cork bobbing along in the ocean. So we're on the road to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is the point of Jesus' mission.

He wants to get to the city because that is where he's going to be crucified. And so we read back in chapter 10 and verse 33 that he said to his disciples, we're going to Jerusalem where I'll be handed over to die.

[ 2 : 30 ] And even though the way that Jesus rides into Jerusalem is the way to death, and it should have registered with the disciples, they just don't get it.

And they might have thought to themselves, he's about to ride in on a donkey, and it says, doesn't it, in the Old Testament, that somebody from the tribe of Judah, and Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, will eventually link donkey and death together, but they don't get it.

They might have thought that almost the last book of the Old Testament is Zechariah, and it says this, it says, Rejoice, your king comes humble riding on a donkey, but they've obviously not been reading their Old Testament.

And so they don't remember, and they don't register. And they don't get what Jesus is doing. And even though we need the word of God to understand the events which take place, nobody even seems to remember.

In the incident before, Blind Bartimaeus, do you remember? He put one and one together, and he made two. He recognized that someone was coming who was called king, someone was coming who was called son of David, and Jesus is acting like this son of David, so he must be the son of David.

[ 3 : 50 ] He put one and one together, and he made two. But nobody here on Palm Sunday does that. Now, when I think of Palm Sunday, I don't know what you think of. There are certain hymns which we've missed singing today, aren't there?

Certain hymns which, if you grew up in a church, you'll remember those choruses. You'll remember Sunday school lessons where you made palm branches and you put your coats on the ground. And we think often, Palm Sunday must have been a day when people really recognized who Jesus was. When people got very, very excited about Jesus and there was lots of faith in Jesus. And then really strangely, five days later, they all turn against him. And they call for his crucifixion. And I want to suggest to you that isn't what is happening.

I want to suggest to you that actually there's no faith at all here. Everything is completely superficial. And I think I can prove that to you. If you look at the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they all record the coming of Jesus introducing him on a donkey.

[ 4 : 59 ] It's a big event. This is what Matthew says in Matthew 21. He finishes with this verdict from the crowd. The crowd said Jesus is a prophet. And I'm absolutely sure they've missed the point.

They don't say he's king. They don't say he's the Messiah. He's just a prophet. If you go to Luke's Gospel, chapter 19 records the event. And then it finishes with this verdict that Jesus wept. And he said, to the people, if only you'd know what would make for your peace. You did not recognize God's coming to you. And John tells us, in his account, in John 12, the final sentence of John 12, the disciples did not understand what Jesus was doing.

And Mark's Gospel, he records a number of things they said, but none of the things they said really connect to Jesus. I want you to look at me with me at this lonely ride for Jesus and why it's important that it is a lonely ride.

Because Jesus is doing a mission on his own that no one else can do. And as we look at these verses, verses nine and ten, some of you might think, isn't our minister really, really clever to show us things that we've never seen before?

[ 6 : 23 ] And where would we be without our great guide and guru, pastor? I doubt you're saying that. But I want you to notice that I'm not going to say anything that actually if you carefully read the text and follow up the references in the Old Testament, you wouldn't be able to see yourself.

So first of all, look at verse nine of chapter 11. The people call out, don't they, Hosanna. And that word means save. And it was the sort of thing that they called out when they walked or marched into Jerusalem.

And it was a very general word calling out to God to save us. And it doesn't say, does it save us from our sins? It could be just save us from our Roman oppressors.

It's a general, oh God, save us from our problems. There's nothing specific being said about Jesus. And then in verse nine, and those who went before and those who followed were shouting, Hosanna.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Now we read that and we think that it's speaking about Jesus. But if you go to the Psalm, it's not talking about Jesus.

[ 7 : 36 ] It's talking about the pilgrim. The pilgrim who is on his way to Jerusalem. Blessed is the person who goes up to Jerusalem. Blessed is the person who goes up to Jerusalem and ends up in the temple.

It's not about Jesus at all. Then look at verse 10. Blessed is the coming kingdom. And that's just the standard language of we're looking forward to something better.

There's no direct link to Jesus at all. And the final sentence of chapter 11, verse 10, Hosanna in the highest. Save us.

Save us. It's vague. It's really vague. It's general. It's not specifically related to Jesus. It's pretty empty. And so you see, each of the Gospels in their own way are telling us that Jesus is on a very lonely ride.

At Palm Sunday, the crowds don't understand him. The disciples don't understand him. They're just having standard Passover celebrations.

[ 8 : 39 ] There's no grasp that Jesus was the king at all. Do you think it's possible for you to be so in the dark? Do you think it's possible for people to be in a crowd and to be saying things and singing things that are really orthodox but actually completely missing the point at the same time?

Do you think that's possible? Think about weddings. Think about Christian weddings. There's a hymn, isn't there, that explains that Jesus lived and died and rose.

And then there's a reading from the Bible that explains that Jesus lived and died and rose. And then there's an explanation of what marriage is. There's a picture of Jesus living and dying and rising.

And then there's a sermon, isn't there, or a talk. And they proclaim that Jesus lived and died and rose. And then you go to the reception. And what do people say?

They say, Minister, that was a lovely service. Thank you. And they pay no attention to what was being said. Can I just say, that was a lovely service.

[ 9 : 51 ] They were lovely words. And even though they were singing and listening, nothing has gone in. Think about Christmas. It's a privilege, isn't it, that people pile into Christmas services.

And the carols are so wonderfully full of rich truth about the Lord Jesus and who he is, that he's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He's God made man.

He's the saviour of the world. He's the Messiah. He's the one who comes to give second birth. And we discover very clearly who he is and what he came to do.

And people sing and they listen and nothing goes in. And well, think about a normal church service where people can sing the hymns and listen to the reading and confess their sin and say the creed and hear God's word and nothing goes in.

You see, it's possible, isn't it, to be like the crowds on Palm Sunday. To be listening and saying but not getting it. And if we look very, very carefully at Palm Sunday, I think we are meant to see Jesus is alone and we are not just meant to despair at that point.

[ 11 : 07 ] Because he is alone. He alone is the answer to our problem, the answer to unbelief. And he's the answer to sin and he's the answer to lostness. And so by the time you get to Jerusalem and he is crucified and he does his work, the temple of the curtain opens and people start to pour in.

One more little clue in Mark 11 that this crowd is not appreciating Jesus is that in verse 11 when he actually gets to the temple, to the meeting place, that place where people were meant to meet with God, Mark doesn't tell us anything.

There's no red carpet laid out for him. There's no people waiting for him. There's nobody talking to him. It's eerie, isn't it? He walks in and he looks around.

And in Mark's gospel when you read it, that little phrase looking around is always ominous. It's almost always ominous. Whenever it says he looks around, what is he looking for?

He's looking for life. He's looking for faith. And how many does he have with him when he leaves? Verse 12, no big crowds. And so here is perhaps the loneliest ride in the universe.

[ 12 : 23 ] And I want to say this to you because loneliness is such a big issue, isn't it? It's a big issue always, but it's a big issue at the moment. I quite like being alone.

But being lonely is different, doesn't it? It's when you feel that nobody is really connecting or caring for you.

And loneliness is when there's no guarantee that if things are going to get worse or not, that there'll be someone there for you. That is a terrible feeling. And you know that slight panic that you may be alone and adrift.

And loneliness is a very big thing in our city. There's lots of loneliness out there, isn't there? And because our world is told that there is no loving Heavenly Father whatsoever, it's just you in an empty universe, it's no wonder that there's such a great deal of despair.

But God has two answers, doesn't he, to loneliness. One is his son who is able to bring you and I immediately into the Father's presence so that you will return to him and he runs down the road and embraces you.

[ 13 : 48 ] And the other partial answer to loneliness is God's family, isn't it, that you see on your screen. And God's family is made up of sinful people and imperfect people.

It's literally tonight a rogues gallery. But it's one of the ways that God builds the bridges of relationships in our world, isn't it? And we begin to show some care and kindness to one another.

We don't do it perfectly, we know that. But we do it profitably. And so that's the lonely road.

Secondly, a loving word. A loving word.

I don't know what you feel when you read the first few verses of Mark chapter 11. I think when you read the first few verses of Mark 11, you scratch your head and you think, what is this here for?

Why are we being told all this stuff about a donkey that's tied up and you're going to go and untie it and somebody's going to say to you, why are you untying it? And you're going to say I'm untying it because of this.

[ 14 : 55 ] What is that all about? Don't you feel like calling out I don't get it? Well, let me try and give you the answer, I think.

Jesus is giving his disciples a reminder that he can be trusted and his words can be trusted. and the reason is if you look at what he says, just look at chapter 11 verse 2, he says to two disciples, remember they forgot in the Old Testament, they're not thinking, are they?

They're not registering, but he wants to help them. So he says in verse 2, go into the village in front of you and immediately as you enter it you'll find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it and bring it. And the implication is this, Jesus knows what is in front. And Jesus knows what's around the corner. And in the future.

And that is a very definite prediction of the future that is going to prove to be true in a matter of minutes. Most of the promises in the Bible that we have, you've got to wait a long, long time for their fulfillment.

[16:07] But this promise to the disciples is going to be fulfilled in minutes. So the disciples might have said to themselves, he is amazing. Or look at verse 2 again.

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, no one has ever ridden it. And so my reaction to that would be don't attempt to ride a colt that has never been ridden on.

It's going to be a disaster. But Jesus is Lord of all, isn't it? So it's no problem. Or look at verse 3.

And if anyone says to you, why are you doing this? Well, you say to them, the Lord is in need of it and we'll send it back here immediately.

And they went away and found a colt tied outside a street and they untied it. So they turn up, they start untying the donkey and the people say, what are you doing?

And they say, dot, dot, dot. And the owners of the donkey say, it's all yours. It's all yours. In other words, nobody may be listening to the word of God, but the donkey owners are listening to the word of God.

[17:28] When they hear Jesus needs it, they say, it's all yours. They cooperate. And the fourth thing is Jesus gives them in verse three, the key to who he is.

Can you see? He says, the Lord needs it. The Lord needs it. I want you to know that Jesus hardly threw the word Lord around.

Most of the time, you'll know that Jesus called himself the Son of Man. The Son of Man is one of those phrases like Clark Kent or Peter Parker, which means a lot if you're in the know, doesn't it?

But it doesn't mean anything if you're not in the know. And the Son of Man was a veiled way of saying, I am significant, but I'm not making it too obvious. And here he says, though, the Lord needs it.

And the word Lord is the word used to describe God. And so finally, as Jesus is entering into Jerusalem, he says to the disciples, go and speak to these people and tell them that God needs the donkey.

[18:32] Jesus needs the donkey. And so these owners of the donkey get the point. But I wonder whether the disciples got the point.

Probably not. John tells us, doesn't he, they didn't get it as they marched into Jerusalem. They hadn't listened to the Old Testament. They weren't listening to Jesus.

They didn't get it. Jesus was on a lonely ride. And even though he'd given them a loving word, he now this instruction is given to the disciples and to me and to you to cause you and I to say something like this.

Jesus Christ knows what's in front of us. He is in charge of the future. Jesus Christ controls the uncontrollable and his words are to be listened to.

And his words are to be trusted and his words are to be obeyed. And he describes himself as the Lord. And we need to make a decision.

[19:40] What will our family do? What will we do about Jesus Christ? That's the big question. Will we just say he's a prophet? In which case we press the point.

Will we say he's a good man, he's a religious leader? In that case we press the point. Or will we say he is the Lord? God. And our family is only going to be safe and sound and wise and well underneath the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And that is the decision, isn't it? But can you notice with me here there's a real contrast. The words of men and women are really empty.

empty. The words of men and women in this passage are really empty. Even the slogans, the pious slogans, they are empty.

And if you don't see that Jesus Christ and his words are crucial, not only the words of men are so empty, but the words of Jesus are so powerful, so safe, so true, so foundational.

[ 20 : 55 ] And so isn't it true that you and I, we listen to thousands of words each day, most of which are completely useless.

And in a week's time, no one will pay the blindness bit of attention. Just think of the things that are said today, and there will be a complete waste of space next week.

But the words of Jesus will be utterly necessary. Next week. And the week after, and the week after that. And the deeds of men, they're so empty.

All these religious actions, all these waving of palm branches, all these throwing of cloaks, there's no clue as to who Jesus is. But when you are lit up by the person of Jesus, suddenly everything starts to make sense.

And you understand that your future is under control, and you have promises to stand on, and his deeds make your deeds worthwhile.

[ 22 : 05 ] And so Jesus is on a very lonely road, and he's on a lonely road for a reason. And he is the only one that understands his mission. He is the only one that can do his mission, and within a week he will be completely alone.

He will not even have the fellowship of his father anymore. he'll be on the cross and he will cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Because he is going to experience the darkness that our sin deserves in order to give us freely the salvation that he deserves.

And so let me ask you tonight, are you like the crowds? A bit of a song when we sing? A bit of a listen? A bit of a song, but no change.

Or are you really hearing the words of God that Jesus is the King and the Saviour and he is the key to the future and the Lord of your life? And you need to surrender to him and to trust him.

Let me tell you what Jesus Christ is like. He goes on a lonely road right to the end to make sure that you and I can have a certain future.

[ 23 : 23 ] And he gives a loving word to you. He's promised so that you and I can have a certain presence. Right now, let's thank him.

Let's bow our heads. Let's bow our heads. Thank you.