

# Mark 11:1-11

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[0:00] Mark chapter 11 verses 1 to 11. It's very, very familiar, isn't it? The famous ride of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey. Two things I want to say right from the off. Two things immediately. Number one, I want to say this is a lonely ride. It's a lonely ride. And I think that's often overlooked.

But I want to show you that although Jesus had a great crowd around him, great crowds thronging him, nobody was really with him. He was really on his own.

I wonder if you know that. Sometimes when I talk to people who are going through a really difficult circumstance, and I know that I myself, I can't identify with them. What I find myself thinking and saying to them is, there is no one who will understand what you're going through except the Lord Jesus Christ. And not only will he understand, but he is able to help you.

And the second thing I notice as I've read these verses about this walk into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday is everything's upside down. Everything you think is impressive is actually not impressive. All the things that you think are not impressive are actually very impressive. I read this week that two art students last year went to a modern art show in Aberdeen.

[1:33] And they took with them a pineapple, and they left the pineapple on an empty stand at the art show. They were delighted to find that a couple of days later, when they went back to the show, that the pineapple had been given its own glass case, and had been made part of the art show.

That's the world we live in, isn't it? That's the world you live in. Things that are completely stupid become serious, and some things that are serious become stupid.

And so look at Mark 11, and let's look at it under two headings. First, a lonely ride and a loving word. First of all, a lonely ride. Chapter 11, verse 1. And we're on the road to Jerusalem. That's where he's going.

And Jerusalem is the point where Jesus wants to get to. That's the aim of his mission. He came into this world to save sinners.

And to die on the cross. He goes to the city, because that is where he'll be crucified. Look at just chapter 10, and verse 33, just the chapter before. He says to his disciples, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man, that's the way he refers to himself, will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

[2:47] They'll mock him, spit on him, and flog him, and kill him. After three days he will rise. And even though the way that Jesus rides into Jerusalem, with this great crowd around him, singing and shouting, he is riding to his death.

And it should have registered, shouldn't it, to the disciples? But it doesn't register at all. They might have said, he's about to ride in on a donkey. And it says in the first book of the Bible, in Genesis, that someone of the tribe of Judah, and Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, and they would eventually link donkey and death together, from that passage, but they don't get it.

They might have gone to maybe the last, nearly the last book of the Old Testament, Zechariah, where he says this, Rejoice, your king comes to you, humble riding on a donkey. But they've obviously not been reading their Old Testament.

And 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 that took place, no one obviously remembers the word of God in this context.

In the previous story, that brilliant story about Bartimaeus in Mark 10, blind Bartimaeus, this blind beggar puts one and one together, and he makes two. He's been begging, and suddenly he hears that a king is coming.

[4:19] A king who is the son of David. And he recognises that Jesus is acting like the son of David. He is the son of David. He puts one and one together, and he makes two, and he calls out,

and he cries and relies upon Jesus, and is healed.

But nobody here puts one and one together. Now as we think about this Palm Sunday passage, you and I, many of us have been to church nearly all our lives, and we've got Palm Sunday services, flashbacks, and memories.

Do you remember when you were in Sunday school, and you made palm branches, and you waved palm branches? I remember that as a boy. It was a day, wasn't it, of celebration in church life, where everybody got very excited about Jesus.

There seemed to be lots of faith in Jesus. Lots of recognising him as king. And really strangely, a week later, the crowd all turned against him, and started a call for his crucifixion.

That's the way I remember it. Maybe it wasn't exactly like that. Be like the crowd on Palm Sunday. I want to say to you, as I've read it this week, I want to say to you that what is going on at the start of Mark 11 is not faith at all.

[ 5 : 37 ] There's no faith in it. And actually the message this morning is don't be like the crowd. And I think I can prove that to you.

I think I can prove to you because all four Gospels record the coming of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all talk about it. So it's a big event. This is what Matthew says in Matthew 21.

He finishes with this verdict from the crowd. They say Jesus is a prophet. And I'm absolutely sure that they've completely missed the point.

They don't say he is the king. They don't say he is the Messiah. They say he's just a prophet. Luke in his Gospel in chapter 19 finishes with this verdict.

Jesus wept. He wept and he said to the people, if only you had known what makes for peace. Yet you did not recognise God's coming to you.

[ 6 : 42 ] John's Gospel, chapter 12, the final sentence there, the disciples did not understand what Jesus was doing. And in Mark's Gospel, you might have noticed that he records a number of things that they said, that none of the things that the crowd says really connect to Jesus.

So I want to ask you to look with me at why this is such a lonely ride. And it's important to think that it is a lonely ride. Because Jesus is doing a mission on his own that no one else can do.

As we look at verses 9 and 10, I think it may be that some of you think, oh it was so clever of our minister to show us these things that we'd never seen. And without him, where would we be without our great guide and guru minister?

I want you to know, perhaps none of you will say that. There's always hope there, isn't there? But I want to say to you, I am not saying anything this morning. I think you couldn't have figured out for yourself by carefully reading the text and looking at the Old Testament references.

The problem is, when we come to a familiar story with this, we don't carefully read the text. It's all that. So first of all, chapter 11, verse 9. Hosanna.

[ 7 : 58 ] Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest.

What does the word Hosanna mean? It means save. Save. It's the sort of thing that actually, the people often cried out when they gathered together or marched into Jerusalem.

It's a very general word calling on God to save us. Save us. Save us from what? It doesn't say save us from our sins.

It could be just save us from our oppressors. It is general. Oh God, save us from our problems. There's nothing specific being said about Jesus in verse 9.

Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And we think, don't we, ah, that's obviously talking about Jesus. They're recognising he is the son of David.

[ 9 : 01 ] But if you go back to the Psalms, Psalm 118 verse 26, it's not talking about Jesus. It's talking about the pilgrim. It's talking about the people of God who go to Jerusalem.

Blessed is the person who goes to Jerusalem. Blessed is the person who goes to Jerusalem and ends up in the temple. It's not specifically about Jesus at all. And then verse 10.

Blessed is the coming kingdom. Well again, that's just standard language. Looking forward to better days without the Romans, without the oppressors. There's no direct link to Jesus at all.

And the final sentence in chapter 11 verse 10. Hosanna in the highest. Save us. Save us. It's vague. It's general.

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

[10:11] This Palm Sunday, the crowds don't understand him. Not even the disciples understood him. They're just having a standard Passover celebration. There's no grasp that Jesus is the king at all.

Shocking. But do you think it's possible people could be so in the dark? Do you think it would be possible for people to be in a crowd saying orthodox things and singing things that are orthodox but completely missing the point of Jesus and the person of Jesus?

Do you think it might be possible for that to happen? Sadly it is. Think about the funerals that take place. This funeral in the church can be a very, very sad funeral and everybody in the building is faced with the sad departure and this great sadness and suddenly a hymn is sung and they sing and the song and the Bible reading explains that Jesus lived and died and rose and somebody will speak and preach that Jesus lived and died and rose and somebody will read the Bible again that Jesus lived and died and rose and then you go to the wake afterwards and you discover that everyone is standing around and basically saying it's all in the past there's no future all but hope is there we each drink and be merry for tomorrow we die but they've got no idea who Jesus is even though they've been singing and saying and listening nothing has gone in

I heard recently of a nurse who went to a funeral of a hundred year old woman and the words of John 14:6 were read I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father but through me and as the woman heard that she said that is Jesus she put her faith in him and she walked out of that funeral believing in the Lord Jesus Christ but I tell you about that because it is so so rare in fact I can't think of another funeral where I have heard of that happening think about Christmas people pile into Christmas services don't they still and they hear amazing readings they hear that he's the King of Kings that he's the Messiah he's the Saviour that he is the one who gives second birth and we discover who he is and what he's come to do and we sing about him and we listen to him but nothing goes in think about a normal church service where people sing hymns they hear the reading and they say the creed and they hear preaching nothing goes in it's possible it's possible to be like the crowds on Palm Sunday to be listening and singing and not getting it and if we look very carefully at Palm Sunday

I think we are meant to see that Jesus is alone he is alone and we're not meant to despair of that point because because he is alone he alone is the answer to our problem he is the answer to unbelief and he is the answer to our sin and to our lostness and by the time he gets to Jerusalem and to the cross and he does his work the curtain of the temple is torn in two and people start to pour in one more clue in Mark 11 that this crowd is not appreciating who Jesus is here in verse 11 when he actually gets to the temple that's the meeting place where people meet with God Mark doesn't tell us anything does he there's no red carpet laid out for him there's no people looking for him no one is talking to him he walks in he looks around and in Mark's gospel that little phrase looks around is always ominous it is always ominous whenever he looks around he is looking for life he is looking for faith you see it with the victory in the next passage and then how many does he have when he leaves with 12 doesn't he verse 11 no big crowds it is perhaps isn't it the loneliest ride in the universe and I want to say this to you because loneliness is such a big issue

[14:58] I don't mean being alone I absolutely love sometimes to be alone but to be lonely is a very different thing isn't it to be lonely is where you feel nobody is really connecting with you or caring for you and there's no guarantee for you that if things get worse that there's going to be somebody there for you it's a terrible terrible feeling and especially if you've lost a loved one and you just have a slight panic that you might be left alone and adrift loneliness is a very big thing and in a city like ours loneliness is an enormous problem and there's a lot of loneliness out there and in here it's not surprising is it in a world where people are told there is no loving father there's no loving father that exists whatsoever it's just you in an empty universe no wonder there's a great deal of despair but God has two answers to loneliness and one is his son one is his son who is able to bring you immediately to a heavenly father so that you return to him and he runs down the road to meet you and to embrace you and the other partial answer to loneliness is God's family the church and although

God's family is made up of very sinful people like me and like you and very imperfect people it is one of the ways in which God builds the bridges of relationships in this world as we begin to show kindness and care for one another and we never do it perfectly but we do it profitably that's the

lonely ride secondly the loving word first few verses I don't know about Mark 11 but you find yourself scratching your head don't you at them and say what is this here for why are you being told about this about a donkey that's tied up and you're going to untie it and somebody's going to ask you why are you untying it and if they do ask you you will say I'm untying it because of this what is that all about why has Mark put this in the gospel I don't get it but here's the answer I take Jesus is giving his disciples isn't he in these really detailed instructions and then relaying the detailed instructions when they actually have them what is Jesus doing he is giving his disciples you and I a reminder that he can be trusted and that his words can be trusted and the reason I say this is if you look at what he says he says to his two disciples in verse 2 remember they've forgotten the Old Testament haven't they they don't know what they should know they don't know what's happening they're not thinking 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 will find a coat a donkey tied on which no one has ever sat untie it and bring it and if anyone says to you why are you doing this say the Lord is in need of it and we'll send it back here immediately they went away and found a coat tied at a door outside in the street and they untied it some of those standing there said to them what are you doing untying the coat and they told them what

Jesus had said and they let them go the implication is this isn't it Jesus knows what's in the future he knows what is in front and around the corner and this is a prediction about the future that is going to be proved to be true and it's going to prove to be true in a matter of minutes most of the promises in the bible you've got to wait a long time for haven't you hundreds of years for but this promise is going to be fulfilled in minutes and therefore the disciples would have said to themselves he is amazing as they untied that donkey and someone comes and says exact words that Jesus says what would you say to somebody that says I'm going to ride a donkey that's never been ridden your reaction is well don't attempt to ride it it's going to be a disaster but Jesus is lord of all and so this is no problem so they turn up they start to untie the donkey and people say why are you untying the donkey and they say dot dot dot and the owners of the donkey say it's all yours it's all yours so in other ways nobody in the scene is listening to the word of God but the donkey owners are listening to the word of

God and when they hear Jesus needs it they say it's all yours they cooperate and the fourth thing in verse three is Jesus gives them the key as to who he is do you see what he says he says the Lord has need of it the Lord needs it the Lord needs it and if you're familiar with the gospels you will know that Jesus did not throw the word Lord around about himself that's not how he usually described himself in fact he rarely described himself in that way most of the time he called himself the son of man the son of man is one of those phrases like Bruce Wayne or like Clark Kent it means a lot doesn't it if you're in the know but it doesn't mean anything if you're not in the know and son of man was a veiled way of saying I am significant but I'm not making it too obvious but here he says the

[ 20 : 54 ] Lord needs it and the word Lord is the word used to describe God and so finally he speaks to these two disciples and he tells them go into the city tell the owners that God needs the donkey Jesus needs the donkey and so these owners of the donkey get the point but I wonder if the disciples got the point I don't think they did did they Jesus tells us John tells us that even as they marched in with Jesus on the donkey they hadn't listened to the Old Testament and they weren't listening to Jesus and they did not get it that Jesus was on a lonely ride even though he had given them a loving word now this instruction is to cause the disciples you and I to say something like this Jesus Christ he knows what's in front of us this week and he is in charge of the future and Jesus controls the uncontrollable his words are to be listened to and they are to be trusted and they are to be obeyed and he describes himself as the

Lord and so you and I have a decision to make this morning what will we and our family if we have them do about Jesus Christ and if you say well he's just a prophet you've missed the point and if you say he's a good man and a religious leader you missed the point or will you say he is the Lord he is God and me and I and my family are only going to be safe and sound and wise and well living under the lordship and control of Jesus Christ and that is the decision I read a book called The Strange Death of Hero by Douglas Murray he's not a Christian and he says Europe is dying because of two processes one is that the whole world is moving around and moving in everywhere so that the views of everywhere have arrived and at the same time

Europe has thrown away its beliefs and its values and he specifically mentions Europe throwing away its Christian heritage Douglas Murray is not a Christian by any stretch of the imagination and it's not a really revolutionary view of Europe but it is simple a lot of views have moved in all over the place and the foundational issue has been removed and he says that is why Europe is in no place to charter a course for the future that's why it doesn't know what it's doing so that when it goes to make a contribution to Iraq or Libya it's got no concept of the right way and so how can it charter a course for other countries it's trying to influence let alone itself and what the book shows is a fascinating book is the emptiness of the world's ideas and we see that clearly don't we in Mark 11 so clearly the words of men here in Mark 11 they are really really empty they're slogans that are being thrown out pious slogans but you see this contrast don't you the words of men so empty so futile and yet the words of Jesus so powerful so true so safe so foundational we listen to thousands of words each day most of which are completely useless in a week's time just think of all the things that are being said today that would be a complete waste of space this time next week and the words of

Jesus are utterly utterly necessary next week and the week after and the week after that and the deeds of men are so empty all these religious actions all these waving of branches throwing of cloaks but there's no clue as to who Jesus really is but when you are lit up by the person of Jesus suddenly everything begins to make sense you understand that your future is under control that you have promises to stand on and his deeds make your deeds worthwhile and so Jesus is on a very lonely road but he's on a lonely road for a reason he is the only one who understands his mission he is the only one who can do his mission and within five days he is going to be completely alone and he will cry on good friday my god my god why have you forsaken me forsaken why because he will experience the darkness that our sin deserves in order to give us freely the salvation that he deserves and so I need to ask you whether you and I are a little bit like the crowds we come and we sing our songs and we have a bit of a listen but no change or whether you're really hearing the words of God that Jesus is their king and their saviour and Jesus is the key to your future and lord of your life and you need to surrender to him and have him as your lord let me tell you what Jesus Christ is like he goes on a lonely road right to the end to make sure that you have a certain future he is forsaken by God so that you need never be forsaken and he gives a loving word to you and he promises to make sure that you can have a certain present right now let's pray