

3/22 Mark 11-13

Chapter 11

Zechariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Vs. 1-11, Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem is the fulfillment of this ancient prophecy. Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead of him to procure a colt from the village. It's uncertain whether or not Jesus had foreknowledge that the owner would be willing to share it, or whether Jesus sent his disciples to friends he had in Bethany or Bethphage whom he knew would be willing to share their colt with the Lord. They spread their cloaks and branches on the road as they would have for an approaching king. "Hosanna" means "Save us, Lord!" Their shouts and acclamations made clear that they believed Jesus to be the Messiah.

Vs. 12-33, Jesus was hungry and cursed the fig tree for not producing fruit when he was hungry (even though it was not fig season). By the time they returned from Jerusalem (1 day) it was completely withered. This seems strange, but it's likely that Mark intended this episode to function metaphorically as an image of Jerusalem itself who failed to produce the fruit God intended. Jesus then went to turn over the tables in the temple because of the injustice that the temple system stood for. Jesus wanted the people to return to the religious heart of the purpose of the temple (prayer), not a place of economic exploitation which it had turned into. The chief priests and scribes plotted to kill him because he was messing with the system that kept them comfortable and in power, and because the general people were listening to Jesus! This teaching on prayer is Mark's version of the Lord's Prayer.

The next day, Jesus continues to mess with the chief priests, scribes, and elders. He refuses to tell them the origin of his authority (if he told them the truth they would have accused him of blasphemy), as they refuse to answer where John's authority came from because they were afraid of the crowds.

Chapter 12

Jesus now answers their question in a parable and only further angers the chief priests, scribes, and elders. The vineyard represents Israel, which God founded and provided everything needed for God's people to flourish. The chief priests, scribes, and elders are the tenants who were tasked with faithfully stewarding God's vineyard, Israel, but who strayed from their loyalty and faithfulness. The servants who were repeatedly beaten and killed represent the prophets. Of course Jesus is the beloved son, as this title echoes what was spoken to him at Baptism.

Jesus uses this parable to let them know that he knows that they are actively plotting to kill him now. There is an ominous tone of warning to the religious elite, who do nothing but leave Jesus because they still fear how the crowd will respond.

Groups continue to come and question Jesus to put him to the test. Jesus' answer pleases pro and anti-Roman groups because it seems to support both paying taxes and the notion that everything belongs to God. Jesus does not appear to carry money. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, so their question is not a legitimate one, but purely a way of testing Jesus. Jesus' suggestion that they will be like the angels in the resurrection implies only that humans will not desire sexual relationships in the resurrection, not that they will fly around with wings. Finally, one comes to Jesus to ask about the greatest commandment, and says that the commandment Jesus shares is far more important than offering burnt sacrifices. The crowd appears to appreciate Jesus' denouncing of the scribes and their hypocrisy. This is further expression of the total corruption of the religious establishment in Jesus' time. The widow gives out of her poverty, rather than out of her abundance. This is sacrificial giving. The treasury Jesus is speaking of is likely the alms box where faithful Jews would provide support for those in need as a traditional act of piety (almsgiving).

Chapter 13

Mark's "little apocalypse" takes up this entire chapter. Jesus prepares us for what "the end" will look like, what must take place before he returns. Vs. 6 "I am he" is the same word spoken from the burning bush in Exodus. This passage functions in two ways, on the one hand it points us to what the world will look like before Jesus returns, on the other hand it describes the very real persecution that the early church experienced at the hands of political officials, synagogue leaders, and pagan authorities. The "Desolating Sacrilege" refers back to the time of Daniel when a pig was slaughtered in the holy of holies by Antiochus Epiphanes, but also could speak to the unrealized threat that Caligula made of placing his statue (an idol) in the temple. Jesus urges his followers to have courage and to trust that the Holy Spirit will give us the words we need to speak in that moment. The Son of Man is coming back to GATHER his elect from all of heavens and earth. Jesus urges us all to be on the look out for his return, to stay awake and work as his slaves (disciples), for he has left us in charge of this world in his absence. During his arrest, trial, and Passion, the disciples fail to remain awake at "evening, midnight, cock crow, and dawn."