

The King is Waiting

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[0 : 0 0] I want you to turn with me to Mark's Gospel chapter 11. It's a very well known passage. It's a very well known chapter of the Bible. But what I hope that it's the fact that it's well known, I hope will not mean that you'll be complacent as we open up this passage and look at it.

What I want you today to be in church and also in your Christian life and as a Christian, I want you to be shocked. I want you to be surprised. I want you to be amazed at Jesus Christ.

Because that really should be the reality, probably every day for us as we learn new things about Jesus Christ. Because of who God is, we should be shocked, surprised and amazed by Him.

And this sermon, for example, was murder to prepare. It was wrought in blood and sweat and tears with struggle and doubt and not a great deal of prayer earlier on.

Great struggle and a battle. And God sometimes does that. And maybe that shocked you. I hope it has. Because I think sometimes you'll come to church and you'll think, and maybe as ministers we think, that we just kind of open the Bible and we think a few thoughts.

[1 : 3 3] And there's a few ministers here in the congregation, so they'll have sympathy with me here. And we'll just teach the Bible and it's just like a lesson and we go home and we carry on with our lives. But sometimes it's not like that. Sometimes it's like a battle of life and death.

And there's a real struggle going on to understand what Jesus is saying and what the Bible is about. And it's really hard and really difficult. And what I want you to think about and consider today is the same thing about the way you listen.

And the way that we think of Jesus Christ. And maybe you've come today, church, same old, same old. You know, we'll be here for an hour, we'll stand at the same place, a sermon will go on and then it can finish and go home.

And everything will just be carry on as normal. There may be for us absolutely no sense of expectancy. That God will do anything. That God will speak to me. That I'll learn anything new.

And certainly that I don't expect to be shocked, surprised or amazed by what I find out about God. I know this passage. It's a well-known passage. Nothing new about Jesus entering into Jerusalem and a donkey, that kind of thing.

[2 : 4 3] And we make, we cut sometimes, and I'm speaking personally and that's why there was such battle this week, we shrink God down to something that's so small that there is no sense of expectation for us.

We're sitting on comfortable seats. We're sitting beside our friends. We love the social intercourse of church. And we'll say goodbye to people and we'll welcome other people. But it'll be nothing that will go beyond the surface of our lives, into our heart and into our soul, where the very eye of God will pierce into what we are and how we exist.

Because sometimes we've made God that small. Can I give you, and I'm sorry for this, because I know there's some people who don't like me giving football illustrations, but it's all I know.

And some very rarely will I go now to a football game expecting, now people might say that's because of the team I support, but of maybe one player being absolutely special.

And you know sometimes when that's the case, you go to a game or you watch a game and there's one player who's a standout and you expect, every time you hear the commentator speak about it, every time he gets in the ball, there's a buzz of expectation around the ground.

[4 : 0 0] Because they expect him to do something, something special, something different. And that's what I'm looking for again in my relationship with God. Each time that we open scripture, there's a buzz of expectation that God is going to speak into my need, that he's going to speak into what I have to understand and what can I learn about this sovereign, everlasting, eternal, mortal God who is coming to flesh.

What does that look like? How can that be? How is there not absolute amazement each time we think about this God who is it where empties himself into humanity on our behalf?

I hope this chapter helps us a little bit think about him. One of the worst things I ever heard, and I'm not going to say what happened, this is not a football-related illustration but it did happen at a football ground, where it was a Christian rally really, I guess.

There was an evangelistic speaker and it was an open air and there was thousands of people there. And I was on the stage because I was doing the opening prayer. The guy who was leading it stood up and saw everyone.

I'm sure he meant it absolutely genuine. I'm sure he was excited by what he saw. He said, it's great to see everyone here. I think we should have three cheers for Jesus. And so we did a hip-hop parade for Jesus.

[5 : 2 7] Maybe it's my doer, Presbyterian kind of, I kind of cringed when I heard that. And I've always cringed when I've heard that because I think sometimes that's what we think.

We kind of give a hurrah for Jesus and it's three cheers for Jesus. And it's a bit like what the crowd were thinking about here. What is entitled, what I would say wrongly, is the triumphal entry.

It wasn't a triumphal entry. The triumph was on the cross. There was nothing triumphal about what happened really as he entered into Jerusalem. But the crowds, it was a bit like that for them. They were basically saying, three cheers for Jesus.

This is day one of Passion Week, but it was also the time of the Passover. And the pilgrims were flocking to Jerusalem and the buzz, the word had got around it. There was a Messiah who was going to come and he was going to be king.

And he was going to free them from Roman oppression. He would be on the throne, and I've heard, you've heard all this before, be on the throne in Jerusalem. And he would redeem them from the kind of poverty and the oppressive rule of the Romans.

[6 : 3 1] And they would know peace in the land and happiness in their lives. Three cheers for Jesus. That's who he's going to come. That's who he's going to be. And that's what they were expecting.

Hosanna, we're told. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David. He was the greater David. They knew their Old Testaments.

They knew about what was happening in the Old Testament and what it was pointing towards. And so they thought Jesus was going to be this new king on the throne. Three cheers for Jesus' happiness.

So, but aren't you surprised, if you've been here for the number of weeks we've looked at Mark, aren't you surprised by what happens here? Is that Jesus asks for a donkey to ride in, in the public eye.

Now, all the way up till here, Jesus would be saying, don't say anything. Don't tell anyone. Don't make it public. Don't speak about me. And here, at this point, he says, yeah, I'll take the adulation.

[7 : 39] I'll be right at the centre of attention. It's time to draw attention to myself in public. And in one way, he's definitely saying, I am the Messiah.

And there's times I'm going to look at the Old Testament today and I want you to follow, follow me. Because it's important. It's important we see the links between the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus coming. So in Zechariah chapter 9, and this will be a real test of your Bible knowledge.

The Old Testament minor prophets. Real test of mine as well. And the pressure have been up the front. Zechariah 9 chapter 9. We have this prophecy. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

Shout, daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you. Righteous and having salvation. Gentle and riding on a donkey. On a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So that's the kind of prophetic message that many of them would have known about. And would have thought was being fulfilled. And indeed was being fulfilled here. As Jesus comes into Jerusalem.

[8 : 41] And his entry into Jerusalem in this way is full of Old Testament fulfillment and symbolism. It's exactly what the Old Testament was pointing towards. Jesus coming into the city as the Messiah.

I'm your Messiah. That's what he's crying out. That's what these verses speak about. He is the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy. Why does that matter? What are the minds of the reliability of Scripture?

And of the fact that we have one message. We have one theme right from the beginning to Christ on the cross. And one theme from Christ on the cross back in the New Testament.

But he's also beginning to say, and we can see it because we have Scripture in front of us. I am not your King. Or I'm not the King you expect.

Yes, I ride in and the foal of a donkey. I ride in and you put palms before me. And say, this is the great Jesus. And he says, but I'm not your King.

[9 : 41] This is not me coming in triumph. Wearing white clothes as the resplendent King with an army behind me.

It's not your idea. Don't give me the three cheers for Jesus right now because this isn't the end. There's an unfolding revelation in this passion week of the kind of King Jesus was.

And the kind of King Jesus was to be. He's a King that's coming to destroy a temple, which we'll see in a moment. He's a King who would go on to wear a crown, but it would be a crown of thorns.

And it's a King who would be hailed as a King, but in mockery by the Roman soldiers, the ones that they hoped he would be disposing of.

And he would be raised up, but it wouldn't be onto a throne. It would be onto a cross. See, that's the difference and they would have been and where as the week went on.

[10 : 47] I'm kind of jumping forward a little bit. Shopped by this Jesus. It's not the Jesus they expected. It was not the Jesus that they were looking for. It wasn't the Jesus they thought was the Jesus of Old Testament prophecy, the Messiah.

It was a very famous song in the 80s made famous again in this decade by Johnny Cash called The Personal Jesus by Depeche Mode.

I think sometimes that's what we've got to come to terms with and face that we, like the people here in the crowd, have a danger of wanting our own personal Jesus, one who is fits our own thinking, our own comfort, and our own happiness, but isn't the Jesus that is revealed in Scripture.

And it's time for us again in our lives to be shocked by him, to be shocked that he isn't content to just rub skin deep into our lives and comfort us and give us all sometimes our sinful nature wants.

But he is the King, and he's the King of Kings, and he's the King who comes, who comes the King through the cross. I want you to challenge yourself as I have to challenge myself.

[12 : 16] Do you just have a comfortable Jesus? You know, a Sunday morning Jesus, an easy Jesus, a Jesus who will bless you, a Jesus who will give you what you want, a Jesus you're willing to lay, palm leaves down before.

As long as he's your Messiah and your understanding of Messiah, what kind of King is Jesus in your life? What does it mean that he's King? What does kingship mean to people who come from cultures like our own in many ways that don't really have a sovereign King over them?

What kind of King do we believe Jesus to be? Are we imbibing society as Jesus? The Jesus of the press, the Jesus of popular thinking, the Jesus of political correctness?

Are we quite content to be just part of the Christian crowd as this crowd were happy to be? Great to be in church on Sunday, wonderful to enjoy these things.

Love the society, love the friendship, love the happiness, love the hospitality, love the feel good factor. But is that as far as you're going? I'm not saying any of these things are. These things are great. We long and we've molded and we've worked for that in the church, but not as if that's all there is.

[13 : 39] It must be because there's something different, because I'm asking you the question, I have to ask myself, will you walk with them to the cross? But this crowd didn't do that.

They wanted a certain type of Messiah and when they saw it wasn't going to be, they completely turned in their heads and said to crucify him. Are we going to be Christians that take our understanding of King Jesus to the cross?

Are we willing, in other words, to apply his kingship to the denial of ourselves, our sinful selves and fall in our knees before him? Are we willing to say, Lord God, you are absolute, you are truth, you are to be feared.

Do we fear God? And I don't mean are we afraid of God and a kind of oppressive, I mean in an awesome fear for who he is, for who he is, or are we twisting him round our finger?

Is he our pet savior? Is he our savior and a lead? Is he a savior that we, we, he follows us rather than we follow him. And the moment things don't go right for us and he's the different kind of Messiah and he isn't on the throne in the way we thought he was, we ditch him, or we accuse him, or we turn against him.

[15 : 00] Amazed, shocked and marvelling at his grace and his love. Because you know, I'm sorry but it gets worse, it gets worse.

The second question, I looked about three chairs for Jesus which kind of encapsulate the first kind of thing I was open to say from this chapter. And what about religion? What about religion? Because the context here, and again, well it doesn't say so much here in the NIV but it's in our typical thinking.

It says here Jesus clears the temple as a headline. But we'd often entitle this passage the cleansing of the temple. Just as we were talking about the triumphal entry, it wasn't a triumphal entry.

Nor was it the cleansing of a temple. When I go back to the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 3, I'm giving you a clue, verses 1 to 2, some page 961 just to speed things along.

See I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me, then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant whom I desire will come, says the Lord Almighty.

[16:15] But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? So this is a prophecy, it speaks about the messenger, John the Baptist, then it speaks about the Lord coming, and he comes to his temple.

And he comes, but he comes in judgment. Who can endure the day of his coming? He's not coming here in terms of Old Testament prophecy to clean the temple from its bad religious practice.

See the temple had become something it was never intended to be. Can I get you again? I don't do this often, but I want you to do this today.

Jeremiah chapter 7, I'll tell you the page so that it moves us on. Jeremiah chapter 7 and verse 11, it's on page 7, 6, 4.

I'll read from verse 9, will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to bale and follow a god you have not known, and then come and stand before me in my house, which bears my name, and say, we are safe, safe to do all these detestable things.

[17:19] Has this house, which bears my name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching, declares the Lord. Okay, so the problem wasn't that they were doing the rituals wrong, it was that they were abusing the whole place.

They were using it as a crude confessional. They were living any old way they liked outside of the temple, and then they were coming into the temple and offering their sacrifices and confessing their sins before God and thinking that that would make them right before God.

There was no prayer, there was no repentance, it was an end in itself. It was a religious ritual. They did these religious things and they thought that would please God. And the religion, the temple itself, the institution became the means of salvation.

So it became the centre of political life, the centre of economic life, and it became the centre of religious life. It was a sacred cow, because it became the salvation.

It was never meant to be that. It became a tool for power, and it was spiritually disastrous, because God was absent from that. The temple was always meant to point towards something that was still to come.

[18:30] It was meant to point towards the need for forgiveness and repentance, and the need to depend on God, but that had far been removed. So Jesus didn't come just to put that right and say, let's pray the temple was it right? Let's reform things.

Let's have a disruption and do things differently, and get back to praying and offering sacrifices properly. No, he didn't do that. He didn't want to destroy, to search and destroy.

We're told that he comes into Jerusalem, and there's a bit of an anti-climax. He looks at the temple and around Jerusalem, and he goes home to bed.

But then he comes back the next day, and you know the story of what he does. He rips everything up in that temple, and the crowd were amazed what he did, and the religious leaders wanted him dead, because they knew he wasn't talking about reform.

He was talking about something much more radical, and he had come to destroy that temple, because he was wanting the people to know and to understand that religion and ritual cannot ever make us right with God.

[19 : 47] Religious observance, man-made religion, is offensive in God's eyes. Church attendance as a means of justifying ourselves before God.

Bible reading to please him. Prayer to offer and tell him how good we are will have no effect with God. I want to read you a great section.

If I can find it from Amos chapter 5, verse 21. Page 920. Listen to this. Listen to this. It's amazing. I hate. I despise your religious feasts.

I can't stand your assemblies. I hope that's not in relation to the coming forlorn. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard.

Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll like a river. Righteousness like a never-ending stream.

[20 : 49] That is class. That is absolutely what the gospel is all about. Justice and righteousness and stuff all the religious things that go on.

If that is what you're taking to make you right with God. And Jesus nails it here with what he does with the fig tree. There's a lot of bleating liberals, and I take that loosely, who say it's terrible why he's done that.

What did the fig tree do wrong? The fig tree did not do it wrong. It wasn't even in season. And yet he curses the fig tree because it didn't bear fruit. It wasn't even in season. What kind of Jesus is that? It's harsh. What about the fig tree? Poor fig tree.

You know, some things are more important than fig trees. And he's symbolizing something very important. It's in between what happens at the temple and what he's trying to explain, trying to make clear what is happening with what he is doing.

It says at the temple that the fig tree didn't bear fruit because it wasn't in season. If I can find that.

[22 : 01] Yeah, in verse 13 it says, when it reached he found nothing but leaves because it was not the season for figs. According to those who are Greek scholars, that's not the usual word that's used for a tree being in season.

But it's the word that's used in chapter 114 and 15 where God says the time has come. The season has come, in other words. So it uses a different word to remind us that there's something symbolic about what's happening.

It's not normal. And he's saying, look, religious ritual, going to church, doing things at the surface level, cannot bear spiritual fruit.

It can never be the answer. The temple and what it symbolized as a way back to God being religious is not the answer. It's not possible for you to make it.

The temple was never meant to bring people to God. It was a temporary measure to point them towards the fact that there needed to be a saviour. A blood of goats and of lambs never takes away sins.

[23 : 06] But it was that Jesus was to come. There was a saviour to come. And they had made it worse even. They had just made it a crude confessional. They made it just an outward religion. It never touched their hearts.

It never came near to their sins. It never came near to their behaviour and to their conf... They never fell on their knees before the living God. Jesus says, I've come to destroy this, not to cleanse it.

I've come to destroy it. Christ becomes the temple. And when He finishes His work on the cross, the curtain is opened from the Holy of Holies from top to bottom because the way into God's presence and the way into the relationship with God is through Jesus Christ.

It was never through the temple. It was never through religion. You will not ever be able to stand on the last day and stand before God and say, I want to get into heaven because I'm free church.

Because I'm religious. Because I'm a religious. I'm happy if you say to everyone that you're not religious because it has such a negative tone with people anyway today.

[24 : 10] It's so pejorative for most people. Religion isn't the way to God. Being moral isn't the way to God. Being in church isn't the way to God. Being in church is the place where we worship the God who has died in our place and that we accept His righteousness.

And what Jesus shows in this passage, really, when he responds to Peter who talks about the withered tree, Jesus reminds us of what, or he gives us a glimpse of what our hope is.

He says, have faith in God. Pray and recognize forgiveness. That's when that section is pointing towards what he has come to do. Have faith in God, he says.

If anyone says to this mountain, go throw yourself into the sea. He believes it will happen. This mountain, this temple mountain of religion, this mountain of self-reliance, this mountain of self-dependence, this mountain of moral goodness, throw it into the sea and all the impossibility that goes with it.

And have faith in what? A carpenter from Nazareth who is the Son of God did when he was nailed to a tree. Have faith in him, broken its power.

[25 : 24] Now today I'm going to give out to several people who are leaving today the book, The King's Cross, by Tim Keller, which is a study in the book of Mark, which is what we've been going through.

And I ask those who I give it to and encourage everyone else to get it, read the introduction, because it talks all about the fact that people are beginning to recognize, again, even in secular American society out of the UK, that it must come back to this crucified, risen Saviour.

There's nothing else. It's not old fashioned, it's not a way, it's not fundamentalist. It's just the only way there is. Faith in God, characterised by a life of prayer, as he says there, you know, whatever you ask in prayer, believe you receive it, it will be yours.

This relationship, this access, you know, that's what offended God so much that this temple had been a house of prayer for all nations, and it had been abandoned. People had stopped, there was no conversation.

What was your conversation with God? Where's mine? That's what Jesus died to procure. Open, free 24-7 access into His presence where we can come before a friend.

[26 : 35] The living God who becomes those who hates sin and who transform us from the inside out, and we need that life of prayer in order to do that. Can I just say one thing about prayer? I'm being very technical and biblical, and not biblical, I hope I'm always biblical, and I'm kind of quoting books and using books today.

You'd think I never used them. But there's this great commentary called the NIV application commentary, which I've been using all the time for this series.

And he kind of goes, he just goes on a little side about prayer, and he says a lovely thing about prayer here, and how important prayer is. His name is David Garland. The community needs to pray receptively.

And that prayer is not imposing our will on God, but God opening our lives to God's will. True prayer is not an endeavour to get God to change His will, but an endeavour to release that will in our own lives.

Now, this is a great bit, and it's a great visual bit, so remember it, and it'll help you. Prayer is like a boat hook that a boatman uses to pull the craft to its anchoring place.

- [27 : 46] The boatman doesn't try to pull the shore to the boat, but the other way around. Isn't that a great picture? That the boatman in his boat on the edge of the water doesn't try and bring the universe to him, the shore to him in order to be secure.

But rather, as he puts the rope out, he pulls the boat towards the shore to its security. And that is what prayer is. We are drawing ourselves to God, to pull God down to us.

Jesus provides an example of this, the receptive praying and Gethsemane, where he boldly entreates God, but concludes, not, I will, but what your will be done. Prayer is bringing us towards God, not as seeking to change God to give us what we want.

It's faith in God, a life of prayer, and as he says here, true religion is characterised by forgiveness. If you have anyone against him, forgive him so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

These are tidbits towards true faith, and what faith is, and what he's come to do. In destroying ritual religion, he wants this relationship based on faith, based on prayer, and based on an attitude, and a lifestyle of forgiveness.

- [29 : 04] See, if we've been forgiving ourselves, it changes how we think about other people. Grace leaves us self-righteous, judgmental and arrogant, doesn't it?

I'm better than other people. I'm doing my best. God will accept me. Grace is recognising that we stifle and deal with criticism and gossip and ignorance and lovelessness, and we are forgiving.

We are slow to condemn others. We are quick to seek forgiveness for ourselves. Grace thinks twice. Grace is shocking. Grace is shattering.

Grace is exciting. Grace is surprising. Grace is amazing. These people were amazed. It doesn't say that they followed him, but they were amazed by what he did in the temple.

They didn't say, oh, this is great. The Messiah is coming. Look what he's doing. I think they were beginning to realise, wait a minute, and then they will break what we rely on. If you're not a Christian today and you're to become a Christian, you may have the same fears today.

- [30 : 15] He's going to break what I've trusted in for a long time. But can I say it's worth it? And there is nothing else. He has come to destroy religion, and this is to be a community of forgivers to one another, of grace, of faith, and of prayer.

And if we're not that, we're nothing. If we're hospitable and kind and nice and good and generous, but if we are not gracious in forgiving and in prayer and in faith, we're nothing.

Now, I simply don't have time to speak about Jesus' response to the cynics in the last section here, the authority of Jesus' question. But can I just finish by saying sometimes you need to answer a question with a question?

That's what Jesus did here. To those who weren't genuinely seeking salvation, they were wanting to trip them up. Now, you might find in your week this week that there will be people who want to trip you up in your faith.

They're not genuinely looking for salvation. They're not asking openly about Jesus, but they just want to make a fool of you. They want to trip you up, and they might ask you a very difficult question. Can I suggest that you learn sometimes to trip up with a question? You don't need to answer them.

- [31 : 30] But challenge them. Put the question back to them. Challenge them about their preconceptions, because that's what Jesus did. And we're here to do what Jesus does.

Amen. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father God, help us to follow you and to understand you and to love you. May we be shocked by you and amazed by you, and may we not be just complacent.

May it be that we come here and we seek and know and recognize that we are to be moved and changed by you every day.

Each time we open scripture, that we are to be expectant and looking to be transformed and moulded and moved to become more like Jesus Christ. And this week that we've entered, may we live with more forgiveness.

We will be challenged on it this week. There will be opportunities for us to be forgiving and not to be judgmental or not to be brutal. Help us to be forgiving.

[32 : 34] There will be times when we are asked to display faith, when it will be easier to sin and walk away from God and not have faith. And Lord, we will all know, I think, to a greater or lesser degree how easy it is to be prayerless.

Go to bed prayerless, to rise prayerless, to face the challenges and problems and opportunities of the day prayerless. But He has come to change that by His grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May that be our experience this week. And may we do nothing, trust in nothing less but Jesus' cross and righteousness. So help us God. Amen.