

What It Means To Live In Christ's Kingdom

Mark 11:1-25, Part 6

Joe Jones February 9, 2020



Good morning. Let's pray together.

Father, we praise You. We thank You this morning that You have sent Your Son Jesus to die in our place. We confess and believe that You have also raised Him from the dead. He is alive today and He's coming back. We thank You for that.

We thank You that we have a very bright hope and future as Christians. We have many, many good things coming to us after death and after Jesus returns. So we're filled with hope and joy this morning. Thank You for Who Jesus is, Who You sent Him to be for us. We worship Him. Open our eyes to see wonderful things from Your Word as we look into Mark 11 this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

This morning we'll be looking at Mark 11:1-25. We're entering into the final section of the Gospel of Mark. Chapters 11 through 13 trace three days in the life and ministry of Jesus. So we're slowing down now and narrowing our focus on Jesus and His teaching as He approaches, then actually enters into Jerusalem.

One theme that keeps on coming up in these three chapters, in the next three days of Jesus' life, is the clash that happens between Jesus and the Jewish people—in particular, the Jewish religious leaders. The conflict keeps getting more and more intense, actually signaling that the Israelite people are going to reject their Messiah Jesus. Commentator Peter Bolt says, "The arrival of Jesus' last days also means the arrival of the last days for Israel." The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders will be central in the next few weeks' sermons.

Let's read Mark 11:1-11. This is God's Word:.

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "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. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a

door outside in the street, and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Let's begin by confessing and acknowledging that Jesus is Lord. He is the King. But what kind of king is Jesus? I will give you three descriptions.

Jesus is an authoritative and mighty King.

In this passage, He uses the word to fetch an animal, and both His disciples and these strangers obey His word. He also receives the praise and worship of His people as the Son of David and as the Son of God. These words are kingly words. The King has come. The King is entering Jerusalem. From Zechariah 9, Jesus is the One Who was prophesied to come in power to save.

So we must never think of Jesus of Nazareth as a nice guy, a mere prophet or a tame teacher. Jesus was and always will be King. He is not tame. He is not timid. He is not weak. He is not a pushover. He is not to be ignored or taken lightly. He is explosive and almighty. He is Lord of all. He has absolute, undeniable, all-expansive dominion in every sphere of the universe. His rule is limitless. His Kingdom has no end.

In a word, Jesus is great. He's terrifyingly great. And before we say, "Let's just move on to the next point," let's let this sink in—the greatness and terror and holiness of this man Jesus of Nazareth. He is Lord and the starting point of following Him is acknowledging that this is Who He actually is. What this means is that to begin with Jesus requires recognizing that He has a rightful claim on the whole of our lives. Not part of our lives, not most of our lives—Jesus demands that the whole of our lives is given to Him, because He is the Lord of the universe. No area is withheld. He is an authoritative and mighty King.

Jesus is a humble and gentle King.

Notice that He enters Jerusalem on a colt. This is important. He doesn't come riding on a royal horse with a military entourage surrounding Him. He comes on a young donkey in

fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9: *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he.”* There’s the power. There’s the might. There’s the ability to save.

But then it says this: *“Humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”* So the point of Jesus riding on this particular animal is to tell us that King Jesus is humble. Yes, He is righteous. Yes, He saves. Yes, He is exalted. Yes, He is worthy of worship. And yes, He is humble, meek, lowly and gentle—and we desperately need a King like this.

You see, if Jesus is only great, you and I are in big trouble, because we’ve rebelled against God. The Kingdom of God is not good news if God’s Son is exclusively powerful, holy and sovereign. In fact, that is very bad news for us sinners. But good news: He’s also gentle and lowly.

I want you to hear this somewhat extended quote from Jonathan Edwards on this theme:

Christ was a person of infinite majesty. It is He who is spoken of in Psalm 45:3, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.” It is He at whose presence the earth quakes and the hills melt, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, from whose presence and from the glory of whose power the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction; who is the King of kings and Lords, who has heaven for his throne and the earth for his footstool; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and of whose dominion there is no end.

And yet He was the most marvelous example of meekness and humble quietness of spirit who ever was. Fitting with the prophecies of Him in Matthew 21:4-5, “All this was done that it may be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your King comes to you meek and sitting upon a donkey, and a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” It fits with what Christ declares of Himself in Matthew 11:29.

Matthew 11:29 is the only place in all the Gospels where Jesus tells us what His own heart is like. It’s the only place in all the Gospels where Jesus said, “This is what My heart is like,” and this is what Matthew 11:29 says: *“I am meek and lowly in heart.”* Isn’t that astounding for the King to tell us that is what His heart is like?

Jonathan Edwards goes on to say:

It fits with what is manifest in His behavior, for there never was such an instance seen on earth of a meek behavior, under injuries and reproaches and toward enemies. With what meekness did He appear in the ring of soldiers who were condemning and mocking Him. He was silent and opened not His mouth, but went as a Lamb to the slaughter. Thus is Christ: a Lion in majesty and a Lamb in meekness.

This gentleness of Christ has so many implications for us, as He is our example in this. This is what I long for for my son Noah—that he would be like Jesus in these ways: tough and tender, strong and gritty, lowly and kind. Isn't this a beautiful coming together of qualities? Jesus displayed these things perfectly for us. Imagine if this quality of gentleness was just infused in our marriages. Wouldn't that change things? Imagine if this fruit of the Spirit of gentleness was infused into our parenting. Wouldn't that change things? Or infused in children for how they treat parents. It would change things there, right?

But I want to focus on one particular area, which is church leadership. This gentleness is so vital for church leaders. I wonder if many successful pastors in the West grow their churches and lead through domineering—maybe behind closed doors—but through domineering, harshness, intimidation, rejection of critical feedback and placing demands on others that they themselves are unwilling to fulfill. This is all done under the guise of strong leadership, but it's not strong leadership. These are guys who wouldn't be caught dead riding on a colt. They need power, control, spotlight, attention and respect. The King Who is gentle is not happy about this. Jesus shows us what strong leadership is.

Jesus is a King on a mission.

So Jesus is an authoritative and mighty King. He's a humble and gentle King. And third, He's a King on a mission. Look at verse one of Mark 11. It says that Jesus is approaching Jerusalem. Now if we rewind to Mark 10:33, Jerusalem is not the place where Jesus is going to be honored as King. It's the place where He's going to be nailed to a cross and humbly suffer a shameful death. So Jesus is on this mission to Jerusalem, headed to His own death.

Look at Mark 11:8. It says the crowd spread their cloaks "on the way" or "on the road." This indicates a specific, pre-determined path to the cross. Jesus is on mission. He's on this path. He's not wandering off the path. He's not getting distracted. He's staying on the path and on mission.

Verse 11 ends this section in such an anticlimactic way. If we were thinking like the Jewish leaders of the time, we would expect Jesus to enter the temple and set up His rule. Here the King has come! He's in Jerusalem. He's in the temple. Now He's going to set up His rule. He's going to appoint leaders. He's going to draw up battle plans. He's going to divvy up inheritances. He's going to honor religious leaders.

Instead, He enters the temple, looks around, then goes home and goes to sleep. Do you see the anticlimax here? What's going on here? Jesus is staying on mission. He's not getting distracted. He's headed to the cross and He will not be deterred.

I've been watching some TV shows on what are called wingsuiters. Maybe you've heard of these people who do wingsuiting. It's just what it sounds like. The people wear these suits where, when they stretch out their hands, they essentially have wings. They select some of the highest and most extreme cliffs and mountains that they jump off of—sometimes even from helicopters—and they literally fly. It's pretty incredible. I'm a sucker for extreme sports, so I love watching this—although I would not do it myself.

These people seem to always have this particular mindset, like they're researching and thinking, so their minds are set. They are bound and determined they're going to jump and fly. They want to find the best and highest and most extreme places to jump from to get the longest and fastest and most beautiful flight possible. Their minds are set on flight. It's like they've been infected with this love of adrenalin, so they need to do this.

Jesus has His mind set, not on flight, but on death—His own death for you. And nothing is going to stop Him, not even His own pain and suffering. Jesus will bring about the forgiveness of His people. He's on mission and He will not be deterred. Nothing will stop Him. His love is too strong.

Do you know what? His mission isn't yet complete. So for you struggling sinner and sufferer this morning, Jesus is going to save you. He is going to bring you safely home. He will do it, not because of you, not because of your resolve, strength, power or how hard you fight against sin. It's ultimately because your Savior Jesus is on a mission that began 2,000 years ago and still continues to bring you safely home—and He's going to do it! You're going to be brought home because of Jesus and His mission.

So take a deep breath this morning. Relax. Be at peace. It is well with your soul, not ultimately because of who you are, but because of Who Jesus is for you and because of this mission that He's on for you.

Look at Mark 10:9 where it says the people cried, "Hosanna!" The word hosanna means something like, "Save us now, we beg." So the people are anticipating that Jesus is going to bring His Kingdom soon, like right now. They're on the edge of their seats. Jesus is coming. He's the King. He's bringing His Kingdom. So we're presented with this question: what Kingdom does this kind of King bring? This is a relevant and not obscure question. What does the answer to that question mean for my life?

It means a lot, because Jesus was raised from the dead, He is alive, He is reigning over us today, right now, and we're living in His Kingdom now. So what does it mean for our lives today to live as part of the Kingdom of Christ? Let's find out from Mark 11:12-25. I want to talk about two things: what the Kingdom is not, then what the Kingdom is.

The Kingdom of Christ is not about the temple.

Let's read Mark 11:12-21:

¹² *On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.*
¹³ *And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.* ¹⁴ *And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.*
¹⁵ *And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.* ¹⁶ *And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.* ¹⁷ *And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."* ¹⁸ *And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.*

Don't you just love how Jesus is so different from these religious leaders? They're so fearful of men, but Jesus just doesn't care what people think. Don't you love that about Him? So He's free to just speak the truth in love. These religious leaders were not like that.

¹⁹ *And when evening came they went out of the city.* ²⁰ *As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.* ²¹ *And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered."*

What's happening here? Notice the way the events unfold. There's a fig tree, then the temple, then a fig tree. What the Holy Spirit is indicating through this is that the fig tree is an illustration of the temple. It's placed on either side of the temple and what happens with Jesus and the fig tree is an illustration, a picture, of the temple.

You say, "What do you mean?" The fig tree was not bearing fruit as it should have been. It wasn't fulfilling its purpose. In the same way, the temple wasn't bearing the good fruit it should have been. It wasn't fulfilling its purpose. It wasn't as if the temple building was built poorly. It's the people of Israel who were failing to be and do what God had called them to. So Jesus did not come to cleanse the temple so that it would be used for its intended purpose, regardless of what the heading in your Bible says there. He actually came to curse the temple, so that it would wither and die altogether, and He came to fulfill what the temple was intended to be by being the new means of meeting with God Himself.

Therefore the cursing of the temple is the beginning of what Jesus would go on to predict in Mark 13—the destruction of the temple. So if the Lord of the temple says it's cursed, like the fig tree, then it's definitely going to happen. And in A.D. 70, the temple was destroyed and lay in ruins. What had gone wrong with the temple? If I can boil it down, it would be this: it had become a place that blocked rather than opened up nearness to God and others. The temple was supposed to be a place where people from all nations, all ethnicities, all races could come and find peace with God and peace with other people.

Instead, it had become just the opposite. It had become a place of restriction, where people were blocked from accessing God. It had become ethnically exclusive. It had become a corrupt place of money-making, defrauding and stealing. What a shame! But there is some amazing good news I want us to see in this passage that I think is hinted at in some strong ways.

Look at Mark 11:16. It says Jesus "*would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.*" Now, what would people have been carrying through the temple? What would they have been buying and selling in the temple? Most centrally animals for sacrifice, right? There's another hint that sacrifice was a central piece of this. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7 when He says, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.*" But He actually only quotes part of Isaiah 56:7. What He doesn't include from that verse is this: "*Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar.*"

So just picture the scene. Jesus comes into the temple, He blocks all sacrifice, and now here's the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world standing in the midst of the temple as the new and better sacrifice. Isn't that beautiful?

Perhaps you've come to church today weighed down by your sin. You've messed up yet again this week; you've had a really bad week and maybe you even feel physically weighed down by guilt and shame this morning. You say, "What do I do with that?" Look to Jesus. Don't look inside yourself. Do not say, "I'm going to pull myself up by my bootstraps on Monday morning." No, right now, look to the Lamb of God Who takes away all of your sins. Jesus gives complete forgiveness, so stop trusting in yourself. Behold Jesus, Who has authority to forgive your sin.

The Kingdom of Christ is about the people of God who pray and forgive.

So the Kingdom is not about the temple. Instead, the Kingdom is about disciples of Jesus who pray and who forgive. If this temple goes away—and it does in A.D. 70—what happens to forgiveness and prayer? You see, the temple was the place people would gather to receive forgiveness and pray, as we just read. So what happens if that goes away? Well, Jesus answers that question by an appeal for His disciples to be the beginning of a new people of God who lead the way

in prayer and forgiveness. That's us today, right? We're disciples of Jesus, followers of Jesus, who are leading the way in prayer and forgiveness.

Let's read Mark 11:20-25:

²⁰ As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." ²² And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Prayer and forgiveness—this is what it looks like to live in the Kingdom of Jesus today. It's to be a praying and forgiving disciple. When we read verses 22-24, we should be reminded that Jesus Himself was a praying man. When He refers to "this mountain," He's probably referring to the mountain that the temple is sitting on, that is right behind them as they're leaving Jerusalem.

So we can imagine Jesus praying like this. "Father, cause this corrupt temple to be destroyed. Cause it to be no more. Let it not lead people astray any longer. And cause these people who trust in their religious performance, but whose hearts are far from Me, to remain hardened. Let Your Kingdom come through these disciples of Mine." Jesus prayed in these ways with absolute confidence that God was going to hear and answer. He instructs His disciples to pray in the same way—with faith and confidence in the will of God and directly to God Himself. No longer would they have to go to a temple or talk to God through a priest. Rather, they would have the privilege of praying directly to God Himself. Isn't that a privilege? And doesn't Satan hate that prayer?

So today, follower of Jesus, pray with confidence in the will of God directly to God Himself. You see, faith-filled prayer toward God is extremely powerful and effective. You ask, "How can I make an impact in the Kingdom of Christ? What can I do?" Well, how about starting here, with prayer? Praying to God is very simple, very straightforward. Jesus invites you to ask big things of God and expect big things from God, as well as to ask small things of God and expect small things from God—and everything in between.

This is an area of my life I feel the Lord, by His grace, has been helping me grow in recently. When I'm praying for things that I know will glorify Him and do good to me and others, there's a

confidence there. I'm finding a growing confidence that the Lord is actually hearing me and He's going to answer. So how is your prayer life? Prayer is such a central part of Kingdom living.

Then there's forgiveness. Let's read Mark 11:25 again: "*Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*" When I read that, there's this theological tension in my mind and heart. Maybe you feel that a little bit too.

The first question that can consume our attention is this: is Jesus teaching that we'll only experience God's forgiveness if we're willing to forgive other people? Is this a works-based mentality, where I need to grit my teeth and just grant other people forgiveness? Only then will God forgive me of my sins? We feel that theological tension, because we know that God forgives and justifies us, making us right with Him based on His grace alone. But I don't want us to get caught up with that theological tension and miss something very, very important and very simple about forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit is saying to us this morning, "It is very, very important—vital, even—that we forgive." So do you accept, embrace and cherish the forgiveness of God for you? Is your heart soft and free to forgive? Jesus is calling us to forgive anyone for anything.

I know some of us have been wronged very deeply by people. But you know what? Forgiving actually is for our own joy and freedom, so we're not chained by bitterness and anger. Jesus is calling us to be free and extend that forgiveness. Maybe as you're hearing this, you're right on the edge. You're thinking, "I don't know if I can do it. I've been so badly hurt. I don't know if I can extend that forgiveness." I just want to gently push you over that edge, where Jesus would say, "Go and do that. Go and extend that forgiveness, there will be a freedom and joy in that."

So what exactly is Jesus teaching here about forgiveness? First, He's teaching that you can't expect to enjoy fellowship with God if you're unwilling to make peace with someone else. That vertical relationship is going to be hindered by the horizontal relationship. Have you experienced trying to go to God in prayer, but there's unresolved sin with someone in your life? You just can't seem to get through to God. It literally feels like there's a wall there. In fact, if you haven't had close access to God for days, weeks, months or even years, could it be that there's a broken relationship that needs to be mended first?

Second, the forgiveness we receive from God is an every-day and not just a once-for-all forgiveness. How many of you have asked God to forgive you since you became a follower of Jesus? It should be most of us. Then how many have asked God to forgive you this week? Today? This morning? I would raise my hand—a few times, actually, this morning.

What are we doing when we're asking God to forgive us like that? We're not asking Him to save us from the penalty of sin. It's not, "I need a right relationship with You, God, and I need You to save me from the penalty of sin." No, we're saying, "God, I've sinned against You again. I've blown it again. I've fallen again and I need Your forgiveness again. I need Your cleansing again. I need that broken relationship through my sin to be healed up and mended again. So will You forgive me? I want that freshly-restored relationship."

Yes, God forgives us once-for-all for all our sins, then He also forgives us on a daily basis, over and over and over and over and over and over and over again in our lives. That daily type of forgiveness is withheld so long as we withhold forgiveness from others. Do you see that? This is what Jesus is teaching us here, where that relationship with God is unrestored and needs to be restored again. The way that happens is through forgiving others.

Third, if we obstinately refuse to forgive altogether, it might reveal that we haven't yet really received God's forgiveness in the first place. So if we're so hardhearted that we can't extend forgiveness—and that lasts all our lives long—it may reveal that we've never truly understood the grace and forgiveness of God in the first place.

A couple years ago I had a health scare. I had just transitioned from one job into another, having moved from northwest Indiana to this area, so everything was new for me. We were kind of church hopping. We had three little ones. I started to feel this pain in my chest, then I started to feel pain in my left arm. Then it got a bit more intense one day, so I told my wife. And of course Rachel said, "You should go to the doctor right away." Of course, I had this internal struggle at the moment, because I hate going to the doctor, yet I knew Rachel's urgency was right.

I decided to go to an urgent care center. They did some tests and the doctor said my levels were off in such a way that it could indicate a recent heart attack and possible future heart attacks. He then referred me to a cardiologist. There were a few days between seeing this doctor and seeing the cardiologist—and some restless nights. On those nights, this one question pressed into my mind: "Are your sins forgiven?" Only one thing mattered to me in those moments—my sins being totally washed clean so that when I die and stand before this holy God, I'm clean and right with Him.

When we really boil it down, isn't this what matters? In fact, there are only five words that are underlined in this Bible of mine. I don't like to mark up or underline in my Bible, but I do have five words underlined. Actually, I underlined them during a sermon from this very series on Mark that Pastor David preached. It's in Mark 2:5 where Jesus says to the paralytic—and to just as needy me—these five words: "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*"

So I went to the cardiologist, who was a gruff dude, and he said, "You're fine." And I am fine. But be amazed at this. Whether you're near death's door—and some of you are getting to that point and it's quickly approaching—or whether you're 80 years from death, hear this: "Son, daughter, *your sins are forgiven.*" All of them, past, present, future—not because of anything you've done—because you have a Savior Who loves you. Your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus.

Here's what the King is like. He's authoritative, He's exalted, He's humble, He's lowly and He's on a mission to forgive sinners. Here's what it's like to be part of His Kingdom. It means to be a forgiven, forgiving and praying disciple.

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