

“Christ Is King! (... But Over Who?)”
Mark 11:1-11
January 11, 2026
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

We return this morning to the Gospel of Mark.

For those who are new here at Faith, the last few years we’ve followed a rotation through different portions of Scripture over the course of the year. In the late spring and summer, we are in an epistle of the New Testament – most recently the Book of Philippians. In the fall we are in the Old Testament – the last four years we’ve been working through the Book of Deuteronomy. And from mid-winter to mid-spring, we’ve been a Gospel. And the last few years we have been working our way through the Gospel of Mark.

And it’s there that we return today, and where we’ll remain until around Easter.

Over the first ten chapters of Mark, we’ve followed Jesus’s ministry as he preaches the gospel, calls people to repentance, drives out demons, performs miracles, heals diseases and disabilities, and instructs his disciples.

Now, for the last six chapters of the gospel, Mark turns to the events at the end of Jesus’s earthly ministry, as he enters Jerusalem, teaches there, is arrested, crucified, and then rises from the dead.

That portion of Mark’s Gospel begins this morning with Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem – an event often referred to as the Triumphal Entry, and commemorated on Palm Sunday.

But Mark’s telling of those events has a bit of a different angle than we find in the other gospels.

To see it, let’s turn now to our text: Mark 11:1-11.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

Mark writes:

^{11:1} 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.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Lord, our souls long for your salvation,
and so we hope in your word.
As we come now to your word to us,
We ask that in your steadfast love you would give us life.
Strengthen and guide us,
so that we can keep the testimonies that have come to us from your lips.
Grant this we ask, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.
[Psalm 119:81-84, 88]

Introduction

So, we return this morning to Mark. And we come to a well-known passage. And while it’s a passage that may be familiar to us, as we look at it closer, I think it’s a passage that will challenge us, maybe in ways we hadn’t thought of before.

Because what we see here, as we look closer at this text is that: Jesus comes, claiming to be king. And while we can be enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on others, we’re often much less enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on us. But even so, he is the king we need reigning over our hearts and lives.

Let me say that again: Jesus comes, claiming to be king. And while we can be enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on others, we’re often much less enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on us. But even so, he is the king we need reigning over our hearts and lives.

Let’s break that down together.

Jesus Comes, Claiming to Be King

First, Jesus comes, claiming to be king.

Specifically, what I want to suggest is that with the way Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem, he was claiming to be king. And he wasn’t doing it in a cryptic or confusing way, or a way that would only be clear later to his followers – he was doing it in a way that would have been clearly understood the moment he did it.

He does this by employing culturally recognizable signs. And cultural signs can often clearly and powerfully communicate something, even without words.

If we see a young man and young woman walking in the park, and then the man takes the woman's hand and gets down on one knee, we all know what's going on there, even if we don't hear a word of what's spoken, because he's employing a culturally recognizable sign.

Similarly, if suddenly, all the major television networks broke from their regular programming to go to an announcement from the White House, and the live video started, and the first thing we saw was the Vice President sitting behind the desk in the Oval Office, then before he even said a word we'd know what that meant. For him to appear publicly behind that desk meant that, for one reason or another, he was acting as President at that moment. He was claiming, whether momentarily or more long-term, he was claiming the office and authority of the Presidency.

And it's symbols like that that Jesus employs here when he enters Jerusalem as he does, on a donkey.

After all, a weirdly large amount of space is used up emphasizing the donkey... right? And Mark generally doesn't waste words on unnecessary details. So he must really want us to notice the animal Jesus rides in on.

The term here that's translated "colt" can refer to either a young horse or a donkey, and the other gospels confirm that it was, in fact, a donkey. And Mark makes it clear that Jesus was very intentional about entering Jerusalem on a donkey, and his disciples went through some extra steps to make that happen.

So why did this matter so much?

Well, there are a few Bible passages that might have some significance in answering that question [Horne, 147-148; See 1 Kings 1:33-35, 1 Samuel 10:2a], but the most striking among them, as the other Gospel writers highlight, is that by riding in as he did on this donkey, Jesus was intentionally fulfilling the words of Zechariah 9:9. And while we might not know that verse off the top of our heads, several scholars argue that the Jews in the first century would. They knew that verse. For them the reference wasn't lost – they didn't need to go look it up, they knew what it meant. It was, for them, like someone else, besides the president, appearing behind the desk in the Oval Office.

Zechariah 9 discusses the judgment God will bring on Israel's enemies, along with the rescue that will come to God's people, and right in the middle of the chapter, it discusses the coming King would bring that rescue about. Zechariah 9:9-10 says:

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,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

In Jerusalem, in the first century, at a time when Israel was living under the rule of its pagan enemies, this passage was fresh in people's minds.

And so, when Jesus intentionally fulfilled this prophecy by riding into Jerusalem mounted on a donkey – on a colt – people knew exactly what he meant by it. As one scholar said: “Within his own time and culture, [Jesus's] riding on a donkey over the Mount of Olives, across Kidron, and up to the Temple mount spoke more powerfully than words could have done of a royal claim.” [N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 490]

And so by entering Jerusalem the way he does in our text, Jesus openly claims that he is the King of Israel.

And so, as he enters Jerusalem, we see that Jesus comes, claiming to be king.

We Can Be Enthusiastic About Jesus Imposing His Reign On Others

And one thing we see with that in this text is that we can often be enthusiastic about Jesus imposing his reign on others.

We see that pretty clearly in this passage.

The people respond with enthusiasm. And when we understand their actions in historical context, we see that even more clearly.

Look again at their response in verses eight through ten. There we read: “And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, ‘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!’”

Let's take these actions and statements one at a time.

First, we're told in verse eight that they put their cloaks on the road. As one commentator puts it: “You don't spread cloaks on the road – especially in the dusty, stony Middle East – for a friend, or even a respected senior member of your family. You do it for royalty.” [Wright, *Mark*, 147; see also Edwards, 336] And so, in responding this way, the people weren't just noticing Jesus's claims to kingship – they were enthusiastically welcoming him into Jerusalem as king, as they placed their cloaks in the road like this.

Second, we're told in verse 9 that the crowd was shouting “Hosanna!”

“Hosanna” is a cry based on the Hebrew phrase meaning “Give salvation now!” or “Save us now!” While the phrase is technically a request, it had come to be used among the Jews as a term of praise

or acclamation, directed at the one who they believed would save them. [Carson, 432] And so, we see that the crowd expects Jesus to be a king who will save them.

Third, they shout “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” That phrase comes from Psalm 118 – the same psalm that the term Hosanna appears in, just one verse earlier [118:25-26].

Psalm 118 as a whole focuses on God’s saving work towards Israel, but as the psalm progresses, many have pointed out that it seems to focus on an individual – on a ruler, on a king, who will save Israel, and later Jewish writings interpreted it that way. [Kidner, 447-451; Carson, 432]

And then fourth, they shout “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” The people are thinking of King David – of his kingdom being restored, and that Jesus may be the king to make that happen!

The crowd, we see here, is enthusiastic about Jesus’s claim to be King.

But what kind of kingship did they expect?

Well, the leafy branches in verse 8 – which the other gospel writers tell us were palm branches – may be key to understanding what the people were so excited for.

While palms were associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and with Psalm 118 itself, in Jesus’s day they also had another strong and more recent association. In the second century B.C., during the Maccabean revolt, the Jewish leader Simon the Maccabee drove the Syrian forces out of Israel ... and he was then celebrated with praise, music, and palm branches [1 Macc. 13:51]. Palms would later appear on the coins minted by Jewish insurgents in the first and second centuries AD, during the Jewish wars against Rome, pointing back to that Maccabean revolt. In other words, for many Jews, the palm had become a symbol of nationalistic military victory over their enemies. [Carson, 432]

And so, when the crowd comes out with palms, that is something of what they expect. They are hailing Jesus as a king, but also, it would seem, as a certain kind of king. They expected a king who would deliver them, by imposing his reign on their enemies. That’s what they expect. That’s what they’re so enthusiastic about.

They expect a king who will impose his reign on other people. And they’re thrilled about it.

And we can often be the same.

When we think of Jesus’s power, when we think of him as a sovereign King – as the Lion of Judah – then so often our first thought is excitement about him imposing his reign on others.

We think of our opponents or our enemies in the culture, and how great it will be for Jesus to impose his reign on them. We think maybe of our theological opponents in the broader Church and we imagine with satisfaction how nice it will be when Jesus sets them straight. We think, maybe, of those we have personal conflicts with, and we imagine Jesus taking our side, and imposing his reign on them, and showing them how right we were all along. When we think of Jesus as a king, so often our first thought is enthusiasm for him imposing his reign on others.

Now, it is true that Jesus will impose his reign on his enemies, and on the enemies of his people. [WSC #26] And we are to find peace and comfort in that.

But it's also true that that's not all there is to Jesus's reign. And if we embrace one part of Jesus's kingship while neglecting others, we can have a serious problem. In order to see that, the first thing we need to note from this passage is that we can often be enthusiastic about Jesus imposing his reign on others.

But We're Often Much Less Enthusiastic About Him Imposing His Reign On Us

But then the next thing we need to see here – and which Mark may especially highlight – is that we're often much less enthusiastic about Jesus imposing his reign on us.

Now ... where do we see that?

Well, I think we see it in verse 11.

In verses 7 through 10 there's all this excitement and anticipation. Jesus comes to Jerusalem – the capital city of the Jews. He comes claiming to be the rightful King of Israel – and the people seem to welcome him as king with excitement. Here is their Lord! Here is the one who will save them. And he arrives in Jerusalem with all this enthusiasm and anticipation ... and then we read in verse 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.”

What?

As one commentator puts it: “The scene ends, dramatically, with nothing happening.” [Wright, *Mark*, 148]

Another describes verse 11 as “a complete anticlimax.” [Edwards, 337]

Jesus enters Jerusalem being hailed by the people as one bringing the kingdom of David to bear.

But the first thing to note is that, when he gets to the Temple, he's given no royal reception there. [Edwards, 334]

And yet, the issue isn't just how the scribes and the temple leaders fail to receive him. It's also that the crowds of verses 8 through 10 seem to have “mysteriously vanish[ed]” when Jesus enters the temple in verse 11. [Edwards, 337]

And so, as one writer puts it: “The whole scene comes to nothing. [...] The crowd disperses as mysteriously as it assembled.” [Edwards, 338]

But why?

Well, I argued earlier that as the crowd gathered palms, they likely had in mind the stories of Simon the Macabee entering Jerusalem. And while the Maccabees were interested in the Temple and in right worship, the first step in the process for them was driving out the Gentile rulers who were over the Jews. Simon the Macabee's first focus in Jerusalem was the Gentile military garrison,

which, we're told, Simon "expelled" from city, and cleansed the citadel from their "pollutions." [1 Maccabees 13:50] The key thing for Simon was to impose his reign on the Gentiles, driving them from Jerusalem. [Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible]

But when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, he doesn't go to the Roman strongholds. Instead, we read in verse 11, that Jesus "entered Jerusalem and went into the temple." And as the rest of the chapter will make clear, Jesus's first concern is not imposing his reign on the Roman soldiers. His first concern is imposing his reign on the people of God – on the Jews who confess faith in Yahweh. Where Simon drove out the Gentile pollutions from the Jerusalem citadel, Jesus is going to go to the Temple, not to drive out the pollution brought there by the Gentile pagans, but to address the spiritual pollution brought in by those Jews who professed to be followers of God.

Jesus first seeks to impose his reign on God's people. And we see here that God's people have a lot less enthusiasm for that. The temple leaders greet him with no royal reception. And the Jewish crowd that had been praising him seems to drop off, fade, and disappear by the time Jesus reaches the temple. Perhaps they dissipated bit by bit as they realized where he was headed.

They were excited for Jesus to impose his reign on their enemies. They were much less enthusiastic for Jesus to impose his reign in their own lives.¹

And the same can be true of us.

We may be thankful for Jesus as the Lamb of God in our lives – the one who pays for our sins, who is patient with our shortcomings, who understands our struggles, who forgives our transgressions. And surely Jesus is that to his people.

But he's also more than that. He's also our King. He's also our Sovereign, who will impose his reign in our lives. He's also the Lion of Judah who will call us to repentance and obedience with power and might – the One who is good ... but is not safe.

And we're less enthusiastic about that, because so often we have elements in our own lives that we want to keep separate and "safe" from Jesus – areas we want to be in control over – areas we don't want Jesus to impose his reign over.

¹ The picture becomes even more striking if we look more closely at Zechariah 9. It's not just that Jesus would impose his reign on the people of God, but that Jesus would seek to reign over the Gentiles by pursuing peace with them, not war. Because by evoking Zechariah 9, Jesus was also presenting himself as a messianic king characterized by humility – by gentleness. [Köstenberger, 472-474; Carson, 433].

In Zechariah 9:10-11 we read: "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit."

Three things stand out here. First, the coming of this king is associated with the cessation of war – not its start, as the crowd might suppose. Second, that this king will "speak peace to the nations" rather than stand in combat against them. And third, "the coming of the gentle king is associated with the blood of God's covenant that spells release for prisoners." [Carson, 433-434]

Rather than a messiah king that would deliver Israel by waging war against the nations and shedding their blood, Jesus presents himself as the messiah king who would deliver Israel by the sacrificial blood of the covenant, and would bring peace not only to Israel, but also to her enemies. This could be hard for them to swallow. Indeed, it can be hard for us to swallow as well: that Jesus is at work to speak peace to our enemies, even as he challenges us to greater faithfulness.

Maybe, for you, it's an aspect of our thought life, or maybe it's an element of your work, or maybe it has to do with how you spend your money, or how you live out your sexuality, or your work ethic, or your acknowledgement of your shortcomings, or your struggles to be patient or gentle with others, or something else. But we each have aspects of our lives we don't want Jesus to impose his reign over.

While we can be enthusiastic about Jesus imposing his reign on others, we're often much less enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on us.

James Eglinton pointed out recently that it's hard to think of a statement that defies the default assumptions of Western culture today more than the claim that "You are not your own." [<https://x.com/DrJamesEglinton/status/1743923604004147546>] And yet, that's exactly how the Heidelberg Catechism begins in its summary of the Christian Faith. It calls Christians to confess together: "I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful savior Jesus Christ." [Question #1]

If you're a Christian, then Jesus is not your president. He's not your governor, or your prime minister. He is your King – he is your absolute Monarch, your total and complete Sovereign, your King in the fullest possible meaning of the word, so much so that no aspect of your life is your own – you yourself are not even your own – but you belong, utterly and completely, in body and in soul, in life and in death, to Jesus Christ your King.

But in our world, so often, we've domesticated Jesus's claims over us, so that this foundational Christian truth seems odd to us. But we can't escape it. Jesus comes, claiming to be our King – claiming total and complete authority over us. [Wright, *Mark*, 148-149]

Which means we are not be our own. We belong to him. He will reign over us. And we need to submit not to our own will, but to his.

And the truth is ... we're often hesitant to do that.

Jesus comes, claiming to be king. And while we can be enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on others, we're often much less enthusiastic about him imposing his reign on us.

But Jesus Is the King We Need Reigning Over Our Hearts and Lives

But the final thing we need to see here is that as hesitant as we may sometimes be about this – as unenthusiastic as we may be about this, as much as we, like the crowd in Jerusalem, may be tempted to slowly and quietly drop off as the realities of Jesus's claim over us become more apparent ... despite all this, in truth, we should rejoice over Christ's absolute kingship over us ... because Jesus is exactly the kind of King we need reigning over our hearts and lives.

Jesus is the King we need reigning over us.

Because we need a king who is both firm ... and gentle. We need a king who is both powerful ... and patient – both King and Savior ... both Lion and Lamb.

Tim Keller, reflecting on this, points to a sermon that Jonathan Edwards preached in 1738 on Revelation 5. In that passage, the Apostle John is given a prophetic vision of Jesus. And he writes in Revelation 5: “And one of the elders said to me, ‘Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, [...]. And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.’”

John was told to look for a conquering lion. And the conquering lion he saw was also a lamb who had been slain. Which tells us something important about Jesus.

Jonathan Edwards puts it like this – he says: “The lion excels in strength and in [...] majesty [...] the lamb excels in meekness and patience [...]. But we see that Christ is in the text compared to both, because the diverse excellencies of both wonderfully meet in him.” [quoted in Keller, 169]

And that is a gift. Because we need both the lion-like attributes of Jesus, and the lamb-like attributes of Jesus. And it’s not that we need some of those attributes for ourselves and some just applied to others. But we each need them all.

So often, we want Jesus to be the Lion in the lives of other people – the powerful King who imposes his reign over them ... while we want him to be the Lamb in our own lives – the patient Savior, who speaks peace to us and works as a gentle physician of souls.

But Zechariah 9 tells us that those two things cannot be separated: Jesus is the lion of Judah who will cut off the chariot and the war horse and the battle bow. But he is also the Lamb of God who will speak peace to the very nations who had waged war against his people.

Jesus is both the one who brings peace, riding into the city of God on a donkey and not on a war horse. [Keller, 168] But he’s also the one who heads straight to the Temple to authoritatively demand repentance among the very people who profess faith in the Lord.

And that’s what we need. We need One who is both Savior and King – who is both Lamb and Lion – to us.

And yet ... even now, I suspect some of you are thinking about other people who need to hear this. But that’s the error the crowd made. Think instead of yourself.

What’s that area of your life that you know is not in line with Jesus’s reign – where you know you’re not living as he wants you to live?

Jesus, in that part of your life, truly is the gentle and patient lamb of God, who will forgive your sins, who will not break the bruised reed or quench the faintly burning wick. And that’s important. Because you need a Savior who will be patient and gentle with you in your weaknesses and failures, or you would not be able to stand.

But don’t you see, you also need a King who loves you too much to let you stay the way you are – a King who cares too much about your wellbeing to let you hold on to the diseases of sin and selfishness in your heart and life. He cares too much about you to let that continue. And he won’t just weakly suggest that you hand these areas of your life over to him ... he will ride into your heart and life as King – as Sovereign – and he will demand that you hand those parts of your life over to him. He will impose his reign over that aspect of your life. And that too is a gift.

A Jesus who is our King, but not our Savior, would crush us under the weight of his Law. A Jesus who is our Savior, but not our King, might save us from the penalties of our guilt, but leave us under the power of our sin and selfishness.

And so, brothers and sisters, thanks be to God that for those who trust in him, Jesus Christ is both: he is Savior and King, he is Lion and Lamb to each one of us.

And so, let us enthusiastically welcome him into our hearts and lives.

Let us willingly hand over every aspect of our lives to his saving work and his sovereign rule.

And let us do so not begrudgingly or fearfully – but with thanksgiving.

Because Jesus is such a gentle Savior and such a powerful King, it truly is our greatest comfort in life and in death that we are not our own, but we belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful Savior – to our sovereign King – Jesus Christ.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Bayer, Hans. Introduction and notes to Mark in *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.
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Keller, Timothy. *Jesus the King*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2011.
Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 73-150*. Kidner Classic Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975 (2008 format).
Köstenberger, Andreas J. “John” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.
Wright, N.T. *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996.

This sermon draws on some materials found in sermons I preached here on March 20, 2016 and April 26, 2020.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church’s core value of “Reformed Catholicity”), and also (following the Apostle Paul’s example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.