

January 25, 2026

JESUS AS PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

Mark 11:1-26

*(5 of 15 in a series through Mark 10-16)*

One of the things that I tell my theology class at Union is that when you're attempting to understand things like "Who is Jesus?" you've got to pay attention to the categories that Scripture is giving us. In other words, the Old Testament isn't simply going along talking about animal sacrifices, the temple and tabernacle, prophets, kings, and festivals just to buy time until Jesus comes along so that ignore and forget all of those things. Rather, the Old Testament is establishing categories for us to understand who Jesus is and what he does. In other words, the Old Testament is all about forming a framework to point to Jesus who is the substance of all the Old Testament shadows. He is the fulfillment of the categories the Old Testament gives us. And three of those categories established in the Old Testament were that of prophet, priest, and king.

What I mean is that in addition to the roles they served in guiding the Lord's people, instructing them, ruling over them, and aiding them in worship, another role every prophet, priest, and king served was providing a category and picture for us that Jesus would come and fulfill. They were helping us have categories to make sense of who Jesus is. Therefore, people have traditionally understood Jesus as fulfilling all of those categories as he is the true and perfect prophet, priest, and king. But perhaps no text shows Jesus as the fulfillment of each of those roles more than our text this morning as we look at Mark 11:1-26.<sup>1</sup>

In Mark 11 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the final week of his life as he will be crucified on that Friday. And it's not as if he sheepishly comes in, bashfully identifying himself as Israel's true king, prophet, and priest. He does so openly, boldly, and even confrontationally. Throughout the book of Mark, it's almost as if Jesus has been trying to keep secret who he is, but as he comes into Jerusalem, that changes.

Therefore, what I want to do is walk through this text under the headings of Jesus as king, prophet, and priest—which aren't the order we typically speak about these things but the order in which we find them in the text—hopefully showing us what Mark wants us to see about who Jesus is and what he's doing. So, let's begin with the heading: Jesus as king.

### **Jesus as king**

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<sup>1</sup> We will actually look at Mark 11:1-25. Verse 26 is absent in the ESV because this verse only appeared in later manuscripts of the book of Mark. In other words, the earliest and best manuscripts of Mark's gospel simply have the content of verse 25 followed by the content of verse 27. Later manuscripts inserted content in between those two verses that appear in some of our English Bibles as verse 26. The ESV, however, has removed that verse (rightly, I think) in order to show it wasn't original to Mark's gospel—though what that verse affirms is true and addressed elsewhere in Scripture.

We mentioned a few weeks back that in the middle of chapter 10 Jesus had set his face to go to Jerusalem. As we get to chapter 11, Jesus is now entering the city. But we're told that he enters the city in a fashion that we've not witnessed before. Everywhere Jesus has traveled in Mark's gospel—and he's done a lot of traveling—he's either gone by foot or by boat. He's never ridden an animal anywhere. And yet, right as he's about to go into Jerusalem for the final week of his life, Mark tells us that Jesus pulled aside two of his disciples 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. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately'" (vv. 2-3).

Now, usually when a colt is mentioned, you'd think a young horse, but it could refer to a young donkey as well, and since Matthew's parallel explicitly says "donkey," we can be certain that's what Jesus is referring to here. He'll ride into Jerusalem on this young donkey. And while this may seem like a small detail, I hope to show you in a second that it isn't.

Well, the disciples do indeed go get the young donkey, untie it, and tell the owners that the Lord has need of it but will return it quickly. And they bring it to Jesus, putting their cloaks over it since it had no saddle, and as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowd spread their cloaks on the road and spread leafy branches on it, as something akin to rolling out the red carpet, and they shouted, "Hosanna! [a term that means "save now" but can serve as a declaration of praise, adding:] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (vv. 9-10).

Now, all of this raises a question. Why did Jesus decide to enter Jerusalem in this manner, and what's going on here? The answer is that Jesus is making clear that he is indeed the Messiah. He is God's promised, eternal king from David's line. I say that for a couple of reasons. First, Jesus is clearly acting in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9-10 in which the prophet declares, "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. . . . 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." Jesus is clearly picturing this text as he comes into Jerusalem, intentionally fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy of the coming Messiah, riding on a donkey. He is saying by this action, in no uncertain terms, that he is this promised king.

The second reason I think Jesus is announcing with this scene that he's God's promised, eternal king from David's line is because that's what the people are shouting. When they say, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" they're saying that in order to proclaim that Jesus is this promised king from David's line. And Jesus isn't rebuking or correcting them. He's receiving their recognition and praise.

But it's not that Jesus is passive here in any way. Jesus is the one who initiates this scene. He is *intentionally* taking steps to show himself as the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy about God's coming king. When he told his disciples where to get the donkey and what to say to the owners, I don't know if he was just using his divine knowledge to say what would happen or he'd arranged

it ahead of time. It really isn't crucial to know. What *is* crucial, though, is recognizing that Jesus is the initiator of this scene. And the reason this is important to recognize is because Jesus would have known Zechariah 9:9-10 quite well. In other words, Jesus is sending a clear message: "Your Messiah is here. God's king has arrived, and I am he!" Again, there was a time when it seemed like he wanted to keep his Messianic identity a secret. But that time has ended. He's clearly entering Jerusalem as God's king.

Now, if he's God's king, then the implication of that is that he must be obeyed. So, let's ask ourselves if our life is characterized by obedience to our king. Have we become comfortable with our rebellion? It feels like almost every day news comes out of another famous pastor or teacher who has walked in unfaithfulness over a long time. When we hear that, we should ask, "How did he become so comfortable with the presence of that sin in his life while carrying on day after day?" Well, brothers and sisters, it starts by becoming accepting and comfortable with any sin. And not one of us is immune from having sin harden our hearts. So, let's ask the Lord to examine our hearts this morning, uncover our sin, and bring us to repentance so that we might obey our king, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus makes clear in our text that he is indeed God's eternal king. But that's not even the most audacious thing he does in this text. In Jesus' next act, we see him as prophet.

### **Jesus as prophet**

The very first thing Jesus does as he enters Jerusalem feels like the most meaningless detail Mark could communicate. He writes 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." So, he comes into Jerusalem, goes and looks at everything in the temple, and then goes back out to Bethany, where he seems to be staying each night as he's in Jerusalem for the week. Again, it feels like the most meaningless detail, but hold on to it. I think it's an important detail, especially the note that "he . . . looked around at everything."

Okay, so if the first thing Jesus did felt meaningless, the second thing he does might feel senseless. We're told that on the following day, he came into Jerusalem again from Bethany, and he was hungry. And he saw a fig tree in leaf, so he went to see if there were any figs on it. But there were none, as Mark notes, "for it was not the season for figs" (v. 13). And then Jesus curses the fig tree, saying, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (v. 14).

Now, the next time we see this fig tree is the following morning, when Mark tells us that they came back into Jerusalem from Bethany, and as they saw the fig tree, it had withered away to its roots. In other words, it's not that this tree had an issue that could be remedied. It had died at its very roots.

So, what do we do with that? The whole scene can feel almost unfair toward the tree—if we can speak in those terms. It wasn't the season for figs, but Jesus cursed it for not having figs anyway? Well, there are three things we can say. First, though it's not the season for figs, the presence of leaves was somewhat of an advertisement that it might have at least unripened figs, so it was a

category of false advertisement or hypocrisy. Second, the fact that Mark tells us that it wasn't the season for figs should push us to understand that this act is symbolic. In other words, the tree and its cursing isn't just about a tree. It's pointing us to something else. Finally, the fact the cursing of the tree sandwiches the story of Jesus clearing out the temple shows us that the meaning of the two things are connected. What I mean is that Mark commonly uses this sandwiching technique, and when he does, he's showing that the story bracketing the middle story and the middle story itself are pointing us to the same idea. So, let's move to the next scene of Jesus in the temple to see what's going on there, and then we'll come back to the tree.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem this time, he doesn't simply look around the temple. Rather, we're told that he "entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables and money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple" (v. 15-16).

At this point, we're helped in understanding why Jesus is driving out those selling and buying in the temple, as well as those exchanging money and selling pigeons because Jesus says something about what he's doing. He says, "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" (v. 17).

With this act, I think Jesus is declaring to unbelieving Israel that they're about to face God's judgment—ultimately because they've denied the Son—and they shouldn't think they're safe because they're coming to the temple, carrying out the sacrifices, etc. The reason I say this is because when Jesus says they've turned the temple into a "den of robbers," he's quoting from Jeremiah 7, and when you go to Jeremiah 7 the prophet declares that because of Israel's rebellion against their God, they're going to face judgment, and they can't find refuge from God's wrath by hiding out in the temple.

Going back to Jeremiah 7:1-15, where Jesus draws his saying from, we see that the prophet pronounces judgment on the people of Judah who think that just because they have the temple, they are protected from judgment. Jeremiah declares in verses 9-11, "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, because a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD."

In Jeremiah's day, the people were carrying out the sacrifices and worship in the temple as if that made everything ok. Though they were sinfully rebelling against God in gross ways—all the ways Jeremiah mentioned—God declared to them, "You're not safe from my judgment. It's coming." In fact, I think that last note in Jeremiah 7:11 where God says, "Behold, I myself have seen it, declared the LORD," is what Mark is picking up on in verse 11 where in that seemingly meaningless note he told us that Jesus looked in the temple at everything going on. That was Jesus saying, "Behold, I myself have seen it."

This also fits with the fig tree that sandwiches this temple scene. This fruitless people, like the fruitless tree, are about to face God's judgment, bearing the curse of his wrath. His king has arrived, but they have refused to bow the knee. Therefore Jesus, as the prophets of the Old Testament once did, is picturing for them the judgment to come as he turns over the table and drives them out. Also, only a couple of chapters later, he will make clear the presence of the temple cannot shield them from God's wrath as even the temple itself will be destroyed.

For us, this is a reminder not to presume on the mercy of God. Perhaps we think we're okay because we belong to a family where everyone else follows Christ. That is not sufficient. Maybe we've professed faith and have been baptized but aren't bearing the fruit of a transformed heart. That's not sufficient. Look at the fruitless tree. The Lord knows who are his. He sees what's going on. So repent and believe in him.

We're also reminded that there are no secret sins. No one else may know what you're doing, but the Lord sees. And judgment won't wait forever. For that fig tree, it took a day. Those in Jerusalem would feel judgment in forty years as the city and the temple itself was destroyed. God's judgment is real, and it's coming, so let's not trifle with sin but flee to the Son.

Jesus not only fulfills everything the OT kings pointed to, he fulfills what the prophets pointed to. They spoke God's Word. Jesus comes as God himself, speaking his very words, as he sees the sin of this people and pronounces judgment against them. And finally, Jesus comes as priest.

### **Jesus as priest**

It's not just that Jesus pronounces judgment on fruitless Israel. He also cleanses the temple for proper worship. When Jesus sees all the commercial activity going on in the temple courtyard, he begins turning the tables over and driving out everyone. But it's not because this activity was utterly unnecessary. Certain animal sacrifices were required for faithful Jews, and it would be a pain to bring all those sacrificial animals with you on your journey, especially pigeons, perhaps. So, having an option to buy the sacrificial animals you'd need at the temple was a real gift, enabling people to worship as they were instructed. Also, there was a temple tax that was owed, and you had to pay it in a certain currency. Therefore, being able to exchange money was a good thing as well. So, these things going on were actually helpful services.

What then is the problem? It seems it was two-fold. First, they were no doubt taking advantage of their fellow countrymen. I do think the "den of robbers" reference points us to Jeremiah 7 and the judgment the prophet pronounced there, but Jesus probably also chose a text with the word "robbers" in it intentionally. There were probably corrupt practices going on.

Second, though this trade was helpful, these booths, tables, and animals shouldn't have filled the temple courtyard. As Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7, he says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." You see, this area was the one part of the temple where the Gentiles who wanted to devote themselves to the God of Israel could come and pray, but the religious leaders had allowed it to be filled with trade stations as if to say, "These Gentiles don't

need a place to pray,” devaluing both Gentiles as a people God could save and prayer as an act of worship that God commands.

Therefore, Jesus acts as a priest, cleansing the temple for proper worship. In fact, though the fig tree communicated God’s coming judgment against a fruitless, unbelieving people, it also provided an opportunity for Jesus to tell his disciples about the power of prayer and what must accompany our prayers—faith and forgiveness.

After Jesus pronounced judgment on the tree on Monday morning, they pass by the tree on Tuesday morning and see that it’s dead. And Peter notes in amazement that this has happened, which prompts Jesus to teach them again. Jesus says, “Have faith in God. 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. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 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” (vv. 22-25).

The only way you could fill the courtyard with commercial business where individuals were supposed to pray is if you devalued prayer. But Jesus makes clear that prayer is an absolute necessity for his people. In fact, if we pray in faith, while forgiving others, we can see amazing things happen. Now, of course, this doesn’t mean that we can pray for things contrary to God’s will and purposes and somehow bind him into granting us our requests. Of course, we must pray in accord with God’s will. But prayer is a powerful means through which God works. James mentions that Elijah prayed and it quit raining for three-and-a-half-years. Then, he prayed again, and it started raining. That’s crazy. But James brings it up to note that Elijah had a nature just like ours, making clear that he didn’t have special access to the power of prayer that eludes us. Therefore, it’s worth us asking if we devalue prayer just as much as those who’d filled the courtyard with trade. Do we fill our lives with lesser things that crowd out prayer because we don’t believe it’s necessary and valuable? If so, let’s repent. Pray in faith. Pray with forgiving hearts. And let’s see what God might do.

As priests would have been responsible for proper worship, we see that Jesus comes as a priest as well. He’s the fulfillment of everything that the priesthood pointed to. But we can say more. He came to fulfill the entire sacrificial system and the temple itself. When he died on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn into. And with that, our Lord was sending the clear message that all can have access to God and not by going to the temple but through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Two chapters later Jesus will foretell of the temple’s destruction, but for those of us who understand that the temple was always merely to point to Jesus—the true temple—this makes sense. The temple had fulfilled its service in casting a long shadow, but now the substance had arrived in Jesus, and the shadow was no longer needed.

Interestingly, in that Isaiah 56 text, where Isaiah says that the temple should be a house of prayer, he also prophesies that God would bring the foreigner and the eunuch to himself. Most Israelites, if they thought about it at all, probably thought that would happen in the distant

future, and even then probably didn't understand how. Deuteronomy 23:1 had made clear that eunuchs were excluded from the temple, but in Christ, all can come to the true temple and find forgiveness and life.

Therefore, come to God's true prophet, priest, and king. Obey him. Run to him to find salvation instead of judgment. Flee from our secret sins. And as you come to him, faithfully worship him, especially through a life of faithful, expectant prayer. And the reason we can be confident he hears our prayers, even this morning, is because he lived for us, died for us, and was raised for us, opening a path for us to approach the throne of God with boldness. So, let's run to him, even as we come to the table this morning. Amen.