

Mark 11:1-11 "Palm Sunday: A Journey to the Cross" [\\*\\*](#) [11](#)

Main Idea: It's been said that actions speak louder than words. We see a powerful example of that in Mark 11:1-11, where Jesus preached two powerful wordless messages. By His actions on Palm Sunday, Jesus revealed two insights concerning Himself on His journey to the cross

I. Jesus revealed His identity: He is the King (1-10).

A. Consider what He did.

1. He told His disciples to bring a colt.
2. He entered the city to the applause of the crowd.
3. He fulfilled Zechariah 9:9.

B. Consider what His actions are saying.

1. He is declaring that He is the Messiah.
2. He is forcing people to make a decision about Him.
3. He is bringing about His own cross.

II. Jesus revealed His intent: He came to rescue sinners (11).

A. Consider what He did.

1. He went to the temple.
2. He looked around at everything in the temple.
3. He left the temple.
4. He left the city of Jerusalem.

B. Consider what His actions say to us.

1. Our greatest need isn't what we often think it is.
2. Our greatest need is to be right with God.
3. Jesus came to meet that need.

Application: Let's take to heart Jesus' message...

1. Is He your King?
2. Do you treasure His cross?
3. Will you help others come to know Him this week?

It's one of the most common symbols in our country. In fact, it's all over the place. I saw several last week as I was driving along Interstate 79 in West Virginia. I've seen them alongside Route 23 heading north towards Waverly. You'll see them on sign posts in front of certain buildings, and of course, on top of many of those same buildings, not to mention in cemeteries in nearly every community. What's more, people wear this symbol as a piece of jewelry around their neck, and use it as a bookmark. Why, someone even made a clock fashioned in the shape of this symbol and gave it to Sherry and me as a gift.

The symbol, of course, is **the cross**. We see the cross everywhere. It's literally all around us. And all around the world, too. I've seen crosses towering above towns and cities as I've traveled in Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Brazil, and Peru. The cross is all over the place.

But here's the sad reality. It's possible to have a cross and miss the point of the cross. For millions and millions of people, it's just an ornament, or a piece of architecture, or a memorial marker for a loved one. The symbol is there, but it's been gutted of its significance.

And even those of us who know the message of the cross, and believe in the One who died on the cross for our sins, are prone to take the cross for granted and even trivialize it in our lives. If we're not intentional, we'll neglect the cross. It's that simple. We're so prone to take for granted the most important event that ever occurred on planet earth.

That's why we're doing this two-part series of messages, **Getting Ready for the Cross**. We're traveling with Jesus to the cross in Mark's Gospel account, and this morning we come to Mark 11. In Mark 11 Jesus preached a message about the cross without saying a word about the cross. In fact, the Savior used a couple of unspoken messages to prepare us for the cross.

Life is full of unspoken messages. Two cars pull up to an intersection at the same time. The drivers make eye contact, and the one on the right goes first. They had a wordless conversation, didn't they?

A child is crawling under the pew in church and the parent makes eye contact and raises an eyebrow. That's an unspoken message and the child, if he's listening to the message, will quickly return to his seat.

It's been well said, "Actions speak louder than words." Jesus, the Master Teacher, certainly understood this. It's significant how few words He spoke, at least recorded words, on one of the most significant days in His earthly life. I have in mind the day of His triumphal entry. We call it "Palm Sunday," and on that day, according to Mark 11:1-11, Jesus preached two powerful wordless messages. And by His actions, Jesus revealed two insights concerning Himself on His journey to the cross. He revealed His **identity** and His **intent**.

## I. Jesus revealed His identity: He is the King (1-10).

When Jesus rode that colt into Jerusalem the colt was more than a means of transportation. He was sending an unspoken message to all who saw Him. What was it?

Allow me to set the stage. The Gospel of Mark is a Gospel of action. One of the key words in the book is "immediately" (we see it in 10:52). Mark continually allows Jesus' actions to teach us about the Savior's identity.

The first ten chapters of Mark tell the story of Jesus' life and public ministry up to His final week. Beginning in chapter 11 to the end of the book, Mark puts the spotlight on the events of Jesus' final week, the **Passion week**. The event that kicked off the final section and the final week is presented in the story we're about to consider. In fact, it's so significant that all four Gospel writers include the account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

In Mark 8, Jesus told His disciples that He would soon suffer, be killed, and rise again (8:31). In Mark 9, He repeated the same prediction (9:31). In Mark 10, He states it again, "We are going up to

Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles (10:33)."

Now it's time. In Mark 11 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to fulfill the plan of God. He will remain in Jerusalem basically for the rest of Mark's Gospel.

From reading Mark (as well as the other synoptic Gospels penned by Matthew and Luke), we might assume that Jesus didn't go to Jerusalem very often. In the fourth Gospel account, however, John makes it clear that Jesus regularly went to Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts. The Gospel writers are selective of course, including only a sampling of events from Jesus' life. The first three Gospels focus on Jesus' ministry up north in Galilee, whereas the fourth Gospel takes interest in what Jesus did down south in Judea.<sup>[2]</sup>

It's Sunday, the first day of the week. The Jewish Passover is just a few days away, and thousands of devout Jews are making the trek to Jerusalem. The city's population more than tripled during that feast which prompted the Roman occupants to bring in backup troops. Tensions were high in Jerusalem at Passover time.

At this point Jesus preached the first of His sermons without words in Mark 11. Let's look at it from two perspectives.

**A. Consider what He did.** Notice verse 1—"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples..."

Keep in mind some pertinent background information. Bethany [which means 'house of dates'] was where Lazarus lived, the man Jesus raised from the dead (John 11), a miracle He performed not long before this (perhaps a few weeks). The sensation from that miracle caused Jesus' popularity to soar in Judea. It also incensed the religious leaders who were aggressively developing their plot to kill the Lord (John 12:9-11).

Furthermore, it had only been a short while and a few miles down the road in Jericho that Jesus had healed blind Bartimaeus with hundreds of witnesses present. Everybody was talking about Jesus. The crowds loved Him. The religious establishment hated Him out of jealousy. All eyes were on Him. What would He do next? Mark tells us at the end of verse 1 and following...

**1. He told His disciples to bring a colt.** Verse 1 concludes, "Jesus sent two of his disciples." Which two? Mark doesn't give us their names.

Bethphage [which means 'house of figs'] and Bethany were located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, just two miles from Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives at 2,700 hundred feet provides a magnificent view of the capital city and especially the temple. That was in Jesus' view on this important Sunday.

In verses 2-3 the Lord gave instructions to the two unnamed disciples, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

The instructions seem kind of strange to our ears. Why does Jesus want a colt? Is He tired of walking? And if so, why doesn't He just stop and rest? And why an untamed colt? Everyone knows you don't ride an unriden animal if you're interested in smooth transportation.

But this isn't about mere transportation. This is a sermon without words and every first century Jew watching Jesus knew it. So without question and likely with great anticipation the two disciples obeyed their Master's orders.

Verses 4-6—"They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go."

I've wondered before why Jesus told His disciples to take the colt without first asking for permission. Some suggest that Jesus Himself had already asked for permission from the unnamed owner, that He had even given him a previously arranged signal: ***When I'm ready for the ride I'll send two of my men who will say, "The Lord needs it," to verify the legitimacy of the request.***

That's possible. There may be another explanation as to why Jesus took the animal without first asking for it. We have here a good picture of what happens when Jesus enters our lives. When the Lord comes He doesn't ask for permission to use what we think is ours. He who is King owns all and deserves our all. That may not sound kosher to our democratic ears, but Christianity isn't a democracy. It's a monarchy. Jesus is the King and everything exists for Him. We exist for Him. Everything we have is rightfully His.

Do you see Jesus' omniscience here? He makes several predictions to the two disciples. ***There will be a colt. You'll find it just after you enter the village. It will be tied. It will be an unriden colt.*** And everything Jesus predicted, the disciples found to be true. Everything.

Apparently, Mark is giving the abbreviated version of the story, for Matthew's account indicates Jesus told them to bring a donkey as well as her colt (Matt. 21:2). That's interesting. The choice of a donkey may seem strange to us, but once again to first century Jews it made perfect sense. Unlike today, in first century Israel a donkey was an important animal, often connected with nobility, even royalty.

It's worth noting that Jesus made it clear He didn't intend on keeping this colt. He specified that after using the colt He would send it back shortly.

What's Jesus doing? I'll say it now and support it from Scripture momentarily. ***Jesus is purposefully going public.*** Until now He who is the King of kings has gone out of His way to conceal His true identity from the public. Now He initiates it. This ride on a colt was a powerful and revealing action, and as we'll soon see, the crowd got the message.

Another significant detail. Note that the chosen colt had never been ridden. According to Old Testament guidelines, for an animal to be used for a sacred purpose, it must never have been used for any other purpose (for instance, the ***red heifer*** in Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3). This colt was certainly selected to fulfill a sacred purpose, hence, the Lord chose an unriden colt.

Notice what Jesus did next as He continued to preach His wordless sermon. Mark tells us that...

**2. He entered the city to the applause of the crowd.** Verses 7—"When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it." Why did they throw their cloaks on the animal? It's not just to pad the ride. They're getting the message. They know what Jesus is saying by riding this donkey, and they like what they are hearing. They are sick and tired of the Roman occupation. They've been waiting for a God-sent king for centuries, a Jewish king who would deliver them and establish the kingdom of God.

Verse 8—"Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields." That's strange, to throw your cloak on the dirty, manure-spotted road. Unlike us, most first century Jews did not have closets full of clothing. Many had only one cloak. This was BIG. To throw your clothing on the ground so that a donkey could step on it indicated that you believed this rider to be quite important.

Others placed branches on the ground. The word for "branches" (***stibadas***) means "leaves" or "leafy branches." Only John's Gospel mentions these were palm branches (which were not native to Jerusalem and probably came from Jericho). Hence, we call it "Palm Sunday."

But it's not just what the people ***did*** that indicates they were paying attention to Jesus' wordless sermon. It's what they ***said***, too...

Verse 9—"Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, '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!”

Hosanna is Hebrew and literally means **“Save now!”** Barclay points out it occurs in the same form in 2 Samuel 14:4 and 2 Kings 6:26 where it is used by people seeking help and protection from the hands of the king. When the crowd here shouts “Hosanna!” the people are asking God to fulfill His long-standing promise, to **Save now!** by the hands of this One on the back of the colt.

Mark specifically says there were two sets of voices shouting that day, those in **front** of Jesus and those following **behind** Him. Some suggest this is an antiphonal chant between the people in front of Jesus and those behind Him.

**First group:** “Hosanna!”

**Second group:** “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

**First group:** “Hosanna in the highest!”<sup>[3]</sup>

The shout from the crowd is actually a quotation of Psalm 118:25-26, one of the Hallel (‘Praise’) psalms. The psalm predicts that someone is coming in the Lord’s name, that is, someone who will demonstrate the Lord’s authority and power. That special someone deserves to be **blessed**. And that’s what they are doing, blessing Him with their voices and actions.

Don’t miss this. When the crowds spread their branches and shouted “Hosanna!” it was not a cry of praise to Jesus, as much as it was a cry to God to save His people from Roman oppression. They believed the Messiah had come. They believed God’s king had come to establish His kingdom. Of course, He had, but not as they thought. He hadn’t come to save Jerusalem from the Romans. He had come to save them from their sins, and you and me too.

You ask, “How did the Jews know Jesus was presenting Himself as King?” They knew it because they knew their Bibles. As soon as the Jewish pilgrims saw Jesus riding down the Mount of Olives on a donkey’s colt, their minds raced to a prophecy they’d heard all their lives. It was hope of the Jewish people...

Zechariah 9:9—“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.”

That’s what Jesus did on Palm Sunday...

**3. He fulfilled Zechariah 9:9.** One thousand years before Christ God established a covenant with King David, declaring that a descendant of David’s would rule forever. But in 586 B.C. David’s offspring Zedekiah was taken into captivity, and God’s people waited and waited. Around 500 B.C. the prophet Zechariah gave a message of hope to his hurting people. “Your King is coming!” he said. “He will bring salvation!” he announced. “How will we recognize this king?” the people must have wondered. And Zechariah gave this response. “He will be riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

And for over five hundred years the Jews waited. Oh, they had a glimmer of hope a hundred and fifty years before this. That’s when Simon Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem after defeating Jewish enemies. The crowd in Jesus’ day knew very well the story of Simon Maccabaeus which is recorded in the Jewish book of 1 Maccabees, which states:

“And he entered into it the three and twentieth day of the seventh month, in the hundred, seventy, and first year, with thanksgiving and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and viols, and hymns and songs, because there was destroyed a great enemy of Israel (13:51).”<sup>[4]</sup>

Yes, without saying a word to the crowd Jesus preached quite a message that day. We’ve considered what He did. Now let’s...

**B. Consider what His actions are saying.** Simply put, by riding into Jerusalem this way, Jesus is making it plain to all who He is...

**1. He is declaring that He is the Messiah.** He is the One the prophets foretold. He is the Deliverer of Israel. He is Anointed One whom God sent to establish the eternal kingdom. That was Jesus' declaration on Palm Sunday. "I am the King," He said in a sermon without words. His actions say something else...

**2. He is forcing people to make a decision about Him.** The fact is, the people shouting 'Hosanna' expected Jesus to be a king like Caesar, but Jesus had come to be a different kind of king. Here we see Him riding, not on a white stallion but a donkey, with his subjects carrying, not swords but palm branches. "Conquering by gentleness, that is the Lord's plan," as J. D. Jones observes.<sup>[5]</sup>

On this day Jesus declared Himself to be King, yes, but those who heard Him had a different set of expectations. That happens in our day, too.

We may cry out to God, "Hosanna! Save now!" But what do we want Jesus to save us from? From physical illness? From our problems? From the hardness of life? Please realize that King Jesus has a different agenda. He didn't come to save you from physical illness, or from financial problems, not in **this** life. He came to save you from your sin.

When before Pilate, Jesus stated clearly, "My kingdom is not of this world." If you want **this** world, you won't accept Jesus. Jesus' offer pertains to the life to come. Yes, He is a different kind of King. Jesus is doing something else in this wordless sermon...

**3. He is bringing about His own cross.** By riding into Jerusalem on this donkey Jesus, He is riding into the den of the lions. He knows the scribes and Pharisees are there. He knows what they want to do to Him. He knows.

But that's why He came, as He just told His disciples in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and **to give his life as a ransom for many.**" Was this sermon without words successful? Indeed, it was. It set in motion the events that would lead to a cross outside of this very city, in fulfillment of God's eternal plan.

So there's Jesus' first wordless sermon in Mark 11. He rode a colt into Jerusalem and in so doing He revealed His identity. He is the King. He preached a second wordless sermon in the next verse, and in so doing...

## II. Jesus revealed His intent: He came to rescue sinners (11).

Verse 11—"Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve."

I've wondered about this for a long time. Why did Jesus ride into the city, go to the temple, and **leave** without doing anything? Mark says He left because it was late, but does that mean that Jesus ran out of time and failed to do what He intended? No way. Jesus never failed to do anything! We can be sure that He did what He did with intentionality. No, there's another sermon here, another wordless sermon. Let's take a closer look at it.

**A. Consider what He did.** Mark indicates that Jesus did four things here...

**1. He went to the temple.** That's significant. Think of where else Jesus could have gone, but didn't. Jesus did NOT enter Jerusalem and head for Herod's palace, nor for a Roman barracks, but went to the temple. That speaks volumes about what is on the heart of this King.<sup>[6]</sup>

**2. He looked around at everything in the temple.** Chew on that word "everything." There

was a lot to see in the temple, the altar, the animals, the money-changers. My friend, this was not the look of a tourist (this wasn't the first time Jesus had been in the Temple). This was the look of investigation, the look of a King inspecting the worship of His people. It's not insignificant that the first thing Jesus did when He returned to the temple the next day was to throw the merchandisers out of the temple (11:15)!

**3. He left the temple.** Oh, ponder the sadness in this. He looked around and then **left** the temple without saying a recorded word. We know from verse 15 that what He saw displeased Him greatly. God intended this temple to be a **house of prayer**, a place where sinners could come and experience cleansing. But man misinterpreted and misused this place, viewing it as a sort of religious lucky-charm. For centuries God had looked at this temple and forgiven sinners on the basis of the blood sacrifices offered there. But in just a matter of days that would end. The form would soon give way to fulfillment. In five days the temple veil would be torn in two, and in a few years the temple itself would be torn down.

Jesus left the temple. It was late, perhaps indicating more than the loss of daylight. Time had run out for the temple. It had fulfilled its purpose. God's people would soon have a new temple. Indeed, God's people would soon BE that temple (1 Cor. 3:16).

Which is why church is so important. In this new covenant age, to neglect the church is to neglect God's temple. Keep that in mind when you're wondering whether it's worth all the effort to get the kids up and come to church on the Lord's Day.

**4. He left the city of Jerusalem.** He retraced His steps and headed back to Bethany where He would spend the night. There may be symbolism here. He who found no room in the inn at His birth now finds no place for rest in the city of Jerusalem and goes elsewhere to find a home.

Those are the actions of Jesus' wordless sermon. What's the point?

**B. Consider what His actions say to us.** We learn three truths from this sermon.

**1. Our greatest need isn't what we often think it is.** Let this sink in. He entered Jerusalem and went **to the temple**. That's the first clue that Jesus had not come to Jerusalem to do what the Jews expected. What's on His mind is not Rome. It's the temple. He had not come to give them what they wanted, but what they needed.

**2. Our greatest need is to be right with God.** That's what the temple was all about. Our greatest need isn't for political reform, but for God's forgiveness. We are sinners, cut off from God, who need to be reconciled to God. That's what this temple was supposed to have provided for people, not just Jews but all people. "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations," Jesus would say the very next day. Sadly, the very people who should have known better, the religious leaders, turned this house of worship into a religious relic.

Beloved, listen to Jesus' wordless sermon. This is your greatest need. You need to be right with God. Are you? You can be...

**3. Jesus came to meet that need.** It's why He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It's why five days later He allowed wicked men to nail Him to the cross. It's also why He conquered the grave the following Sunday. He came to meet our greatest need.

Do you believe that? That's what the cross is all about, not a sentimental symbol but the means of our salvation.

Two sermons without words, that's what Jesus delivered on Palm Sunday. And as with any sermon, the response is critical.

Application: Let's take to heart Jesus' message...

**1. Is He your King?** It's worth noting that Luke tells us something else that occurred when Jesus came to Jerusalem that day. With the city before Him, the Messiah **began to weep** (Luke 19:41). These were not silent sobs either, but the loud expression of a deep sorrow. Why did He weep on this day? Because He was afraid? No. Because He was stumped that His plan didn't work? No. He wept for the sake of the people He saw, for He knew their hearts. He knew they'd reject Him. And He knew the consequences they'd experience for their fateful decision.

It's a tragic reality that a city that shouted "Hosanna!" to Jesus on Sunday yelled "Crucify Him!" just five days later. As sad as that was, it still happens, as J. D. Jones observes:

"These people confessed Him, and crucified Him within a week. Is it an ancient crime? Do we never act in similar fashion? Do we not pay homage to Him on the Sunday and then crucify Him during the week? We sing in church, 'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ'; but do we not by our actions outside often say, 'We will not have this man to reign over us?'...Are we then loyal subjects?"<sup>[7]</sup>

It's much easier to applaud Christ on Sunday than to obey Him during the week. It's one thing to cheer Him, to say how much we love Him. It's another to do His will. But that's what He asks of us. That's what He who is King deserves from us.

Is He your king? Be honest with yourself. Is Jesus truly **your** king?

**2. Do you treasure His cross?** It's so easy to say you love Jesus on Sunday, like the crowd did in our story. It's another thing to treasure Him on Friday when the world mocks Him and seeks to eliminate Him. That's the real test. Do you treasure Christ and His cross?

A lot of people give intellectual assent to the cross. "Oh, sure. I believe that Jesus died on the cross. I've believed it all my life." Okay, but do you **treasure** His cross?

There's an eternal difference between agreeing that Jesus died on the cross and treasuring the cross. The demons believe in the cross, but they certainly don't treasure it.

Do you treasure His cross? It's so easy to take it for granted, to take Him for granted. That's why I recommend that we sing a song every day about the cross, to keep our affections warm by reminding ourselves again and again what our Savior endured for us.

Here's one by Wesley...

***And can it be that I should gain,***

***an interest in the Savior's blood?***

***Died He for me who caused His pain,***

***for me who Him to death pursued.***

***Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God would die for me?***

Here's another by John Newton that's helped me greatly...

***In evil long I took delight,  
Unawed by shame or fear,  
Till a new object struck my sight,  
And stopped my wild career.***

***I saw One hanging on a tree,  
In agony and blood,***

***Who fixed His languid eyes on me,  
As near His cross I stood.***

***Sure, never to my latest breath,  
Can I forget that look;  
It seemed to charge me with His death,  
Though not a word He spoke.***

***My conscience felt and owned the guilt,  
And plunged me in despair,  
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,  
And helped to nail Him there.***

***A second look He gave, which said,  
"I freely all forgive;  
This blood is for thy ransom paid;  
I die that thou mayst live."***

***Thus, while His death my sin displays  
In all its blackest hue,  
Such is the mystery of grace,  
It seals my pardon too.***

***With pleasing grief, and mournful joy,  
My spirit now is fill'd,  
That I should such a life destroy,  
Yet live by Him I kill'd!***

Let's treasure the cross, beloved. And here's an important way to show we do.

**3. *Will you help others come to know Him this week?*** Let's talk to our neighbors about the cross. Let's invite them into one of our homes on Good Friday. That's what our Good Friday Neighborhood Bible studies are all about, to help others come to know the truth about the cross that we so cherish. It's perhaps the only day that some are even thinking about the cross, so let's make the most of the opportunity to make our Savior known.

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**\*\***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] This message has been adapted from an earlier study at WBC in an expository series in the Gospel of Mark.

[2] Barclay, p. 263

[3] Kent Hughes, p. 82.

[4] Taken from W. Barclay, p. 266.

[5] J. D. Jones, p. 400.

[6] Matthew's account states that once in the temple, the blind and the lame came to Jesus, and He healed them (Matt. 21:14). He also records the response of the chief priests and scribes, stating, "They became indignant (Matt. 22:15)."

[7] J. D. Jones, p. 401.

