

Main Idea: Jesus preached two powerful sermons in Mark 11:1-11 without using words. Both have much to say to us about His true identity and mission, and the difference it should make in our lives.

- I. Jesus rode a colt into Jerusalem (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 visited the temple (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.

Take Inventory: Two questions to ask in light of Jesus' wordless sermons...

1. Is He my King?
2. Is He my greatest treasure?

[Ministry report on last week's Lebanon trip]

This morning we come to part three in our series, “Up to Jerusalem: Heading to the Cross.” Today is Palm Sunday and we'll be looking at Jesus as He enters Jerusalem riding a colt in Mark 11.

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:1-11

Words. We use words every day to communicate. Parents use words. Teenagers use words (in this technological age it's like you are in a constant dialogue). Preachers use words (sometimes too many) to teach the truths of God's Word. Words are a good thing, a gift from our Creator who Himself used words.

But sometimes words just can't say it as well as deeds. Sometimes we preach our most memorable sermons by what we *do* rather than what we *say*.

I don't remember the words he spoke, but I can still picture the sight of the pastor who led me to Christ as he wept on the day he resigned from leading our church. His tears communicated his love for us.

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 important days in His earthly life.

We call it “Palm Sunday.” On the first day of Jesus' passion week, the Master preached two powerful sermons without using a word. These wordless sermons,

^{**}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 For a previous message from this passage, see the Mark series, 6/4/06.

recorded in Mark 11:1-11, have much to say to us about the Messiah's identity and mission, and the difference it should make in our lives.

I. Wordless Sermon #1: Jesus rode a colt into Jerusalem (1-10).

When Jesus entered Jerusalem that Sunday, the colt was far more than a means of transportation. There was an unspoken message being sent to all who saw Him.

Let's 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.²

It's Sunday, the first day of the week. Passover is just a few days away. Thousands of devout Jews are making the trek to Jerusalem for Passover. 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. 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

² Barclay, p. 263

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 He has entrusted to us. He who is King owns all and deserves our all.

You might think of it this way. Christianity isn’t a democracy, but a monarchy. Jesus is the King and everything exists for Him. We exist for Him. Everything we have is rightfully His. We experience joy when we learn to make everything we have available for His kingdom purposes.

Do you see the omniscience of the King in these actions? *There will be a colt,* says the King. *You’ll find it just after you enter the village. It will be tied. It will be an unriden colt.* And everything the King predicts, 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. In first century Israel a donkey was an important animal, often connected with nobility, even royalty.

It’s worth noting that Jesus specifies that He didn’t intend on keeping this colt. He says that after using the colt He will send it back to the owner.

What's Jesus doing? I'll tell you what I think He is doing, and then support it from Scripture momentarily. He is going public.

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 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.

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 fed up with the Roman occupation. They've been waiting for a God-sent king for centuries, a Jewish ruler who would deliver them and establish the kingdom of God.

And now He's here. And they are thrilled. Notice how they respond in 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!”³

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.

You ask, “How did the Jews know the meaning of Jesus’ wordless sermon?”

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 earlier God had established a covenant with King David, declaring that a descendant of David would rule forever. But in 586 BC David’s offspring Zedekiah was taken into captivity, and God’s people waited and waited. Around 500 BC 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 so they waited. For over five hundred years the Jews waited.

A hundred and fifty years before Christ, a man named Simon Maccabaeus defeated Jewish enemies and entered Jerusalem, an event recorded in the Jewish book of 1 Maccabees: “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).”⁴

That happened a century and a half prior, but the crowd in Jesus’ day knew well the story of Simon Maccabaeus. And they also knew that would be deliverer eventually died, and the nation kept waiting.

Until this day. Until they saw this man from Nazareth riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey. We’ve considered what Jesus did. Now let’s...

B. Consider what His actions are saying. Simply put...

1. *He is declaring that He is the Messiah.* He is the One the prophets foretold. He is the Israel’s Deliverer, the Anointed One whom God sent to establish His eternal kingdom. That was His Palm Sunday declaration. “I am the King,” He said in a sermon without words.

2. *He is forcing people to make a decision about Him.* The reality is, the people shouting ‘Hosanna’ expected Jesus to be a king like Caesar, but Jesus had come to be a

³ Kent Hughes, p. 82.

⁴ Taken from W. Barclay, p. 266.

different kind of king. He's riding, not on a white stallion, but on a donkey. His subjects are carrying, not swords, but palm branches. "Conquering by gentleness, that is the Lord's plan," as J. D. Jones observes.⁵

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

We may cry out to God, "Hosanna! Save now!" But what do we want Jesus to save us from? Perhaps a physical affliction, or a financial challenge, or some oppressive situation. He can certainly help us with problems like these, but that's not why He's riding into Jerusalem this day, but because we have a much bigger problem, and it's universal. He's come to Jerusalem to save us from our *sin*.

"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

"The soul that sins shall die."

"The wages of sin is death."

In just four days Jesus will stand before Governor Pilate and tell him plainly, "My kingdom is not of this world." My friend, if you want *this* world, you won't accept this King. You won't want this King. This King's offer pertains to the life to come. He's offering an eternal kingdom. He is a different kind of King.

But that's not all. By preaching this wordless sermon Jesus did something else.

3. *He is bringing about His own cross.* By riding into Jerusalem on this donkey, Jesus is setting in motion the events that will result in His crucifixion. He knows the scribes and Pharisees are there, and He knows what they want to do to Him.

Oh yes, He knows. But this is why He came. It's precisely why He came as He had 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 His wordless sermon successful? Very. It did precisely what He intended it to do. In just five days they will nail Him to a cross on the outside of this very city, in perfect fulfillment of God's eternal plan of redemption.

So there's His first wordless sermon in Mark 11. He rode a colt into Jerusalem. The second sermon occurs in just one verse. It's so unassuming we're inclined to miss it.

II. Wordless Sermon #2: Jesus visited the temple (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."

That seems strange, doesn't it? Why did Jesus ride into the city, go to the temple, and then *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, Jesus never failed to do anything He intended to do. We can be sure that Jesus did what He did with absolute intentionality.

Which means 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 that day, but didn't. He didn't head for Herod's palace. He didn't head for a

⁵ J. D. Jones, p. 400.

Roman barracks. He went to the temple. This speaks volumes about what is on the heart of this King.⁶

The temple. The house of God. The house of prayer. The place where thousands and thousands of animals have been slain so sinners could approach God in prayer.

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. This was not the look of a tourist, for this wasn't the first time Jesus had been in the Temple. This was the look of a King inspecting what is rightfully His.

He has come to inspect what His people have done with what He has graciously given them, this place and all its contents so they, sinners though they were, could enjoy a relationship with the Holy One Himself.

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 to be a *house of prayer*, a place where sinners could come and experience cleansing. But man misinterpreted and misused this place, and many turned it into a sort of religious lucky-charm.

For centuries God had been looking at this temple. Indeed, He had 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. The temple veil would be torn in two, and in a few years the temple itself would be torn down.

So 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 *become* that temple (1 Cor. 3:16).

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.

These 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*. He's making it clear He had not come to do what the Jews were expecting. What's on His mind is not Rome. It's the temple. He is not going to give them what they want, but what they need, what *we* need.

2. *Our greatest need is to be right with God.* That's what the temple was all about. Our greatest need isn't for a better life. It's for God Himself. And that's our problem. When we enter the world, we don't have God. We don't know Him. We are sinners. We enter the world alienated from Him. We need to be reconciled to Him.

We need forgiveness. We need God.

That's what this temple was supposed to have provided for people, and not just Jews but all people. “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,” Jesus would

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).”

say the very next day. Sadly, the very people who should have known better, the religious leaders, had turned this house of worship into a religious relic.

Beloved, please listen to Jesus' wordless sermon. This is your greatest need. And mine. We need to get right with God. And we can't make ourselves right with God. It's something God Himself must do. And that's why He sent Jesus.

3. *Jesus came to meet that need.* It's why He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It's why He allowed wicked men to nail Him to the cross. It's why He left the tomb the following Sunday, and returned to heaven, promising to return. He came to meet our greatest need, our need for God Himself.

Application:

We've heard two sermons from Jesus this morning, two sermons without words. As with every sermon, there must be a response.

Take Inventory: Two questions to ask in light of Jesus' wordless sermons...

1. *Is He my 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?"⁷

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 you 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? "But as many as received Him, to those who believe on His name, He gave the right to become the children of God (John 1:12)."

2. *Is He my greatest treasure?* 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. Is Jesus *your* greatest treasure? Are you taking steps to show Him that you value Him above all else?

See Him, dear friend. See Him on the colt. See Him walking in silence in the temple. See Him, and listen to the sermon He is preaching to you today. Then bow before Him and own Him as your king.

⁷ J. D. Jones, p. 401.