

LESSON NINE

TITLE The Servant Comes to Town

SCRIPTURE Mark 11:1-12:44

MEMORY VERSE

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. (Mark 10:45)

MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

Jesus wants true devotion, not false religion or empty praise.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

TEACHER TIP

Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: "IN CHRIST ALONE" BY KEITH AND KRISTYN GETTY AND ALISON KRAUSS

The lyrics of Keith Getty and Stuart Townend's powerful hymn "In Christ Alone" sound as if they were written two or three hundred years ago. In fact, the hymn is barely twenty years old, having been released in 2001. The hymn takes the listener on a journey through the life of Jesus, from birth to resurrection. The lyrics are crafted with precision and skill and are filled with nuance. The hymn also calls the listener to live and stand in the power of Christ alone.

Let's watch a lyric video of the hymn sung by Keith and Kristyn Getty with country and bluegrass artist Alison Krauss accompanying them.

*In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here, in the love of Christ, I stand*

*In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones he came to save
'Til on that cross, as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin, on him, was laid
Here, in the death of Christ, I live*

*There in the ground, his body lay
Light of the world, by darkness, slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave, he rose again
And as he stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am his and he is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ*

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Could ever pluck me from his hand
'Til he returns or calls me home
Here, in the power of Christ, I stand*

(Play song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16KYvflc2bE>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *In Christ alone my hope is found. Some view their faith as “Jesus Plus.” That is, it is based on Jesus plus performance, achievement, etc. How does this hymn help correct this kind of thinking?*
2. *And as he stands in victory, sin’s curse has lost its grip on me. How does Jesus’s victory over sin impact your daily fight against sin?*
3. *From life’s first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. In what ways has Jesus been guiding you recently? What is he asking of you?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: “In Christ Alone” invites us to see Jesus for who he is and what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection. When we do this we discover that life and salvation totally depend on Christ alone. Only through him can we have hope. Only through him can we be brought back to God.

The story of Mark’s gospel is moving quickly forward. Jesus, having already predicted his death and resurrection, has set his sights on Jerusalem and the place where he will be arrested and sentenced to die on the cross. He is the God-sent Messiah, and only he can fulfill the mission that God has sent him on to this earth.

OPTION 2: SCENE FROM THE MAJESTIC

In director Frank Darabont’s *The Majestic* Jim Carrey plays Peter Appleton, a blacklisted screenwriter in the 1950s who is suffering from amnesia after a freak car accident. Peter ends up in a small California town where he is believed to be someone else—a local soldier thought to have been killed in World War II. Eventually, his memory returns, and he has to choose between remaining the person people think he is or telling the truth about his identity.

Let’s watch a scene from the film when Peter is put on the spot in front of the whole town to show off his piano-playing skills.

(Play clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJaYYnb1lLA> – fade out at 4:37)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Share about a time when you were mistaken for someone else. What happened?*
2. *What are some common misconceptions people have about who Jesus was and what he did?*
3. *What helps you remember who the real Jesus is? What helps you stay close to the truth of what God’s Word says about him?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: We are intrigued by stories of mistaken identity because they hold us in such suspense. Will the person's real identity be revealed or exposed? What will befall the person who is being accused of a crime or murder they did not commit?

You could say that the life of Jesus includes elements of the mistaken identity story. The Jews were waiting hundreds of years for the God-sent Messiah to come, and their expectation was that this Messiah would come to overthrow Israel's oppressors and establish a literal kingdom on earth much like other kingdoms of the world. However, the mission of the Messiah and the nature of God's kingdom defied people's expectations. Yes, the Messiah came to save but the real enemy was not Rome. It was Satan, sin, and death. Jesus came to establish God's kingdom but he would not do it through military conquest or political savvy. He would do it through suffering and death.

This week we are going to look at scenes from Mark's gospel when people rightly recognized Jesus as the God-sent Messiah and other times when the Jewish leaders, blinded by their own pride and hypocrisy, could not recognize Jesus as God's Son, the true Messiah standing right in front of them.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

1. Jesus Comes to Jerusalem (11:1-11)
 - A. Jesus instructs two of his disciples to find a colt (vv. 1-3)
 - B. The two disciples find a colt for Jesus (vv. 4-6)
 - C. Jesus enters Jerusalem and the people praise him (vv. 7-11)
2. Jesus Curses a Fig Tree and Clears the Temple Courts (11:12-26)
 - A. Jesus discovers a fruitless fig tree (vv. 12-13)
 - B. Jesus curses the fig tree (v. 14)
 - C. Jesus enters the temple and begins driving out those buying and selling there (vv. 15-17)
 - D. The religious leaders plot to kill Jesus (v. 18)
 - E. Jesus and the disciples return to the fig tree Jesus cursed (vv. 19-21)
 - F. Jesus teaches his disciples about the power of faith, prayer, and forgiveness (vv. 22-26)
3. Jesus Questioned by the Jewish Leaders (11:27-33)
 - A. The Jewish leaders ask Jesus where his authority comes from (vv. 27-28)
 - B. Jesus replies with a question about the origins of John's baptism (vv. 29-30)
 - C. The Jewish leaders cannot give a clear answer – Jesus refuses to tell them where his authority comes from (vv. 31-33)
4. The Parable of the Tenants (12:1-12)
 - A. Jesus begins to teach in parables with one about a man who planted a vineyard and rented it to farmers (vv. 1-2)
 - B. At harvest time the vineyard's owner sends three sets of servants to collect fruit, but are all beaten by the tenants (vv. 3-5)
 - C. The vineyard's owner sends his son and he is killed by the tenants (vv. 6-8)
 - D. Jesus explains the parable, citing scripture, and showing the Jewish leaders that they are opposing God (vv. 9-11)
 - E. The Jewish leaders look for a way to arrest Jesus (v. 12)
5. Paying Taxes to Caesar: Jesus Questioned by the Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17)
 - A. The Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus whether to pay Caesar's imperial tax (vv. 13-15)
 - B. In response, Jesus says it is right to pay taxes to Caesar (vv. 16-17)
6. Marriage at the Resurrection – Jesus Questioned by the Sadducees (12:18-27)
 - A. The Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a theoretical question about marriage (vv. 18-23)
 - B. Jesus reveals that the Sadducees falsely assume marriage in heaven (vv. 24-27)
7. The Greatest Commandment—Jesus Questioned by the Teachers of

the Law (12:28–34)

- A. A scribe asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment (v. 28)
- B. Jesus answers the scribe, citing Deut. 6:4 (vv. 29–31)
- C. Jesus acknowledges that the inquisitive scribe is near to God's kingdom with his understanding (vv. 32–34)

- 8. Whose Son is the Messiah? Jesus Poses Questions and Warns Others (12:35–40)
 - A. Jesus questions others about whose son is the Messiah, David's or God's (v. 35)
 - B. Jesus cites Ps. 110:1–5 as evidence that the Messiah is God's Son (vv. 36–37)
 - C. Jesus exposes the pride and exploitation of the teachers of the law (vv. 38–40)
- 9. The Widow's Offering (12:41–44)
 - A. Jesus watches a widow give a small offering (vv. 41–42)
 - B. Jesus teaches his disciples about sacrificial giving (vv. 43–44)

CONTEXT

Jesus has just taught his disciples about true discipleship in the areas of divorce, trust, wealth, and humility on their journey toward Jerusalem where Jesus has predicted that he will be arrested and crucified but rise again.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

We prefer to relate to God through religion and rules in order to be accepted and get what we want.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus exposes false religion as hollow and loveless. Through Jesus, we can be accepted by God and receive what we need—a new heart, a new life, and a new relationship with God in which obedience and serving come out of love for him.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.

The drama of Mark's gospel is nearing its climactic moment as Jesus, the God-sent Messiah, enters Jerusalem with his disciples. He has already told his disciples why he must go to Jerusalem and what will happen to him after he arrives, so there one can assume a sense of foreboding as they approach the city. However, Jesus's reception is anything but hostile. The people recognize Jesus as the triumphant Messiah and praise him with loud cheers and celebration. In their minds, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah God has sent to free them from their enemy, the occupying Roman Empire. What they do not know is that Jesus has bigger aspirations and larger enemies to defeat—Satan, sin, and death.

Quickly the celebratory tone shifts as Jesus enters the temple courts to see it has become essentially a marketplace and not a place of worship. Jesus clears the temple and the Jewish leaders, seeing Jesus as a clear threat to their authority, begin hatching a plot to kill him. These Jewish leaders need a reason to arrest him, so what comes next is a series of potential traps set for Jesus to catch him in his own words. Jesus evades their snares and exposes both their ignorance and hypocrisy. At one point, Jesus shows these Jewish leaders—those who are supposed to be experts in Scripture—that the Messiah is more than just a descendant of David. He is God's own Son.

Of course, Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem will be a sharp contrast to his ultimately being arrested and crucified outside the city's walls. Knowing that Jesus will and must die, one cannot help but see the shadow of the cross in these episodes of Mark's gospel. And yet, Jesus marches forward as God's Servant, knowing full well that his arrest and death are both imminent and necessary. He is the King and he must be inaugurated and crowned as such. However, contrary to the expectations of all—including his disciples—Jesus will become king by suffering and giving his life as a ransom for many. His crown will be thorns, not gold, and the throne he will sit on will be a cross. His great victory will not come by overthrowing Rome with political and military strength but by laying down his life as God's Servant.

11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, "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. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway.

As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"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 heaven!"

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

12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." [26]

27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the

temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 28 “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”

29 Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John’s baptism— was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”

31 They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 32 But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

33 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

6 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

7 “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
11 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

12 Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

And they were amazed at him.

18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

24 Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

32 “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? 36 David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“The Lord said to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.”

37 David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

38 As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Read the passage and write down as single words or short phrases what you think are the key themes in the passage. Remember that identifying key themes at the beginning of your study will help you develop a good

overall grasp of the passage.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: ASKING QUESTIONS OF THE TEXT

Ask and write down important questions from the text like:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- How?

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: PARALLEL PASSAGES

Read John 12:12–50 where John records Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem. What is similar to Mark's account of Jesus's approach to Jerusalem? What is different?

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Refer back to what you wrote down as key themes in the passage. How do these themes help you understand Jesus's authority and teaching?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE TEXT

In the previous section, you made a list of the questions you had concerning this text. Take some time to find the answers to your questions and answer the big 'Why?' question. Why is everything happening? What might be God's purposes behind the events that unfold in this passage?

When you answer the questions, reflect on your answers and what they have to say about the ultimate mission of Jesus, the God-sent Messiah.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: PARALLEL PASSAGES

Based on your reading of John and Mark's accounts, what do both authors reveal about the purpose and intent of Jesus at this stage in his ministry?

How do the differences in the accounts emphasize Mark's point about who Jesus is?

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: How could you search to see whether you have Pharisee-like beliefs about religion in your heart and attitude like the Jewish leaders in Jesus's day? How might bringing those into the light benefit you?

QUESTION 2: The Jews praised Jesus upon his arrival to Jerusalem only to demand his crucifixion later on. As people, we are naturally forgetful. What practical things could you do to help you remember Jesus and his gospel in your daily life?

QUESTION 3: Jesus said the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). What would it look for you to wholeheartedly obey this command? How would you live differently?

QUESTION 4: Jesus said the second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31a). Where do you see opportunities to show God's love to those around you? How might you take advantage of those opportunities to serve others?

QUESTION 5: What's the difference between obeying and serving God out of duty and obeying and serving God out of love for him? How might understanding that difference change the way you relate to God?

4

CHALLENGE

TEACHER TIP

End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

The attitude of the Jewish leaders in Jesus's day has not vanished over time. It is alive and well in any given culture the world over. At the heart of this attitude is the belief that we must do something for God in order for him to do something for us. Play by the rules and God will be happy with you and give you what you want. Break the rules and God will be angry with you and punish or—even worse—condemn you.

This kind of attitude assumes a transactional relationship with God based on our performance, and it could not be further from the gospel. Jesus came to show us that if being accepted by God were only based on our performance, we would not measure up. Sin is too big a problem for us to overcome on our own. That is why we need a Savior. We need Someone to fight for us against the enemies of Satan, sin, and death. That is why Jesus came and that is what he did for us. He defeated our enemies for us.

God's acceptance of us is not based on our performance but on Jesus's. As God's Servant, he gave his life and died so that we might live. He suffered the punishment for sin that we deserved so that our sins might be forgiven. Remarkably, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, Jesus did this with joy in his heart: "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame..." (Hebrews 12:2b).

When the gospel penetrates every area of our lives and hearts, it exposes false religion and misguided notions of how we are to relate to God. It helps us understand that obedience and serving come, not from duty, but out of love and desire for God. As he changes our hearts and renews our minds, we draw closer and closer to God and his life-changing power. As we move forward in our relationship with God, we see Jesus, our King, more clearly for who he is and for all he has done for us.

LET'S PRAY

COMMENTARY

MARK 11:1-11

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, in their commentary in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, help the reader understand all the nuances of language, culture, context, and background that are loaded in the scene.

The primary significance of Jesus' approach to Jerusalem with reference to both the mind-set of the historical Jesus and Mark's theological narrative is that Jesus intentionally acts out the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10, where the humble and righteous messianic King comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, proclaiming peace to the nations:

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.
I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Although Mark—unlike Matthew (21:5) and John (12:15)—does not explicitly cite the OT text, he also seems to have it in view. The implications for Jesus' ministry are threefold. (1) First, this is Jesus' strongest public affirmation yet of his royal and messianic identity. The messianic secret, which Jesus has enforced throughout Mark's narrative, is coming to an end. (2) Together with this self-revelation comes a confrontation. Jesus will now openly challenge the authority of the religious leaders of Jerusalem. (3) Jesus comes to Jerusalem not as a conquering hero on a warhorse but humbly riding on a donkey, thereby indicating that his messianic victory will come not through force-of-arms but through his sacrificial death (cf. 10:45).

The traditional designation "triumphal entry" is something of a misnomer, since Jesus' royal procession concerns his approach to Jerusalem rather than his entrance to the city. Only in v. 11 does Jesus briefly enter the city before returning to Bethany for the night. The primary point is that the King has arrived at his destination, Jerusalem. The stage is set for the narrative's climax.

1 The approach to Jerusalem was through Bethany and Bethphage. Bethphage ("house of figs") was a village close to Jerusalem. Its precise location is not known. Bethany, located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, lay about two miles from Jerusalem (cf. Jn 11:18). The Mount of Olives is directly east of the city and rises to an elevation of about twenty-six hundred feet. Its summit commands a magnificent view of Jerusalem and especially of the Temple Mount. Mark's mention of the mountain may be more than geographical, since the Mount of Olives carries eschatological

significance in Zechariah 14:4 as the place where the Lord will stand on the day of judgment. Thus the reference here has messianic and eschatological overtones.

2 From this vicinity, Jesus sent two of his (unnamed) disciples “to the village ahead” to get a colt. The village is not identified and could have been either Bethphage or Bethany, or perhaps another nearby village. The word translated “colt” (p. los) can mean the young of any animal; but here, as in the LXX’s parallel (Zec 9:9), it likely means the colt of a donkey (cf. Mt 21:2; Jn 12:15). The description of the tethered colt (vv. 2, 4) may indicate a secondary allusion to Genesis 49:9–11, where the Messiah from Judah’s line will “tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch.” In the LXX, the words for “colt” and “tether” are the same as those used here.

Jesus stipulated that the colt must be an unused one (“which no one has ever ridden”). Such animals were regarded as especially suitable for sacred purposes (such as sacrifices [Nu 19:2; Dt 21:3] and, formerly, pulling the ark of the covenant [1 Sa 6:7]). The Mishnah says that no one else may ride on the king’s animal (m. Sanh. 2:5). Some commentators have suggested that the background to Jesus’ command is the right of “impressment,” which stipulated that a king or other person of authority could borrow an animal that was needed for immediate service (cf. 1 Sa 8:16; J. M. D. Derrett, “Law in the New Testament: The Palm Sunday Colt,” *NovT* 13 [1971]: 243–49). If correct, this allusion would add still further royal imagery to the passage.

3 Jesus anticipated that the actions of the disciples might be questioned; so he instructed them that, when asked why they were taking the colt, they should answer, “The Lord needs it.” The term “Lord” (kyrios) is ambiguous and could here refer to (1) Jesus himself (so Gundry, 624, 628; Nineham, 295); (2) God, in whose authority Jesus is acting (so France, 432; Evans, 143); or (3) the owner of the colt (so Taylor, 455; Cranfield, 350; Lane, 395). By capitalizing “Lord,” the NIV has interpreted the passage to mean either the first or second option. But kyrios can mean simply “master,” and some commentators favor the third. On this understanding, Jesus has made an arrangement with the owner (who may have been with Jesus at the time) to borrow the animal, and the last phrase of v. 3—“and will send it back here shortly”—is an assurance by the owner that the animal would be returned promptly after he was through with it. While this interpretation is possible, it would apparently contradict Luke 19:33, which says that while the disciples were untying the colt, “its owners [hoi kyrioi autou] asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ ” It seems more likely, therefore, that ho kyrios in Mark 11:3 refers to Jesus or to God. The former makes the most sense of the scene by explaining why the bystanders so easily relinquish the animal (v. 6). Jesus was probably well-known by this time in the area around Bethany, and his authority was recognized.

Mark does not say whether Jesus had earlier arranged to borrow the colt or whether his awareness of its presence was an act of divine foreknowledge. In either case, as I. H. Marshall (*Gospel of Luke* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 713–14) notes, “The fact that the trivial detail of obtaining the animal is told at such length ... suggests that the Evangelists saw some importance in it, and this lay in its testimony to the authority and perhaps the prescience of Jesus.”

4–6 The disciples found the colt as Jesus had told them and carried out his orders to the letter. Mark makes no mention that the owners of the colt were present, but the phrase “some people standing there” (v. 5) may be equivalent to Luke’s “its owners” (Lk 19:33). The people (owners?) did not object to the disciples’ taking the colt (v. 6) either because Jesus had arranged for the procurement ahead of time or because they knew of Jesus and recognized his authority.

7–8 Jesus’ act of riding is significant at several levels. First, nowhere else in the Gospels is he seen

riding an animal. Second, the normal approach to Jerusalem by pilgrims was on foot, so Jesus' mounted entry again indicates that he is performing a unique and symbolic act. Third, the ride is reminiscent of the ceremony at Solomon's coronation (1 Ki 1:32-40), which itself has both royal and messianic connotations. Finally, as noted in the Overview, the whole approach to Jerusalem seems to be Jesus' intentional enactment of the messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10 (which itself echoes Solomon's coronation).

The action of the crowd was evidently spontaneous. The outer garments on the back of the donkey made a kind of saddle for Jesus to ride on (v. 7). When he mounted the colt (Luke 19:15 says the people put Jesus on it), other people in the crowd spread on the road before him garments, branches, and foliage (v. 8). The spreading of garments recalls the greeting given to Jehu in 2 Kings 9:13—an act of royal homage. Palm branches, hymns of praise, and songs are associated with the entrance of Simon Maccabeus into Jerusalem in 1 Maccabees 13:51. The word *stibadas* (NIV, "branches") is a general term for vegetation and can mean "leaves, leafy branches, tall grass," or "stalks of grain" (MM, 589; BDAG, 945). This vegetation could easily have been cut from the fields located nearby. Like the garments, the foliage is placed before Jesus to make a path for him. Both actions signify honor for a figure of high rank and authority. Only John specifically mentions palm branches (12:13), which could have come from Jericho. They are not native to Jerusalem, though in protected places they are known to grow there.

9-10 The crowds surrounded Jesus. Some people went ahead of him, some behind. All shouted, "Hosanna." Cranfield, 351, comments,

Perhaps the foliage that was being strewn to make a path of honor for Jesus reminded someone of the *lûlabîm* (bundles of palm, myrtle, and willow) that were carried at the Feast of Tabernacles and shaken at the occurrence in the liturgy of the word *hosiahanna* in Psalm 118:25 ... and so called to his mind and lips the passage of the psalm, which once repeated would quite naturally be taken up by the crowd of pilgrims.

"Hosanna" means "save now," but it had become simply an exclamation of praise. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD" is an accurate quotation of Psalm 118:26, one of the Hallel Psalms (Pss 113-118), which were used liturgically at the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover. This quotation was a customary religious greeting or blessing pronounced on pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the feast, but as Lane, 397, suggests, that use did not exhaust its meaning, since "the formulation is ambiguous and Mark may well have intended his readers to detect a deeper, messianic significance in the phrase 'he who comes in the name of the Lord' (cf. Gen 49:10)."

Verse 10 seems to support that interpretation. The blessed kingdom is the "kingdom of our father David," clearly the messianic kingdom promised to David's son (cf. 2 Sa 7:14-16; Isa 9:1-7; 11:1-16; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-16). R. P. Martin (Mark, 138) claims that not even this statement gives away the secret of Jesus' person, "since ... the cry of Hosanna is related to the coming kingdom and does not directly designate Jesus as Davidic King." While it is certainly true that the messianic intentions of the crowd are more explicit in the other three gospels ("Blessed is the King who comes ..." [Lk 19:38]; "Hosanna to the Son of David!" [Mt 21:9]; "Blessed is the King of Israel" [Jn 12:13]), there can be little doubt that Mark expects his readers to see the crowd's cry as messianic and centered on Jesus himself. That it is so is evident from the intensity of the homage directed toward Jesus, as well as the acclamation "son of David" by Bartimaeus in the previous episode (10:47-48). At the same time, the crowd's cry is less than explicit, and its nationalistic tone will be sharply qualified in the narrative that follows. In 12:35-37 Jesus himself will question the adequacy of the title "son of David," and the passion narrative will

radically redefine the nature of messianic salvation.

11 On entering the city Jesus went to the temple. Mark uses the word *hieron*, which here means the “temple area,” not the building itself (which would be *naos*). Apparently, the crowd had quickly dispersed, and only the disciples remained with Jesus. “He looked around at everything,” not as a first-time tourist viewing the sacred precincts (Jesus had been to Jerusalem before), but as the sovereign Lord examining the institution to see whether it was fulfilling its divinely appointed mission. The examination prepared for the prophetic act of cleansing. But since the hour was late, Jesus delayed his action against the temple and instead withdrew with his disciples to Bethany for the night. Mark does not say with whom Jesus stayed in Bethany, but John’s gospel refers to the home of his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha there (11:1; cf. Lk 10:38–42), and Mark will later describe Jesus’ dinner at the home of Simon the Leper (14:1–11).

MARK 11:12–25

In his commentary in the ESV Study Bible, Hans F. Bayer explains the somewhat strange structure of Mark’s gospel in this section and what is significant about Jesus cursing the fig tree and clearing the temple courts.

11:12–21 The way in which Mark organizes his material in these verses (fig tree/cleansing of temple/fig tree) suggests a connection between the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree.

11:13–14 found nothing but leaves. Since the fruit of the fig tree begins to appear about the same time as the leaves (or a little after), the appearance of leaves in full bloom should have indicated that fruit (in the form of green figs) was already growing. Jesus’ actions here have symbolic importance, signifying the hypocrisy of all who have the appearance that they are bearing fruit but in fact are not. The specific reference, though, is to Israel, since in the OT the fig tree often serves as a metaphor for Israel and its standing before God (e.g., Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10, 16; Joel 1:7). Here the cursing of the fig tree signifies the judgment of God on the “fruitless” Jewish people (cf. Mark 7:6), who had turned away from God into empty ritual and legalism (cf. Hos. 9:10–17). It is a visual parable to signify Jesus’ unrequited search for the true fruit of worship, prayer, and righteousness in the Jewish nation and its religious practices.

11:15–17 And he entered the temple. Jesus comes as Lord of the temple, and he comes to purify it (Mal. 3:1–4; see also notes on Matt. 21:12–17; 21:12). On the Mount of Olives, as well as in the temple precincts, tables were set up to enable pilgrims to change their respective currencies into coins for the annual temple tax (half a shekel; Ex. 30:13–16), as well as to purchase pigeons, lambs, oil, salt, etc., for various sin and thanksgiving sacrifices (Lev. 1:14; 5:7, 11; 12:8; 14:22, 30). The business activity turns the house of prayer into a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11). Gentiles in particular were hindered by the temple commerce in the outer court. The goal of Jesus’ action is to restore the temple (temporarily) to its function, namely, to serve as a house of prayer for all the nations (Isa. 56:7).

11:18 Paradoxically, the chief priests and scribes (who are in favor of commerce in the temple) seek to destroy the Purifier (3:6; 15:31–32) rather than to be purified themselves. Their actions are motivated by fear of Jesus’ popularity, fear of losing power (social, economic, and political), and fear of a public uprising (in which case the Romans would intervene). The Jewish leaders correctly saw Jesus’ act as a challenge to their authority in the most sacred space in the world.

11:19 As in Galilee, Jesus periodically retreats from public work.

11:20 in the morning. Matthew compresses the events of these two days into a single narrative and does not specify that the disciples did not see the withered fig tree until the next day. Mark gives more detailed chronological information, while Matthew treats the event topically (Matt. 21:18–22).

11:21 The fig tree had withered within 24 hours, perhaps sooner (Matt. 21:19). It represents the judgment of God on Israel (Isa. 34:4; Joel 1:7–12; Amos 4:9; see note on Mark 11:13–14).

11:22–23 Have faith in God. Jesus' response must have surprised the disciples. (What does faith have to do with the cursing of the fig tree?) His point is that they should trust God to remove whatever hinders them from bearing fruit for God. Moving a mountain was a metaphor in Jewish literature for doing what was seemingly impossible (Isa. 40:4; 49:11; 54:10; cf. Matt. 21:21–22). Those who believe in God can have confidence that he will accomplish even the impossible, according to his sovereign will.

11:24–25 whatever you ask. God delights to “give good things to those who ask him” (Matt. 7:11) and is capable of granting any prayer, though we must ask with godly motives (James 4:3) and according to God's will (1 John 5:14). believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Those who trust God for the right things in the right way can have confidence that God will “supply every need ... according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19), knowing that he will work “all things together for good” and will “graciously give us all things” (Rom. 8:28, 32). Some have misused this verse by telling people that if they pray for physical healing (or for some other specific request) and if they just have enough faith, then they can have confidence that God has already done (or will do) whatever they ask. But we must always have the same perspective that Jesus had—that is, confidence in God's power but also submission to his will: “Father, all things are possible for you.... Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

MARK 11:27–33

James A. Brooks, in his commentary in *The New American Commentary*, brings clarity and understanding to the religious leaders' motivations and tactics in trying to trap Jesus and how Jesus's response to them may reflect the “messianic secret” that was prominent early in Mark.

This brief account affirms the divine authority of Jesus and shows that it is superior to the authority of Jewish officialdom. This pronouncement story lacks an explicit pronouncement. The implied pronouncement is nevertheless quite clear.

11:27 Some have questioned whether Jesus could have walked around in the temple after clearing it. The encounter could have taken place at an earlier time and could have been placed here by Mark for topical reasons. But even on the assumption that it did take place the day following the clearing, Jesus' popularity may have prevented the authorities from taking immediate action against him (cf. v. 18).

“The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders” comprised the Sanhedrin, the Jewish executive, legislative, and judicial council. It consisted of seventy members plus its presiding officer, the high priest. The reference here, however, is not to the entire Sanhedrin but to a delegation sent from it. The reference is not necessarily to Caiaphas, the chief priest at the time, or to Annas and other former chief priests but to officials in the priestly hierarchy, to the Sadducees in general.

11:28 The purpose of the question was to force Jesus to admit that he had no authority to teach

and act the way he did. The Sanhedrin claimed it was the authority in religious matters. "Authority" (exousia) is an important term in Mark (1:22, 27; 2:10; 3:15; 6:7; 13:34 in addition to four times in the present passage). "These things" (twice in the Greek text, "this" in the second instance in the NIV to avoid redundancy) probably refer to the clearing of the temple, the public entry into Jerusalem, and Jesus' teaching in the temple.

11:29 The use of counterquestions was common in rabbinic discussions (cf. 10:2–3), but the one of Jesus here is unusual in that he made his answer depend on the answer of his opponents. Jesus' use of a counterquestion was not an evasion but a means of establishing the source of his own authority and all authority in the spiritual realm.

11:30 The expression "John's baptism" embraces John's preaching of repentance as a prerequisite of forgiveness and his proclamation of a "coming one" (cf. 1:1–8) as well as the act of baptism itself. In fact, what Jesus said here suggests the reason Mark began his Gospel the way he did. The clear implication of the question is that John's ministry was divinely authorized. If John's message had God's approval, then Jesus and his message also had to have divine authority because of John's inspired attestation. "Heaven" is a reverential substitute for "God."

11:31–33a The religious officials immediately recognized their dilemma. They did not believe that John was a prophet from God, but they dared not say so publicly because of the high esteem in which John was held. Nor in the present situation could they admit that John's baptism was from heaven because Jesus would castigate them for not repenting and being baptized as a sign of their repentance. The only way out, even though it was not a good one, was to confess inability to decide. What they did not realize was that such inability disqualified them from being religious authorities.

11:33b The nature of Jesus' pronouncement may still reflect the "messianic secret" that dominated the earlier parts of the Gospel. Although Jesus refused to tell, he did not refuse to claim. The claim of divine authority is as clear as if it had been stated explicitly.

MARK 12:1-12

Jesus often taught in parables to reveal the truth but also expose hypocrisy. Such was the case with his encounter with the religious leaders of his day. In his commentary in the Holman New Testament Commentary, Rodney L. Cooper elaborates on the meaning behind the parable and how it may have implied that Gentiles would share in God's salvation plan.

12:1. This parable continues the discussion in Mark 11:27–33. Jesus was speaking this parable to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Although it was a parable, it was meant to elucidate truth, not veil it, as some of his parables did. It is clear from the reaction in verse 12 that the leaders knew exactly what Jesus was saying. This parable also contains more allegorical elements than other parables, where one idea is central. Many of the allusions in this parable would have been familiar to the Israelites, and certainly to the leaders, because of their symbolism in much Old Testament prophecy (see particularly Isa. 5:1–7).

A man would have been understood to be God because he planted a vineyard, which symbolized Israel. While the medieval church interpreted this strictly as an allegory and assigned symbols to the wall, the pit, and the watchtower, it is more likely that these are fictional details, added to enrich the story. Rather than being symbols of something, they show that the landowner cared deeply about

his vineyard and went to some lengths to make sure it was protected. The wall protected it from wild animals, the pit is where the fruit was processed, the watchtower protected it from thieves.

The renting of the vineyard to tenants was not unusual at this time. They would have lived in the watchtower and offered protection to the vineyard. In this parable with allegorical elements, the tenant farmers represented the religious leaders whom God had sent to serve the nation of Israel.

12:2-5. When the owner sent a servant (or slave) to the vineyard, the tenants beat him severely. The servant was to collect some of the fruit for the owner. The servants symbolize the prophets, who were sent repeatedly to Israel to call the nation back to holiness in their role as a separate and holy people for God. Note that the treatment of the prophets grows worse throughout the story. The first servant was beaten. The next was hit on the head and treated shamefully. The next was killed.

12:6. The phrase, son, whom he loved, gives the sense of an only son, a beloved son. Words similar to these were used by God of Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:11). Only the foolish would not respect the son of the owner. As Cole points out, there is finality in the act of sending the son. God could do no more. If the leaders would not respect the son, why should he send more prophets? The time for judgment had arrived. How they treated the son would determine their judgment.

12:7. At the sight of the son, the farmers may have mistakenly believed the father, the owner, to be dead. Hence their plot to kill the son. An "ownerless" piece of property could be claimed by anyone. To read these words is to feel the sorrow of God and yet how just his judgment! "It was not through their failure to recognize the Son that they killed him; that would have been pardonable. It was, as in the parable, precisely because they recognized him for who he was ... We reject the claims of Christ not because we misunderstand them, but because we understand them only too well" (Cole, Mark, p. 259).

12:8. The tenants carried out their heinous plot, killing the son and throwing his body out of the vineyard. Not burying a body was a sign of disgrace. Although Jesus was buried by those who loved him, he was humiliated and disgraced by being mocked, stripped of clothing, and hung on a cross like a common criminal.

12:9. In the parallel passage in Matthew 21, the listeners themselves pronounce judgment. In Mark, the words come from Jesus' lips. To others is a direct pronouncement that the blessings of God have come to the Gentiles. Because Mark's Gospel was written for a Gentile audience, he may have wanted to make it clear that God's blessings came from Jesus. Whether or not the pronouncement came from Jesus or from his listeners, the point is plain: judgment is inevitable and is deserved.

12:10-11. Notice the phrase, haven't you read this scripture? Of course they had. They were scribes, they were religious leaders, they were the learned people of their day. Jesus' words echo Mark 4:12: "They may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding." The quotation in this verse is from Psalm 118:22, the same psalm that had been quoted upon Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. With this quote, linked as it is with the messianic titles bestowed upon him on his triumphal entry, and with the unmistakable claim of identity in the parable, Jesus answered the question the leaders had originally posed to him in 11:28, "By whose authority?"

12:12. The Sanhedrin did not miss the message of the parable. They recognized that Jesus had claimed divinity for himself, that he had prophesied destruction against them and their elaborate system, and that God's blessings would come upon the hated Gentiles. But again, their fear of the

people, with whom Jesus was popular, kept them from taking action at this point.

MARK 12:13-17

In his commentary notes in *The Reformation Study Bible*, R.C. Sproul gives insight into Jesus's response to the Pharisees' and Herodians' question.

12:13 Pharisees and some of the Herodians. The alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians reemerges (3:6). This alliance is possible because both parties accept the Roman occupation, the former as a divine punishment on the sins of the Jews, the latter for political advantage.

12:14 taxes to Caesar. In addition to numerous customs taxes, tolls, and other charges (2:14 note), each Roman province was obliged to pay the imperial tribute. The same sum was exacted from all, rich and poor alike. This tax was unpopular with the people.

12:15 Why put me to the test. His opponents' question is apparently an attempt to brand Jesus as a political revolutionary or as complicit in Rome's occupation of God's land and oppression of God's people.

denarius. Numerous currencies were in circulation in Palestine during the first century. Jesus asks for the Roman denarius, about a day's wage, bearing on one side a picture of Caesar and on the other a scene glorifying his reign.

12:17 Render to Caesar. Jesus takes the occasion to affirm that Rome's political power is legitimate, as at His trial He declares that it is from God (John 19:11). The early church followed this teaching of Jesus (Rom. 13:1-7; Col. 1:16; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; Titus 3:1, 2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

to God the things that are God's. Governments have legitimate claims on their subjects by God's appointment, but their domain is not universal. Since the "likeness" on the denarius (v. 16) is the Gk. word rendered "image" in Gen. 1:26, describing the creation of human beings in the "image of God," Jesus may be challenging His questioners to devote themselves wholly to the God whose image they bear.

12:18 Sadducees. The Sadducees denied the resurrection and the existence of angels, and they rejected the oral tradition of the Pharisees (Acts 23:8). Their name probably derives from Zadok, David's high priest (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Chr. 15:11; 29:22) and appointed officer over the Aaronic priestly line (1 Chr. 27:17) who was given the exclusive right to be high priest (Ezek. 40:46; 43:19).

12:19 Moses wrote. The story they tell Jesus (vv. 19-23) is based on the "kinsman-redeemer" (or "levirate [brother-in-law] marriage") commandment of Deut. 25:5-10, which provides for a family line to be perpetuated by the nearest of kin in the event of a premature death (Ruth 2:20 note).

12:24 you know neither the Scriptures. That is, the implications of God's self-identification to Moses in Ex. 3, which Jesus is about to cite.

nor the power of God. Probably refers to God's power to bring about, through His Messiah, a completely new order of existence in the new heavens and the new earth at the end of time (Luke 22:69; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18, 24).

12:25 neither marry. The final resurrection marks the complete transformation of the physical universe (Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:52, 53). Therefore, the creation mandate of marriage and reproduction (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:24), which applies to human relationships in the present order, will no longer be needed or appropriate.

12:26 the passage about the bush. See Ex. 3:1-6. The God who appears with miraculous power in the theophany of the burning bush is the Lord not of "the dead" but of the "living," those who are united to Him in an eternal covenant of grace. Although the patriarchs had been in the grave for centuries when the Lord spoke to Moses, by identifying Himself as their God He affirmed His commitment to redeem them as whole persons, body and soul, for communion with Himself. The teaching about resurrection, Jesus implies, is not limited to certain OT proof texts (e.g., Job 19:25-27; Ps. 16:9-11; 17:15; 73:24-26; Is. 26:19; 53:11; Ezek. 37:1-14; Dan. 12:2; Hos. 6:2; 13:14) but is grounded in the person of the living and life-giving God.

12:27 You are quite wrong. This strong phrase recalls Jesus' damning indictment of those who adamantly resist God's truth despite their learning and positions of religious influence.

MARK 12:28-34

Warren W. Wiersbe, in his commentary in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, goes back to the Old Testament to explain how Jesus's answer to the scribe regarding the greatest commandment reinforced the truth that the Jewish religion has always been more than sacrifices and offerings.

The next challenger was a scribe who was also a Pharisee (see Matt. 22:34-35). The scribes had determined that the Jews were obligated to obey 613 precepts in the Law, 365 negative precepts and 248 positive. One of their favorite exercises was discussing which of these divine commandments was the greatest.

The Lord quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the great confession of faith that even today pious Jews recite each morning and evening. It is called "The Shema" from the first word of the confession which means "hear." Then He quoted Leviticus 19:18 which emphasizes love for one's neighbor. Jesus made love the most important thing in life, because "love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. 13:8-10). If we love God, we will experience His love within and will express that love to others. We do not live by rules but by relationships, a loving relationship to God that enables us to have a loving relationship with others.

When he started this conversation, the scribe was only the tool of the Pharisees who were trying to get evidence against Jesus (note Matt. 22:35). But after he heard our Lord's answer, the scribe stood and dared to commend the Lord for His reply. The Word had spoken to the man's heart and he was beginning to get a deeper spiritual understanding of the faith he thought he understood. Even the Old Testament Scriptures taught that there was more to the Jewish religion than offering sacrifices and keeping laws (see 1 Sam. 15:22; Pss. 51:16-17; 141:1-2; Jer. 7:22-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8).

What does it mean when a person is "not far from the kingdom of God"? It means he or she is facing truth honestly and is not interested in defending a "party line" or even personal prejudices. It means the person is testing his or her faith by what the Word of God says and not by what some religious group demands. People close to the kingdom have the courage to stand up for what is true even if they lose some friends and make some new enemies.

MARK 12:35-37

In his commentary notes in the ESV Study Bible, Hans F. Bayer explains the complexity of Jesus's self-identifying words as the Messiah and Son of God.

While in the temple, Jesus publicly raises a question that he has already discussed in private with his disciples: who is the Messiah of God—is he essentially the son of David or the Lord of David? Jesus' point is not to deny that the Messiah is a descendant of David (e.g., Ps. 2:1-12; 89:1-52; Isa. 9:1-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24). The issue is that, in this passage (i.e., Ps. 110:1-5), there is no mention of the Messiah being the son of David; rather, the Messiah is here the "Lord of David" (see note on Matt. 22:41-46). Jesus affirms the divine inspiration of the Psalm through the Holy Spirit. The Lord (Hb. Yahweh) grants to David's Lord (Hb. 'Adonay) an exclusive place of honor at his right hand and helps David's Lord overcome his enemies. Jesus anticipates being exalted to the right hand of God, and thus he far transcends any expectation of a merely political, Davidic messiah.

MARK 12:38-40

James A. Brooks, in his commentary in *The New American Commentary*, delves into Jesus's denunciation of the Jewish religious leaders.

This passage recalls the warning in 8:15. There is no indication of time or place, and the incident could have happened earlier. Mark appropriately placed it here as a summary or a conclusion to the section that began at 11:27. A much more lengthy denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees appears in Matt 23. Luke's parallel in 20:45-47 is quite similar to Mark, but other denunciations are scattered throughout that Gospel.

In the previous section the scribes' teaching was questioned; here their practice was condemned. It must be emphatically said, however, that not all scribes and perhaps not even most scribes were guilty of the things indicated (cf. 12:28-34). The frequently heard charge that Mark and the other Gospel writers were anti-Jewish is abated when one realizes that this passage, for example, functions not only as a condemnation of a Jewish practice but also as a warning against a Christian one. Certainly the church has produced a multitude of leaders who have been characterized by pride and greed as were some of the Jewish teachers. The present passage, as well as others in Mark, distinguishes between the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people. Therefore this is not a blanket condemnation of Jews or Judaism.

MARK 12:41-44

Rodney L. Cooper, in the *Holman New Testament Commentary*, contrasts the hypocritical and prideful Jewish leaders with the sacrificial faith of a poor widow.

12:41-42. Jesus contrasted the greed of the scribes with one on whom they preyed—a poor widow. The temple treasury was located in the court of women. Here Jesus sat to watch the people as they put in their offerings. He did not condemn the people who put in large amounts of money. Jesus' intent was to show the disciples what true sacrifice is.

12:43-44. The woman did not call attention to herself. She was elevated by Jesus for all time. Perhaps

it was one such as she who would sit on Jesus' right or left. Although poor, she gave all she had. God does not look on the amount of money a person gives, but on the attitude with which it is given and on how much the person keeps back. Because the widow put in all she had, she had to trust God for her life. This may actually be an answer to Peter's implied question in 10:28: "We have left everything to follow you!" Those who give sacrificially will not be forgotten by God. With this illustration, Jesus ended his public ministry.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Hans F. Bayer, *Mark*, The ESV Study Bible.

James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary.

D.A. Carson, *Mark*, The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary.

Donald English, *The Message of Mark*, The Bible Speaks Today.

Timothy Gombis, *Mark*, The Story of God Bible Commentary.

Geoffrey Grogan, *Mark: Good News from Jerusalem*, Focus on the Bible Commentary.

Grant Osborne, *Mark*, Teach the Text Commentary Series.

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