

The King Who Sees Everything

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Preacher: Andy Gemmill

[0 : 00] to something or other. Hold on. It's found on page 1015 of your Pew Bibles.

So it's Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples saying to them, go to the village ahead of you and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there with no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, why are you doing this? Let's say, the Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.

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. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

[1 : 29] Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 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 heaven. 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. Amen. Just a try.

So carrying on, verse 12. The next day, as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree and 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.

Then he said to the tree, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard him say it. On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there.

[2 : 42] He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 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.

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

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

Have faith in God, Jesus answered. 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 what they say will happen, it will be done for them.

Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

[4 : 08] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, good morning everyone. Please keep your Bibles open in Mark chapter 11.

These next three weeks we're going to be in Mark chapters 11 and 12. And these are startling, gripping chapters. And so we're going to have a moment of quiet now and we'll pray for God's help to properly understand the great King that they revealed to us.

So let's bow our heads and pray. We thank you, Father in heaven, for these, your living words concerning your King, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And we pray that as we think about these words together this morning, you would please open our eyes to see Jesus as he really is and to rejoice that this is the King who rules our world. We ask these things in his name. Amen. Imagine for a moment a great day, a great occasion, something that's been looked forward to with excitement so much so that you can't get it out of your mind.

[5 : 30] Think of what Christmas was like for you when you were a small child. The excitement builds and builds and builds and then you can hardly sleep the night before. Or think of a wedding. Those of you who've been married will know what this is like.

Gradually, all the arrangements fall into place. The church, the service, the food, the guests, the invitations, and so on. And eventually, you can't wait for it to happen.

Well, the passage we're looking at today has all that sense of expectation about it. Not an annual festival like Christmas, not a wedding. It's more like a royal visit. In fact, it is a royal visit.

I wonder if you've ever experienced a royal visit firsthand. I used to work in a hospital which had a royal visit. And for weeks beforehand, it was almost the only thing that seemed to be happening. The whole place was cleaned up, repainted. All the public areas were smartened up. Everyone was talking about it. As the day arrived, a few fortunate ones were asked to be involved directly and got to shake the royal paw.

[6 : 33] When it arrived, it was a great day. The queen came and saw and smiled and shook hands and left her mark. Not just new paintwork, but she gave the place a new name.

From that day on, it was the Royal London Hospital. Well, the day that's described here in Mark chapter 11 was a great day.

The day when God's king visited Jerusalem. A huge event. And an event which left its mark forever. But before we look at it in detail, I think we need to plug into that sense of anticipation.

Of excitement. Because that had been building not for days or weeks or even years, but actually for generations. This was a hugely anticipated visit.

So come back for a little trip back in time and take a tour of the preparations for this great event.

The people of Israel had had a checkered history when it came to God.

[7 : 44] They were a people with unique privileges of all the nations in the world. God had chosen to come and make himself known to the people of this little nation.

And not just communicated with them, he'd come as it were to live with them. And the greatest sign that he'd done that was the temple in Jerusalem. A building unlike any other in the world because there God had promised to be accessible to his people forever.

Imagine the privilege of having the God of the world live with your lot. Of course God isn't containable in a building but he did send all sorts of signs of his presence with them especially his glory that filled the temple.

And yet that unique privilege was met with extraordinary indifference throughout their history. They wouldn't listen to him.

They wouldn't obey him. And in the end the unthinkable happened. God left the building. God's glory left the temple. The temple was destroyed by Babylonian invaders some 600 years before this day in the passage today.

[8 : 55] And Jerusalem was destroyed but he hadn't abandoned them completely. He promised that he'd return. That the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt. That his glory would again fill the temple and that the consequences of this would be much bigger and better than they ever had been before.

We actually have a quotation from one of those promises in this passage. Just look at verse 17 would you? Jesus says is it not written my house will be a house of prayer for all the nations?

That quotation is from Isaiah chapter 56. God promising to make himself accessible in a bigger and better way than has ever been known before to the whole world not just this nation.

The people of Israel had been a long time waiting for that great day to come. Some good things had happened. The city of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. A temple had been rebuilt and then a bigger one rebuilt and yet all was not well.

I'd like you to keep a finger in Mark chapter 11 and turn back to the last book in the Old Testament the book of Malachi. At this stage the people of Israel have a temple.

[10 : 13] Not a very good one at this stage and they're not a very great nation yet. And God's glory has not returned to the temple and they're longing for God to come and visit the temple to make

things great again.

But along with the longing has come all sorts of grumbling about how things are. All kinds of dissatisfaction. Look at chapter 3 verse 1. God promising again I will send I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me.

Then suddenly the Lord you're seeking will come to his temple the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? He's going to visit. But how good a visit is that going to be for this temple? Well turn to Mark's gospel chapter 1. Mark's gospel starts with a quotation from Malachi chapter 3.

I'll send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way. And anybody who knows the story of the Old Testament is pricking their ears up.

[11:26] The royal visit being announced at last. So as we get to chapter 11 we get to a climactic moment in this gospel and indeed in the Bible.

The royal visit is happening today. The long promised one. And huge crowds are piling into Jerusalem for the Passover festival. And for the last few chapters Jesus has been marching relentlessly southwards with his disciples from Galilee towards Jerusalem.

His words on the journey have suggested that it's going to be a big visit. Well in chapter 11 here we are. The moment has arrived. All of a sudden Jesus does something unusual.

He's walked all the way from the north of the country to the south. Now he gets on a donkey. Verse 2 Go to the village.

You'll find a colt there. The word here just means a young animal. Matthew's gospel indicates that it's a young donkey. Untie it. Bring it. If anybody asks you what you're doing here's what to say. And so verse 4 they go and they find it just as he said.

[12:35] And they untie it and people do ask. And they answer as he told them and they say okay take it off and they go. It works out just as he said. Now folks as far as I can see in Mark's gospel so far there is absolutely no interest in zoological issues before this point.

So why so much donkey time all of a sudden? Answer because several hundred years before the prophet Zechariah foretold the great day of national deliverance when God's chosen king would conquer the world and ride triumphant into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Jesus is playing the donkey card at this point. I guess we're all familiar with virtue signaling. You know people doing all sorts of trivial little things to draw attention to just how good they are.

This is royalty signaling. How king I am. The king of Israel. The king of the world. This is me. It's a massive deliberate public statement that he's the king.

And the people get the message loud and clear. Look at verse 9. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted Hosanna which just means save or rescue or salvation. It's a kind of hooray word.

[13:54] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest heaven. They've been looking forward to a great king from the dynasty of David the great king and here he is and they're shouting with joy and the words they use here are from Psalm 118 a psalm describing the possession of a great military conqueror to the temple.

So Jesus signals publicly that he is the king and they say yeah you absolutely are.

You're just the king we want. At which point we really should pause and reflect before going any further.

for chillingly within a week this same Jerusalem crowd will be yelling for him to be tortured and publicly humiliated and brutally executed.

The same crowd. He turned out to be so much not the king they wanted. Not just disappointing but intolerable to them.

[15:15] And it's God to make us ask how can one who was so longed for desired and admired so quickly become hated?

And that's a question that's going to keep popping up these three Sunday mornings and it ought to make us reflect on how easy it is completely to misunderstand Jesus.

even if like them you've been around religious things for a long time. Of course we're not in their situation at all. So much has changed.

There will be all kinds of people here this morning. You may have been around churches all your life or you may be in a church building for the very first time. If that's you here this morning it's great

to have you here.

You may have thought lots about Jesus before or you may be just taking your first peek through the door whoever you are though we are very different from them their response warns us of the great human propensity to write Jesus according to our script for what he ought to be like.

[16:24] The kind of religious leader we would like to have. The kind of king who would please us. The kind of Messiah who do and support the things we think the world really needs but the real Jesus turned out to be hate provokingly different for them.

I've titled this series Jesus the king we might not want but really needs and the best thing I think we could pray for ourselves this morning and for the weeks ahead is that we be willing to see Jesus as he really is not as we like him to be.

They thought he was just what they wanted but he turned out to be quite the opposite. Well the title for this morning's talk is the king who sees everything.

So what does this king do when he comes on his long promised momentous visit to the temple?

Well look at verse 11 please. Jesus 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.

What does he do? He looks and he leaves. When I was a small boy the highlight of my TV viewing week was the original Batman series and every week was really just a rerun of the week before.

[17:49] Every episode would end with Batman or Robin or both of them in a position of almost unimaginable peril facing certain death with absolutely no hope of escape and you'd have to wait a whole week to see what was going to happen when without fail one of the pair would suddenly remember that he had just exactly the anti deadly peril device that was required somewhere hidden in his cape and he forgotten about that those week long cliff hangers dominated my TV life well in a less dramatic looking way verse 11 there's a massive cliff hang the king has come on his promised visit to the temple he's looked around at everything what's he seen what will he do how's it gonna go come back folks next week and find out well fortunately you don't have to wait till next week we only have to wait until the next day when he does perhaps the most unexpected thing possible he curses a fig tree verse 14 he said to the tree may no one ever eat fruit from you again and the next day it's dead and withered instantly lifeless now

I'm going to spend the rest of the time this morning asking a few really obvious questions that this passage raises question number one why does Jesus curse the fig tree Jesus is known for his wonderful healing restoring and life giving miracles this one only this one is completely the opposite it brings death and what's more death to something apparently completely innocent he's hungry he goes to the fig tree for figs the fig tree doesn't have figs but of course it doesn't because it hasn't it's not the season for figs says Mark so why on earth does he curse it well the answer to that question is found not in the fig tree but in what the fig tree is placed next to look with me at a moment for how the storyline shifts backwards and forwards between two things verse 11 Jesus is in the temple looking around verse 14 next morning he curses the fig tree verse 15 later that day straight back into the temple verse 20 next morning the fig tree is with it big surprise to everyone verse 27 later that day we're back in the temple you see how it goes temple fig tree temple fig tree temple interleaved layers a bit like a licorice all sort if you're familiar with those why is this well the answer is the fig tree is an illustration an illustration for the disciples they are the only ones who see the fig tree bits an illustration for them of his attitude to the temple the problem is not the fig tree the problem is the temple and what is his attitude to the temple well the answer is he doesn't want any fruit to come from it ever again he's finished with it no one will ever benefit from it again why does Jesus curse the fig tree he's passing verdict on the temple so that his disciples know what his verdict is God's plan for this building is over for good full stop its end is as certain as the fig tree's end now in a moment we'll think about why these disciples particularly might need convincing that the temple was done with but for the moment let me ask the next and most obvious question well what's wrong with the temple then what sort of problem is it that provokes such a terrible judgment and Jesus only destructive miracle what could it have done now folks this is exceptionally important so if you had a late night last night and you're beginning just to nod off a little bit now is the time to slap yourself around the chops and concentrate really hard for about three minutes it is often said that two things are wrong with the temple here two things that would have been pretty obvious to the casual observer number one financial extortion why do people say that well because of verse 15 there are money changes and there's the buying and selling of animals and

Jesus calls this a den of robbers and that must mean there's robbing going on there somewhere problem number two Gentiles non-Jewish people are being kept out many people say well Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56 my house will be a house of prayer for all the nations and this activity is probably going on in the court of the Gentiles outside the temple the bit of the temple that Gentiles are supposed to be allowed into so all this selling stuff is keeping the Gentiles away from their place of prayer folks I do not think that is the right way to read this passage signs let me explain why why are the money changes here well the answer is because Jewish people come from all over the world at Passover and they have to pay the temple tax that's a normal bit for the support of the temple and to pay that tax in the coinage of the rest of the world which would likely have the heads of the images of gods and foreign deities on it would be highly inappropriate in the temple in Jerusalem why are the animal sellers here well because the sacrificial system demands animals of a certain quality they need to be flawless in fact back in Malachi's day the people of Israel were criticized for bringing second rate sacrifices to the temple and who's going to bring their own sacrificial animals all the way from North Africa or Greece or Turkey or Italy to Jerusalem no these things are signs that these people are actually being very careful about the sacrificial system I have not been able to find a single piece of evidence suggesting that anyone in first century Palestine thought of the temple as being a place of extortion and in addition though the temple compound certainly had an outside area that anyone could come into the temple itself was absolutely not ever in its history open to

[24 : 57] Gentiles to come and pray in it really wasn't it wasn't set up for that so to suggest that the money changes are somehow keeping the Gentiles out of their rightful place of prayer is I think just wrong no to the casual observer the temple looks as healthy as the fig tree looks the problem is much deeper and more serious than a bit of financial dodgy dealing and the clue is in verse 17 you have made this place a den of robbers that phrase comes from the old testament keep your finger in mark 11 and turn back to Jeremiah chapter 7 page 765 Jeremiah chapter 7 Jeremiah is told to go and preach a sermon in the temple I'll read the first few verses of this chapter and watch out for the phrase the den of robbers verse 1 this is the word of the

Lord that came to Jeremiah stand at the gate of the Lord's house the temple and there proclaim this message hear the word of the Lord all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord this is what the Lord Almighty the God of Israel says reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place do not trust in deceptive words and say this is the temple of the Lord the temple of the Lord the temple of the Lord if you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly if you do not oppress the foreigner and the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm then I will let you live in this place in the land I gave to your ancestors forever and ever but look you're trusting in deceptive words that are worthless will you steal and murder commit adultery and perjury burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you've not known and then come and stand before me in this house which bears my name and say we are safe safe to do all these detestable things has this house which bears my name become a den of robbers to you but I have been watching declares the Lord here's the question where's the robbing going on answer outside not inside why is the temple a robber's den because that's the place the robbers go to hide it's their safe place one of the other features of my TV life when I was a small boy was western movies there were lots of them there was one every

Saturday afternoon picture yourself then in a western movie scene in the badlands of Wyoming a train comes over the horizon and as it draws near to the foothills a band of outlaws boards the train and steals the payroll they always steal the payroll whatever that is the outlaws escape they ride off into the hills and after a steep climb they enter a rugged canyon the infamous hole in the wall with guards posted along either side and they know that once they're back there they're safe because no army is ever going to break into that well fortified place this place is their den their security you see the robber's den is not the place the robbers do their robbing the robber's den is the place they find security after their misdeeds why does Jesus use these words here in Mark 11 back to Mark 11 please the temple is not the place where the wrong is being done it's the place the bandits go to hide they go there to do the ritual to push the right god buttons oh ever so carefully thinking that doing that again and again will keep them safe though they've lived the rest of their life without reference to god they're scrupulously careful about the sacrifices and about keeping the Jewish law in Mark's gospel but their hearts are a long long way away from god and they think that god doesn't

see doesn't know but it's easy to pull the wool over his eyes about what's going on in the rest of life but of course this visiting king looks around and sees everything now folks we're obviously very different from them we don't have a temple do we but it remains the case that religion seems to many like a great place to hide from god that's why many people come to church to push the god buttons sometimes ever so carefully thinking that he doesn't see that the rest of life is being lived totally without reference to him and often when people are like that they're super concerned with what goes on inside the building that the ritual is done right that the songs are sung right and so on and so on of course if you think that about god that religion keeps him happy really you think he's very small indeed don't you that he can't see things that he doesn't know things that he's fooled by a bit of careful religion but just as he did then this king sees everything a royal visit a big day in fact it was a final day no one is ever going to eat fruit from this system again says

Jesus he's not cleansing it he's closing it he's not reforming it in fact he's going to replace it with something else he just overturns the outward signs of the sacrificial system it's going he is going to make access available to all nations but not through the temple turn on to chapter 15 would you quickly we have to we have to look forward and get a glimpse of what's coming how is the world going to access god well look at chapter 15 verse 37 in these few verses in miniature the whole drama is encapsulated chapter 15 verse 37 Jesus dying on the cross verse 37 with a loud cry Jesus breathed his last the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom that system's gone and when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died he said surely this man was the son of God now up to this point in Mark gospel nearly everybody has completely misidentified

Jesus at this point someone says the right thing and who is he a Roman I'm going to make my house of prayer a house of prayer for all the nations but it's not that temple building that's going to do that it's Jesus death for the sins of the world that will do that it's a much bigger thing he's replacing one system and bringing something completely different instead back to Mark chapter 11 and here's our final question and it's going to have to be very brief but it needs to be asked I think look at verse 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus Rabbi look the fig tree you cursed has withered have faith in God Jesus answered truly I tell you if anyone says to this mountain throw yourself into the sea and doesn't doubt in their heart but believes that what they will say will happen it will be done for them here's the last question it needs to be asked doesn't it why on earth does he start talking about praying for mountains to be thrown into the sea what has that got to do with anything here notice it's not when you pray for a mountain to be thrown into the sea it's when you pray for this mountain to be thrown into the sea what mountains he talking about well where are they they're on their way into Jerusalem what mountain is in front of you when you walk into Jerusalem anyone who's done this will know the only thing you can see in front of you is the temple mountain where the temple stood why might somebody want to pray for the temple mountain to be thrown into the sea well consider

[34 : 25] Jesus has just passed judgment on the temple hasn't he no fruit ever again but actually this system not only killed him a few days later but ran on for another 40 years unchallenged until AD 70 when the Romans destroyed it 40 years of apparent prosperity no fruit ever again during that time the Jewish religious institution became a thorn in the flesh for the church not just Jerusalem but all over the Mediterranean world can you imagine being a disciple in that period can you imagine longing for this temple eventually to be overthrown during that period imagine the doubts that its ongoing existence might have caused to you if you were a disciple have we done the right thing being associated with Jesus he said this was on its way out but it's still running are his words really true he said he was going to bring a new access to

God but the temple still appears to be functioning like the access point to God are his words right can he be trusted should we go back to the temple maybe that would be better life would certainly be easier for us if we did do you see how the ongoing existence of this temple for another 40 years would be a major stumbling block to this first generation of disciples says Jesus you guys don't be surprised that the fig tree is with it put your confidence in God that he will end the temple just the same way as I've ended the fig tree and you may well long for that system to be overthrown so that you're vindicated for your choice to follow me let me assure you says Jesus if you pray for it to be overthrown you're praying right right in line with the judgment that I have just made and that prayer will be answered in the end that mountain will be overthrown the temple's gonna go now of course there's a danger in that kind of prayer isn't there and the danger is of being vengeful

Judaism was very hostile to the gospel of Jesus during those 40 years how easy to pray for something's end because you hate the people who've been persecuting you and that I think is why we get verse 25 and when you stand praying if you hold anything against anyone if anyone's harmed you forgive them so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins you see vengefulness is easy when you're having a hard time but that wasn't Jesus motive and it wasn't not to be his disciples motives Jesus has passed judgment on the temple he assures his disciples that it is going to disappear it won't be immediate but it is gonna go just as certainly as the fig tree went they needed to know that well our time is gone folks so much to think about here and so little time let me just close with one or two reflections something for us have you ever considered how wonderful it is that Jesus is not the sort of king who can have the wool pulled over his eyes have you ever considered how wonderful that is we often think of judgment as a scary thing and indeed it is for nothing can be hidden from Jesus in the end but this judge also holds magnificent forgiveness out through his death on the cross to anyone who will accept his verdict and just think folks just think how awful it would be if God was a God who could be fooled by religious observance think how awful that would be think how small that would make him think how terrible it would be if the real king of the world did not judge justly in the end how terrible there are so many things we know are wrong with the world and there's so much denial among human beings of the wrongs that we've done and so much hopelessly naive virtue signaling in this world so much putting on an appearance of being good and right how awful it would be if the ruler of the world were fooled by that it would mean that nothing would ever be put right wonderfully this passage indicates that when the king of the world looks around he sees everything everything about the world everything about religious systems everything about individuals and the magnificent thing about him is that he can see us right through and he still offers forgiveness to us freely it's a magnificent truth he might not be the king we think we want but he is absolutely the king we need let's pray together heavenly father you see your world completely and you see us through and through help us to rejoice that you are a just judge help us to be confident that you will set everything right in the end and help us in the meantime to be quick to seek the forgiveness you hold out to us and to remain confident that in the end you will do everything that you have promised we ask this in Jesus name amen toho to so it it it it it it it it ■

