Lesson 11—20/20 and Still Blind (Mark 10:46–11:26)

Following in the Way: The Gospel of Mark · Class taught November 22, 2026

Welcome

Well, good morning. We're glad you're with us today as we continue our study of the Gospel of Mark. I wanted to give you something today that, if you want it, you can have, and if you don't, you don't have to. I have tried to provide this class in different formats. One is live, as you are now. Number two is the audio that I record, which is on my website. The transcript of the same thing is on my website, as well as the slides with the notes. But for those of you who neither listen nor read extensively, I have a one-page summary of this class on that same website. If you want to sleep through about 47 minutes of this, you can get the summary instead. Where do you get it? Look at the last slide today. I'll have a QR code on there. You just shoot that with your phone. It's easier than me telling you all the numbers and things.

What Do You Want?

We are in the Gospel of Mark today, and I want to ask you a question. This is the time of year when we are asking it all the time. What do you want? Your family is asking you, "What do you want for Christmas?" I hate that question. I don't know what I want. If I knew what I wanted, I'd go get it. And they say, "Well, if you want it, you go get it." Well, yeah, of course I do. But what do you want? I don't know.

So how would you answer that question? It doesn't have to be about Christmas. What do you want? (Class members offered "memories" and "peace of mind.") Most people like to store things up like that. Now, you see, it's an easy question, but it's hard to answer, isn't it? And if I asked you why you want that, you would tell me another answer. If I asked why again, by the time I got to five, I'd know what your truth is. I'm not going to do that today. I charge for counseling.

My son-in-law, every year at Christmas time, we say, "Give us a list," and he never gives us a list until about December the 23rd at 10:30 at night. My wife keeps saying, "What do you want?" He says, "I want peace on earth." She says, "I can't wrap that." And that's the problem.

Here's the next question. Suppose Jesus asks you the same question. What would you say to that one? That's an interesting problem, isn't it? How do you answer the question that Jesus asked? He keeps trying, and we keep resisting, no matter what it is. It's a hard question, and it has to be answered by somebody. We're going to talk about it today.

Three Questions That Drive the Gospel of Mark

Three questions drive the Gospel of Mark. We haven't answered all of them yet, but they are critical. They are the things driving the book.

- Who is Jesus in the first place? What's his identity? He shows up in Galilee. He's been raised in Nazareth, and suddenly this man shows up, and he doesn't look like anybody else who has ever looked or done what he does.
- What kind of Messiah is he? The first question he begins to answer, and then he gets to his disciples and asks, in effect, what kind of Messiah are you going to be? Peter says, "You are the Messiah." He gives the right answer with the wrong idea. He thinks it's all about power and position, and Jesus has to clarify that.
- What does he expect from his followers? If he is indeed the Messiah who serves and gives his life as a ransom for many, what does he want from you and me?

Those three questions frame the Gospel of Mark. They really frame the whole idea of Christianity. You have to answer them: Who is Jesus? What kind of Messiah is he? And what do I do with it?

Where We Have Been

Our previous lessons gave us three things. First, miracles: he raises the dead, casts out demons, heals the sick, feeds the multitudes. The disciples, with their brine-soaked clothes, see him calm a storm. Second, teaching that amazed people. At Capernaum, in Mark chapter one, it says, "And they were amazed at his teaching." That is a constant theme through the book. Third, statements that fueled rage. He tells the man let down through the roof in Mark chapter two, "Your sins are forgiven," and the Pharisees fly into a rage. He doesn't wash his hands correctly, and they fly into a rage. He doesn't keep the Sabbath the way they expect, and they fly into a rage.

All of that filters into this lesson. As we said last week, this is basically the last week of the life of Jesus. Half of the book of Mark is a single week. In that final week you discover the answer to all three questions: Who is he? What kind of Messiah is he? And what does he want you to do about it? That's what our class is running toward today.

The Final Journey

Just to give you an orientation, Jesus makes a journey in this week from Galilee down to Jericho, and then he goes to Bethany, and he is back and forth between Bethany and Jerusalem. A lot happened during that period. Some of it we covered and some we didn't, for the interest of time.

Jericho is one of the most ancient cities in the world. It is called the City of Palms because it sits in the middle of an oasis, and in the desert you have all this greenery. When Jesus comes to town, he encounters a man named Bartimaeus, who is the

embarrassment of the chamber of commerce. He's the kind of man you want to get out of the way, because he's always in the way. He's always begging in the streets.

Two Blind Men

There are two blind men that I think are important to understand here. This last journey is bookended by two men who were blind, and their healing says something about what Jesus is trying to do. At the start of the journey, which we looked at last week, there is the blind man who took a little bit to get healed. Jesus spits on his eyes, lays his hand on his head, and says, "Can you see?" He says, "It looks like men who are walking like trees." So Jesus touches him again, and now he sees clearly. That is a key idea in the Gospel of Mark. Can you see Jesus clearly? Even the disciples didn't see him clearly.

Then when you come to this lesson, the last miracle he does in the Gospel of Mark is for Bartimaeus, who wants to see. So you've got one man who finally sees clearly and another who wants to see. Isn't that the crux of the gospel? You want to see clearly, but what you really want is to see completely.

Bartimaeus in Jericho (Mark 10:46–52)

The Cry

Jesus is passing by, and the blind man doesn't know who this is. Probably he asks a question. I'm filling in gaps here. He probably says, "What's going on? What's all the noise?" "Oh, Jesus of Nazareth, the miracle worker. He's coming to town." Wow, that's big news. He's sitting by the roadside begging, usually wanting somebody to pay a few dollars or so, and he begins to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

That phrase is going to carry a lot of weight in this lesson, because it is answering the second question: What kind of Messiah is he?

He's crying this all out loud, and everybody around him is saying, "Would you be quiet?" Have you ever had somebody making a lot of racket around you, and you wish they'd be quiet? I remember one of the churches where I preached had a lady who visited. She had a son, and he was the kind you don't want in the audience. I've got to tell you, about four years old, he runs up and down the pew during church and makes all kinds of racket. He's talking out loud where everybody can hear him, and you can just see everybody going. What the mother would do was even worse. She'd turn to him and go "Shh." I thought my tires were going down the parking lot. Everybody kept coming to me and saying, "You need to tell her to do something about that kid. We can't do this anymore." Well, I understand what this passage is about. Would somebody shut him up? He's an embarrassment to our town.

But notice something. He's shouting the right things. Jesus comes along and says, "Call him." The people say, "Cheer up. He's calling you." And notice all the action. He throws off his cloak, gets up, and makes his way to Jesus.

What Do You Want Me to Do for You?

Then Jesus asks that question: "What do you want me to do for you?" Think about it if somebody asked you that. If there was one thing I could do for you, what would it be? For most beggars the answer is very clear: I need money. This man had a different idea. He said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

That's far different from the last time we heard somebody say what they wanted. If you go back to last week's lesson, James and John come to Jesus and say, in effect, "We want you to do this for us," and the only thing they want is powerful positions in the kingdom. In contrast, Bartimaeus just wants to see. Different motivations, different way of dealing with it.

Jesus says, "Go, your faith has healed you." Notice he makes that statement before the healing takes place, and immediately he receives his sight. And it says he followed Jesus.

The Blind Man Could See

These statements are important because they frame the response. The blind man could see many things.

- He could see his condition. He said, "Have mercy on me." I need some compassion here. Don't we all, at times in our lives, need somebody just to show a little compassion and mercy? He had been used to being shoved to the curb, told to be quiet and get out of the way, and he says, "Have mercy on me."
- He could see who Jesus was. "Son of David" has a particular importance. According to the prophets, the Messiah has to be the Son of David. This is the first time the phrase is used in the Gospel of Mark, and it comes from a blind beggar. Jesus is about to come into Jerusalem, and we will hear the echo of it again, because when you come into Jerusalem as the son of David, you know what that means. You're about to be crowned king. That's what happened with Solomon.
- He could see where he could be healed, because he called to Jesus. The only way people deal with their problems is to go directly to Jesus himself. There was a story we didn't cover, and I wish we could have, that week we dismissed classes. A father has a son afflicted by a demon. He takes him to various teachers, then to the disciples. The disciples can't do anything for him, and he finally brings him to Jesus, and he's healed. Think about how many people go through life trying to find the answer to their deepest problem in philosophy, self-help, or TikTok. That's the new philosophy. You're looking for the answer to the biggest question in life, and you don't know where to go. This man knew where to go.
- He could see what he needed to do next. He followed.

If you want to come to God, three things have to happen. You have to know where to go, to Jesus himself. You have to let him cleanse you and heal you. And you have to follow

him. That's exactly what blind Bartimaeus did. He understood who he was, and he understood what needed to happen.

The Approach to Jerusalem

After Jericho they make the final approach to Jerusalem. The trip from Jericho is about fifteen miles, all uphill. They come to Bethany, where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus live. Lazarus is still quite the attraction, having been resurrected from the grave, to the point that even the Pharisees are thinking that if they can eliminate the evidence, they can eliminate the problem. Then there is the Mount of Olives, which will become very important in the next few lessons, and finally Jerusalem and the temple.

The interesting thing in the Gospel of Mark, at least in this stretch, is that Jesus never spends the night in Jerusalem. He goes into Jerusalem and then goes back to Bethany. He will spend his nights in the next lesson or two in Bethany, and go into Jerusalem to work by day. He's not an insider in the Jewish system. He doesn't belong in Jerusalem. His kingdom is bigger than that.

A Question About Touching

A class member asked whether there is any significance to the fact that sometimes Jesus touched people when he healed them and sometimes he didn't. This is my personal commentary, so take it for what that's worth. I think Jesus touched some people because they needed to be touched. For some people, being touched is helpful to them. But Jesus could heal from afar. He didn't have to be in the proximity. Sometimes it may have been for the crowd to see. I don't know for sure. My answer is that he touched the people who needed to be touched and didn't worry about the rest of them. That may or may not be true at all, but that's my feeble mind at work.

A Moment Prepared For (Mark 11:1–10)

The Colt

I have always found this interesting. Jesus tells the disciples, "I need you to go into the village, and when you get there, find a colt that has never been ridden, tied to a post. Untie it and bring it to me. And if somebody says, 'What are you doing with that?' tell them the Lord needs it." Think about that. They go in, and they're going to find an animal, a colt unridden, tied to a post, and they're going to say that. Is that just prophetic, or is it planned? I have a feeling this is part of the plan of God beginning to take shape in very specific detail.

It says the animal should be one that has not been ridden. This week I started thinking about that. How can you tell, without getting on its back? I don't think they did that. But it's interesting, because in the Old Testament, oxen or bulls that were sacrificed to God could not have been used for labor. They were devoted to God. So when they say, "The

Lord needs it," that is a sacrificial moment. A class member observed that the colt would probably be quite young. Yes, and if you take a nursing animal away from its mama, guess what? It's not happy. Mama's not happy either. So this is a unique set of circumstances.

And how many people would say, "I'm just going to borrow this car out of the parking lot. Don't worry about it. I'll bring it back someday"? No, no. "9-1-1, what's your emergency?" "I've got a guy out here stealing a car." That didn't happen here, because this was what the Lord was doing.

Zechariah 9:9

This is a prophetic moment. Every Jew knew about Zechariah 9:9. Now, when was the last time you sat down with a cup of coffee and said, "Man, I'm going to dig into Zechariah today"? That's part of what I call the stuck pages of the Bible. You know what those are? You buy a new Bible, and five years later there's a bunch of pages still stuck together, meaning you haven't touched that part. But they all knew it. Zechariah says, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

In the first part of First Kings, when David is dying and there is a plot to take the kingdom from his lineage, the way they know who the king is going to be is that Solomon rides into town on David's own mule. The king is going to come riding on the colt of a donkey. It would be a sign.

Hosanna

So he comes into Jerusalem, and those who went ahead and those who followed shouted a passage we know well: "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!"

There is a pattern in ancient literature called an ABBA pattern. That is not the musical group that sings "Dancing Queen," just to let you know. This is a rhetorical idea in which the lines on each end are parallel and the ones in the middle are parallel, and the ones in the middle drive the point. Hosanna means "save us." Then you get the idea that this is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of the kingdom of his father David. You've heard that before: you are the Son of David. Then it closes with "Hosanna in the highest heaven." What they're saying is, save us, because we know the King has come, and we appeal for him to save us. If they only knew how pregnant that phrase was, they would have said something better.

The Fig Tree and the Temple (Mark 11:12–19)

The Fig Tree

Then there is this curious little thing. When I read through this, it always looks like an interruption, an aside. It's like the travelogue version: "When we were outside, we saw a fig tree." I've heard mission reports where, instead of telling me about their work, someone says, "You see that lady in the yellow dress? Isn't that a pretty yellow dress?" Who cares? That's what this sounds like.

When they were leaving Bethany to go back into Jerusalem, Jesus is hungry. 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. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And the disciples heard him say it.

Here's my question: Why does he curse a fig tree that's not supposed to have fruit on it? Is he just irritated? Is he hangry? If he knows it's not the season, why does he look for fruit, and why does he curse it? If you want apples off an apple tree, you go when the apples are ripe, not when they're buds, and you don't get irritated because they're not there. But Jesus seems to. Well, you are in luck. This is your Jeopardy answer, if you will. Notice what happens right after this.

The Temple

He goes to the Temple Mount. We're going to talk about the temple over the next several lessons. He enters through the Kidron Valley, comes up, and the entrances to the temple are there, with the courtyards all the way around, and the holy place and the most holy place. The courtyards are where most people come: the court of the women, the court of the Gentiles. That's the general place.

It's Passover time. You come from out of town and you don't have a sacrifice, so you have to buy one, and the only place to buy one is in the temple courts. And they're jacking up the price. After all, you can get a lamb pretty cheap any other time of year, but not during Passover. I am cursed, I've got to tell you. My wife's birthday is May the 12th. My anniversary is May the 15th. I send her flowers every year on her anniversary, and the price is double because of Mother's Day. I'm tempted to send them in October. It wouldn't be the same thing, but see, they jacked the prices up.

Josephus reported that at the Passover of A.D. 65 there were over a quarter of a million lambs sold in Jerusalem. You can't verify that necessarily, but if you took ten people per lamb, that would mean about 2.7 million people in Jerusalem at this time. So you've got all this hubbub going on. It is business as usual. It is supermarket time. It is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving at the supermarket.

Jesus enters the temple, sees all of this, overturns the tables, and throws them all out. He won't even let people carry what they bought back through the temple courts. And he

says, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." First of all, God had an intent, and it's not just for the Jews. It's for all the nations. This would have caused a little turmoil as well, because what God expects in the temple is righteousness. Think about Isaiah chapter six. Isaiah is in the temple, and he says, "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up." You couldn't have gotten that vision that day. Too much noise, too much merchandise. Jesus says that's not what God expects, and he drives all that out of the temple.

Jesus Is Never Out of Control

Understand something: Jesus is never out of control. We have always read this passage and inserted the idea that he was mad, he was angry. What happens when you get angry? Are you in your right mind? No. Emotions take over. I was coming up to the building on Thursday, driving up Campbell and passing Custer, and there's a construction zone, so I'm being careful. All of a sudden I see in the oncoming lane two cars stopped in the middle of the road with their doors open, and two people out there just beating the fire out of another guy in the middle of the road. If you had asked any of them, "Are you in control of yourself?" they would probably have said no. They're responding to something else. I had never seen anything like that, and I don't want to see it again. But that's what happens when you get angry. You lose control. Jesus is never out of control. There's a bigger point to be made, and that's how everything starts to fit together.

What It All Means: God Expected Fruit (Mark 11:20–21)

He comes back the next morning out of Bethany, and Peter says, "Look, there's that fig tree, and it's withered at the root." Now, what does all that mean? First, we met a fig tree without fruit. Second, the temple was being emptied. Third, we found a withered fig tree. How does that fit together? You can read them as three individual stories, but I think there's more than that.

If you go back to Jeremiah, and there are other prophets who say the same thing, in Jeremiah chapter 8 and verse 13 he says, "I will take away their harvest," declares the Lord. "There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them." There's something going on there. God expected fruit from these people, but he found none.

The fruit he's looking for is not the fruit they were trying to give him. Judaism at the time of Jesus wanted to look righteous. It had all the trappings of being righteous. You washed your hands right. You had fastidious observance of the Sabbath day. You knew what to do and what not to do, and as long as you complied with the externals, as long as the ritual was done, that was all God cared about. They said, "I have obeyed God because I have given ten percent of everything I've got, and I have kept the Sabbath worship, and I have not washed my hands the wrong way. I've done what God wants me to do." And

yet, from time immemorial, the ritual mattered little if the heart was not right. You could perform well but not be good. You can have perfect church attendance and not be good.

So God is going to take away what he has given them, the privileged status of God's chosen people, and now the temple will be open to the nations. God is going to change some things, and it's going to be a magnificent change. But the Jews will never again have that exalted status. It will not be because you are a Jew that you are saved. It is because you believe in Jesus Christ and obey him. That temple can be destroyed, and it would be in A.D. 70, and that didn't change anything about God's plan. If you wanted to be a child of God, you had to come through the gate of Jesus.

That creates dangerous times. They know they can't tolerate this anymore. He is now upending their worship service. He is upending their merchandise store. You know how you really hurt people? Don't worry about their religion. Take away their money. There's how you hurt people. It's kind of like one time when I preached. I made a point in my preaching to preach about giving twice a year, but no more. I had a man who was my wife's assistant principal, and he came to me and said, "I'm mad at you." I said, "What are you mad about?" He said, "All I ever hear out of you is about giving." I said, "That's because you only come twice a year." I took out a long list of sermons and said, "There's one, and there's one, and none of these others are." But if you really want to irritate people, talk about their money. Jesus had done that, and now the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to look for a way to kill him. They still needed the right moment, the right time. Things were changing.

Dangerous Times (Mark 11:22–26)

How do you deal with dangerous times? In the next seventy-two hours Jesus is going to be arrested, scourged, and killed, and the disciples become targets. They will scatter. When the kingdom comes in Acts chapter two, there will be danger. They will be put in prisons. They will be beaten. Some will be executed. What does he say in general? First of all, have faith in God, because if you ask anything in his name and believe it, God can take a mountain and cast it into the sea. And don't forget while you're praying that others need your forgiveness as much as you need his.

So in dangerous times, three things have to happen.

- Trust in God's power. A lot of times we don't know if God knows what he's doing. He does. We don't understand it, but his power is great. His power can do anything. Have faith in God.
- Pray expecting something to happen. I like the statements in the early parts of Acts. Peter and John are put into prison, and the people pray, and they're let out of prison in the middle of the night. I especially like the story of Peter in Acts chapter 12. They were in the house of, probably, Mark's mother, praying because

Peter was going to be executed the next morning. They pray and pray and pray, and the angel comes and lets him out of the jail, and he shows up at the house where they're praying and knocks on the door. The servant girl who has been in that prayer session opens the door and says, "It's a ghost." Now that's expectant prayer, isn't it? Oh, it can't be him. He's supposed to be dead. Pray expectantly, and something may happen. After all, you can take a mountain and throw it into the sea.

- Forgive when you pray. That's the whole crux of what Christianity is about. God gives forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and we need to give at least as much as we have received. You'll never get what you will not give.

Answering the Three Questions

So Bartimaeus answers the question, "Who is Jesus?" He's the Son of David. The fig tree answers the question, "What kind of Messiah?" He's the one who is going to take the old and wipe it away and start over again. "Have faith in God" answers the question, "What does he expect of his followers?" To move forward with God's help and strength.

There are two things in here: a beggar who knew what he wanted and followed, and a tree that looked good but had nothing to show for it. Everybody is like that in one way or another. There are two kinds of people in this world. There are people who use their sight to follow Jesus. I see what God wants me to do, and I'm going to do what he has asked me to do. And then there are some who are 20/20 but still blind. That's the Pharisees. They've got all the prophecies. They've got all the right answers. They just don't want to see it. A lot of people don't want to see it, and that's the tragedy of all things.

So if Jesus asks you, "What do you want me to do for you?" what's your answer?

Remember, if you want a one-page summary, there it is. Shoot it, ignore it, do whatever. But it's all there, and I'll see you again next week as we continue the journey.

Notes on This Transcript

Corrections made from context:

- "Bride-soaked clothes" corrected to "brine-soaked" (matches the slides).
- "Hosea, blessed is he who comes" corrected to "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes" (Mark 11:9; the text echoes Psalm 118:25–26).
- "Cult" corrected to "colt"; "Zechariah nine nine" given as Zechariah 9:9; "Bartimaus" standardized to "Bartimaeus."
- False starts and repeated words were tidied without changing the meaning. Class members' comments were removed; Robert's replies were restated so they stand

alone (the questions on "memories" and "peace of mind," on touching in healings, and on the age of the colt).

Facts worth a quick check:

- Solomon's ride (1 Kings 1:33). The class said "David's donkey" and the slides say "mule." The text says David's mule, so the transcript says mule; Zechariah 9:9 speaks of a donkey and colt.
- Josephus and the Passover lambs. The class said "65 A.D."; the slides say 255,600 lambs in A.D. 65 and about 2.7 million celebrants. Josephus (Jewish War 6.9.3) gives that figure for a census under Cestius Gallus, which the slides place in A.D. 65. Worth confirming the date before quoting.
- Oxen "devoted to God" and not used for labor: the Old Testament idea of animals never yoked (Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3; 1 Samuel 6:7). Confirm the reference if you cite it.
- Acts 12:12 names the house as that of Mary, the mother of John Mark, so "probably Mark's mother's house" is sound.
- Peter and John in prison and released at night: Acts 5:17–20 (the angel release) and Acts 12 for Peter alone.
- The "first time" "Son of David" appears in Mark is at 10:47–48; the term appears again in Mark 11:10 ("kingdom of our father David") and 12:35.