

Jason Upchurch - Mark 11-16 - An Overview of Passion Week

This morning we are beginning the third and final section of Mark's gospel. And I want to give you a little bit of an overview of where we're headed in this third and final section of the gospel because I think it will help us navigate the section a little better. And help us to keep perspective as we move through the final week of our Lord's life.

I think many times as we read the gospels we see Jesus going from one town to another town doing miracles and teachings and it all begins to kind of run together. But the gospel writers are very intentional in how they present the life of the Lord. We are entering into something of a crescendo in Jesus's life that actually culminates in his glorious death and resurrection.

So it may feel a little more like a Bible study this morning than a sermon, per se. But bear with me because I really do think this will help us.

Mark's gospel, as I mentioned some time ago, is broken into 3 main sections.

The first section of Mark's gospel is from **Mark 1-8:21**. That's Jesus's baptism and his ministry in Galilee in the north. In those 8 chapters Mark touches on the highlights of Jesus's 3 year ministry both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. This is where Jesus's fame is growing, his disciples are continually amazed.

The second section is from **Mark 8:22-10:52** and that is where Jesus has wrapped up his ministry in Galilee and begins his winding route to Jerusalem. In this 2.5 chapters the disciples are not more and more amazed, they are more and more confused about Jesus and his ministry. It seems like the more he tells them, the more confused they are.

This section opens with a blind man being healed and closes with a blind man being healed. And it seems as though what Mark is telling us here is that only Jesus has the power to open the eyes of the physically blind. And only Jesus has the power to open the eyes of the spiritually blind. This middle section probably encompasses a couple of months of ministry.

This last section, from **Mark-11-16**, covers just one week. These 6 chapters cover the very last week of Jesus's life. So in the beginning of the gospel we had 8 chapters for 3 years, now we have 6 chapters for one week.

It's like climbing a mountain, the closer you get to the top, the steeper it is, the slower you go. That's where we're at with the gospel: The further into the gospel we get, the slower Mark goes recording for us the most significant aspect of Jesus: his final teachings, his suffering, his death on the cross and of course his glorious resurrection.

1. Now, in this final section I want to note 2 huge themes in this section that we need to keep in the back of our mind. First, remember this final week of Jesus's life is Passover. Jerusalem would have been absolutely packed with visitors from outside of the city. Passover was one of the 3 great feasts the Jews were commanded to attend each year. And so people would be flocking to the city en masse. **Turn to Exo. 12:1-14.**

This is where the Lord commands Israel to prepare themselves to leave Egypt. And while they are commanded to leave Egypt they are also commanded to remember this very night forever. **Read**

So a few things to note. First, this feast is really Israel's identity. This is what constituted Israel as a nation because through this event they were brought out of Egypt.

Second, it was a week-long feast. It's not just a day - but the whole week. This is part of the reason that Mark gives us a spread of the whole week because the whole week is the feast. It's not by accident that Jesus comes into Jerusalem the day after the Sabbath.

Third, there was no work to be done. People wouldn't have been out in the fields - they would be in the city when Jesus arrived. The city would be packed all week long as families gathered with family and friends to celebrate.

So when we go back to **Mark** we realize that Jerusalem is packed with people who are celebrating this week-long feast of Passover. It was also called the feast of unleavened bread. The Israelites were to eat no leaven at all and actually rid the leaven from their house. Why? Leaven represented sin. And so it was to be a time of repentance and asking of forgiveness. Of soft hearts.

Side, along with all the people, the city and the surrounding area would be filled with additional animals. It's been said that somewhere in the neighborhood of 250,000 sheep were sacrificed on Passover. The sheep had to be brought into the city, into the Temple, through the streets and sacrificed all in just several hours. Blood would be running into the Kidron valley just outside the Temple, the sound of animals everywhere, smoke and fire from burning the leftovers and eating the meat. If you've ever seen a 3rd world market with live animals imagine that probably 100 times over. The city would be filled with constant commotion and noise anyway.

This feast, of course, always looked forward to Jesus. That act of passing over, in reality, looked forward to Jesus. In **1 Cor. 5:7** Paul says that Jesus is our Passover Lamb. It is through Jesus's death - his blood - that God passes over us and we are spared from the wrath of God. Jesus died to cover us from God's wrath.

So Jesus is entering into Jerusalem on this final week of his life. The city is packed with people and animals and everyone thinks they are celebrating what God did in Egypt but in reality what God did in Egypt was just a shadow of the real Passover, Jesus Christ. So keep in mind that Passover is happening.

2. The other thing to keep in mind is that there is a central theme in these chapters that Jesus is King. From the very beginning of his entrance into Jerusalem to his crucifixion Jesus is portrayed as King. He rides into Jerusalem to the praise and adoration of the crowd. That was traditionally how a king would enter into the city for his coronation. This isn't just some weird gesture, some one off thing. This is how the kings in the OT were coronated. And Jesus himself sets up this very gesture telling his disciples to go ahead and get a colt so he can ride into Jerusalem.

He's not a reluctant participant in this ceremony. He knows full well what this is about and he orchestrates it because he is the rightful King of the Jews.

And if you recall throughout the gospel so far, Messianic fervor is full swing. There have been several times where Jesus had to leave a town or a crowd because the crowd wanted to forcibly make him King. They know who he is. And especially those who are from Galilee know who he is. Not so much the folks who live in Jerusalem - they don't believe so much. But the Galileans do and the people he's met along the way.

So as Jesus is coming into Jerusalem he's coming in as Israel's king. The King they've all been waiting for.

Last time we saw Bartimaeus cry out "Son of David have mercy on me!" Son of David is alluding to the fact that Jesus is King. And the crowd walking along with Jesus knows it.

Now, I want to walk you through these last few chapters just to get feel for what will happen. And I want to give you a little bit of a timeline but know that a precise timeline is very difficult to give.

The biggest reason it's difficult to give is that how we understand days is different than the Jews understood days. We reckon days midnight to midnight. But Jews reckoned days sundown to sundown.

Furthermore, Jews from Jerusalem often understood the Passover timeline different than Jews outside of Jerusalem. So some Jews celebrated Passover on Thursday, others on Friday. And the gospel authors seem not to always be concerned about which system they're using. And sometimes they reference the day of the week and sometimes they reference how many days until Passover - but we don't know which reckoning.

Why does this matter? Well, in some academic circles there's a debate about whether Jesus was crucified on Thursday or whether he was crucified on Friday. I won't get into all of that except to say I hold to the traditional view that he was crucified on Friday.

In our culture we have the luxury of precision. When we say we're going to be somewhere at 3pm we mean 3pm and we can look at our phone that's synced to the atomic clock and realize that when we say 3pm we really mean 3:06 because we're running late.

Ancient people didn't do that. There were no clocks, there was sundown as best you could reckon, to sundown as best you could reckon. There were 4 watches in the night as best you could reckon with no clock and no sundial in the middle of the night.

So all that to say I'm going to give you a timeline, don't lose sleep if you end up coming up with some different math than I do.

Sunday: 11:1-11 - Triumphal Entry / Enters Temple / Goes to Bethany

We often call this day Palm Sunday. This is precisely one week before Jesus is raised from the dead. Jesus has come up from Jericho and is on the hill east of the Jerusalem and he's overlooking Jerusalem. There is a valley between he and the city and he rides into the city as Israel's rightful king. He goes into the temple and looks around. He's evaluating what is happening with his holy Temple. Remember it is Jesus in his divine glory that once sat in the Holy of Holies on the Ark of the Covenant.

This is his city, this is his Temple. He is the divine King but robed in human flesh. And he is watching as his home, his city, his temple, and his people are absolutely corrupted. And they are corrupted by the religious leaders. And they are corrupted on one of the most holy days of the year.

So he's left Jericho, he comes into the city late. There's commotion in the city. The people with Jesus are excited about him, the people from Jerusalem are confused. They don't understand this huge commotion outside of the city. Then Jesus eaves back across the valley that evening. That's Sunday.

Monday: 11:12-19 - Curse Fig Tree / Cleanse Temple / Return to Bethany

Monday is an exciting day. Jesus spent the night in Bethany with his disciples and they're heading back into Jerusalem. On the way in he curses a fig tree because it produced no fruit.

Once in Jerusalem he cleanses the Temple. What does that mean? It means he spends the day driving out the entire scam operation of the high priests and money changers from the several acre complex. They had turned this beautiful feast commemorating the deliverance of God into a massive money laundering operation in the heart of Jerusalem. They were exchanging foreign money for temple money at a huge profit, then they would sell Temple-approved sheep for sacrifice at another massive profit.

If you've ever been to a theme park or football game and paid \$15 for a hotdog or \$50 for a cheap t-shirt, imagine that the religious leaders were doing that to their people by the tens of thousands. They were bilking God's people for an amazing amount of money in the name of worship. And the people had to do this.

You had to buy an approved sheep to sacrifice. But in order to buy it you had to exchange your money. So they'd get dinged on the exchange and then they'd get dinged on the purchase of the Sheep. It was a total scamming of the people and Jesus was having none of it.

So he cleared the place out. Monday s a long day and then he heads back out.

Tuesday: 11:20-13:37 (Long Day) - This is the longest recorded day. Jesus comes back to Jerusalem. Along the way he passes the same fig tree and that fig tree isn't just dead. It is dried up to the roots.

Imagine a lush green tree one day, then the next a tree that looks like something we'd see in early February. Brown shriveled leaves ready to be burned. What's that about?

It's a living parable that Jesus is cursing unbelieving Israel. These Jewish leaders and the whole Temple system is so corrupt it is unrecoverable and God himself will curse it and destroy it.

They walk past that tree back into Jerusalem, back into the Temple. And you can imagine what the religious leaders were thinking: This is going to be round 2 with this Jesus guy. So they confront him. And Jesus confronts them. And what follows is the showdown which is why his authority is challenged. **Read 11:27-33**

There's the parable of the tenants - showing how God is going to seize the Kingdom from Israel and give it to others. Then there's the back and forth about paying taxes, the resurrection, and the great commandment. They're trying to trap Jesus.

See, the crowd is on Jesus's side. They love Jesus at this point because the religious leaders are taking advantage of the people and the people know it and Jesus is finally sticking up for them.

And they want to trap Jesus into saying something that would turn the tide. They can't siege Jesus when the crowd loves him because the crowd would turn on them.

Then in a brilliant turn of events, Jesus traps the leaders. **Read 12:34-37**

Jesus asks them why David calls the Christ Lord. David is the great king, but his son is even greater. In ancient thinking, the younger generations were always inferior but here's David calling Christ Lord in **Psalms 110**.

And the implication is that Jesus is greater than David. And they know it. And they can't answer it. Jesus is the greater king standing right in front of them.

It's still Tuesday when Jesus heads back out of the city and back toward Bethany. Bethany was only a mile east of the city. So they leave the city, walk through the Kidron Valley and up the mount of olives and sit down.

Now Jerusalem would have been a sight to see at night during the feast. Completely lit up, still bustling with people. It'd be like Times Square on New Years Eve. And the disciples, who are backwoods Galilean men sit and are amazed. They don't get to see this very often. **Read 13:1-2**

This city is going down. God himself will judge it and overturn it. And this is what we call the Olivet Discourse. Olivet because it's the Mount of Olives, discourse because it's a teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem.

And Jesus details in vivid imagery the destruction. Now, I'm just going to stop and tell you we're going to spend some time here because the average American Christian is so influenced by Left Behind and dispensational theology they've created the craziest understanding of this passage.

We'll cross that bridge when we get there. But that's Tuesday. Tuesday was a very long day and ends with Jesus prophesying Jerusalem's destruction in just a matter of a generation - 40 years.

Wednesday - 14:1-11: **Read 14:1-2**

Now this is where the timeline gets a little tricky. Mark isn't too concerned with giving us a precise layout. And this is where the different gospels help us understand.

The best I can tell we don't really have much recorded for Wednesday. It seems as though Wednesday Jesus doesn't go back to the Temple. He stays in Bethany. But he probably also made arrangements for the Upper Room and the Last Supper on Wednesday. He may have even gone into Jerusalem quietly and arranged the room and the setup, but we're not sure.

At the same time Judas goes and tells the religious leaders that he'll sell Jesus out. Now, we know a little about their deal, but we don't know everything. It seems like from the moment Judas made a deal with the chief priests he was trying to figure out a way to surrender Jesus. **Read 14:10-11**

Something to keep in mind is that Judas didn't plan the garden of Gethsemane thing. From the moment he made the deal, Judas was just an opportunist. He was desperately trying to figure out some way to hand Jesus over. Jesus was in an out of Jerusalem among several hundred thousand people. It was a zoo. There were a few times he could trap him, but not many.

And Jesus knows what's up. Which leads us to Thursday.

Thursday - 14:12-72 - It takes up the rest of chapter 14.

It's this Thursday that Jesus will institute the Lord's Supper. He will transform the Passover into a meal that rightly focuses on him. In John's gospel this is where the Upper Room discourse takes place - **John 13-17**. So we know there is a lot of teaching that occurred here.

This is where Jesus tells the disciples that there is a betrayer. And Judas goes out to tell the soldiers where Jesus is at.

And they come for him. They come late at night while Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. That night they'll arrest Jesus, they'll go through a mockery of a trial where they have absolutely nothing legitimate to charge him with.

It will be Jesus who confesses that he is the Christ and the religious leaders will use that as an admission of treason. Treason was one of the few things that would get someone sentenced to death in Rome. If Jesus - by his own admission - was claiming to be the Christ, then he was claiming to be the King of Israel. He was supplanting Caesar and worthy of death!

But they can't kill Jesus. Only Rome can do that and the one person who could order his death - Pontius Pilate is asleep. So they have to wait until early morning.

Friday - 15:1-47 - **Read 1-5**

You remember how I said the theme of Jesus being king runs through this whole section? That's what's happening right here. Jesus is on trial for treason. The Jews have told Pilate that Jesus wants to be king. Pilate takes that seriously because Rome doesn't tolerate insurrection, they brutally kill insurrectionists.

But Jesus is unusual because he doesn't fit the type. Pilate doesn't even seem to have heard of Jesus. Jesus doesn't act crazy or say anything. The Jews themselves have no proof of what Jesus has done. And so Pilate is put into this weird situation of having to interrogate Jesus - who isn't answering - and at the same time defending Jesus to the Jews.

Now, Pilate tries to pacify the Jews. He has Jesus whipped and beaten and mocked as a king to see if that will make the Jews satisfied. **Read 15:15-20**

So Pilate is hoping to satisfy the Jews and let Jesus go with just a beating. But the Jews won't have any of it and are screaming all the louder for Jesus's death.

Pilate's stuck here. He's already on bad terms with Caesar because of mishandling 2 other uprisings. He's about to have a third uprising when Jerusalem is packed with people. If they get out of control Pilate would be done - maybe even murdered.

So he has Jesus crucified. Better to kill Jesus than be killed himself.

In Roman times when someone was crucified their crime was written on a piece of wood and placed above their head as they hung on the cross. What was the crime Jesus committed? **Read 25-32**

He's just outside of the city wall. And here hangs the King of the Jews. He likely could have seen the Temple as died as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. **Read 33-39**

His death confirms he is the Son of God.

He died quickly. And is buried that afternoon before dark. They have to bury him before dark because at dark begins the Passover. It turns out there's a brand new tomb just a hundred feet away from the crosses and they bury Jesus there.

Saturday - We have nothing in Mark's gospel. Matthew records the chief priests and that Pharisees actually broke the Sababth and went to Pilate to ask for a guard to be posted at Jesus's tomb so that his body wouldn't be stolen.

Sunday - 16:1-8

Which of course leads to the glorious resurrection. **Read 16:1-8**

What ended on Friday in utter defeat is now unbelievable hope. The Lord is not in the tomb. He's not dead. He's alive! His last miraculous act is the greatest act - his own resurrection from the dead.

And the last response is exactly what we'd expect: feat and awe. **Read 8**

Trembling and astonishment. Jesus is alive! Go tell others.

Pray