

“Until I Put Your Enemies Under Your Feet”

The Thirty-Seventh in a Series on the Gospel of Mark

Texts: Mark 12:35-44; Psalm 110:1-7

After entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus spent much of the next two days in the temple area, engaged in what amounted to a verbal sparring match with various members of the Sanhedrin. But this was not just debate for debate's sake. The Sanhedrin's hostility toward Jesus is the critical sign that Israel will reject Jesus as Messiah. The Sanhedrin's opposition to Jesus stems from two factors. The first is that the people who packed the city to celebrate the annual Passover, regarded Jesus as a potential Messiah and Davidic king. Not only did the crowds welcome Jesus and the disciples into Jerusalem to the chants of “Hosanna,” but whenever Jesus debated with members of the Sanhedrin in the temple area, the people were amazed and enthralled by his teaching. Simply put, the Sanhedrin hated Jesus' popularity, which undercut their own authority and prestige. The second factor was that when Jesus entered the temple courtyard and saw merchants selling their wares, Jesus drove them out in righteous anger. This act enraged the Sanhedrin, which tacitly endorsed the merchants selling their goods to pilgrims who visited the city. But given all that had happened early in the week, Jesus' fate was already sealed. Although the members of the Sanhedrin would stop attempting to publicly confront Jesus in the temple, behind the scenes they were already plotting to have Jesus arrested and killed.

We continue our series on the Gospel of Mark. We are in that section of Mark's Gospel which describes the events which unfold in the opening days of Passion Week after Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, yet before he is arrested on Thursday. Mark recounts a number of amazing events which transpired during these four amazing days. First, Jesus entered the city in a grand messianic processional on Sunday. The people cheered when he did so, seeing his entrance into the city as both the climax of his three-year messianic mission and the sign that a final showdown between Jesus and the Sanhedrin would soon get underway. Sure enough, that showdown began as soon as Jesus entered the city. There was no way that the Sanhedrin would ever accept Jesus as Israel's Messiah.

Then, after entering the city, Jesus then went to the temple in fulfillment of biblical prophecy, only to find the outer courtyard filled with merchants who had turned the temple from a house of prayer into a den of thieves. Jesus forcibly drove these merchants out, setting in motion the plot that would lead to Jesus' death. Mark also recounts how Jesus cursed a fig tree in what amounted to an eerie foreshadowing of what lay ahead for Israel, Jerusalem, and for the temple. When Jesus cursed the tree (the fig tree being a symbol of Israel throughout the Old Testament), Jesus was, in effect, acting out a visual parable which graphically predicted what was soon to come. Israel was about to be left desolate because of her rejection of the Messiah. There was certainly the appearance of righteousness (zeal for the law, the magnificent temple, etc), but the reality was there was no true righteousness.

As Jesus came and went from the temple area, he was repeatedly confronted by members of the various factions within Judaism who made up the membership of the Sanhedrin, (the Jewish religious ruling body headquartered in Jerusalem). Mark has told us that the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law initially confronted Jesus with a question about by what authority he cast the merchants from the temple. Next, the Pharisees and Herodians confronted Jesus with a trick question about paying tribute to Caesar, while the Sadducees asked Jesus another deceptive question about the nature of the resurrection. In every instance, Mark recounts how Jesus exposed the deceitful efforts to trap him for what they were.

The crowds who were watching all this saw through this phoniness as well. In every one of these encounters, Jesus managed to confound these men with their own words. Mark's point in listing these groups and describing these various encounters is to make it clear to his reader/listener that Jesus is being rejected by the entire religious leadership of Israel, not just a faction or two with Judaism. That the Sanhedrin would repeatedly taunt their own Messiah and were already plotting to kill him, reveals the depths of Israel's unbelief. This also foreshadows the tragedy about to befall the nation.

In addition to the verbal confrontation between Jesus and members of the Sanhedrin, Jesus also told the Parable of the Tenants, which was a retelling of the "Song of the Vineyard" from Isaiah 5. In this parable Jesus speaks of Israel as the vineyard, YHWH as the land-owner, the prophets as those men whom the landowner sent to collect the rent due him in exchange for the use of the land. But Jesus also included a group of evil tenant farmers in his parable, men who use the land, but who don't pay rent (offer repentance), and who abuse the landowner's messengers, before finally killing his beloved son. Thus Jesus retells the history of Israel (including the rejection of the prophets). Jesus goes on to speak of what is about to happen to Israel should he (the beloved son) be put to death. The landowner (YHWH) will come with his men, kill the evil tenants, and then give the land to others. The giving away of the land refers to the Roman armies who will destroy the city and the temple, and then disperse the Jews into the four corners of the earth. Jesus is also referring to the fact that God will give the inheritance to others, namely those Jews and Gentiles who are part of a new Israel, which is Christ's church.

As so as we proceed to our text then, the die has been cast. The Sanhedrin will no longer attempt to engage Jesus in public. Not only did he turn their words against them and expose their hypocrisy, but every time he did so, we read that the people were amazed. No, the Sanherdin will begin plotting in earnest to have Jesus arrested and then put to death.

Meanwhile, Jesus was going about the business of preparing his disciples for what was soon to come. In the last part of Mark 12, Jesus begins to speak openly of his Davidic kingship, which is the clearest indication yet that he has come to Jerusalem as the Messiah who was promised to Israel throughout the Old Testament.

From Mark's account in chapters 11 and 12, we learn that Jesus went in and out of the temple at various times, and that he stayed for the evening in Bethany, a small village several miles outside Jerusalem. At some point—probably shortly after the Sanhedrin ceased trying to trip him up before the people—Jesus began to teach in the temple area. While the Sanhedrin stopped confronting Jesus directly, no doubt, they were listening to his every word, either in person, or through witnesses who would report back as to what Jesus was saying (cf. Luke 20:20). The Sanhedrin would not like what they hear when Jesus quotes messianic prophecies from the Old Testament and then applies a number of them to himself.

The context for Jesus' teaching in the temple is the wide-spread messianic expectation hanging thick throughout the city. Furthermore, recall that Jesus had just told one of the scribes that he (the scribe) was close to the kingdom of God. The reason for this was that when this particular scribe overheard Jesus' debating with the Sadducees and was thoroughly impressed by Jesus' answer, he then asked Jesus a question about which of the 613 commandments recognized by the Jews was the greatest. When Jesus told him that the greatest commandment is that God is one (citing the *Shema*, from Deuteronomy 6:4), that we are to love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5), and that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (from Leviticus 19:18), the scribe correctly deduced that these things were far more important than offering sacrifices.

If this scribe had figured out that the reason why sacrifices were offered to God was because God was gracious to his people, and because God had graciously revealed himself to Israel, whatever then, the scribe did was a response to God in the form of love for God and neighbor. He understood that sacrifices were not offered as a means through which God would be pleased with us as though we earned his favor by doing these things. Rather, sacrifices were offered because God reveals himself to us as the true and living God, who loves us and who calls us to be his people. The offering of sacrifices are a response to God's love and his commandments. The offering of sacrifices is not the basis of God's love for us.

Therefore, Jesus could speak of the scribe as being near to the kingdom of God for several reasons. The first is that in the very person of Jesus of Nazareth, the kingdom of God draws near. Jesus bestows that kingdom upon those whom he wishes. The other is that from this man's question and reply to Jesus' answer, it appears as though he is in the process of coming to faith. That he is coming to faith is a sure sign that the kingdom is at hand. Couple this discussion with all of the messianic expectation hanging so thickly in the air, the stage is set for Jesus to openly declare that his is the long anticipated Messiah who has entered his royal city to claim his royal throne and bring salvation to Israel. Soon, Jesus will make it clear that this salvation involves far more than anyone could have possibly anticipated.

In verse 35, Mark tells us that "*while Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, 'How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David?'*" Since Jesus accepted the messianic praises of the people who thought that the messianic kingdom was at hand, Jesus must explain the relationship of his own kingdom to his Davidic ancestry and the teaching of David regarding the coming Messiah. When Jesus entered Jerusalem to the messianic chants of "Hosanna" and "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," what exactly did that mean? The people rightly sensed that the appearance of the Messiah in Jerusalem and at the temple was directly tied to the deliverance of God's people, Israel.¹ The problem was that the people of Israel saw this primarily in terms of a military victory over Rome, or as some type of miraculous deliverance of the nation from Roman occupation. What the people could not see is that while Jesus came as Israel's Messiah, he came to deliver them from their sin, not from Rome. Their expectations were not too high, but were instead far too low.

The theme of a Davidic king arriving to deliver Israel from her enemies is prominent throughout the Old Testament. In 2 Samuel 7:11-16, Nathan prophesied about David, "*'The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'*" The same thing is discussed in Isaiah 9:2-7; 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5 ff. and a host of other passages throughout Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea and Amos.² The scribes of Jesus' days interpreted these passages to mean that Israel's Messiah would be a biological descendant of David and a great king who return Israel to its greatness. He would be the "son of David,"

¹ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 435.

² Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 435.

a phrase which came to be used throughout Israel in anticipation of his arrival.³

Therefore, when Jesus shows up in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and intentionally invokes messianic images as he enters the city, the people of Jerusalem and the pilgrims who packed into the city were hoping that these prophecies about a Davidic king were being fulfilled when Jesus entered the city. They were right. But this raised a huge question which must be answered, especially in light of the conflict between Jesus and the Sanhedrin. “What had the scribes been teaching about the Messiah’s Davidic lineage?” How should the people understand this. This is what Jesus is getting at in verse 35. “What do the scribes mean when they teach that the Messiah is the Son of David?”⁴ Jesus will now give those listening to him in the temple a lesson on the Old Testament’s teaching about the Messiah and his relationship to David. How can the Messiah be both David’s son and at the same time his Lord?

In verse 36, Jesus answers this question by referring to David’s prophetic words, which were uttered under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “*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.’*” The Messiah was thought to be a biological ancestor of David, and yet David bears witness to the Messiah’s exalted majesty and character. David clearly believed that the coming Messiah would possess a far greater dignity than his own. In fact, he would be David’s own Lord. Thus the critical question is how can the Messiah be both a descendent of David (as the scribes were correctly teaching), and yet according to David himself, possess a dignity much greater than that of David?

In verse 37, Jesus answers this by stating, “*David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?*” To explain how this is the case, Jesus quotes from Psalm 110:1 (our Old Testament lesson). The question gets right at the heart of the issue. How can the Messiah fulfill these prophecies—which require a majesty far greater than David himself possessed, and yet still be David’s son (i.e., David’s biological descendent)? Clearly, David was looking ahead to a Messiah who would be both his son and his “Lord.” Those listening to Jesus had no idea how this could be true. It made no sense to them given the information they had. The genealogical aspects of this were simple—the Messiah would be a biological descendent of David, i.e. his son. Could Jesus trace his genealogy to David? Yes he could (Matthew 1:6; Luke 3:31). The hard thing to grasp was how could a descendent of David, be David’s own Lord?

By asking this provocative question, Jesus is letting the people know that he is that Lord about whom and to David had been speaking! And if he is David’s Lord, then his messianic mission cannot be limited to simply restoring the nation of Israel to its former greatness. Jesus’ kingdom is therefore not of this world. It is not a kingdom which has come to ensure the defeat of Rome, or even to liberate the Jewish people from their oppressors. The throne from which Jesus rules is not therefore in Jerusalem, but at the right-hand of the father. Thus the messianic prophecies spoke not of a mere extension of national Israel’s greatness (in a political, military, or economic sense), but of a different kind of kingdom and rule altogether.⁵ The Jews of Jesus’ day would not have made that connection, but upon hearing this words, Mark says, “*the large crowd listened to him with delight.*” No one had ever talked like this before, or possessed such a remarkable ability to interpret the Old Testament.

³ Cranfield, The Gospel According to Mark, 383.

⁴ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 436.

⁵ Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 438.

The irony is that David's Lord and descendant is standing in the very same temple which, ultimately, was designed and built to point Israel to him. Yet, he is still not recognized by the people of Israel. Although, the people were amazed at his words, they could not in any sense fully understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus knew that he was about to suffer and die for the sins of his people. Jesus would do that which would liberate his people from something far worse than Roman oppression and tyranny—namely, the guilt and power of sin which holds all men and women under its sway. Jesus will usher in a kingdom which would do far more than enable the Israelites to stunningly defeat Rome. Jesus' kingdom would bring all its enemies into submission, the primary enemy being death itself.

When Jesus suffers and dies upon the cross, and then is raised from the dead, the meaning of both David's words in Psalm 110, Nathan's prophecy in 2 Samuel 7, as well as in all of the other passages we mentioned, will become clear. Jesus is David's descendant according to the flesh, but is also David's Lord according to his divine nature. As Paul puts it in Romans 1:3-4, "*regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*" No one in the temple that day could fully grasp the meaning of these words, this side of the cross and the resurrection. But one thing was sure, the scribes had no answer as to how the Messiah could be both David's son and his Lord. Jesus, however, had the answer, and the people were amazed by his words even though they could not fully grasp what Jesus words entailed, and how they would be fulfilled.

That the scribes could not explain the Scriptures they so ardently sought to defend, is yet another remarkable irony given us by Mark. This fact, provides the context for Jesus' warning about the scribes, and their complete misunderstanding of both the law and true righteousness.

It was during the time he was teaching in the temple, that Mark recounts these remarkable words in verses 38-40. "*As he taught, Jesus said, 'Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.'*" This is the irony of ironies. Those who claim to love the law the most, and who see themselves as its guardian and defender, do not have the slightest idea about how to interpret that law. Lacking faith, they do not understand that the law was intended to point Israel to the Messiah who has just arrived to save his people from their sins.

There are two main issues involved here. The first is that these men claim to be so zealous for God that they have devoted themselves entirely to studying his commandments and to ensuring that the people of Israel obey them. But Jesus informs us that what these men really are about is receiving the praise of others *because* of their apparent holiness. These men may strive to please God in some sense, but they so enjoy the perks of holiness that they walk around in their flowing robes, receiving the greetings of the people, taking the seats of honor, taking poor people's money, and then praying long prayers so that people think they are holy. But Jesus knows otherwise. The scribes love it when people sit at their feet when they pontificate about matters which they know not. These men are hypocrites of the first order.

The other issue is their mishandling of the law they claim to champion. According to these men, righteousness is to be found in external conformity to the commandment. If someone does not take their neighbor's property, then they have not stolen. If someone is faithful to their wife, they are not an adulterer. If someone rigorously follows the law, then they have put YHWH first. But what these men have missed is that external conformity to the law is not enough. If we covet our neighbor's property, we are as guilty as if we had stolen it. If we lust after our neighbor's spouse, we are guilty of adultery even

if we've never touched them. And even though we may manifest a zeal for God that makes others feel we are the holiest person they've ever met, God knows that in our hearts, we have sought other gods and have not even for a moment, put God's interests above ours.

In other words, the purpose of the law, was not to give the scribes a means to demonstrate how holy they were. The purpose of the law was to expose how sinful we truly are. But then, they missed that point. They have turned the law from a revelation of the will and character of God, into a means to show everyone how pious they are. Jesus not only warns the people about them, he also promises that the self-righteous will be in for a huge shock on the day of judgment. Their so-called piety will be exposed for what it is—hypocrisy. They will not stand in the judgment. In fact, they will be judged more harshly than others, since they of all people should have known better.

In light of their taking money from the poor to support their religious pretenses, Jesus finds the perfect object lesson for true piety, in contrast to the self-righteousness of the scribes. As we read in verses 41-44, *“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. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’”*

While the scribes make a point of being seen and being pious, Jesus sees a poor widow quietly giving alms. This was an area outside the temple (the court of women) indicating that Jesus was leaving the temple. This unnamed pauper gave all that she had—two small copper coins. As an indication that Mark's readers were Gentiles, he tells us how much the coins were worth—not much.⁶ The point isn't how much the coins were worth, but the devotion with which they were given. The widow came and went, probably unnoticed, yet truly demonstrated great piety and faith. She gave all that she had, and if anyone had been watching, they probably would have thought this was a paltry amount and that the woman was stingy. Yet, in fact, because the coins were given out of love and devotion, and because it was all that she had, in God's eyes, her gift was worth more than the pile of coins left by the wealthy.

Jesus' point is that what sinful men and women regard as piety, may not be regarded as such by God. The scribes could put on a show of piety which made the poor widow look like an absolute sinner, who could not give enough to please God. And yet she demonstrated true piety and faith without ever once calling attention to herself. In reality, her gift was greater than all the others. And the self-righteous who judge her for her paltry gift, will instead, find themselves condemned on the day of judgment. When the kingdom of God comes in power, God reverses everything sinful yet religious people think about what God expects. The disciples must understand that this great reversal was about to happen to them, and like this poor widow had done, soon they would be called to give everything.

There are several important points of application we need to make regarding this passage.

The first point of application is that Jesus openly declares himself to be both David's son and David's Lord. This is a remarkable claim. Jesus is not only a biological and legal ancestor of Israel's greatest king, and is therefore, truly David's son, but Jesus is also that Lord to whom David had been speaking. This means that Jesus is both son and Lord, both man and God. It also means that his kingdom

⁶ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 442.

is truly everlasting and completely transcends any kind of national/political kingdom such as the Jews were then expecting. Yes, the Jews were expecting a lot. But, sadly, they were not expecting enough. Jesus came bringing the promised messianic kingdom. The people were correct to cheer and sing messianic refrains to him as he entered Jerusalem. But the people's eyes were on earthly things, and their hopes were focused on temporal deliverance from Rome. Jesus came to deal with the root cause of their problems (human sin), but the people were focused on the symptoms (Roman oppression). This is why we must see Jesus as David's son and his Lord, and that he alone could utter these words and apply them to himself. Jesus is that one promised throughout the Old Testament. This is what the Jews do not see.

It is also important that we notice that Jesus came to direct Israel's gaze to a heavenly kingdom, a kingdom which frees us from sin's guilt and power and which gives us the victory over our greatest enemy, which is death. Even though the great patriarch Abraham was called to the promised land, nevertheless because he had faith, he was also looking for a heavenly city whose builder and maker was God. But the Jews of Jesus' days were so preoccupied with political and temporal matters, trust in what God had promised, sadly, turned into an insistence that God fix their problems, right now! Admittedly, before the cross and resurrection, this must have been hard to understand. But had people been listening to Jesus throughout his many encounters with the Sanhedrin, they would have heard Jesus direct them to a great future inheritance for God's people yet to come, an inheritance which included Gentiles. They also would have also heard the warning to Israel of an impending disaster. But few, it seems, were truly listening. Therefore, we must expect what he promised—an everlasting kingdom, concerned with peace, righteousness and the forgiveness of sins, and that we not expect that which he didn't promise, namely a Christian America, or health, wealth and prosperity.

This notion of an eternal kingdom explains why Jesus directed the disciples to an amazing contrast between the apparent righteousness of the scribes—who dressed and acted like holy men—and a poor widow, who probably would have gone unnoticed had Jesus not pointed her out. Jesus warned his disciples about the scribes because while they showed themselves to be pious, what they really wanted was the praise of the people. They were not nearly as zealous for God, as they were eager to hear the praises of men. But the widow quietly gave away all that she had because she loved God and trusted him to provide. No one noticed. And yet, no doubt, she was great in the kingdom.

Jesus raises this contrast not to encourage us to give away all that we have, but rather to make the point that true piety will often go unnoticed because it is unassuming and private. True piety is not a matter of mere external conformity to the law. Rather, true piety results from that faith which trusts God to provide everything we need for body and soul. And yet, this is all so counter-intuitive! It runs smack-dab up against the sinful notion that holiness is a matter of keeping rules and showing people how "holy" we are. But as Jesus insists, true righteousness is not a matter of an outward demonstration of righteousness (a religious show in the case of the scribes) but true piety is a matter of the heart, as in the case of the widow. Furthermore, the kind of righteousness God requires of us can never be earned, even if we gave away everything we had! The righteousness which God requires of us was found in the person instructing his disciples in the temple. It can be found nowhere else! Jesus' righteousness is perfect. His righteousness can withstand the holy gaze of God because he alone was obedient to God's commandments. His righteousness can indeed be seen in that he perfectly loved God and his neighbor. For he is both David's son and David's Lord. Scripture has foretold of him. And he will do something far greater than lead Israel to victory over Rome. He will put all his enemies under his feet, including our sin and its wage (death) when he is raised from the dead that first Easter. But this day in the temple, no one could yet see it. Soon enough, they will.