

## Palm Sunday 2026 Mark's Gospel

A Holy Week Cantata, the whole week, paraphrased from Mark's Gospel. It's a lot to cover, Enough material to give any preacher a solid, solid, couple hours to preach on. And if that doesn't make you want to wave your palms in rejoicing, I don't know what will!

Mark's Gospel is pretty fast paced, very event driven, using the word "immediately" more often than any other Gospel writer. But in the midst of one service it can leave us with a bit of whiplash as we go from a pivotal event like the triumphal entry, to cryptic teaching, to conflict with the pharisees, to a sermon illustration using a fig tree, to the passion and suffering, to a resurrection (God be praised), to the bold ending depicting how signs will accompany the apostolic age--fulfilled in Acts as Paul is bitten by a snake but doesn't die, or as tongues are given to show that Gentiles also receive the Holy Spirit.

It's a lot.

And what does it teach us about our Lord? When we speed through it like today, I actually think Jesus can come off a bit grumpy sounding! Is this the same man who took the children up in his arms and blessed them? Is this the same man who said the beautiful beatitudes? Is this the same man who was a friend to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? The same man who released the paralyzed and sent them leaping with joy?

We know it is.

And perhaps the easiest and most obvious reason he comes off so serious in this sweeping account of the whole week is because, well what would you be like if you knew you would die in a week?

And we might say, “I’d make the most of every sunset and take all the time I could with my family” – I ask, what makes you think Jesus didn’t? He withdraws to pray, he is in the temple and the garden, he returns from Jerusalem each night to stay and spend time with his friends, and on Thursday he sits down, for hours, in the upper room with his closest friends and family. John’s Gospel spends chapters recounting Jesus’ “Farewell discourse.” Where he calls them “friends.” No, I don’t think the sincerity of the week is lost on Jesus at all. Even if the tone is a bit more serious.

And it’s that very reason why he ups the ante with the pharisees. He’s going to die, why hold back? Why play their games? He has told them things plainly for three years, they aren’t interested, so now they get cryptic teaching-- “have it your way.” It’s why he ups the ante with his disciples, that fig tree isn’t even supposed to be bearing fruit right now and it is cursed, what makes us think we don’t deserve judgment when it IS the season for us to be bearing fruit of repentance and truth? He ups the ante.

Why? Because the stakes are high. Life and death.

And they still are this Holy Week. Are the hospitals closed? Are the funeral homes closed this week? Or is there still a brokenness that leads to death out there. And in here?

We have so many distractions, so much business that keeps us occupied, but does it give us joy? Deadline, after appointment, after screen time, after doomscroll, after wish and hope for the future that may or may not come true... and do we stop to think before another 5 years go by that it all could be over in an instant for us, for a loved one, folks it’s Holy Week, the stakes now and every week are high--life and death.

And so who is this Jesus? The real one, who walked in this broken world of heartache, pain, brokenness, and stress, and death? Who is this Jesus? Just a crank? Just here to look around at how bad we are at everything and be grumpy about it until we shape up?

Or is this the same one who blessed the children and now will die for them to keep them safe unto eternal life? Yes.

And this is the same Jesus who spoke the beatitudes and the one who will know exactly what it means to hunger and thirst and to mourn and be persecuted as he goes to an unjust death that the inheritance of the Kingdom might come to the lowly.

This is the same one who looks at enemies, even us with our sin, and says Father forgive them. And dies that we might be friends, and even more, children of God.

This is the same Jesus who healed the paralytics but now he dies to overcome death so that when those paralyzed were healed only to get older and to not be able to walk again someday, and so that we, who aren't "lucky" enough to get a miraculous healing, they and we might receive full and final healing in the resurrection.

It's life and death in holy week. And every week in this broken world. Let's wake up and see that, but not so we cower in fright, no, but so that we might keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. The Real One, who, when it came down to life and death, chose death – that we might have life – and we say we have no value and are meaningless – that can't be more wrong! The real Jesus dies for you, and that same real Jesus is the One who overcame death that we need not fear it, and rest knowing, that with so many scary things out there and the stakes so high, we can actually rest a little – the stakes are so high – but you don't have to overcome them, he already has for you. The victory is won by our Real and Risen Lord.

So yes, Jesus got cryptic, yes he got real, in this last week, that's because his mission was serious, dead serious, and that mission, put in place longer than a week, before the foundation of time, was to give his life for yours, that you might be his forever.

God be praised for the culmination of that universe-changing plan, that happened that first Holy Week, that we remember and celebrate, in the midst of so much brokenness, business, and distraction, that we may rejoice that Christ's Work is accomplished and for us, by grace – we sure didn't earn any of this week- but is ours according to his Word, His Promise, and His gifts. And that's true every day. Amen.