

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

What it Takes to Get Jesus “Fighting Mad”

(Mark 11:1-18)

Study #23

Introduction: Road (and other) rages...

As I was sitting at my desk on Friday I clicked on a tab on a website and it took several second longer than it should have to bring up the new page. I got angry.

A few weeks ago, I remember getting cut off in traffic by a rude driver on the access road to 1604. I got mad.

Less than two weeks ago, someone in the church made a comment to me that was, well, rude. After a few seconds of mopeiness, I got mad.

Anger is a real and present danger for most of us. After all, there are so many things to get angry about.

We could rage at the weather and the traffic and our family stresses and job stresses and the economy and election results and Facebook posts and sooooo much more.

Do you recall the last time you erupted with an unexpected outburst of anger? Do you remember what prompted that outburst? How did you express your anger?

We get angry at so much, and in a quiet moment wonder if our anger is ever justified.

Well, the answer is “Yes.” There is a justifiable anger.

Of course, there is unjustified anger - and much of mine is just that! - but there is also anger that fulfills the purpose for which God gave anger in the first place.

Today, we see an angry Jesus. It may surprise some to see Jesus angry, but we’ve seen Him angry before. Here, though, His anger turns violent.

In the minds of lots and lots of people, Jesus is, well, nice. Buried deep within our subconscious, even if we’ve never heard the song, are these lines from Charles Wesley’s hymn, “*Gentle Jesus meek and mild...*”

The hymn accuses Jesus of being “mild.” Read through the Gospels and I dare you to find evidence that Jesus is mild. There is nothing in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John that would suggest the word “mild.”

What we will see today in Mark’s Gospel destroys the idea of a mild Jesus. He may be lots and lots of things. But He is not mild.

In what we will see today, I never want to leave the impression that Jesus was out of control. He was completely in control of Himself during His outburst of anger. But by giving us a record of His rage, Mark gives us insight into what Jesus cared about most passionately, and directs our hearts to the same place.

Going “up” to Jerusalem

When we catch up to Jesus He and His disciples have finished their trip from Jericho to Jerusalem.

Some time earlier they had left Galilee, crossed the Jordan River, and then traveled south through the region of Perea (the area to the east of the Jordan River across from Samaria). Then they crossed the Jordan again at Jericho and traveled the main highway from Jericho to Jerusalem.

From Jericho (which was located about five miles from the Jordan River but still in the Jordan River valley) Jesus traveled the remaining twenty miles southwest - and uphill - to Jerusalem.

The elevation of Jericho is about eight hundred feet *below* sea level, while Jerusalem is right at 2700 feet *above* sea level.¹ Thus, Jesus' trek would have been a tough one involving a hike on rough roads through rugged territory and a 3,500 foot gain in elevation.

The route they traveled took them directly to the two small villages of Bethany and Bethphage, suburbs of Jerusalem. On their arrival, Jesus and the disciples stayed in Bethany overnight with good friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus.²

When it came time to finally enter Jerusalem, Jesus set in motion His plan for a grand entrance into Jerusalem.

The Conquering King (Mark 11:1-11)

King Jesus Chose His Steed (vv. 1-7)

Instructions (vv. 1-2)

[11:1] As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, [2] and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here.

This is unlike anything we've seen in Jesus' life. He is orchestrating. He wants His entrance into Jerusalem to be "just so." He is the Messiah entering the capitol city of Israel and He is thinking of how the prophets envisioned the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem.

Here is how the prophet Zechariah pictured it:
[9:9] Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

***Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

In the ancient world a King's decision to ride an animal - colt, donkey - that would be useless in battle made a very clear statement.

It demonstrated his sovereign control. Riding a donkey showed that he had things so completely in control that there was no threat of warfare.

And Jesus' choice of a colt said to the crowds who were streaming in to Jerusalem for Passover, *"I've got everything under control. Nothing to worry about. Relax. The Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of God is just where it should be and just where I want it."*

So, He needed a colt. But Jesus' followers were not wealthy men, and He Himself had no cash reserves to purchase a colt. So, how were they going to secure this colt?

Simple. THEY WOULD TAKE IT! The King can do that.

You can almost see the question marks forming on the faces of the two disciples He's tasked with getting the colt. They have concerns about how all this is going to play out.

Jesus told them how to handle any resistance that might arise.

Preparations (v. 3)

[3] "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here."

Some have wondered if Jesus had been scheming behind the disciples' backs to have the colt tied up at just the right place? Maybe He had made prior arrangements with the owner of a colt in Bethphage...

¹ From the Sea of Galilee (which, at 700 feet below sea level, is the lowest freshwater lake in the world) southward, the Jordan River is all below sea level.

² We might as well refer to it as a neighborhood it was so small.

Me? I don't think so. I believe that the Lord, exercising divine *omniscience*, knew that there would be a colt tied up at a place the disciples would find.

Further, by a sovereign act of *omnipotence* He controlled, in advance, the reaction of the owner of the colt, so that there would be no hindering His plan to enter Jerusalem on that colt.

Jesus is the King. He has the authority to control events. And He is controlling events on the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Mission: Accomplished (vv. 4-7)

[4] They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. [5] Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" [6] They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. [7] They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it.

The disciples went into town, just as Jesus had told them to do. The colt's owners questioned them, just as the disciples had suspected they would. And when the disciples replied as Jesus had told them to, the owners allowed them to take the colt, just as Jesus had said they would!

With Jesus seated on the colt, surrounded by His disciples, He began riding down the slopes of the Mount of Olives, toward Jerusalem. Don't miss this! Jesus is riding into town as a conquering KING, as the Messiah.

The King Approaches (vv. 8-10)

Treated like royalty (v. 8)

At that time of year (spring time) all the roads leading to Jerusalem were crowded with Jewish pilgrims making their way to the capitol city to celebrate Passover.³

Since Jews would not pass through Samaria,⁴ many of those coming from Galilee would have taken the same route Jesus had taken on this trip.

As King Jesus descended into the Kidron Valley and then rode up toward the wall that surrounded Jerusalem leading up to the Golden Gate - the gate through which the kings always entered Jerusalem - the people with Him on the road were all stirred up.

By this time the crowds had swelled into the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands.

Now, you and I might be thinking that the multitudes had shown up to accompany Jesus, but that was not the case. These folks had been on the road anyway. But their response to Jesus as He passed by them, was remarkable.

Some of those in the traveling crowds had no doubt heard about Jesus. They had heard the stories of His miracles and His teaching. They had heard about how He had bested the Pharisees in some great "one-on-ones."

They had heard that He was a Savior (after all, His name, "Yeshua" means "savior" in Hebrew).

Well, this multitude saw Jesus riding on a donkey the last mile outside of Jerusalem, put two and two together, and figured, "*This is it! He's come to set up the Kingdom!*"

And they began to treat Jesus the way people in a monarchy treat their King.

[8] And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.

See, you don't want the King to get His feet dirty. You don't even want the King's colt to get dirty hooves.

³ Conservative estimates put the population in Jerusalem and vicinity at upwards of 1,000,000 people during the Feast days.

⁴ Although Jesus Himself had not hesitated to pass through Samaria at least one time

Branches from trees (palm trees, according to John 12:13) that lined the roads helped make a carpet for King Jesus, so the crowds cut off those branches and piled them in the road, along with their outer garments.

They treated Him as a King. And they spoke to Him as people speak to a King. Each word in their cheer is significant.

King Jesus, the Messiah (vv. 9-10)

[9] Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting:

“Hosanna!

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;

[10] *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David;*

Hosanna in the highest!”

“Hosanna” is sometimes used today as a near synonym for “Hallelujah!” But “Hosanna” doesn’t mean “Praise the Lord!”

It means, “Save us NOW!” It is a cry of desperation, shouted by people who were realizing that HERE was a Man who held the key to their salvation.

Now, the salvation they were thinking of was almost certainly salvation from Rome’s tyranny, and Jesus had come to deliver them from a much greater bondage.

But, they did see their desperate plight. They did recognize that they could not save themselves. And they did beg King Jesus for deliverance.

Then they cried out, ***“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”***

That is a quote from Psalm 118, a psalm that was read during every Passover season. It was also read in ancient times as the Jewish King led the people to worship in the Temple.

This line was one that was very popular in the days of Jesus. People quoted it often in reference to the coming of the Messiah, the One around whom all their hopes and dreams centered.

On this particular day, Palm Sunday, the crowds saw in **JESUS** the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams.

And THAT is the Triumphal Entry. Mark tells the tale of the day of Jesus’ greatest popularity with the greatest brevity.

On another occasion, people had been clamoring for Him to be crowned King and He put them off. That incident is recorded in John chapter 6, after the feeding of the five thousand.

John tells us that the crowds wanted to make Him King by force. At that time, He would have nothing of it.

He preached a special message just for that occasion, too, (we refer to it as “The Bread of Life” sermon) and the upshot of that sermon was that His followers dropped from thousands to exactly twelve.

But here, on this Palm Sunday, He agreed to receive the praise of the crowds. Here, He welcomed it. Here, He drank it up.

On this day, as He said in another place, if the crowds of people had been silent, the rocks would have cried out. (Luke 19)

Granted, it was a short-lived popularity. It lasted as long as it took for Jesus to ride on the back of a donkey the mile long journey from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Gate.

What could that be - thirty minutes? An hour? Surely not much more than that.

Yet in that brief time span Jesus presented Himself, finally and irrefutably, as the King He truly was.

Responding to King Jesus today...

From the very beginning of His life, some people had understood that Jesus was a King.

Herod the Great, the Roman-installed King of Israel who reigned at the time of Jesus' birth, was so convinced of Jesus' royalty that he ordered the slaughter of all the babies around Bethlehem so as to do away with his competition.⁵

The Gospel of John records that Nathaniel, one of Jesus' earliest disciples, said to Jesus, ***"Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."***⁶

But for most of His life Jesus was a King *incognito*, under the radar.

We've seen that throughout our study of the Gospel of Mark. He took on the mantle of a Servant.⁷ He showed the way to greatness throughout His life by working His way to the back of the line.

And today we see the one shining exception to the general rule of His life's commitment to lastness and lowliness. This was the day - Palm Sunday - when the veil was ripped away and He was recognized as the King.

It is so hard for us Americans to relate to issues of kingship. Because of the democracy in which we live, we are accustomed to considering each other - including our leaders - as equal. Everybody is on the same level.

And truer words have never been spoken! We PEOPLE are all equal.

However, a person living under a monarchy has a head start in knowing how to relate to King Jesus, because he knows how to relate to Queen Elizabeth or Caesar. The citizen today living in an absolute monarchy - Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Swaziland - knows how to treat and respond to royalty.

You and I don't. So here's the quick and dirty low-down on how to respond to a king. You submit to him. You obey him.

The fact of Jesus' Sovereign Kingship demands that we give Him our SUBMISSION, our WORSHIP, and our OBEDIENCE.

"Jesus is Lord" has been the cry of the church for two thousand years. And it is our cry this morning.

He is the King, the Lord, the Sovereign. And He is calling you, His child, to submit to His lordship today!

Off to the Temple

The Triumphal Entry calls us to a heart posture with respect to Jesus: submission, worship, obedience. The event that follows gives us direction as to how to channel that heart posture in very practical ways.

Immediately after Jesus' entrance into the city, Mark tells us about a run-in Jesus has with a fruitless, out-of-season fig tree. It's a fascinating little story and we'll explore it in detail next Sunday. But for the remainder of our time today we'll skip past the fruitless fig tree and watch Jesus, in action, in the Temple.

Jesus is the King. He is our Lord. In addition to being our Lord, Jesus is also our Example. We get our marching orders from His commands *and* we take our cues for action from His actions.

And for those of us who want hearts that beat with His heart, what we are about to see is HUGE!

In the minutes that remain we are going to see what it takes to provoke King Jesus to anger. What does it take to get Jesus "fighting mad"?

Just watch.

⁵ Matthew 2.

⁶ John 1:49 - This was after Jesus identified him as an Israelite in whom there was no guile.

⁷ This, the Servant aspect of Jesus' life and ministry, is the special emphasis of Mark's record.

The Cleansing King (vv. 15-18)

Entering the Holy City (v. 15a)

[15a] Then they came to Jerusalem...

Mark lets us know that this event occurred on the day *after* the Triumphal Entry. Jesus had entered Jerusalem on the first day of the week (Sunday), gone back to stay in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and then returned to the city on Monday.

It being Passover season, the scene inside the city walls would have been hectic. The crowds in and around the Temple would have been thick with thousands upon thousands of people.

As they entered the holy city, they made their way to the Temple.

In the Old Testament we read of a Temple built by Solomon - and this is not THAT Temple. That Temple was destroyed by the Babylonian army when Jerusalem was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

A century later, the Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel when he and other refugees from exile returned to Jerusalem to re-establish the worship of God in the city. This is not THAT Temple, either.

This is Herod's Temple. Herod had been the reigning King when Jesus was born, and Herod had replaced Zerubbabel's Temple with an enormous edifice that while much less ornate and beautiful than Solomon's, was much more massive.⁸

Once at the Temple, Jesus saw something that made His blood boil. He saw marketplace activity in the Temple precincts.

The King Enforces the Law (vv. 15b-16)

The need for marketplace activity

The kinds of activities that Mark describes were perfectly legitimate activities.

The Jews were required to pay a Temple tax and the tax had to be paid in Jewish currency. Money had to be exchanged from Roman to Hebrew currency in order to pay the tax.⁹

And there was a need for animals to be bought and sold to be offered as sacrifices. The sacrificial system required the offering of doves, and goats, while the approaching Passover season made necessary the sacrifice of lambs.

The Mount of Olive Market

And for all of these transactions there was a market in place located on the Mount of Olives, outside the city walls of Jerusalem.¹⁰

In fact there were as many as four different markets in place on the Mount of Olives. Arranged like a typical middle-eastern bazaar, these markets were operated by the Jewish Sanhedrin.

At these markets you could exchange your money and you could purchase animals for sacrifice.

Temple protocol

The markets were put in place far away from the Temple so as to keep marketplace activities separate from the Temple and its functions.

If you don't have much familiarity with the way the Jewish Temple was built, think of the Temple as a building arranged in a series of concentric circles radiating outward.

⁹ Actually, the currency was Tyrian, the currency with coinage closest to the old Hebrew shekel.

¹⁰ So Lane, France, in their commentaries.

⁸ Jerusalem was destroyed - along with Herod's Temple - in AD 70 by the Romans.

At the center of the Temple precincts was the Holy of Holies, the place where the presence of God dwelt. Beyond that was the Holy Place.

Outside of the Holy Place was the Court of the Priests, the Court of Israel, the Court of the Women, and, on the outer periphery, the Court of the Gentiles.

Temple protocol was clearly laid out. Under no circumstances was merchandise to be carried through any of the Temple precincts. There was to be no buying and selling.

And there was no need for buying and selling or money exchange in the Temple because of the four markets set up on the Mount of Olives.

However, a few years prior to Jesus arrival in Jerusalem, things changed.

A Temple Market?

Caiaphas, who was serving as the High-Priest at this time, made a calculated decision to open up new markets for animal purchases and for money-changing in the Temple. This was to be in direct competition with the Mount of Olives markets.

By the time Jesus walked through these Temple markets they had become well known for their carnival-like, flea-market style atmosphere.

Inequities in the Temple Market abounded. People were setting up shop in the Temple Market to sell animals that would be sacrificed - and they were selling them at exorbitant prices.

I've read accounts of Jewish pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to worship. They had money to buy an animal for sacrifice, would pay their money and watch as the animal was taken behind a curtain. After they left, though, the same animal would be brought back out and sold to others throughout the day for the same purpose.

Money-changers were charging exorbitant rates for the exchange of Galilean money and other currency for "Temple coins."

So, there were problems with a market being located in the Temple precincts at all. And there were further problems with the Temple Market's corrupt operations!

When Jesus saw what was going on, He became angry. Very angry.

Jesus unleashed (v. 15b-16)

[15b]...And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; [16] and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple.

The misuse and the abuse of the Temple was all it took to provoke King Jesus to anger.

His act of enraged violence was thoroughly premeditated. It was not an impulsive outburst. He made a plan and He carried it out.

Among the many ways in which this act was remarkable perhaps the most remarkable aspect is that nobody tried to stop Him.

I like the way author John White puts it:

"The [amazing thing about] the cleansing of the Temple is that protests were as feeble as they were vain. Jesus would have been sweating and panting with exertion, and yet there would also be a calm purposefulness in His eyes that people could not face.

"Sheep, oxen, pigeons, and people were forced out through the Temple gates. Still, having done so much, He did not stop.

"Unsuspecting merchants arriving with more animals would be startled to find their way barred. They would find a whip gripped in the menacing fist of the Man with the unflinching gaze."¹¹

¹¹ It is John's Gospel that tells us that Jesus made (and presumably used) a whip to drive out the buyers and sellers. The cleansing recorded by John took place early in His career, meaning that Jesus cleansed the Temple on two occasions.

“It is false to assume that there was something supernatural about the awe He created. He was God, but He called down no legion of angels to help Him, nor is there any evidence that a mystical terror paralyzed the merchants.

“His control of the crowds was by a moral force, forged by His total lack of ambivalence and the moneychangers’ uneasy consciences.”

This is not the only time we see Jesus angry in the Gospels. But it is the only time we see Him violent. And He explains why He reacts so strongly.

Rationale for the Cleansing (v. 17)

[17] And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”

If you had asked Caiaphas about what he was doing setting up a market in the Temple he might have responded, “*Hey, what’s the big deal. It’s not really the Temple. This is just the Court of the Gentiles.*”¹²

That’s where he set up the flea market - in the Court of the Gentiles. The one place in the whole Temple area where a non-Jew could worship the one true God.

We can imagine Gentile worshipers wanting to know about Israel’s God, coming to the Temple and finding their way to worship blocked by money-changers and cattle sales.

It was this - people getting in the way of others who were far from God coming to God - that provoked Jesus to violent anger!

Of course Jesus objected to the unscrupulous pricing structures (which were real).

But even more He objected to the whole enterprise of buying, selling, and transporting merchandise, and trafficking through the Court of the Gentiles.¹³

King Jesus was caught in the current of God’s love. That’s what moved Him to take out the whip and drive out the merchandisers.

Well, by expelling the “robbers” from the Court of the Gentiles, Jesus freed up the space for Gentiles to again worship God.

And while all those present might not have been pleased, all were impacted and everybody responded.

Aftermath (v. 18)

The response of the rulers (v. 18a)

[18a] The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him...

And they moved quickly. A few short days after the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus will be put to death on a Roman cross.

The response of the crowds (v. 18b)

[18b]... the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

The crowds now see Jesus bucking the authority of the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, the Chief Priests and the scribes. He’s claiming the moral high ground in the nation, not the recognized rules. How astonishing, indeed!

The only response lacking this morning is the one you and I will give to King Jesus.

¹² Note “for all the nations” thus identifying the location as the Court of the Gentiles.

¹³ A couple of centuries earlier, a Gentile ruler by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled the temple (164 BC) with the sacrifice of a pig on the altar in the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus sees what the Jews of His own day are doing as similarly a perversion of the purpose of the temple.

Your response and mine...

We who are His subjects - by virtue of having been saved by grace through faith alone in Him alone - respond to His Kingship by joining the crowds who lined the road to Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday two thousand years ago.

They saw that Jesus alone could save them. We see the same and worship Him for His salvation. They saw in Jesus the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams - and we, today, see the same.

And we also join Him in the Temple.

We see what was close to His heart. Worship. The glory of God. Allowing nothing to come between God and someone who is far from Him.

Seeing the strong emotion that prompted in Jesus jars us awake to the truth of how much Jesus loves those who are far from God. A few days after He cleaned out the Temple He will die for them.

If our hearts would beat with the heart of Jesus we will likewise make sure that we never do anything that would put a barrier between God and those who need the Gospel. We'll join Him in opposing those who make it difficult to come to God.

Our love for Him and for those He loves will direct us to the passionate pursuit of life-changing relationships with those who don't know our Jesus.