

**Sermon Notes of  
Elder Ronald Kelly's Sermon on March 22, 2015  
"The Fateful Final Week"**

**[In today's sermon, Elder Ronald Kelly begins a two-part series based primarily on the Gospel of Mark about the final week of Jesus Christ leading up to the glory of His resurrection.]**

**Notes:**

Introduction:

- Today we will begin a two-week series dedicated to the week leading up to the glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday.
- Because we start our discussion of the final 7 days, we have to begin on Palm Sunday – normally commemorated next Sunday.
- So please bear with us as we back up a few days to take in the magnitude of what transpired from Sunday to Saturday – we call “Holy Week.”
  
- We will use the Gospel of Mark as for our primary outline, and refer to other scriptures as needed.

**Sunday:** The triumphal entries (From the book by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan)

- Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30.

The peasant procession:

- One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession.
- From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers.
- Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and his followers came from the peasant class.

The Imperial procession:

- From the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea and Samaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers.
- Pilate's procession proclaimed the power of the Roman Empire.
  
- Pilate's military procession was a demonstration of both Roman imperial power and Roman imperial theology.
- It was the standard practice of the Roman governors of Judea to be in Jerusalem for the Jewish festivals (because the population of Jerusalem swelled with all the Jewish visitors) – to be in the city in case there was trouble.
- The Roman governors normally lived in a palace that overlooked the Mediterranean Sea at Caesarea.

- The mission of the troops with Pilate was to reinforce the Roman garrison permanently stationed in the Fortress Antonia, overlooking the Jewish Temple and its courts
- A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold.
- Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums.
- There was also the swirling of dust.
- The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful.
- Pilate's procession displayed not only imperial power, but also Roman imperial theology.
- According to this theology, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome, but the Son of God.
- For Rome's Jewish subjects, Pilate's procession embodied not only a rival social order, but also a rival theology.

Jesus entering Jerusalem: (Mark tells the story in 11:1-11)

- Jesus' coming into Jerusalem is planned in advance.
- He sends two disciples to get him a colt.
- Jesus rides down the Mount of Olives and into the city from the east.
- He is met with crowds spreading their cloaks and waving palm branches. (This is where Christians get our tradition of Palm Sunday.)
- They shout "**Hosanna**" (literal meaning "give salvation now.")
- John's Gospel adds, "**Blessed is the king of Israel.**" (John 12:13)
- It is a prearranged "counter-procession."
- The meaning of the demonstration is clear, for it uses symbolism from the prophet Zechariah.
- According to Zechariah, a king would be coming to Jerusalem (Zion), "**humble, and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey**" (Zech.9:9).
- In Mark, the reference to Zechariah is implicit.
- Matthew, when he treats Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, makes the connection explicit by quoting the passage:
- **Tell the daughter of Zion: look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey'** (Matt. 21:5, quoting Zech. 9:9).
- The rest of the Zechariah passage details what kind of king he will be:
- **He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations'** (Zech. 9:10).
- The king, riding on a donkey, will banish war from the land – no more chariots, war-horses or bows. Commanding peace to the nations, he will be a king of peace.
- Jesus proclaimed peace not rebellion or governmental overthrow.

- Jesus's procession deliberately countered what was happening on the other side of the city.
- Pilate's procession embodied the power, glory and violence of the empire that ruled the world.
- Jesus's procession embodied an alternative vision, the kingdom of God.
- This contrast – between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar – is central not only to the Gospel of Mark, but to the story of Jesus and early Christianity.
- The confrontation between these two kingdoms continues through the last week of Jesus's life.
- Holy Week is the story of this confrontation.
- The Jewish leaders demanded that Jesus stop the crowd from hailing him.
- But Jesus said as recorded by **Luke 19:40**, “**If they don't the stones will cry out.**”
- Jesus and his disciples return to Bethany for the night.
- Thus ends Palm Sunday.

### **Monday:**

- Back to Jerusalem the next morning.
- These are the major events that occurred on Monday.

### **Cursing of the fig tree:**

**Mark 11:12, The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13) 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. 14) Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.**

### **Cleansing the Temple:**

**Mark 11:15-18, On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”**

### **Alarmed about Lazarus:**

- Not long before Jesus had entered Jerusalem, he had raised Lazarus from the dead.
- After the raising of Lazarus the Jewish leadership had become concerned.

**John 11:47-50, Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” They asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. 48) If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”**

**49) Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! 50) You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”**

Writing style of Mark:

- He referred to incident A-1 (the cursing of the fig tree).
- Then went on to incident B (the cleansing of the Temple)
- Mark then went back to the first incident with an update A-2 (the withered olive tree)
- He then ties both incidents together.

The withered fig tree:

**Mark 11: 20-25, Later in the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21) Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” 22) “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. 23) “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”**

- Curse of the fig tree for not producing fruit
- Symbolic destruction of the Temple for not producing justice, but rather were a den of thieves and robbers.
- The fig tree was sometimes used as a symbol for Israel.
- With the cleansing of the Temple Jesus showed by using the fig tree as a parable that the nation of Israel was not producing fruit as God intended.
- Jesus had been welcomed to Jerusalem as a king on Palm Sunday.
- The next day he shows by the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple that their expectations were not based on true understanding
- Jesus, by showing his authority at the Temple was actually showing, as the church would later understand, that Jesus is the true Temple of God, who will bear much fruit – not a building made with hands.
- Finally there is the lesson of faith: “move mountains.”
- Night again falls and the disciples return to Bethany.

Tuesday:

- Mark devotes more discussion of Tuesday than any other day.

Challenging Jesus’ authority:

- A very busy and dramatic day at the temple where Mark tells of several major confrontations between Jesus and various religious leaders.

- These would set the stage for their justification to have him arrested, tried and crucified.
- Jesus and his disciples went on to the temple mount, where crowds began to gather to hear him teach.
- So the religious leaders came to him demanding:

**Mark 11:28, “Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you authority to do this?”**

- Primarily they meant the money changers incident at the Temple, the day before.
- But they could have also meant his riding into Jerusalem being hailed as a king, which they had already challenged him about it.
- And of course the raising of Lazarus

Jesus answered their question with a question: **30) “The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of human origin?”**

**31) They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 32) But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) 33) So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”**

- They didn’t answer Jesus’ question, so Jesus didn’t answer their question.

Parable of the vineyard:

- Jesus tells the parable of a wealthy man who plants a vineyard.
- When it’s time for harvest he sends a servant whom the tenants kill.
- He then sends more servants whom they also kill.
- Finally he sends his son expecting them to respect him – but they kill him, too.
- While the parable certainly could be Christological in purpose –
- God is the vineyard owner.
- The son is Jesus.
- Those who killed him are the Jewish leaders.
- There is a profound reaction of the Jewish leaders’ reaction to the parable.
- They realized the parable was against them, so they wanted to arrest him, but feared the people.

**Mark 12:12, Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.**

- More specifically the vineyard represents Israel – both the land and the people.
- And the vineyard belongs to God – not the greedy tenants.
- It was the top officials at the top of the system who wanted to produce fruit for themselves.

## Taxes to Caesar?

### **Mark 12:14, “Is it lawful for us Jews to pay Roman taxes?”**

- This was a trick question asked by the religious leaders trying to trap Jesus.

Jesus, excellent answer: **17) “Render to Caesar, what is Caesar’s and render to God what is God’s.”**

- Jesus is not here producing a great dialogue of when and how to submit to human government – history is filled with that wrong interpretation.
- Rather Jesus is simply saying, Caesar has the authority to mint coin and to tax. “it’s Caesar’s coin, give it back to him.”
- The phrase is **“Give to God the things that are God’s”** raises the question: what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God?
- What we should understand is that everything belongs to God, but nothing belongs to Caesar.

## Leverite marriage:

- There were substantial differences between the two major Jewish factions – Sadducees and Pharisees
- One difference was Pharisees believed in a resurrection and an afterlife. Sadducee’s did not believe in an afterlife.
- So the Sadducees had a trick question they always asked – a resurrection question regarding marriage – and they did so here with Jesus.
- What Jesus showed was that there was a resurrection and that the important thing is that God is a God of the living, not the dead.
- Jesus message was not so much about life after death, but about life in this world.

## The Great Commandment:

- Jesus was asked by one of the teachers of the law, **“which is the greatest or most important of all the commandments?” (Mark 12:28)**
- Jesus answers by quoting the Shema, **30) “Love God with all your heart, soul and mind. And he added, 31) “Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

## On the Mount of Olives:

- The day ends with no justification to arrest Jesus – so he and the disciples depart for the Mount of Olives
- What Jesus said here is sometimes called the Olivette prophecy or the “little apocalypse.”

**Mark 13:3-4, As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4) “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”**

- They are asking about the temple destruction that Jesus had just commented on – that **“Not one stone will be left on another.”**

#### Summary of Mark 13:1-32:

- False messiahs and prophets
- Wars and rumors of wars
- Earthquakes and famines
- Persecution
  
- Desolating sacrilege
- Great suffering
- Cosmic disorder
- Son of man coming in the clouds

#### Specific warnings:

- Beware no one leads you astray
- Flee to the mountains
- Keep alert – watch – keep awake

#### Much conjecture:

- These verses have had more interpretations than anything else Jesus had said.
- Some say most of this is about the events leading up to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.
- Others have said this is all about the second coming of Jesus.

#### Christ's own admonition:

**Mark 13:32-33, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33) Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.**

- This is just as true today as it was back then.

#### Next Week:

- We will pick up the story next week as we examine the events of Jesus' last days from Wednesday through Saturday.

#### **Closing Prayer**