

DISCUSS

Francis explained the gravity of what faced Jesus’s followers after his crucifixion. In the days preceding his death, Jesus taught them to expect hardship, rejection, and persecution because of their devotion to him.

How does Francis describe Jesus’s last messages to his disciples?

How often do you hear preaching that reflects this message of surrender and suffering as opposed to the message that God wants you to be healthy and wealthy?

Read Mark 11:1–11.

It’s finally Jesus’s time to enter Jerusalem. He rides in on a donkey to cheers of adulation from the crowd. They expect a conquering king. **Do you think there was anything wrong with the people hoping for a king that would come deliver them? If you were there, how do you think you would have reacted?**

Even today, if we are honest, many of us wish that Jesus would return and right all that’s wrong in the world—that he would drive out evil rulers and condemn people who cause harm and fix all the injustice in the world. **Why do you think he’s waiting to return?**

[Note: For further study on the significance of the donkey, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

The tension thickens as Jesus enters the city and goes to look in the temple. But it’s late, so he retreats back to Bethany and returns the next morning.

Read Mark 11:12–26. This is a passage that seems hard to understand, but the fig tree stands as a metaphor for Israel and us. It looked alive but didn’t have the fruit that Jesus expected and desired.

Mark is inviting us to question ourselves. **Are we truly following Jesus, or are we only “fair weather” Christians? What evidence is there of healthy fruit in your life?**

In Mark 11:25 Jesus brings up forgiveness, and the importance of forgiving others. **How does forgiving**

Horizontal lines for writing.

others align with bearing healthy fruit as a follower of Jesus?

Read Mark 11:27–33. **Who’s in power here? What does Jesus do to disarm them?**

Read Mark 12:1–12. **Who is this parable about? Why do you think Jesus decided to speak in a parable here?**

Most scholars believe that the “man” in the parable represents God, the “vineyard” is Israel, and the tenants (“vine-growers”) are Israel's leaders. The meaning of this parable was clear to the religious leaders. Jesus had exposed their plot to kill him, but the approval of the people temporarily shielded Jesus from their wrath.

Read Mark 12:13–17. **Again, what powerful group challenges Jesus? How does he deal with their challenge?**

Now read Mark 12:18–27. **Who comes at Jesus? What does he say that nullifies their argument?**

Read Mark 12:28–34. **Who steps up to the plate this time? What’s the result?**

So, what does this mean for us? What’s Mark trying to point out? For those who’ve begun this journey of discipleship, the reality is we’ll face powerful people who want nothing to do with Jesus.

Maybe you have already. If you haven’t you certainly will. A boss. A family member. Maybe even a politician. The truth that Mark wants us to walk away with is simple: The powerful persecutors in our lives have no real power over us.

Has there been a situation in which your beliefs were held against you? How did you react?

In what ways did that situation impact your view of Jesus and the cost of following him? Is it still worth it? Was your faith shaken, or did it strengthen?

Read Mark 12:38–40. **Whom does he warn against? What aspect of them is he condemning?**

Now read verses 41–44. We see a living example of Jesus’s teaching in the preceding verses. **How does**

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: Why was riding a donkey significant to Jesus's entry to Jerusalem?

Jesus instructed his disciples to find a colt that had never been ridden and bring it back to him before he entered Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–3). Matthew and Luke tell us that it was the colt of a donkey. Why a donkey, and one that had not yet been ridden?

Animals that had never been ridden were considered suitable for sacramental purposes, as seen in Numbers 19:2 and Deuteronomy 21:3, in which they were sacrificed to atone for another's sin. In 1 Samuel 6:7, two milk cows that had never been yoked (made to work in labor) were conscripted to pull the ark of the covenant back to Israel. By choosing to ride an animal thus far set apart from common work, Jesus added an element of sacrament and sacredness to his entry to the city.

Though we see the donkey as a lowly animal, in the Middle East it was considered a noble creature. Judges rode on donkeys (Judges 10:4, 2 Sam. 17:23) as well as royalty (2 Sam. 19:26). The donkey also denoted a king approaching in peace (whereas, a king riding a horse was declaring war).

So Jesus, by riding into Jerusalem on a never-before-ridden donkey, declared himself the Messiah—a savior coming in peace, not to overcome the Romans. He dramatically re-enacted the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Horizontal lines for writing notes.

The people—including the disciples—failed to recognize that he was coming not as a warrior but as the Prince of Peace. Their joyful adulation, while rightly directed at their savior, anticipated the wrong kind of salvation.

What ideas about Jesus did you have previously that you’ve since learned were untrue or mistaken?

The people saw in Jesus what they were hoping for, not what he truly was. **In what ways have you expected God to do things or be a certain way based on your circumstances rather than his Word?**

2. Background: What exactly was a widow’s “mite”?

Jesus observed a poor widow quietly putting her donation into the temple coffers, praising her “mite” over the abundance that the Pharisees ostentatiously poured in. What exactly is a mite? The word is a contraction of “minute,” from the Latin *minutum*, which is the translation of the Greek word *lepton*—the very smallest copper coin. Two mites made a farthing, or one *kodrantes* (quadrant), i.e., the fourth part of a Roman *as*.

How much might a mite be worth? Two of them together paid a farmworker’s wage for about ten minutes’ work. The poor widow—the Greek term specifies that she was a pauper—gave both coins. The fact that her donation consisted of two tiny coins is significant. She might have kept back one, but in spite of her extreme poverty she cast in all that she had.

What was Jesus’s judgment on the widow?

Now, compare her story to that of Ananias and Sapphira, a couple in the early church who also gave to support God’s ministry. Read Acts 5:1–11.

What happened?

Why?

What was the difference between this couple and the widow in the temple?

Reflect on your own willingness to give generously.

