

PALM SUNDAY AND THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY
MARK 11:1-11

INTRODUCTION

As Palm Sunday neared in 1865 the defenses of the Confederate capital of Richmond (PROJECTOR ON--- RICHMOND), Virginia, collapsed. Abraham Lincoln just happened to be making a brief visit to the front lines of the Union Army at the time. Richmond had been largely destroyed (RICHMOND WAR), and Southerners were fleeing the city. When word of the evacuation of Richmond came to the President, Lincoln ordered Admiral Porter (ADMIRAL PORTER) to take him upriver to the Confederate capital.

With an escort of only ten sailors, Lincoln walked the streets of the city that had only a few hours earlier been teeming with Confederate soldiers and panicked Southerners. Admiral Porter nervously watched the windows of buildings looking for snipers. (LINCOLN IN RICHMOND) Soon the Great Emancipator was surrounded by a mob of former slaves, who were reportedly shouting things like this: **“Glory to God! Glory! Glory! Glory! Bless the Lord! The Great Messiah! I knowed him as soon as I seed him. He’s been in my heart four long years. Come to free his children from bondage. Glory, Hallelujah!”**

Lincoln was visibly moved by the crowd of people who were cheering him and struggling to touch him. A reporter for the *Philadelphia Press*, himself a black man, wrote about the scene, **“Richmond has never before presented such a spectacle of jubilee. What a wonderful change has come over the spirit of Southern dreams.”** (PROJECTOR OFF)

Some 1800 years earlier another deliverer entered a capital city to the cheers of supporters who also looked to Him to fulfill their dreams of freedom. That entrance was a spectacle of jubilee as well. It was an event of greater significance than the cheering throngs realized. But it was an event of different significance than the people expected. We are going to explore the significance of that event today and find out what relevance it has for us.

We just finished our long sermon series on the Book of Acts. It seemed appropriate that on this Palm Sunday we might consider the Biblical significance of that day. Next Sunday is Easter. After that I have in mind to do a study of the short New Testament book of 2 Peter.

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE PREPARATIONS FOR...) First, in vv. 1-7 of Mark #11 we are going to examine THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY. The first part of Jesus’ public ministry was spent in Galilee in the northern part of Israel, where He was generally well received. (GALILEE, JUDEA, PEREA) During the last six months

Jesus had come south to Judea and Perea. In #10 Jesus taught about the importance of servanthood. Now He is about to give the ultimate demonstration of that servanthood.

There were a number of factors at work that heightened the tension as Jesus approached Jerusalem. (PROJECTOR OFF) The occasion was the Passover feast. This was one of three celebrations when, according to the Old Testament, all Jewish males were supposed to show up in Jerusalem. Not all of them did. But usually the population of the city swelled to three times its normal size.

Jesus had also been telling His followers that something climactic was going to happen during this visit to Jerusalem. They didn't quite understand what Jesus was telling them. But they recognized that something big was in the works. Jesus had healed a blind man in full view of many of these Passover pilgrims. But even more significantly--- and Mark chooses to omit this in his account--- Jesus had raised His friend Lazarus from the dead a short time earlier. It was at the home of Lazarus that Jesus and the twelve were staying the night before this entry into Jerusalem.

John tells us in his gospel (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 12:9) in #12 v. 9, **“When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.”** The next two verses tell us that this contributed to the growing concern of the religious leaders. John (JOHN 12:10-11) says, **“So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.”** A confrontation was brewing.

The home of Lazarus was in Bethany (BETHANY JERUSALEM), which was a small town two miles east of Jerusalem on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. Sometime on Sunday Jesus set out for the final two mile trip into Jerusalem. First he sent two of the disciples ahead to get a donkey. The tradition that Peter was the main source for Mark about the life of Christ and the detailed account here of the acquisition of the colt suggest that Peter was one of the two sent on this mission.

The village where they were sent was probably Bethphage. The exact location of Bethphage is unknown. Early references to it indicate that it was less than a mile from Jerusalem. Matthew specifically says that the colt that they went to get was a donkey colt. Three of the gospel writers note the detail that this donkey was “tied.” Probably they saw in this a reference to an Old Testament prophecy concerning the tribe of Judah.

In Genesis #49 (GENESIS 49:10) Moses said of the tribe of Judah, from which Jesus was descended, **“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,/ nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,/ until tribute comes to him;/ and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.** The third line of this verse is uncertain. Some of you have “Shiloh” instead of “tribute.” The Jews have generally regarded these two verses as referring to the coming Messiah. Our interest here is v. 11: (GENESIS 49:11A) **Binding**

his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine..." Jesus was about to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey colt.

This colt that the two disciples would get had never been ridden. This implied that it was to be used for a sacred purpose. For several times in the Old Testament instructions were given to the people that animals devoted to a sacred purpose were not to be put to ordinary use. This little donkey had a sacred mission. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 3 Jesus tells the two disciples to promise to return the young donkey. That little detail reminds us of the voluntary poverty of Jesus. The Son of God stayed in borrowed homes. He traveled on the Sea of Galilee in a borrowed boat. In a few days He would be buried in a borrowed tomb. Here He will ride into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey.

The disciples set off on their errand. They found the colt just where Jesus said that it would be, and they untied it. Luke says that among the bystanders who questioned the two disciples were the owners of the colt. They gave their permission, and the two returned with the animal to Jesus.

It is possible that Jesus had prearranged all of this. But the impression is left that the disciples saw this as evidence of a supernatural arrangement. Jesus in His omniscience and omnipotence knew that the colt was there and would be used by Him. The owners were aware of the presence of Jesus in the area and were supportive of His claims. They were willing to help out. The details given about this errand point to something of eternal significance. The timing and method of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem were part of a plan that had been arranged in heaven.

So the disciples brought the colt back to Jesus, put their garments on it, and Jesus got on it. Five hundred years earlier Zechariah had prophesied a number of things about the coming of the Messiah. (PROJECTOR ON--- ZECHARIAH 9:9A) In #9 v. 9 he declared, **"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! (ZECHARIAH 9:9B) 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."**

Pilgrims normally came into Jerusalem on foot. Jesus came riding on a donkey. Donkeys in Jesus' day were hardly seen as fit for a king. They were mainly used as beasts of burden. When conquering Roman generals entered a city, they came riding in on a prancing white horse. Earlier Jewish kings had also ridden on horses or in chariots. (PROJECTOR OFF)

But it was not always so. In the time of David and Solomon donkeys and mules were royal animals. When David's son Absalom was killed, his long hair was caught in the branches of a tree when he was riding on a mule. When David sent Solomon to be crowned as king, he sent him on David's mule.

So as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He presents Himself in a dual role. He identifies Himself with the royal line of David. Yet He also comes as a humble servant. He is God, and He is man. He is king, and He is servant. He is the servant-king.

II.

(PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE DRAMATIC NATURE...) We come then to THE DRAMATIC NATURE OF THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY described in vv. 8-11. Perhaps it was after Jesus mounted the colt that He came over the crest of the Mount of Olives, which is a bit higher than the Temple Mount. (JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES) The first century temple was probably located on the site of the gold-covered Dome of the Rock. In the first century the gold covered temple probably occupied that spot (HEROD'S TEMPLE) It was a beautiful structure. It belonged to God, and to Jesus.

I wonder what thoughts passed through the mind of Jesus as He crossed the top of the hill and gazed at this sight. Perhaps He thought about the Old Testament prophecies that He was now fulfilling. Perhaps He thought about the fate that awaited Him in Jerusalem in a few short days. Perhaps He thought about the destruction of the temple that would be leveled to the ground in 37 years. Perhaps He thought of the Second Coming when He would descend upon the Mount of Olives and enter Jerusalem as a conquering king.

Jesus could see pilgrims making their way into the city for the Passover. But on this day there were also pilgrims coming from the city to greet Jesus. In John #12 vv. 12 & 13 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 12:12-13a) we are told, **“The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him...”**

It was at the feast of Tabernacles in the fall, not Passover, when palm and other branches were traditionally waved to symbolize God's rule over the whole world. But the rabbis also said, **“Whatever time of year the Messiah was to appear the Jews were to greet and hail Him by taking up the Lulav cluster (LULAV) and singing Hosannas to Him as the Holy One of Israel.”** (*Peskita de Rab Kahana, 27:3*) Clearly some in this crowd were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah.

Verses 17 & 18 in John #12 add (JOHN 12:17-18), **“The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. 18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign...”**

So the picture that we get is that there was a crowd of supporters that was traveling with Jesus as He made His way down the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem riding on the donkey. Then another crowd of people from Jerusalem came out to meet Him as well. (PROJECTOR OFF) They had high hopes for this Jesus. Many had seen miracles performed at His hand.

Some hoped that this was the Messiah who was going to establish God's kingdom on earth. Most in the crowd recognized that this was a special person blessed of God. So they gave Him a hero's welcome. They laid their robes in His path. They put leafy branches on the road. They cheered Him. They welcomed Him to Jerusalem.

Centuries earlier the Jews of the northern kingdom of Israel greeted a new king in a similar way. We are told in 2 Kings (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 KINGS 9:13), **"Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, 'Jehu is king!'"** This greeting of Jesus thus potentially had royal implications.

Near the bottom of the hill perhaps the two crowds met. (PROJECTOR OFF) A cry rang out. According to vv. 9 & 10 in our text they cried out: **"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"** It was a traditional greeting given to pilgrims coming to the Passover feast. It was usually done antiphonally. In other words, the group coming out from Jerusalem cried out, **"Hosanna!"** The crowd traveling with Jesus responded, **"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;/ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David."** The first group finished by shouting, or singing, **"Hosanna in the highest."**

This greeting was based upon Psalm 118 vv. 25 & 26 (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 118:25-26), which says, **"Save us, we pray, O Lord!/ O Lord, we pray, give us success!/ 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!/ We bless you from the house of the Lord."** Psalms 113-118 were traditionally recited at the Passover feast. So this greeting was in one sense a normal way to welcome this prominent Jewish rabbi. But the gospel writers recognized that there was greater significance to the meaning of these words on this occasion.

"Hosanna" was a Greek term that meant "save us now." It became a shout of praise, like "hallelujah." By Jesus' day it was used to welcome pilgrims or famous rabbis to Jerusalem. "Hosanna in the highest" meant "Save us, O God, who lives in heaven." It was a very appropriate way to greet the Messiah of Israel.

To come "in the name of the Lord" meant "to come with God's authority and as His representative." One who did that was "blessed." He was honored and favored by God. The normal meaning was that one who came as a religious pilgrim to Jerusalem to fulfill His Biblical responsibilities could count on the honor and favor of the Lord. But with Jesus that statement had special meaning. This was the unique Son of God who came as His Heavenly Father's special representative. He was truly honored of His Father.

The first line of v. 10 in our passage does not actually appear in Psalm 118. But some of the rabbis interpreted the psalm as having special reference to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom to Israel. That was to what these Jewish people, now being ruled by pagan Romans, looked forward. They wanted their own Jewish king. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The people in the crowd didn't grasp all of the significance of what was happening, but Jesus was the fulfillment of their messianic hopes. He was the one who would assume the rule and the leadership of the Davidic kingdom. He came in the name of the Lord. He was truly blessed of God. He was God incarnate. He also had come to save His people, though not in the way that they anticipated.

Jesus accepted the adoration of the crowds. Up until this point in Jesus' public ministry He tended to avoid public acclamation. Often Jesus had told people who witnessed His power to keep quiet about what they had seen. But now Jesus' time had come. He gave the people of Jerusalem and their religious leaders a final opportunity to recognize that He was the Messiah. His entry into Jerusalem had to be triumphant because it was the fulfillment of prophecy.

Luke #19 tells us that there were Pharisees in that crowd which had come out from Jerusalem to greet Jesus. They were aware of Jesus' messianic claims. They recognized that this welcome of Jesus bordered on worship, and they didn't like it. They were convinced that Jesus was a fake, and they felt threatened by Him and His popularity. He didn't fit their expectations for the Messiah. He didn't follow their rules. He did terrible things like healing people on the Sabbath.

So in v. 39 of Luke 19 (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 19:39) we read, **“And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples.’”** According to the next verse (LUKE 19:40), **“He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!’”** This entrance into Jerusalem by the Messiah had been decreed from eternity past. The Old Testament required worship of the entering Messiah. God demanded it. If the people had kept quiet, the stones would have cried out. According to John #12 v. 19 (JOHN 12:19) the shaken Pharisees said to each other, **“Look, the world has gone after him.”**

Thus Jesus was carried into Jerusalem. There He went to the temple. It was His temple, and He came to inspect it. The next day He would clean it out. (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus was the coming king, but the kingdom He was about to inaugurate was spiritual rather than temporal. His triumphal entry ended at the temple, not the palace.

This entry by Jesus into Jerusalem was a tremendous event in the plan of God. It was the fulfillment of prophecy. Genesis #49, Zechariah #9 and Psalm 118 all made reference to it. There is another Old Testament passage that may have even more significance. In the time of the Persian Empire Daniel was told by the angel Gabriel about the coming of the Messiah. (PROJECTOR ON--- DANIEL 9:25) In Daniel #9 v. 25 the angel told Daniel, **“Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. And for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. (DANIEL 9:26) And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off...”**

The original word here for “weeks” is actually “sevens.” It is generally understood to be talking about a period of seven years. In other words, according to the prophecy there would be a period of 483 years between the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem--- which was at the end of the Babylonian Captivity when Jerusalem was in ruins--- and the coming of Messiah the Prince. (70 WEEKS CHART)

We know from Biblical history that the Persian emperor Cyrus issued such a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Students of the Bible have calculated this in different ways. One of my seminary professors argues that the end point of this 483 years was March 30, 33 AD. His claim is that March 30, 33 AD is the date of the Triumphal Entry, the time when Jesus appears in Jerusalem and is publicly hailed as Israel’s Messiah.

Daniel’s prophecy said that it was after the 69 weeks that the Messiah would be cut off. It was a few days after the Triumphal Entry that Jesus was crucified. Thus this event is perhaps the exact fulfillment of another prophecy that had been made hundreds of years earlier.

The entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem created a stir. Matthew says in his gospel in #21 vv. 10 and 11 (MATTHEW 21:10-11), **“And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ 11 And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.’”**

Even in the Triumphal Entry Jesus makes no specific statement that He is the Messiah. The waving of the palm branches was appropriate for the Messiah, but the crowds call Him a prophet. Part of the reason that Jesus didn’t reveal more about His true identity perhaps was the danger of an immediate reaction from the religious leaders. Part of the reason perhaps was that there was a large contingent of Roman soldiers in Jerusalem for the feasts to keep order. They would have intervened quickly if there was major turmoil or if they perceived that there was some kind of political threat. From the perspective of the Romans and many citizens of Jerusalem this entrance by Jesus was probably seen as just a leading rabbi from Galilee coming to town and being welcomed in a traditional, perhaps somewhat overzealous, fashion by His followers.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

Part of the reason that the Triumphal Entry was not a bigger deal than it was relates to the whole nature of the first coming of Jesus. He came as a humble servant. He was born in a manger to a pair of poor, young parents in a small, insignificant town. He grew up in humble circumstances in the sticks of Galilee. He eventually did great miracles. Yet He generally withdrew from situations where crowds were ready to proclaim Him as their leader.

All the evidence was there that Jesus was the Messiah. He fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. But He did it in a humble fashion. He didn’t force Himself on the people of Israel. Even when He made His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, He did it in a humble fashion. He came riding on a donkey.

That is consistent also with the nature of the Gospel. When the good news about Jesus Christ is presented in the right way, it is never forced upon people. The evidence is there for all to see who are interested in establishing the claims of Christ. But it is not forced upon them. Anyone who was serious about learning the true identity of Jesus could discover from prophecies of the Old Testament and from the teaching and actions of Jesus that this was the Messiah. But even in coming into Jerusalem Jesus did not force Himself on the people of the city.

He doesn't force Himself on us either. He is available to us if we want Him. In Revelation #3 v. 20 (PROJECTOR ON--- REVELATION 3:20) Jesus says, "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**" He wants to have a relationship with us, but we have to invite Him in.

III.A.

Let's consider then for a moment THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY first, FOR UNBELIEVERS. (III.THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE... A. FOR UNBELIEVERS) There was irony in the cry of "hosanna!" that came from the mouths of the people in that crowd. "Hosanna" means "save us." That was what the people needed. They needed salvation, and this was their Savior. He had come to their holy city to lay down His life for their sins and for the sins of the world.

As Jesus drew near to the gates of Jerusalem, His mind was not on the honor that was being given to Him. It was not on the pain and agony that awaited Him. It was on the fate of the lost people of Jerusalem. In Luke #19 beginning in v. 41 (PROJECTOR ON-- - LUKE 19:41) we are told, "**And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it...**"

He cried for the people of Jerusalem. Why? Luke goes on to quote what Jesus said (LUKE 19:42): "**Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.** (LUKE 19:43) **For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side (LUKE 19:44) and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.**"

A bit later, according to Matthew's account, the Jewish people responded to Pilate's desire to absolve himself of guilt for the death of Jesus by declaring (MATTHEW 27:25), "**His blood be on us and on our children.**"

Jesus knew that 37 years later the Romans were going to come to Israel and to Jerusalem to put down a rebellion. He knew that they would lay siege to the city, and thousands of people would starve to death. He knew that finally the Romans would break into Jerusalem and level the city. They would knock down the walls of the city, and they would destroy the temple. According to Josephus over one million Jews were killed. During the siege of Jerusalem the Romans crucified an average of 500 Jews

daily. That is what happened in 70 AD. Jesus also knew that the majority of people in this city would not trust Him as the Messiah. As a result God would bring this horrible punishment upon them. Thus He wept for them. (PROJECTOR OFF)

If you have never trusted Jesus as your Savior, you need to know that Jesus cares about you, too. He is concerned about your eternal destiny. He wants you to accept Him as your Savior. He wants you to realize that by dying on the cross He paid the penalty for your sin. He also wants you to know that you need to receive this salvation as a gift. You simply need to put your trust in Jesus. But He will not force Himself upon you. He makes the offer available, and He provides evidence of its truthfulness. But it is up to you to choose whether to believe it and to put your faith in Him. (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 118:28) In the words of Psalm 118 v. 28 you need to say in your heart to Jesus, **“You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;/ you are my God; I will extol you.”**

B.

There is also spiritual significance in this story FOR us who are BELIEVERS in Christ. (III. THE SPIRITUAL... A. FOR UNBELIEVERS B. FOR BELIEVERS) Most of the people in that cheering crowd on Palm Sunday had a limited understanding of who Jesus was. Even the twelve apostles didn't quite grasp who Jesus was or what He was going to accomplish. It was only later that they grasped the significance of the Triumphal Entry. It was only gradually that they learned that they could trust this Jesus in every situation. It was only after the Resurrection that they fully understood that Jesus was truly God who had become man. This was the all-powerful, all-knowing Son of God who would continue to be with them and who would sustain them in every difficulty of life.

It is that same understanding that the Lord wants to develop in us who are Christians. He wants us to learn that we can really trust Him in every situation of life.

Earlier in Psalm 118 the author indicated that he was faced with a time of great distress. He said that he found himself surrounded by enemies. Thus it was that he cried out, **“O Lord, hosanna--- do save, we beseech You.”** But at the end of the psalm he expressed his confidence that God would deliver him. God is good, and He can be trusted.

Thus it was that the psalmist was able to say that the one who comes in the name of the Lord will be blessed. That statement had a unique application and fulfillment in the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. But it also had application to the faithful Jews who came to Jerusalem on the feast days to fulfill their Biblical responsibilities. It also has application to you and to me when we find ourselves in times of stress, in times of health difficulties or joblessness or family problems or financial setbacks. If we come to our Heavenly Father in the name and the authority and the faith of the Lord, we will be blessed. We will be honored. We will be sustained. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.