

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1-11

With Study Questions

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Matthew 21:1-11

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose *them* and bring *them* to Me. ³ And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." ⁴ All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ⁵ "*Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'*" ⁶ So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set *Him* on them. ⁸ And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road. ⁹ Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "*Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!*" ¹⁰ And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matthew 21:1-11)

Introduction

This event is traditionally called the Triumphal Entry. Jesus, the Son of David, riding into the City of David received by fanfare. People spreading their clothes on the road, cutting down branches to create a parade-like atmosphere and shouting a traditional/biblical psalm. Psalm 118 was recited at the Feast of Tabernacles, "**Hosanna to the son of David, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.**" The word "**hosanna**" means save us now. Such an enjoyable pageant! Some people like parades (not me), or maybe think of sporting event or an airshow. But sadly, in airshows a plane will occasionally crash, or in a sporting event an athlete will get injured. The atmosphere changes.

Within a few days there would be a new song in the air. Hosanna would be replaced with "**Let Him be crucified**" (Matthew 27:22). Matthew goes out of his way to let us know that this was something they "**all said.**"

A seemingly confused Pilate inquired as to Jesus' crime and found himself shouting him down. Then the vicious disdain for Christ came out in the words, **"His blood be on us and on our children"** (Matthew 27:25).

What happened in just a few days that would warrant such contempt? We see stories about popular people whose names were immediately in the mud. A Harvey Weinstein, Michael Avenatti, Matt Lauer or Kevin Spacey move from fame to villainy in a heartbeat-often due to some legitimate infraction on their part. What did Jesus do in these few days to merit a crowd chanting for His death?

As it turns out, He did quite a bit in a very short period of time. Not that any of His actions deserved crucifixion. Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). But Jesus did have a very busy week upsetting people. Among these things:

- Cleansing of the Temple (a chastisement of their religion)
- Cursing of the fig tree (a prophecy of their demise)
- Parable of the Two Sons (a denouncement of their character)
- Parable of the land owner (a prediction of their bleak future due to their sin)
- Declaration that the kingdom would be taken from Israel
- Parable of marriage feast (a parable of their judgment)
- Denouncing the Pharisees (an entire chapter dedicated to exposing their hypocrisy)
- Olivet Discourse (He foretells the destruction of the temple)

All of these things are followed by His betrayal by Judas, Peter's denial of Him, His passion in the Garden of Gethsemane. The prophecy of the striking of the shepherd which scatters the sheep and finally, the chant for crucifixion.

Things just didn't go quite the way they thought they should go when they were shouting 'hosanna'. Perhaps the primary reason the tide of public opinion became an undertow was because the people, while chanting for salvation, didn't understand what they needed saving from.

Historically, Israel needed saving from oppressive nations. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and now Rome. They had a cultural, economic and political salvation in mind. And at some level that is understandable.

The language of what the Messiah would accomplish is riddled with these types of things. In Psalm 110:1 (the most quoted verse in the New

Testament from the Old) we are told that the Lord would make His enemies a “**footstool.**” The great Messianic Psalm 22 tells us that Christ will rule “**over the nations.**” Isaiah 9:6, 7 tells us that “**of His government and peace there will be no end.**” Psalm 2 tells the kings of the earth to serve the true living Son of God lest they perish.

They were expecting a different type of salvation. What do you need salvation from? Alcohol and drug addiction? A bad marriage? Depression? Loneliness? Oppression? The Christian faith has something to say about all of these things, and more. Israel, little doubt, viewed their greatest need as deliverance from Rome. Instead of delivering Israel, Jesus confronts them. Apparently, He had His own terms. Truly He came to serve, but He, similar to a wise and loving parent, will determine what that service looks like.

Keeping in mind that Jesus came into, confronted and was crucified (at least called to be crucified) by a religious community, how can we be careful to avoid a similar error? Especially, as Easter is on the near horizon.

Four observations about the Triumphal Entry:

The Mount of Olives

First, Matthew give us the location-the Mount of Olives. There are certain places in the Bible designed to get our attention. This is one of them. There is a prophecy in the Old Testament (Zechariah 13, 14) informing us that the Messiah will stand upon the Mount of Olives.

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south (Zechariah 14:4).

It is considered a day of the Lord’s coming; a day of great division; a day of great terror and redemption – a turning point in history. There is significant disagreement among theologians as to when that day occurs. Some argue that that day is the Second Coming – a day when, they suggest, Jesus begins His kingdom.

Others believe that prophecy was fulfilled here in the Triumphal Entry. Please notice that as Zechariah begins to record the work of the Shepherd Savior, we read this:

Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion," Says the Lord of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered (Zechariah 13:7).

This is a prophecy which was clearly fulfilled at Christ's first coming where Jesus said:

All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered' (Matthew 27:31).

The Old Testament prophecy below culminates with Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives with no significant intervening period – they both happen during the same period in history-during His life, death, resurrection and ascension.

People will often speak of Jesus coming some time in the future to set up His kingdom. I respectfully disagree. Jesus is the risen King and at this very moment He is at the right hand of the Father...

...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:21).

The point here is that Jesus has already placed His feet on the Mount of Olives and the subsequent division began then. Let us not make the same mistake of the community during the time of Christ, expecting an immediate, cataclysmic cleaning up of the mess in history. It is without question a truth, that the work of Christ is finished. He has done everything thing necessary for our redemption. He has no work yet to do-except judge. We, on the other hand, have plenty to do.

Things brings me to my second point.

A Divisive Christ

In the same way the sheep in the Bible often aren't actually sheep but people (John 10), we shouldn't expect the Mount of Olives to split in two and start moving around. The splitting associated with the Mount of Olives needs to be understood as a metaphor regarding the person and work of Christ Himself. A degree of the splitting was about to take place. D. A. Carson explains,

So we see set up the polarization of attitudes to Jesus which during the next week would have some supporting Jesus (21:46) while others shouted for his crucifixion (27:20ff.).¹

Jesus foretold this division earlier in Matthew saying that He did not come to bring **"peace on earth...but a sword."** The truth of Christ would be so invasive, so sharp, so disquieting to sinful hearts, that (as Jesus taught) **"a man's enemies will be those of his own household"** (Matthew 10:34, 36).

This is not to be understood as Jesus being some sort of global trouble-maker. It's the simple nature of the case that truth is divisive. It's divisive in courtrooms, nations, families and our own hearts (Hebrews 4:12, 13). We are called to proclaim that truth, regardless of whatever discomfort or division it may bring. Jesus was displaced as the centerpiece of the parade and moved to a tree of crucifixion because He placed His foot on the Mount of Olives thus initiating a universal line in the sand between truth and falsehood.

But what of my deliverance of other things? Has Christ no interest in my personal failings and victories? Point three:

A Humble Entry-A Progressing Kingdom

None of what I am saying should be understood in such a way as the conclude that the work of Christ will not have global and intimate implications in every sphere of life. The contemporaries of Jesus wanted Him to topple the Roman oppression which dominated their lives. In time, the Roman Empire, with all its hatred and torture of Christians, would be

¹Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Mt 21:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

no more. The Christian is given the great paternal promise that with Christ, the entirety of our lives begins to move in a direction of being conformed into His image. Paul labors the point that the Father, in delivering up His Son to save us, will **“freely give us all things” (Romans 8:32)**. Thankfully, not all things we want, but most assuredly all things we need.

But the changing (sanctifying) of our lives, like the transformation of the world, does not happen cataclysmically. So how would all the promises associated with the Messiah come to pass?

In all the excitement of this Triumphal Entry one wonders if the mode of transportation used by the conquering King ever caught their attention. Mark spends more time talking the donkey than he does about anything else in the account. The Almighty conqueror had decreed the availability of a colt.

He could have decreed the availability of a chariot or even cherubim, but it was a colt (son of a donkey)-and a borrowed one at that! It wasn't as if Jesus was changing the program. A thorough reading of the Old Testament would reveal that the great victories accomplished by the Christ would come, not cataclysmically, but gradually through His humility and sacrifice.

It would be a stone that falls upon the image in Daniel which becomes a mountain covering the earth (Daniel 2:35). It would be a small stream in Ezekiel which would eventually grow to an impassable deluge (Ezekiel 47:6). In Hosea we read that **“He shall grow like a lily, and lengthen His roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread” (Hosea 14:5, 6)**.

A standard triumphal entry would find the conqueror riding on a horse, a stallion. But Jesus was not riding on an animal designed for military conquest; He was riding on an animal designed for burden.

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

I think it is a huge mistake to conclude that the kingdom of God will not advance in such a way as to refine, restore, renew, and redeem every nook and cranny of His creation. But I think it is an equally monstrous

mistake to think that the means by which this restoration takes place is anything other than the people of God proclaiming the death and resurrection of their champion – which brings us to our final point.

The Conquering Priest

Let it never escape our attention that the Savior of the world becomes the Savior of the world by fulfilling the offices of the one true mediator between man and God. This portion of the account ends with Jesus coming into Jerusalem.

And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?” ¹¹ So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matthew 21:10, 11)

Truly Jesus is the Prophet, bringing us the true, perfect and unadulterated message of redemption. Another office, as the crowd so enthusiastically acknowledge is that of King – a King who subdues all His enemies and protects His own subjects who are His family and body.

But Jesus is also our High Priest. And the lamb He is bringing to be sacrificed is Himself. Jesus is the **“Lamb without blemish” (1 Peter 1:19)**. As Paul states, Christ is **“our Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7)**. The love of God toward us is revealed here in that He **“did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Romans 8:32)**.

Jesus, for the first time publicly acknowledges that He is King. Unlike earlier times, Jesus does not instruct His followers **“tell no one” (Matthew 8:4)**. But His kingdom, which will endure forever, advances in love, humility, forgiveness and faith in the sacrifice our High Priest **“who has passed through the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14)**, **“who sympathizes with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15)**, **“who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26)**, **“who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 8:1)**, a

This conquering King, this Triumphal Entry is far superior to those who merely bring back the loot of their subdued territory or gloat in the temporary expansion of their soon-to-be non-existent empire. Those who

trust in this King are said to be “**more than conquerors**” (Romans 8:37) because they have a “**High Priest over the house of God**” that they may

draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:21, 22).

As Matthew Henry so profoundly states,

His government is mild and gentle, and his laws not written in the blood of his subjects, but in his own.²

The Triumphal Entry did not go the way people thought it should go. Their thoughts of what Christ would accomplish were far too small as was their understanding of His call in their lives. He would soon give His life that they might live and He would call them, as He calls us, to lose our lives for His sake, that we might find it (Matthew 16:25).

²Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 21:1). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. What was significant about the Mount of Olives? When did, or will, the event prophesied in Zechariah happen?
2. In what respect is Jesus divisive?
3. Discuss the humble nature of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. What do you think the people were expecting?
4. How will the kingdom of God advance?
5. What are the offices of Christ and why are they important?
6. What benefit is it to us to have Jesus as our High Priest?