



## THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

(Psalm 118:19–29; Mark 11:1–11) Bob Nance

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In the Christian calendar, today is known as “Palm Sunday” which comes from the account in John’s Gospel, although, in our reading this morning, palm branches are not mentioned.

Before we concentrate on our text for today, let’s look at what Jesus had been doing previously. He had travelled down from the region of Galilee into Judea and then across over the Jordan River into Perea, all the time He was teaching and healing all those who came to Him. Consequently, the crowds were getting bigger and bigger and were following Him wherever He went.

During this time, Jesus would take His disciples aside and give them personal instruction, including preparing them for His ultimate death at the hands of the religious leaders who would hand Him over to the Gentiles. They would mock Him, spit on Him, scourge and kill Him, but three days later He would rise from the dead.

He told them that “..... *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*”(Mark 10:45). Although this was the third time He had explained it to them, they still were not sure what He meant.

To reach Jerusalem, Jesus had to cross back into Israel and then continue on through Jericho where he gave Bartimaeus his sight and called Zaccheus down from the tree so He could dine with Him. Both of these men entered the kingdom of God through Jesus ministry to them that day. Then He started up the road to Jerusalem, which rises more than 3000 feet over a distance of 32 kilometres, to reach His destination, the place He had set His face toward many days before. Just before He reaches Jerusalem, he passes through Bethany, where He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and Bethphage.

By this time, a large crowd had gathered and, because of His many miracles and particularly His raising of Lazarus from the dead and His teaching which had authority, His fame spread rapidly amongst the people who had come to Jerusalem to take part in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and this is where our reading starts.

It’s interesting to note that the account of Jesus entering Jerusalem at this time can be found in all four Gospels, so if it is recorded that many times, it must be very important and not brushed over quickly.

It is Passover, and it’s the first day of this week-long festival. The festival is celebrating God’s deliverance of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It symbolised liberation from

bondage to their Egyptian masters. It was like a memorial of God's love for them, and in the current situation of being under Roman rule, Rome was very aware that an uprising could occur at this celebration, so they would always increase the number of soldiers in the city to make sure there would be no uprising. Their presence would ensure there would be no talk of liberation or divine intervention at the festival.

Let's see what the Scriptures tell us about what happens now.

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples saying to them. Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt there, which no one has even ridden. Untie it and bring it here. (v 1,2)*

Now the phrase, "As they approached Jerusalem", seems to indicate that this is Jesus first journey to Jerusalem. But the Gospel of John tells us of His many previous trips. Jesus, like any devout Jewish man, went to Jerusalem to as many of the major festivals as he possibly could.

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, He instructed two of His disciples saying to them-  
*"Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here." (v 2)*

Now the Greek word for "colt" could be either the young of a horse or donkey, but in the Gospels of Matthew and John, it clearly indicates it was a young donkey. Jesus was to ride on a young donkey similar to when king Solomon was anointed king of Israel, and also would fulfil the prophesy found in Zechariah 9:9 which says:

*"Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion!  
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

But why go into so much detail about how Jesus got this donkey? Why? Because it was extraordinary how every detail in this account unfolds. In Luke's account, he says "So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them". Jesus hadn't arranged all this beforehand. So how could He know about the colt and how did He know it had never been ridden before? Jesus knows these things because He is precisely who He said He was in verse 3. "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, '**The Lord** needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" (v 3)

Jesus is Lord and because He is **the Lord**, He knows everything there is to know about this animal even though He was still a few kilometres from the village, and that when His disciples untie it and are challenged as to their right to loose it, they say exactly what Jesus had told them to say "*the Lord needs it*" and permission was given to borrow it. They recognised the authority of the words "the Lord" and gave their permission immediately for Jesus to use the animal.

There is a subtle recognition in this and the rest of the New Testament, that they were honouring "the Lord" because He is, in and of Himself, worthy of all honour. We need to honour Him because **He is Lord**. He does not have to do anything to earn this honour, not even die on a cross or rise from the dead. We need to honour Him, and worship Him because of who He is.

Now, the disciples took the colt back to Jesus where they threw their garments onto its back as a saddle for Him to sit on, and then Jesus mounted the colt. The crowd threw their garments on the ground and some cut branches from the nearby trees and spread these on the road so the donkey could walk on them as they headed into Jerusalem. What the crowd was doing here with Jesus is honouring Him as they would a dignitary or victorious ruler. His mounted entry was a way to convey His status – He is a king riding on a king's mount. Kings would ride a horse into battle but on a donkey when He came in peace.

His path must be made suitable for one so worthy, He should not have to ride over dirt. During Jesus ministry, He always walked from place to place, today He would ride into Jerusalem. It was customary for pilgrims, whether they walked or rode toward Jerusalem for a festival, to walk the final leg into the city, but Jesus is set apart here as He enters riding on a colt, and He is welcomed with shouts. Although Mark only says they cut tree branches, John says they cut palm branches and that is how it is known as "Palm Sunday"

Have you ever been to a rodeo or watched one on TV or at the movies, where men try to ride a horse that has not been broken in, never been ridden before. The outcome is usually that the rider finishes up being thrown off the horses back onto the ground and the horse runs around triumphant, waiting to be released.

In this account involving Jesus getting onto the back of a colt which had never been ridden before, the colt was calm, responsive, gentle and obedient and there was no sign of rebellion from it.

Now, as He rode into Jerusalem, the people were shouting and praising Him.

*When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,*

*"Hosanna!"*

*"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

*<sup>1</sup>"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"*

*"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

*Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.  
(v 8-11)*

There are three elements of praise in these verses so let's look at them.

We'll start with the **second** one first. The phrase, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (v 9) This phrase comes directly from Psalm 118:26 and the end of the Psalm talks about the blessedness of a pilgrim coming to Jerusalem and to the temple.

But note, the word preceding this phrase, (the **first** element) "*Hosanna*" which also comes from Psalm 118 but in verse 25 which reads "*O Lord, save us*".

The crowd would have been very familiar with this phrase from verse 25, because Jewish tradition tells us they would recite it each of the first six days of the Feast of Tabernacles and on the seventh day quote the whole verse while waving branches.

The **final** element of their praise comes in verse 10. It reads: *“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

This showed the peoples expectation of the Messiah, the coming king from David’s line. He would be the one to save His people Israel. His arrival would mark the beginning of the end of Roman occupation and Roman rule and restore Israel’s political pride. It was degrading for them to have people who were “unclean” and worshipped idols ruling over them. These were the expectations they had of the One they were cheering on this day.

Up to this point in His ministry, Jesus had never allowed an occasion like this to occur. An open public declaration of the fact that He was the Messiah was not an option up till now. Once, in Galilee, some people wanted to press Him in to taking authority and acting like a king. Jesus fled the scene because He knew the implications of doing this would not result in a positive outcome- His hour had not yet come. He didn’t allow this to happen because He knew it would precipitate the aggressive action of the Jewish religious leaders who already wanted to kill Him.

You see, from the very beginning of His ministry they wanted to kill Him. When He first entered the temple in Jerusalem three years before and attacked the commercialism being carried on, and discredited their entire religious system, they wanted to get rid of Him Then over the next three years, He undermined their interpretation of the Scriptures and dismantled their theology. No wonder they wanted Him dead.

So, any kind of demonstration of His popularity needed to be low key, otherwise it would be seen as an increase in the threat to the leaders and would hurry up their desire to murder Him. So, He never let it happen.

But here, as He enters Jerusalem, He allows it to happen. It was God’s plan that this was the week He must die, therefore He must stir them up such that they would carry out their desire to kill Him. This was exactly what God wanted, so that on Friday, on Passover, He would be the Passover Lamb. This was designed by God, to inflame His enemies to such a point that nothing would stand in their way to eliminate Him, this man who had caused them so much trouble He had to go.

Jesus knew that the time was right for Him to *“give His life as a ransom for many”*. He knew that He would be fulfilling the prophecy from Daniel 9 verses 24 to 27 that said it would be four hundred and eighty-three years from the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem, till the arrival of Messiah. It works out that the decree of Artaxerxes was being fulfilled on the exact day that Jesus entered Jerusalem. God’s timing is perfect, right down to the smallest detail.

Now in verse 11 it says:

*<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything . but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.*

Note the words. *“He looked around at everything”*. Jesus came into the temple and observed what was going on. This was an official visit by the King of Israel, an inspection tour of the heart of the nation. He went into the temple where the heartbeat of the nation was throbbing, represented in the worship that was lifted up to God.

But what did He find? He found commercialism, moneychangers, exploitation, corruption and injustice. He saw dirt, filth, pride, hypocrisy and haughtiness. But what He didn’t find was the worship and praise of the one true living God, the God of Israel. He saw religious ceremonies being carried on without any meaning whatsoever, and He did not say a word.

Then, *“since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.”* What a subdued ending to a very busy day, but it was a prelude to what was to happen the next day.

In verse 15 it tells us:

*“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,”*

God used these actions to escalate the timetable for Jesus to be crucified the following Friday, Passover day.

The people honoured Jesus as He came into Jerusalem, because they believed He had come to liberate them from their enemies, but the enemy Jesus came to liberate us from was the power of sin and death. When they realised that He was not going to fulfill their expectations, the honour they accorded Him as He came into Jerusalem turned to hatred, such that by Friday, they were now calling for His execution. They didn't honour Jesus because of who He is, but because of what they thought He could do for them.

We honour Jesus, not only just because of what He did on the cross, but because it reveals the earth-shattering, soul transforming truth about who He is. As He suffered there, and gave His life for us, we see, by God's grace, love like no other, grace beyond compare. Let us ask God for a heart that honours Him as we should, and a mouth to shout His praises.