

The Triumphal Entry Matthew 21:1-17

Introduction

Matthew 21 begins with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The rest of the gospel focuses on the Passion of the Christ. The last eight chapters of Matthew present the events of Jesus' final days on earth. It all begins with the Triumphal Entry, which we call Palm Sunday, and ends with the Resurrection, which we celebrate on Easter Sunday.

All of the gospels include details concerning Christ's passion. Jesus' entire ministry and teaching were preparation for these final events. The Triumphal Entry was a public declaration that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Those who gathered around Jesus shouted their praise and adoration in anticipation of crowning Christ as the King of Israel. But for Jesus, it meant presenting Himself as the Paschal Lamb, cleansing the temple, and offering Himself as the perfect atoning sacrifice for the nation.

Matthew 21 verse 1 says, "Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 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. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send *them*."** All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "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.'" So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set *Him* on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road. 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!" And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee." (Matthew 21:1-11 NKJV)

In these verses, we see Jesus revealed as the sovereign King who has the authority of heaven but comes in peace. As He enters Jerusalem, He is heralded as the coming Messiah who brings salvation, and the little children praise him in fulfillment of Psalm 8, the incarnate Son of Man.

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was about 17 miles and rises about 3000 feet. It's why people would say they were going up to Jerusalem or down to Jericho. The road went through Bethany and nearby Bethpage, called the "house of figs," located on the southeast side of the Mount of Olives. The road ran over the top of the mount, down through the Kidron Valley, and ascended again into Jerusalem.

These are not long distances; Chris and I walked it while we were in Israel. From the Mount of Olives, you can see Jerusalem on one side and the Judean desert on the other. It would take about a half hour to walk from Bethany to Jerusalem.

During the last days of His ministry, Jesus probably spent the nights in Bethany with His good friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and went back and forth to Jerusalem. But the night Jesus was betrayed, He stayed in the garden on the Jerusalem side of the Mount of Olives. The Jewish law required that the evening of the Passover was to be spent within the districts of the city. During the feasts, they would extend the city limits to the top of the Mount of Olives but not as far as Bethany.

I. PREPARING FOR THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (21:1-6).

According to Luke 22, Jesus sent Peter and John to Bethpage to get the animals for the ride into town. The disciples found the donkey and its colt tied there in the village. They were to untie the animals and bring them to Jesus.

Jesus probably designed this situation to demonstrate His arrangement and authority. Jesus knew the animals would be there. If Peter and John said the Lord needed them, the owners would allow them to take the animals. This was a planned sequence, designed and arranged by Jesus as a future teaching revelation to increase the disciples' faith. Later, the disciples would remember this and other events demonstrating Christ's authority and control over all the events leading up to the Resurrection.

It's important to realize that Christ was in charge of the events of His life, not the wicked men or evil times. During the final days of His ministry, Jesus frequently used clear titles for Himself. He began to claim authority as the Lord, even over the possessions and positions of others.

Matthew repeats the verses from the prophet Zechariah to say that this event fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah given some 500 years earlier. If we look at Zechariah more closely, chapters 9 through 11 reveal that the anointed King would be rejected. It is chapters 12 through 14 that reveal this rejected King would one day be crowned.

Matthew quotes the part of the prophecy that deals with the rejection and death of the Messiah. The heart of the prophecy was that the King would enter Jerusalem with humility and peace. As Zachariah predicted, the Messiah would come "riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

In those days, Kings would ride on donkeys, especially in times of peace. In Judges 5:9, God says, "My heart *is* with the rulers of Israel Who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD! "Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, Who sit in judges' attire, And who walk along the road." ([Judges 5:9-10 NKJV](#))

In 1 Kings 1:33, King David says, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and take him down to Gihon. There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; and blow the horn, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' (1 Kings 1:33-34 NKJV)

The Jews knew Zechariah 9:9 was a prophecy about the Messiah, the coming King. It's easy to conclude then that Jesus was proclaiming His Messiahship in fulfillment of Scripture. He had come in peace to offer salvation to the people. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the people are compelled to recognize, even if it's briefly, that He is the coming King predicted by Zechariah.

Some like to question the number of animals involved. The typical understanding of Zechariah's prophecy is that it is written with Hebrew parallelism and refers to only one donkey, the colt. In the New Testament gospels, Matthew is the only one who mentions two animals. Matthew probably mentioned the donkey and the colt to clarify that Jesus rode on the colt. The gospel of Mark reports that Jesus rode on an animal that no one had ever ridden, which would also verify it was the colt.

Also of interest is the young, unbroken colt remained calm when Jesus rode it, even during the excitement of the crowd. Not only did Jesus master the winds and the waves, but he was also master of all nature, including the animals. Jesus controlled all of nature, a sign that revealed the Messianic kingdom would be a kingdom of peace.

When the disciples fulfilled their mission and returned with the animals, they spread their cloaks over the animals. When the scripture says that Jesus sat on them, it most likely refers to the cloaks rather than the animals. While both animals were in the procession, Jesus only rode on the colt.

II. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (21:7-11).

Verses 7-11 describe the actual entry into Jerusalem. There was a huge crowd that went with Jesus along the way. Some spread their cloaks on the road to acknowledge Jesus' kingship; others cut branches and lay them on the path. These were the leafy lighter branches, not large ones that would trip the animals. It was an act of homage, celebrating the entrance of the king.

The writings of the Maccabees recognized that spreading branches along the way was a way of welcoming the king to the city. Each of the Gospels says that crowds came out to welcome Jesus as a King.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, news spread fast that He was there. Many followers from Galilee were there, along with local groups hoping to get a glimpse of this Messiah King. Messianic expectations were high, and the word spread quickly that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. Crowds of people began to gather, hoping to see Him. His miracles and teachings drew crowds everywhere He went.

The words the crowds shouted were those of Psalm 118. The whole passage of Psalms 113-118 belongs to what is called the Hallel Psalms. They are psalms sung at all the major festivals in Jerusalem. Matthew includes phrases from these psalms, "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" All of the people knew these songs just like we all know the Christmas Carols.

The word "hosanna" is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew verb from the Psalm, meaning "Save!" The Hebrew word *hosi'ah-na'* is pronounced *ho-she-ah-nah*. It is actually an urgent cry for help. "Save Us!" But over time, it became an acclamation. The Hebrew word *hallelu-yah* is also an imperative, "Praise the Lord!" but also became an acclamation.

The cry, "Save Us!" is addressed to Jesus, the "Son of David." There was no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah and heir to the throne of David. Their exclamation confirmed it, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD."

In Psalm 118, the priest blesses the king, who leads the people in procession to the sanctuary to offer praises to the Lord. It also became a praise to God for the coming of Messiah, and His followers widely recognized Jesus as "the Coming One."

When the people repeated "Hosanna to God in the highest," it was like the angels saying in Luke, "Glory to God in the highest!" However, in this case, "Hosanna" is an exclamation of deliverance. The people are praising God for sending them the Messiah, the Savior of Israel. Hosanna is the cry for God to save. Hallelujah is our praise to the Lord for the hope of salvation.

Of course, it wasn't hard for the people to get caught up in the moment of Messianic fervor in light of Jesus' miracles and teachings. As the text says, they knew He was a prophet and hailed Him as their coming King.

But they hadn't grasped at all the inevitable suffering of the Messiah. They didn't connect Isaiah's Suffering Servant with the Messiah. Even for those closest to Jesus, it was difficult for them to see this entry into Jerusalem was not to sit on the throne but to die on the cross.

Luke says that on the way down the path from the Mount of Olives, Jesus was criticized by the leaders for receiving the people's praise. But Jesus told them that if the people didn't praise Him, the stones themselves would cry out. He is worthy of that kind of praise, and one day, soon, everything in creation will praise Him.

Philippians 2:10 says, "that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." [\(Philippians 2:10-11 NKJV\)](#)

The whole city turned out as Jesus entered triumphantly. When those who didn't know Him were asked, "Who is this?" They said that Jesus was a prophet of

Nazareth, indicating their surprise that a prophet would come from such an unlikely place. But those who knew Him recognized Him as the Messiah, the prophet sent from God.

In Acts Chapter 3, Peter says, "For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN. HIM YOU SHALL HEAR IN ALL THINGS, WHATEVER HE SAYS TO YOU. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERY SOUL WHO WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET SHALL BE UTTERLY DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.' Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities." (Acts 3:22-26 NKJV)

Jesus was a prophet, but He was more than a prophet. Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, who came to save the world.

Conclusion

There are several takeaways for us from this lesson today.

First, since Jesus Christ came to be the Savior and Lord of all people, then every person must acknowledge Jesus as their Savior and Lord. That means crying "Hosanna" – "Save Me" in its truest sense. Every Christian of every age has done this. Those who haven't must do so if they want to be saved and live eternally. The message of the triumphal entry is evangelistic; it's a reach out to all those who are interested.

Zachariah proclaims, "Behold, your King is coming to you; He *is* just and having salvation." But He also comes, lowly, and riding upon a donkey! If you want to share in His eternal kingdom, you must humbly come to him and acknowledge Him as the Master and Lord of your life. If you want to enter His kingdom, you must accept His death as sufficient payment for your sins. But you must also be willing to proclaim the gospel that the Messiah has come and Jesus is the King.

Secondly, if Jesus Christ is God's remedy for the ruin of humanity, we must willingly turn to Him for physical and spiritual healing. In this life or the next, those who trust in Jesus will be made whole in body, soul, and spirit.

Thirdly, all praise, honor, and glory belong to Christ because all power and authority are given to Him in heaven and earth. Jesus has authority over life and death, sickness and health, and the natural and the supernatural. When you know Him, you will never cease praising Him! You can't help but praise Him for who He is and all He does.

Finally, realize there will always be opposition to the message of Jesus. There will

always be criticism of His works, sometimes even from religious people. Sin hardens people, and Satan blinds and deceives many. Those who follow the god of this world won't acknowledge that Jesus is God who came in human flesh. And they certainly won't acknowledge Jesus as the Savior and King who will reign over the whole world forever.

Some will acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet, but they won't admit that He is God. Some say His death was an example of love but not redemption. However, both the Old and New Testaments proclaim that the Messiah came into this world to suffer and die for our sins. Without Jesus, there can be no peace with God, and there can be no hope for peace in this world.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It was a triumphal entry because, by it, Jesus begins to fulfill His mission on earth. That mission was to suffer and die as the sacrifice for sin.

In John 18, "Pilate, therefore, said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 18:37 NKJV)

Jesus did triumph over sin through His death, and by His resurrection, He triumphed over the grave. Palm Sunday is triumphal because Jesus Christ is alive and has victoriously conquered death, hell, and the grave. And with the saints of all the ages, we can victoriously proclaim, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."