

## **The Triumphant Entry**

Mark 11: 1-11

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Jesus' journey to Jerusalem was nearly over. There was only one more thing that needed to be accomplished, His triumphant entry into the city. All four Gospels describe this event. After leaving Jericho, Jesus and His followers climbed the winding road that led to Jerusalem. Arriving at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples to a nearby village where they would find a young donkey that had never been ridden. He instructed them to untie it and bring it to Him. If anyone should ask why they were untying the donkey, they should reply, "The Lord needs it and will send it back to you in a short while." Everything took place just as Jesus had told them. They were given permission to take the donkey. Obviously this had been planned well in advance.

With Jesus seated on the donkey, Jesus and His followers began the descent from the Mount of Olives down into the valley and then up the slopes of Jerusalem to the eastern gate of the Temple. It was a joyous procession. Those who were with Jesus, as well as those who welcomed Him were overjoyed. They took off their outer robes and laid them in the roadway. It was, so to speak, a red-carpet welcome. Others cut down palm branches from nearby trees laying them in Jesus' pathway or holding them up in excited celebration. The crowds became vocal as well, shouting greetings taken from Psalm 118, a traditional recitation for those entering the city during the Passover season. They shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Their shouts of joy were actually petitions for deliverance. The word hosanna literally means "save us." They were beseeching Jesus to be their Savior, the hoped for appearance of a "Messiah" who would inaugurate a national restoration of the Davidic kingdom.

As Jesus approached the eastern gate of Jerusalem, accompanied now by the throngs shouting and praising God, there were a number of Pharisees watching what was taking place. They were clearly worried. This exuberant demonstration could quickly get out of hand. The upcoming festival of Passover celebrated the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in

Egypt during the days of Moses. The dream and even the expectation that God would raise up someone like Moses to deliver the Jewish people from the rule of Rome was always something to be acknowledged and even feared. These religious leaders knew the power of Rome. There was a great big fortress named the "Antonia" right beside their temple, filled with Roman soldiers. This crowd of celebrants could easily provoke a violent uprising. Approaching Jesus, these religious leaders told Him to rebuke His disciples, to stop this dangerous, noisy procession. In response Jesus said to them, "If I tell my followers to be quiet, the very stones of this city will cry out."

Entering the city and more specifically the magnificent temple that had been restored and enlarged by Herod the Great, Jesus looked around at everything. The Temple was a busy place at this time of year. The evening sacrifices were being offered on the high altar and priests were preparing to enter the Temple to burn incense before the Lord. Additionally, there was a beehive of activity in the courts, the colonnade surrounding the Temple. Money changers were exchanging Greek and Roman coins for temple currency and the noise of hundreds of bleating sheep being offered for sale for the upcoming celebration of Passover could not be ignored. The Temple had obviously been transformed from a place of prayer into a den of thieves. Since it was late in the day, Jesus made a mental note of what was taking place and decided that tomorrow He would have to address this obvious abuse of a place that was supposed to be dedicated to God. He retired for the evening to Bethany where He would spend the night with His disciples.

What did this triumphant entry signify? What was Jesus saying to the crowds who greeted Him? Why do we, to this very day call it a triumphant entry? There are three reasons for its designation as triumphant. It was a revolutionary. It was religious. It was revelatory. Let's take a look at each one of them.

First, it was revolutionary. The Jewish people had suffered under a succession of foreign rulers, beginning with the Babylonians, then the Persians, followed by the Greeks and now the Romans. They were tired of others telling them how they should live. It was time to seek independence from their foreign masters and now they were welcoming One who could achieve that very goal. Had He not healed the sick, fed the multitudes, even raised the dead? Had not Lazarus, who lived just outside of Jerusalem, been brought back to life after being dead for four days? Obviously, this was a man who possessed the kind of divine power who could free them from their

oppressors. This is why they hailed Him as a conquering hero. Their former kings had been greeted in a similar fashion. Furthermore, closer to their own day and time, Judas Maccabaeus, a revolutionary patriot, had been welcomed in the same way. Having defeated the Greek oppressors who wanted to destroy Judaism, the crowds welcomed him, laying down their garments in the roadway and waving palm branches as he entered the city of Jerusalem in 163 BC. That's why the crowds shouted, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David," on Palm Sunday.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was also religious. In fact, it was more religious than it was political. Yes, Jesus was announcing His Kingship, but it was a kingship that would usher in a reign of peace, not one of bloodshed. Many of those who welcomed Jesus may not have recognized that His entrance had been foretold by the prophet Zechariah. In Zechariah 9:9, the prophet declared, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of donkey." In the next verse the prophet stated that His entrance would end the need for warfare and bring about a time of peace among the nations of the world. For that reason Jesus had chosen a lowly donkey, one that had never been ridden, an animal set aside for a holy purpose, the arrival of the Prince of Peace, a promise proclaimed by another prophet, the beloved Isaiah. His entrance into Jerusalem did not signal the beginning of a political revolution, but rather a religious revolution, one that would bind all nations together in peaceful coexistence under the banner of the God who had revealed Himself to the Jewish people and now to the rest of the world.

For that reason Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was revelatory. Something which had been hidden, was now ready to be revealed. Jesus had refrained from revealing His divine identity previously. When Jesus healed those who were sick, He often told them to go home and refrain from telling others that He was the Messiah. After the transfiguration when God declared that Jesus was His beloved Son, He told the three disciples, Peter, James and John, not to tell anyone what had taken place until after His resurrection. When demonic spirits wanted to acknowledge His divinity, Jesus told them to be quiet. Such pronouncements would have been premature. There would be a time to announce that Jesus was indeed the Anointed One of God, the Christ. Now that time had come. God was inserting Himself into human history in a way that He had never done before. Jesus was the Christ, the embodiment of God's presence and power

in human flesh. Later that week before the high priest of the Temple in Jerusalem and before the Roman procurator, Pilate, Jesus would proclaim His Messiahship for all the world to hear and see. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem was a dramatic declaration of Jesus' divinity.

The Journey to Jerusalem was now drawing to a close. On this first day of the last week of Jesus' life, it had begun triumphantly. Palm Sunday was the fulfillment of His life and ministry. It was the coronation of the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace and the Son of God. We continue to honor this Sunday year after year because we too are invited to join with those who welcomed Jesus. They welcomed Him into their city. We are given the privilege of welcoming Him into our hearts and lives. Is He your King? Are you among those who have rejoiced in His kingship? Is He your Prince of Peace? Does He provide that inner comforting strength and peace that sustains us in times of stress? Is He your Christ? Has He redeemed you from all that separates you from your heavenly Father? The people of Jerusalem cried out, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Has that desire for deliverance burst forth from your lips? Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus entered triumphantly in the city of Jerusalem. May His entrance into our lives be equally triumphant on this day that we call Palm Sunday.