

JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

John 12:12-19

Key Verses: 12:14-15

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

In today's passage, Jesus enters into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus entered the city where his suffering and death were waiting for him. He would be tortured and crucified in the city. So why do we call it a "triumphal entry"? It's because there he did something that would change the history of mankind forever. What he did in Jerusalem signaled a new beginning for mankind who was destined to die because of sin.

The account of Jesus entry into Jerusalem is recorded in all four gospels, signifying its importance. The account in John's gospel is the shortest. John omits many details found in the other gospels. For example, John does not tell us that Jesus sent two disciples ahead to get a donkey for him, saying to its owner, "the Lord needs it" (Mt 21:2-3; Mk 11:2-3). John does not tell us how Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44). Instead, John's focus is on how and why Jesus entered the city in the way he did, and how the crowd responded.

Look at verse 12. *The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.* The day after Jesus was anointed by Mary at Bethany, Jesus entered Jerusalem. The great crowd that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration heard that Jesus was on his way to the city. What was the atmosphere of the city like on that day? Let me try to illustrate it with a conversation between two men, a Jerusalem resident and a pilgrim from another country.

Townie: Shalom. What's up? Where are you from?

Pilgrim: Hey. I am from Alexandria. This is the second time I came here for the Passover. But this time, things seem different. A lot more excitement is in the air. What's going on?

T: Yes, and it's all because of this man named Jesus of Nazareth. He's been doing some fantastic miracles, like turning water into wine, feeding a crowd of 5,000 with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, and opening the eyes of a man born blind.

P: No kidding. I've never heard of such a thing. How can a man perform such miracles? Is he the Messiah that God promised to send to us?

T: I am not sure. But I know one thing. His miracles are for real. They are not some optical illusions or special effects.

P: How do you know?

T: Well, I was in Bethany last week, with some of my buddies to attend a funeral of this man named Lazarus. We helped to wrap his dead body with linen and put him in a tomb. Then he came—Jesus of Nazareth. And when he called, "Lazarus,

come out!” the dead man staggered out, with the linen still wrapped around his body. It was a truly amazing thing to watch.

P: Wow.

T: But our religious leaders are very unhappy about Jesus of Nazareth. I think they are jealous of him. They are also afraid that they will lose their positions when people go over to Jesus. So they have decided that he must die.

P: Really? That’s crazy.

T: Yea. Now they are watching if Jesus will dare to show up for the Passover, and people are in suspense.

P: Do you think he will show up? I want to see him.

T: Yes, in fact, I just heard that he is on his way right now. Let’s go see him.

Look at verse 13. *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!”* A great crowd took palm branches and went out to meet Jesus, shouting, “Hosanna!” We also love to sing the song, “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest!” But what does “Hosanna” mean? This word comes from a Hebrew word (הושענא) that means, “Save now” or “Please save.” The word appears in Psalm 118:25-26: “Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you.” The NLT version translates Psalm 118:25 as “Please, Lord, please save us. Please, Lord, please give us success.” So originally, Hosanna was a cry for salvation. It was an earnest plea to God to come and save. This word is comparable to words that we cry out when we are in great danger, something like, “Help! Help me, please!” But over time, the word Hosanna took on additional connotation—a declaration of praise in anticipation of salvation, something like, “Oh, thank God, you are here to save me.” So the word is used for both as a cry for help and a praise for the grace of salvation. That’s why we sing, “Hosanna, Hosanna,” followed by “Hosanna in the highest!”

Anyway, the crowd in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus into the city by shouting “Hosanna.” They also shouted, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!” When they shouted these words, they probably did so as a familiar liturgy, because they recited the words frequently, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles. They did not really know what they were shouting. It’s like what we sometimes do. We sing “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest,” without thinking much about the meaning. In fact, the same people in this crowd shouted a very different tune a few days later. They turned against Jesus and shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Nevertheless, what they shouted for Jesus was spiritually meaningful. It is because Jesus is the one who “comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus is the one who is “the king of Israel.”

Of course, Jesus is not the kind of king the crowd would make him out to be. The Jews were waiting for a political messiah, one who would set them free from the oppression of the Roman Empire. Even his disciples were expecting Jesus to be the one

who would restore the kingdom to Israel (Ac 1:6). They were excited to see many people come out to welcome Jesus. But Jesus did not enter the capital city as a worldly king. In fact, he declared to Pontus Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). Then in what sense is Jesus king? Why do we call him King of kings and Lord of lords (1Ti 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16)? It’s because Jesus is the Creator God (Jn 1:1-3). Without him nothing was made that has been made. He is the one with the absolute power and dominion over all creation. His kingdom is eternal.

Amazingly, Jesus the heavenly King came down to this world to save lowly sinners like you and me. While on earth, he did not exercise his power and dominion. Instead, he served many people as their humble shepherd. He suffered a lot to serve many sinners with his love. Now, he was entering the city of Jerusalem as a gentle king. Look at verses 14-15. *Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”* Jesus the king did not enter the city riding on a white stallion. Worldly kings and military generals would make their triumphal entries into their capital cities riding on white stallions to display their power and majesty. But Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a baby donkey. This was like riding on a tricycle to enter the capital city while other people were riding in big limousines. It was comical. It was humiliating. But this was what Jesus chose to do. He found a young donkey and sat on it. Why? It was to fulfill the Scriptures.

About 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Zechariah prophesied about the coming of the Savior King. Zechariah 9:9 says: “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Jesus knew exactly what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. He knew that his time had come to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He knew that he would be crucified as the Passover Lamb this time. And he wanted to obey the will of God by doing things purposely in order to fulfill the Scriptures. This is evident as we read other passages in John’s gospel. At the Last Supper, Jesus shared his bread with Judas Iscariot in order to fulfill the Scriptures (Jn 13:18). He saw Judas’ betrayal as fulfillment of the Scriptures (Jn 17:12). At his crucifixion, the soldiers did not divide his garment so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Jn 18:24). After his death, his bones were not broken so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled (Jn 18:36). Everything Jesus did and all that was done to him were done to fulfill the Scriptures. Jesus was determined to obey the will of God. He entered Jerusalem riding on a baby donkey in order to fulfill what was prophesied.

What were the reactions of Jesus’ humble entry to Jerusalem? Verse 16 says that *at first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.* Jesus’ disciples had probably wished that Jesus would enter Jerusalem like a conqueror. So they felt embarrassed as they followed Jesus who was riding on a baby donkey. Only after his resurrection from the dead, they realized that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and the King of peace (16).

How did other people react to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? Look at verses 17-19. *Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"* The crowd was excited to see Jesus. But they were not fully committed to Jesus. They were more like spectators in a football stadium. They shouted "Hosanna!" But soon they would be manipulated by the Pharisees to condemn Jesus. How about the Pharisees? They were very unhappy when many people went to Jesus.

So what spiritual lessons can we learn from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? Let us think about a couple of them.

First, Jesus is our King. Jesus came in the name of the Lord. Jesus did everything to fulfill the Scriptures about his kingship. He found a baby donkey and sat on it, because it was prophesied. That's how much he wanted to be our king. In fact, the main focus of his preaching was the kingdom of God. Do you remember the very first message Jesus preached? It's found in Mark 1:15: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" The kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is mentioned 102 times in the gospels. Jesus really wants us to be members of his eternal kingdom. Given the bad experience with many evil kings in history, we generally don't like the concept of king and kingdoms (except perhaps for the British). But we learn from the Bible that the kingdom of God is where God rules. God is the Creator and protector of our lives. He is the provider of this universe. Only he can be our true king. Unfortunately, many people reject God's rule in their lives. They want to be their own king, doing things that please themselves rather than obeying the word of God. Worse yet, they turn to other worthless things to worship. The Israelites in the Old Testament did this, which grieved the Lord so much. People today also turn to idols such as money, power and pleasures. Jesus is not their king; instead, a false king is sitting in the center of their hearts. When they reject Jesus as king, something or someone else becomes their king. Because of this, they have no real peace.

Jesus is not like kings of this world who rule with fear to maintain their power. Jesus is a humble Shepherd King who rules with love and peace. He entered Jerusalem on a baby donkey. There he sacrificed his own life on the cross to save us from sin and death. All of us want peace and love in our lives. But kingdoms of this world cannot give us peace and love. They only give us fear and anxiety. Only Jesus our King can give us true peace and love. And this passage teaches us that Jesus really wants us to be our king and become members of his eternal kingdom.

Second, we must follow our King with a full commitment. Many people in the crowd shouted "Hosanna" to Jesus, but they did not know him personally. They had no commitment. So when the political wind changed, they also changed their minds. They shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The Pharisees became even more paranoid about Jesus' popularity after seeing how many people were welcoming him to the city. These uncommitted people could not become the members of the kingdom of God. The disciples did not quite understand what Jesus did on that day. But they followed Jesus

with a commitment (except for Judas). So God helped them to understand it after his crucifixion and resurrection.

How about us? Is Jesus our true king? Are we willing to obey his words rather than insisting on our own ideas and desires? Or are we like the crowd in Jerusalem who failed to commit their lives to the Lord? Are we like spectators in a stadium, only watching what is unfolding rather than participating actively in the work of God?

Today we learned that Jesus entered Jerusalem as a humble king, riding on a donkey. It was a humble entry. But it's called the triumphal entry, because in Jerusalem Jesus defeated the last enemy of mankind—sin and death. Jesus died as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and on the third day he rose from the dead to open the door for us to enter his eternal kingdom. Jesus entered Jerusalem to be our Messiah, the Savior King. Let us ask again to ourselves if Jesus is truly our king. May God help us to follow and serve our king with a full commitment!