



The Entry into Jerusalem, c. 1305 - Giotto

O Worship the King

Mark 11:1-11

Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino

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Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. For almost two millennia, Christians have celebrated the final week of our Lord's life: from his entrance into Jerusalem as King on Palm Sunday to his death on Passover and resurrection on Easter Sunday. The striking thing about these events is that every act of holiness and devotion is birthed in the context of ultimate evil. It is impossible to find a greater expression of love and sorrow than what was manifest during this week when, in the words of the poet, *"sorrow and love flow mingled down."*

This morning we will look at Mark's depiction of the presentation of the Messiah to the city of the great King. This moment has been anticipated for centuries, ever since the day David left this city in shame and ignominy. You may recall that after David was spiritually restored in the wilderness, his return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 19) seemed anticlimactic and unsatisfying. He was welcomed home by a cripple and plagued with constant internal strife. The former glory of his kingdom never fully returned. Following Solomon and centuries of civil war, Israel lived in exile with the constant ache for a righteous king to return and restore Israel to her former glory. The ache and anticipation were fueled by the prophets who, with one voice, insisted the day would come when...

"I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land," (Jer 23:5)

"My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees." (Ezek 37:24)

"Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days." (Hos 3:5)

Fueled by these promises, pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem three times a year for the great feasts would sing verses from the *Hallel* (praise) psalms (113-118) in unison,

Save us, we pray, O LORD!

O LORD, we pray, give us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! (Ps 118:25-26a)

So, you can imagine there is no little emotion as the Lord approaches the Mount of Olives and the city comes into view. Here is the long-awaited coronation of Israel's king upon the empty throne of David. Our text is primarily about worship, and therefore extremely important since authentic worship is what makes us most human. What this text will teach us is how to give Jesus, our King, the true acclamation he deserves and the dangers that threaten it.

In the first scene, Mark gives us **three movements**. First are the preparations for the king, followed by the procession of the king, and climaxing with the arrival of the king. To our surprise, each section is dramatically shorter than the one previous, with less than half the number verses. Mark gives far more space to the preparations for the journey, than the actual journey (which covers almost two miles), and even less to the climatic moment of his arrival in the city. This makes for a very anti-climatic and poignant ending and makes us question whether or not we should title this text, "The Triumphal Entry."

I. The Preparation for the King (Mark 11:1-7)

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.' (Mark 11:1-7 ESV)

In the previous text Jesus and his disciples were in Jericho. From there they hiked up on the Roman military road which was "about seventeen miles long and climbed three thousand feet. It passed through Bethany and nearby Bethphage (*'house of unripe figs'*), which lay on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives stands about three hundred feet higher than the temple hill...affording a spectacular, panoramic view of the city."¹



Scale model of Ancient Jerusalem - Holy Land Hotel

Bargil **Pixner** describes the view,

On the eastern hill of Jerusalem, the city wall with the Golden Gate arose and behind it the wide Temple compound with the Temple at its center and the surrounding walls and builds, beautifully reconstructed and enlarged by Herod. To the back of it, above the Tyropeon Valley, the ancient palace of the Hasmoneans, which now served as the Praetorium was visible; and far in the distance, Herod's Upper Palace with its three enormous towers. The Second Wall north of the city partly hid the public garden, where, in a quarry area, a hill had remained, called Golgotha.²

Mark tells us that as they are approached Jerusalem they came to a **fork** in the road, "the left fork leading to Bethany and a side road, the right fork leading past Bethphage on the main, Roman road to Jerusalem."³ At this juncture Jesus sends two of his disciples on a royal mission. Before he makes his entrance to the city, he needs a proper mount. His choice for such an occasion is extraordinary. He wants a young colt on which no man has ever sat, a very unusual way to make a royal entrance. The issue of "a colt no man has ever sat" was not due to it being 'unbroken,' but an issue of 'holiness,' something that is uniquely set apart to God. Jesus is born in a womb no man has ever touched, he rides a mule no man has ever sat, and is laid in a tomb no man has ever been laid.

Having already procured the arrangements, Jesus gives his two disciples explicit instructions where to find the colt, what they are to do with it, and finally, what to say if someone objects.

4 And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. 5 And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go.

Immediately they are off and find everything just as Jesus had said. By a door outside on the street there is an unbroken colt secured by a rope. They untie it, and when several bystanders question them as to what they are doing, they give the appropriate answer, "The Lord has need of it." As Rikki Watts observes, "Impressment, while permitted for others, was very much a 'royal prerogative.'"⁴ Permission granted, they return with the colt and place their garments on it as a saddle for their king. With everything now ready for his royal entrance, they proceed over the top of the summit in full view of Jerusalem.

II. The Procession of the King (Mark 11:8-10)

7 And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 8 And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. 9 And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

Once the king has his royal mount, which he ordered and prepared, Mark records the unrestrained response of the crowd. Immediately upon seeing Jesus riding this colt, they begin making a 'royal' processional highway out of their garments, leafy branches and straw gathered from the fields. N. T. Wright notes that,

Two hundred years before, Judas Maccabaeus defeated the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, entered Jerusalem and cleansed and rebuilt the Temple — and the people waved ivy and palm branches as they sang hymns of praise. Judas started a royal dynasty that lasted a hundred years.⁵

Can you imagine this sight, the king, mounted humbly on the foal of a donkey, surrounded by the feverish work of all to make sure his royal coach never touches the ground. Two miles of colorful garments, straw and leaves. It appears as if all the creation was coming together to greet him.

Not only is there a royal highway spontaneously made for two miles, but there is also an unrehearsed choir whose voices resound to the heavens (cf. 1 Kgs 1:38-40). Notice that this singing has a spatial fullness, surrounding the king both in front and behind him. And it has a timeless depth, pulling sacred texts out of Israel's ancient past from the Psalms and singing them with fresh vigor in the fulfillment of the present. The verses come from the great Hallel (*Praise*) Psalms 113-118 which were sung by the pilgrims as shouts of acclamation and praise in preparation for their feast days. Here they combine "*Hosanna*" (Ps 118:25a), Aramaic for "*save now*," and a close derivative of the original Aramaic and Hebrew name for Jesus ("*Yehoshuah*", cf. 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26), with Psalm 118:26a, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.*" The ancient blessing of the pilgrims now takes on richer and fuller meaning in the present.

And **finally**, there is a heavenly dimension to their worship, for when they cry, "**Hosanna in the highest**," they expect their singing to resonate to heaven and to be answered with an angelic echo of affirmation and acclamation. This may suggest why much of the singing in the early church was done antiphonally, one group answering the other to give the effect of a choir of angels echoing the praise of our worship on earth.

This is the purpose of **singing** in our worship services. Our music should be designed to transport us to a much larger world of time and space, integrating heaven and earth, where past, present and future all kiss in a moment in time. And it all comes together in the midst of very common settings with the risen Christ divinely present. When that happens as a gift of his grace we are overcome with awe and wonder.

Here is our king on his royal mount, riding down the highway of holiness, surrounded by spontaneous worship that is expansive, full voiced and extravagant. All this prepares us for the climatic reception in the city of the great king. O Jerusalem, the joy of the whole earth, how will she react when she sees her king?

III. The Reception for the King (Mark 11:11)

11 And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Normally when dignitaries came to Jerusalem, especially after having won a great victory, there would be ceremony, “greetings, acclamations, and invocations of God.” The high point would be “a visit to the Temple” with “some sort of cultic activity.”⁶ But when Jesus came to Jerusalem, no one in an official capacity came to greet him or to offer him hospitality. Not one priest, not one scribe or Pharisee, not one representative from the Sanhedrin. Strange, it was no different than his birth.

Have you ever had the experience of arriving at a foreign airport and no one was there to meet you? It catches you unawares, but thankfully it is usually just a slight mishap. But imagine a ruler entering the capital city of his coronation and no one in the administration is there to welcome him. Mark does not prepare us for this emotional let down, unlike Matthew, who tells that Jesus wept when he saw the city, knowing she had missed the day of her visitation. But Mark keeps it a secret, suspending our emotions for one the greatest letdowns of all-time. The silence is like a slap in the face. And now enveloped in an eerie silence, he casts his penetrating gaze all around the temple. Out from the deafening silence you can almost hear Malachi’s haunting words,

“And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.” (Mal 3:1-2)

Jesus now alone, except for the twelve, leaves the city, for it was quite late, and Jerusalem proved not only inhospitable, but dangerous. And so, he retreats to Bethany, the place from where he got the colt and the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

The next day Jesus’ humble demeanor dramatically changes, and Malachi’s words are fulfilled as Jesus takes the temple by storm.

IV. The Reactions of the King: Removing Obstacles to Worship (Mark 11:15-17)

Jesus, on his way back to the city, examines a fig tree, a symbol for the nation, and seeing it void of fruit delivers a shocking curse (vv. 12-14). Jesus and his disciples then arrive in the temple, in the area known as court of the gentiles. This was one place specifically designated for God-fearing gentiles to worship. As the prophet Isaiah looked forward to the Messianic era, he envisioned a time when foreigners would come in droves to this outer court and God would do a new thing among them.

And **foreigners** who bind themselves to the LORD
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain
and **give them joy in my house of prayer.**
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isa 56:6-7 NIV)

Isaiah sees a time when this outer court of the gentiles will become as **holy** as the inner court of the Jews and that time is now at hand. The Gentiles can belong to “the kingdom of priests.” But when Jesus arrives in this outer court, he finds it has been overrun with commercialism, traffic, and noise, and delivers a stinging sermon evoking the memory of Jeremiah the prophet.

15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

The commercialism seemed innocent enough and was set up to be a help, not a hindrance, to the pilgrims and their worship. As Gundry writes,

The sellers sell sacrificial animals guaranteed to be clean to pilgrims who live too far away to bring their own and to locals who do not want to risk having their own animals declared unclean by priestly inspectors. The moneychangers give acceptable Tyrian currency for other currencies in order that worshipers may pay the temple tax and buy sacrificial animals. Doves are sold to worshipers who cannot afford animals (Lev 1:14; 5:7, 11: 12:6,8).⁷

Unfortunately, the place they chose to set up shop was the only place **gentiles** had to worship. And what might have seemed innocent for the convenience of the worshipper turned out to be big business. For worshippers to get rid of their ‘unclean’ Roman money in return for Kosher funds, moneychangers would charge exorbitant prices. Profit took precedence over worship. Add to all this crowds of people everywhere, laden with commercial items, using the temple mount as a short cut from the Mount Olives to the city. The result is that the court of the gentiles, set up to be a house of prayer for all peoples, has become a busy commercial intersection and noisy shopping mall.

Seeing this, Jesus is consumed with rage and with no warning takes complete control over the situation with “a ferocious exercise of authority and power.” In Jesus’ view the court of the gentiles is unique holy ground and **not** to be violated. Quoting the prophet Jeremiah has explosive **ramifications**. Jesus is attacking the whole idea of a Temple tax; he sees the selling of doves as abuse of the poor and his prohibition of vessels being carried are an attack on profiteering by the establishment.⁸ In light of this comparison, the only thing left for the Temple and its leadership is judgment.

V. Conclusion: O Worship the King!

What we learn from this processional drama and its aftermath is how Jesus is to be worshipped and the dangers that threaten the sanctity worship. How then do we give acclamation that is due our King? Let me close with four observations.

A. The Primacy of Humility

First, it is highly significant that most of the verses in our text deal with the preparation for the king’s coronation. And notice that the disciples who make those preparations, do so under very rigid and explicit instructions from the Lord. Everything has been arranged, agreed to, secured all in advance. Everything else in the text is spontaneous and unplanned, except for this one thing. For this Jesus will not relinquish control or leave to chance. And you ask, “What is that one thing?” The answer is “*the manner*” in which the Lord is presented to his people. Yes, he is the new Son of David, ready to restore the kingdom of David, but he is going to do it ‘unlike’ David. His Messianic claims to be the Son of David are to be understood in a new way, the way of Zechariah who said,

**“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zech 9:9)**

Humility is to be the great hallmark of the Jesus ‘way.’ As Rawlinson points out, “every confrontation in Jerusalem with them (*the Jews*) will come down to this, will it be their way or his way.”⁹ Have you noticed that the only time in the gospels Jesus ever gives a self-description of himself, it is that he is “**gentle and humble of heart**” (Matt 11:29)? What this means is that there is never to be an ounce of coercion in his rule over the hearts of men. He is to be presented in humility as the one who dies for others. This explains why Jesus used two disciples to secure the colt. It is so they will learn the lesson well. For it is the job of disciples to put Jesus forward to the world in this manner. Not on a stallion but on a colt, humbly dragging his feet into Jerusalem.

So, whenever we present our Lord to the world, we must always put him on the humble mount of the colt of a donkey, not in limo of wealth, or in the guise of status or power. Our first concern in presenting our Lord before the world is to do so with this face of humility.

B. The Beauty of Anonymity

The second thing to notice about this text is that, unlike the rest of Mark's gospel, everyone is nameless except the king. At other times when disciples are sent on a mission, they are named. But here they are nameless, as are the bystanders, the owner of the colt, everyone in the crowd, and those in the temple. The only name we hear in this royal procession is **Jesus**, and the titles of acclamation "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

Isn't that the way it should be? As the Lord is crowned king, all his servants fade into the backdrop. We are not worthy to have any attention drawn to ourselves. It is all upon him. This is one of most beautiful things about authentic worship. When you give true acclamation to the king, you have no need to be known or stand out, it is far more fulfilling to have Jesus at the center. This is the beauty of anonymity.

To summarize: We have the primacy of humility, the beauty of anonymity and third, is the glory of spontaneity.

C. The Glory of Spontaneity

Once Jesus is given his proper place on a throne of humility and his servants fade into the background, all of creation breaks out into spontaneous worship and heavenly acclaim. It is then that the highway of holiness which the prophets predicted is constructed, not by the puny pleas and plans of men, but by the sight of Jesus crowned in humility. It is that wondrous sight that moves all the tender hearts of those around to sing like angels and cast forth their garments like the rush of the wind. Perhaps our world does not give homage to Jesus as we would like, not because we have lacked strategies or apologetics, but because we haven't presented Jesus his rightful place on his throne of humility and then gotten out of the way.

D. The Poignant Silence

Finally, we discover in the midst of great acclamation in worship there is also great pain. Those for whom the entire procession was meant, fail to attend. They do not even send their regrets. A pain of silence slaps Jesus in the face. Later in Matthew's gospel Jesus says,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt 23:37-39)

Jesus came only once to this city. What she did with him determined their destiny, her house was left desolate. Yet in loyal love, Jesus keeps reaching out offering them repentance. But repentance means they must go back to that place where they rejected him and accept the way he came, in humility, and start afresh from that point. It is this last quality that makes us most human.

I find in my own worship, at the times of greatest intimacy with the Lord, there is a strange mixture of “love and sorrow mingling down.” And it comes for the same reason. Often those for whom you care for the most, those who are closest to you, are far away. And true worship involves embracing that sorrow. Yet if we follow in the Jesus way, we never give up, in humility we keep the invitation open.

¹ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 437.

² Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus in Jerusalem* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin Publishing, 1996), 64.

³ Robert Gundry, *Mark, A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 624.

⁴ Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 306. He also notes the messianically interpreted oracle of Genesis 49:10-12 regarding the colt.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 147.

⁶ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, 305.

⁷ Gundry, *Mark*, 642.

⁸ These three observations come from R. Bauckham, quoted by Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, 326.

⁹ Rawlinson, A.E.J. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, (WC. London: Methuen, 1949), 151.