



# JERUSALEM, MEET YOUR KING!

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Mark 11:1-11

31st Message

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Up to this point in the gospel of Mark everything has been building to the dramatic climax to which we now come, the presentation of the Messiah in Jerusalem, the city of the great King. This is the moment that has been anticipated for centuries, ever since David left the city in shame and ignominy. Following David's spiritual restoration in the wilderness, his return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 19) was anticlimactic and unsatisfying. He was welcomed home by a cripple, to a strife-plagued city. The glory of his kingdom would never be seen again. Following the reign of Solomon and centuries of civil war, Israel lived in exile, beset by a constant ache for a righteous king who would restore the nation to her former glory. This ache and anticipation was 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); and, "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); and, "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,

*"O Lord, do save (hosanna!), we beseech Thee;  
O Lord, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."* (Ps 118:25, 26a)

This is a time of great emotion now as the Lord approaches the Mount of Olives and the city comes into view. At last, the long awaited coronation of Israel's king upon the vacant throne of David is at hand. Our text primarily concerns worship. It is therefore extremely important, since it is my view that true worship is what makes us most fully human. In this text then we will learn how to give Jesus, our King, the true acclamation he deserves.

As we come to the text, I want to point out two things by way of introduction regarding the writer's structure and style. First, as to style, Cranfield notes that in this account, Mark "combines vividness of detail with the most notable restraint regarding messianic color (con-

trast with both Mt 21:9 and Lk 19:38)."<sup>1</sup> While the subtle but vivid nature of these allusions can easily be missed by the casual reader, they are all the more powerful to the one who possesses faith and a sensitive, "seeing" eye. We must read this text in a spirit of humble faith to catch its significance. A casual reading will not avail us much.

Secondly, as to its structure, we will observe that the text has three movements: the preparations for the king; the procession of the king; and the arrival of the king. Surprisingly, each section is dramatically shorter than the previous one, with less than half the number of verses. Mark gives far more space to the preparations for the journey than the actual journey (which covered about two miles), and even less to the climactic moment of the king's arrival in the city. This makes for an anticlimactic and rather poignant ending. It raises the question of whether we should entitle this text, as many do, "*The Triumphal Entry.*"

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

**And as they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." And they went away and found a colt tied at the door outside in the street; and they untied it. And some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. And they brought the colt to Jesus and put their garments on it; and He sat upon it.**

In our last study we left our Lord and his disciples just outside 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, then crossed over the mount and the Kidron Valley and entered Jerusalem. The mounts stands about three hundred feet higher than the temple hill...affording a spectacular, panoramic view of the city."<sup>2</sup>

I caught my first view of Jerusalem from this spot. It was early in the morning and the city was awash in the light of dawn, a fiery splendor that took my breath away. Bargil Pixner describes the view:

Much as today, it was a fascinating sight at that time: 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 Tyropoeon 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."<sup>3</sup>

Mark records that as they 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."<sup>4</sup> At this juncture Jesus sends two of his disciples on a mission: He has need of a royal mount. His choice is extraordinary: He wants a young colt on which no man has ever sat—a most unusual way to make a royal entrance. Having already made the arrangements, he gives his two disciples explicit instructions where to find the colt, what they are to do with it and what to say if someone objects.

Immediately they are off, and they find everything just as Jesus had said. By a door, outside on the street, an unbroken colt stands, 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." Rikk Watts observes, "Impressment, while permitted for others, was very much a 'royal prerogative.'"<sup>6</sup> With permission granted, they return with the colt, and place their garments on it to make a saddle for their king.

Everything is 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 (11:8-10)

**And many spread their garments in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before, and those who followed after, were crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; 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 the colt they begin making a "royal" processional highway, using their garments, together with leafy branches and straw gathered from the fields. When Jehu was anoint-

ed king, "each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps" (2 Kgs 9:12,13). But Jehu's royal highway covered only the steps up to the building. This is what authorities do today when they lay out a red carpet for dignitaries, right up to the airplane ramp. But this royal highway covered two miles! Imagine the sight: here is the king, humbly mounted on the foal of a donkey, surrounded by the feverish work of all to make sure his royal coach never touches the ground, traversing over two miles of colorful garments, straw and leaves. It seemed as if all the creation was coming together to greet him.

On this spontaneously constructed two-mile royal highway an unrehearsed choir now raise their voices to the heavens (cf. 1 Kgs 1:38-40). Their singing has a spatial fullness about it, for it surrounds the king front and rear. And it has a timeless depth, drawing sacred texts out of Israel's ancient past, 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 result is that 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 all the way to heaven, to be answered with an angelic echo of affirmation and acclamation. This is why much of the singing of 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, everything being done in the midst of 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 then is our king on his royal mount, riding down the highway of holiness, surrounded by spontaneous worship that is large, full voiced and extravagant. There is more joy and shouts of acclamation in this text than when David first brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (2 Sam 6). All this prepares us for the climactic reception in the city of the great king. How will Jerusalem, the joy of the whole earth, react when she sees her king?

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

**And He entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking all around, He departed for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.**

It is probable that Jesus entered Jerusalem through “what some call now Saint Stephen’s gate, near the north entrance to the outer court of the temple.”<sup>7</sup> But, incredibly, no one was there to meet him. Have you ever arrived at foreign airport and found no one there to meet you? Thankfully, such an experience is usual. Now imagine a ruler entering the capital city of his own people for his coronation and no one in the administration turns out to meet him. Mark does not prepare us for this emotional letdown, unlike Matthew, who records 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 of the greatest letdowns ever.

When dignitaries entered Jerusalem in ancient times, especially after having won a great victory, there would be ceremony—“greetings, acclamations, and invocations of God”—the high point of which would be “a visit to the Temple” with “some sort of cultic activity.”<sup>8</sup> But when Jesus entered the city, no one in an official capacity came to greet him, embrace him or offer him hospitality—not one priest, not one scribe or Pharisee, not one representative from the Sanhedrin. Strangely, this was no different from what occurred at his birth. This was a painful echo of David’s experience, when his joy in bringing the ark of the covenant into the city was met by the acclamation of all—that is, until he got home. It was there, where he expected to be appreciated by the one closest to him, that he received a massive insult that drowned his joy (2 Sam 6:20). And so the same fate befalls the greater Son of David.

The silence is like a slap in the face to Jesus. Now, enveloped in an eerie quiet, he casts his penetrating gaze around the temple. From out of the deafening silence we 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?’” (Mal 3:1,2)

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

#### **IV. O Worship the King!**

From this processional drama we learn how Jesus is to be worshipped. This is the most important lesson in life, for when we truly worship we are most fully human. How then should we give the acclamation that is due our King? I will 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 preparations for the king’s coronation. Notice that the disciples who make the preparations do so under rigid and explicit instructions from

the Lord. Everything has been arranged, agreed to and secured in advance. All else in the text is spontaneous and unplanned, except for one thing, which Jesus will not relinquish control or leave to chance. What is that one thing? It is “*the manner*” in which the Lord is presented to his people. Yes, he is the new Son of David, ready to restore David’s kingdom, but he is going to do so in a manner quite 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 in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** (Zech 9:9)

Humility is to be the great hallmark of the Jesus “way.” And, 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.”<sup>9</sup> The only time in the gospels when Jesus gives a description of himself is when he says that he is “*gentle and humble of heart*” (Matt 11:29). This means that there is never to be a hint 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—so that they would learn the lesson well. It is the job of disciples to present Jesus to the world in this manner, mounted not on a stallion but on a colt, humbly dragging his feet in the dust of the streets as he enters Jerusalem.

This is why the apostle Paul instructed Timothy as a elder to put on “gentleness” even when correcting a vile false teacher, knowing that it was this one quality that might free the person from the grip of the devil (2 Tim 2:24ff). Not brilliance or dogmatism, but gentleness. If the church had understood this there would have been no need for the Crusades or the Inquisition or the evils that still plague us.

So when we place our Lord before the world we must always put him on the humble mount of the colt of a donkey, not in limousine of wealth, not with the trappings of status or power. So our first concern in giving our Lord his due is presenting him to the world with a 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. So also are the bystanders, the owner of the colt, 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 how it should be? As the Lord is crowned king, all his servants fade into the background.

We are not worthy to have any attention drawn to ourselves. Everything is focused upon him. This is one of the most beautiful things about true worship. When we give true acclamation to the king we have no need to be known and stand out. It is far more fulfilling to have him at the center (Rev 4,5). This is the beauty of anonymity.

So we have the primacy of humility and the beauty of anonymity; and third, 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 made, not by the pleas or plans of men, but by the sight of Jesus crowned in humility. It is that wondrous sight that moves 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 worship and give homage to Jesus as we would like, not because we have lacked strategies or apologetics, but because we haven't presented Jesus in his rightful place, on his throne of humility, and then taken ourselves out of the way.

Last week, a number of brothers experienced this very thing at a men's retreat. One of the men revealed that he had come to the realization that Jesus was Lord just that very morning, so the next day we scheduled a public baptism, at Lover's Point, the most central spot in Pacific Grove. Then another brother spontaneously expressed his desire to profess his commitment to Christ. After a time of public singing, teaching and sharing, we plunged our two brothers into the raging sea as a symbol of their wedding vows to Christ. Here were these two nameless figures taking on the most humiliating image, plunged into a watery grave. To our surprise, spontaneous cheers and applause broke out among onlookers on the sea wall. Several of them came to talk to us, and in the aftermath one of the brothers wrote a song entitled "Holy Ground" to commemorate the event. This was a wonderful time of worship in the glory of spontaneity.

### D. The Poignant Silence

Finally, we discover that in the midst of great acclamation in worship there is also great pain. Those for whom the entire procession was meant failed to attend or even send their regrets. A pain of silence slaps Jesus in the face. Later, according to Matthew, he would say,

**"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"** (Matt 23:37-39)

Jesus came but once to this city to be coronated. What she did with him determined her destiny: her house was left desolate. Yet in loyal love, he keeps reaching out, offering 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 anew from that point. It is this last quality that makes us most human. In my own worship I find that during my 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 whom we care for most, those closest to us, are far away, and true worship embraces that sorrow. Yet if we follow in the Jesus way we never give up. In humility we keep the invitation open.

This is the true worship that glorifies the King.

1. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 347.
2. D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 437
3. Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus in Jerusalem, his first and last days in Judea* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin, 1996) 64.
4. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 624.
5. The issue of "a colt no man has ever sat" is not due to it being 'unbroken,' it is an issue of 'holiness', something 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 (cf. Num 19:2; Deut 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7; 2 Sam 6:3; Zech 9:9; Luke 23:53).
6. Rikk E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 306. Watts also notes the messianically interpreted oracle of Genesis 49:10-12 regarding the colt.
7. Carson, 440.
8. Watts, 305.
9. A.E.J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Methuen, 1949) 151.

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