

The Power of Palm Sunday

4.14.19 (revised from 3.28.10)

Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, John 12:12-19 (all read as one united reading from John MacArthur's "One Perfect Life")

Supporting Scriptures:

Zechariah 9:9 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 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Psalms 118: 24-26 This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord, do save [hosanna], we beseech You; O Lord, we beseech You, do send prosperity! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

1. SET UP OF THE STORY

I was a beautiful day in the spring of 33 AD. It was the first day of the week – Passover week – the busiest week of the year for Jerusalem. All the Jews who were able to travel flocked to the temple city to celebrate the greatest feast of the Jewish year – the remembrance of their national freedom from the slavery of Egypt by the hand of God through the prophet Moses. That year, Friday was to be the climax of the feast, when the specially chosen Passover lamb was to be slain for the nation. The streets leading to Jerusalem were filled with travelers, as well as with the sounds of the multitude of sacrificial animals to be offered and eaten by each family - the bleating of sheep, the crying of rams and the cooing of doves.

Jerusalem was also busy with rumors and whispers of a miracle rabbi who had been teaching, healing and raising people from the dead. Why, just last month Lazarus, from the nearby town of Bethany, had been called forth from his tomb by this rabbi Jesus, after he had been dead for four full days – and the city had not ceased to talk about it. The Pharisees, a prominent part of the religious leadership, had ordered that this Jesus be arrested on sight – concerned that this rabbi was swaying the people away from traditional teachings. So the big question on everyone's mind and tongue was whether this miracle rabbi would show his face in Jerusalem for the great Passover feast that every good rabbi should attend.

Meanwhile, only a few miles from Jerusalem, in the town of Bethany, Jesus was staying in the home of his friend, Lazarus, and sisters Martha and Mary. His twelve disciples were with him, as were many of his other followers. In addition, many Jerusalem Jews who had heard that he was nearby had come to see him and also see one whom he had raised from the dead - Lazarus. So Bethany, usually a quiet Jerusalem suburb, was full of anxious and curious visitors. Jesus had been intimating that he would go to Jerusalem for the Passover, but would he, considering the volatile climate?

2. STEED OF THE KING

That question was answered when on Sunday morning of Passover week he got up and took off on foot for the city. The crowd of disciples, followers and curious onlookers followed. A few miles along, he stopped at the foot of the Mount of Olives which led into the city. Here at a fork in the road was the entrance to the little village of Bethphage. He sent two of his disciples into the village with the instructions to bring back a mother donkey and her colt, which they would see tied up as they entered the village. He further instructed that if they were asked what they were doing, they would simply answer, "the Lord has need of them." The gospel writer of Mark is the author that records that these two went and were indeed questioned by bystanders as to what they were doing. But as soon as they said, "the Lord has need of them" they were given permission with no questions asked. It gives me

pause to ask myself if my possessions are as readily available for the Master's use.

Anyway, to the amazement and delight of the crowd, the disciples put their outer garments on the baby donkey, and Jesus sat on it – his feet probably dragging in the dust of the road. They were amazed that Jesus chose to ride the baby, rather than the mother. And some recalled the words of the prophet Zechariah 9:9 that says:

*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 on a colt, the foal of a donkey*

They were delighted because they saw that Jesus was going to ride into the city – just as Simon Maccabee had done so some 150 years earlier. The Maccabean triumphant victory to take back the city of Jerusalem was a well know historical story for a Jewish child. The apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees 13:15 says that Simon Maccabee entered Jerusalem with “*a chorus of praise and the waving of palm branches.*” No wonder that the waving of palms became a part of Jesus’ “triumphal entry.” The waving of palm branches had historical significance to signal the victory of a conquering hero. And the riding of a donkey’s colt signified the humility of the rider. But I’m getting ahead of my story.

3. SOVEREIGN PRAISE OF THE DISCIPLES

So, Jesus continued on the road to Jerusalem, now mounted on the colt of a donkey.

Matthew, chapter 21, records: “*and most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road.*” It was a truly regal scene, reminiscent of the Maccabean entry. Donkey, palms, garments and shouting of praise. Luke, chapter 19 records these disciples as saying “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.*” Not only are they acknowledging his Kingship, but his Messiahship. By their words they were worshiping this Rabbi Jesus as divine.

So riding the steed of a donkey’s colt spoke of his humble Kingship. And the shouts of the multitude of disciples spoke of his Messiah-divinity. They were hailing the King of kings!

4. “SAVE NOW” OF THE JERUSALEM THROG

It is in John, chapter 12, that we learn that the great multitude who had come to the feast learned that Jesus was approaching Jerusalem. They took branches from the palm trees and went out to meet him. They began to cry “*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.*” In doing this they were borrowing the praise from Psalm 118, which reads in v. 24-26:

This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O LORD, do save [hosanna], we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

The “Hosanna” that they were shouting is translated “do save” or “save us now.” It clearly associated Jesus with the Messiah and Savior of the nation that they believed he was. Their cries for salvation were not a cry for personal salvation as much as a cry for national salvation. They were hoping that this Messiah would set them free from the tyranny of Rome and be the King of Jews they had longed for. So this crowd was also calling for Jesus to be their king in their “save now’s.”

The garments spoke of the people’s submissive homage to the King. The palms spoke of the praise lifted to heaven for the coming King. The “hosannas” linked this King to the saving Messiah for which they longed. All this was prophetic for who Jesus indeed was – the divine Messiah, King of kings.

5. SCOLDING OF THE PHARISEES

Even the Pharisees joined the crowd from Jerusalem to see this Rabbi Jesus enter the holy city. They had wondered if he would come to the feast, and their question was answered. And in their minds he was

playing right into their hands. He was entering their trap. But they were affronted by the adulation of the crowd shouting his praise. How dare the crowd shout for this “two-bit” rabbi to save them?

“We demand that you rebuke your disciples!” they shouted at Jesus, as if he were bound to respect their religious authority. But Jesus saw this event from the perspective of heaven. The Son of God was foreshadowing his ultimate entrance into Jerusalem as King of Kings, being hailed by his followers as exactly who He was – the conquering Messiah. And he knew that all creation was keenly attune to this momentous occasion and praising God along with the crowd. So Jesus replied to the offended Pharisees, “If these should keep silent, the very stones would cry out.”

It could well be that this was not exaggerated hyperbole, but divine prophetic truth. All heaven and earthly creation was acknowledging this entrance as a grand moment in history, and the Pharisees were blind to its significance, and even offended by it. Oh how many even today see no special significance in this day which commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus, the King of Kings into the Holy City for his most regal act of self-sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Well should we join with the adoring crowd with our shouts of “Hosanna.” And well should we today and forever crown him the King of our lives! Well should we worship Him as God come to earth.

6. **SORROW OF THE KING**

Here the account turns from raucous celebration to thoughtful introspection. As the crowd roars on, the procession comes to the peak of the Olivet hill, where Jesus sees the Holy city spread out before him. In his mind, he doesn’t view buildings, but rather sees people – his people. And he weeps over them, saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:42). Oh how his love for his people is seen in this precious lament. He had come to his own – the Jews - and his own did not receive him. (John 1:11)

Jesus goes on to prophesy: “For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:43-44). This is exactly what happened when the Roman conqueror, Titus, overthrew Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The city was barricaded, surrounded and leveled to the ground with thousands of the citizens killed – men, women and children. This was God’s judgment upon the city for not recognizing the Son of God in their midst.

This momentous day ends with Jesus entering Jerusalem and then entering the temple. It is Mark alone, in his account, that tells us that Jesus, “after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late” (Mark 11:11). What began with a raucous “shout” ends with a quiet “whimper.” The people were moved at his entrance, but then undoubtedly stunned and disappointed with the lack of anything that came of it. But oh, the deep, powerful prophetic significance of that day they failed to understand!

7. **“SO WHAT” OF THE STORY**

1. Palm Sunday is the powerful opening act of the Lamb of God willingly submitting to be sacrificed.
2. I must ask if my possessions are available for the King’s use, if “the Lord has need of them.”
3. I must marvel at the humility of the King of kings on a donkey’s foal and emulate that humility.
4. I must acknowledge the orchestration of this event in eternity and prophesied long before it happened.
5. I must crown Jesus as the king of my heart, ruling my thoughts, actions and obeying HIS commands.
6. I must ever cast my garments of self at his feet and raise my palm branches of praise to Him.
7. I must ever ask Him to “save me now” – acknowledging my continual need of His divine aid.
8. I must learn to weep over my “city” of influence and do what I can to point them to their Savior.
9. I must realize that Palm Sunday is a precursor to Jesus’ future entering of Jerusalem and reigning as King over all the earth.
10. I must be a vocal and unashamed proclaimer of His glory “before the rocks cry out.”

The King has come. And the King is coming. Ever may He reign as King in my heart.

The Gospel Story of Palm Sunday

From "One Perfect Life" by John MacArthur – a blended harmony of the four Gospels showing how Matthew, Mark, Luke and John fit seamlessly together. Text is from the New King James Version.

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think – that He will not come to the feast?" Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.

And it came to pass, six days before the Passover, Jesus drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and came to Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.

The next day, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and as soon as you have entered it you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her, on which no one has sat. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them here." So they went on their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. But some of those who stood there – the owners – said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of him," just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.

They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus, laid their clothes on them, and they set Jesus on the colt. All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

"Fear not. 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.'"

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

And a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him. And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread

them on the road. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”

Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples who went before and those who followed began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” But He answered and said to them, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.”

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying “Who is this?” So the multitude said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.” And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, as the hour was already late, and He lodged there with the twelve.