

JOURNEY WITH JESUS

C. THE REDEEMER.

24. The Entry of the King.

Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19. Each of the gospel writers recognized the significance of this “Triumphal Entry”; it was the last appeal by Jesus to his fellow-Israelites to recognize him as the Messiah, the fulfilment of prophecy. Prophets in the Old Testament sometimes reinforced their message to the nation by acting it out and this was exactly what Jesus was doing, not just fulfilling the prophecies of others, but organising the fulfilment deliberately himself. Five hundred years before, when the Jews had returned from exile to their own land of Israel, **Zechariah** had proclaimed, in **chapter 9:9**, “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 a donkey .”

We have little regard for donkeys today, but in that time the ass was regarded as a noble animal, used by kings and rulers. When a king was making a visit to another nation in peace, he would make his entrance riding a donkey, whereas if he came to make war, he would ride in on a horse. Jesus was coming to his own people, his own city of Jerusalem, in peace. This was in stark contrast to his appearance in judgement as recorded in **Revelation 19:11**, “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.” Each of the gospel writers states that Jesus rode on a colt, an animal that had never before been ridden. Even that small but significant detail given by Zechariah was fulfilled! Unused animals were regarded as being especially suitable for religious processions. It is interesting that Jesus told his disciples to say to the owners that “the Lord needs” the donkey – or actually, as the original of **Matthew 21:3** says, “its Lord needs it.” This by the way is the first time Jesus used the title of Lord for himself. **Psalms 50:10,11** reminds us that God is Lord of all creation – “for every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are Mine.” As its Creator, Jesus had full command of this untrained animal!

What amazing condescension! The divine Lord needed a humble animal! We could wonder how the donkey's owner felt with his animal being commandeered. Little could he guess the honour being bestowed on his humble donkey! Maybe he was a devout believer as we get the feeling this loan was pre-arranged. In any case it is a tremendous encouragement to us if we feel we have nothing of much value to give to God: if He can use a donkey, He can sure use us!

We stand in awe at this display of magnificently deliberate courage on the part of Jesus. The authorities who had outlawed him were determined to end his life: if he wanted to enter Jerusalem it would have been prudent to go in secret or disguised. Yet he came in such a way that he focused every eye upon himself. With superlative courage, and in defiance of all that men could do, he came in this act of superlative love – love's last appeal before the offer closed.

So Jesus entered Jerusalem, the embodiment of every detail of that ancient prophecy. He had chosen his time well, for at Passover the population of Jerusalem, normally around 100,000, would be swollen to at least one million with pilgrims from all over Judea and many countries around where Jews were scattered. In addition, this was a special Passover for there was an undercurrent of expectation that the Messiah really would be coming soon – to overthrow the Roman overlords and restore the Jewish nation to its former glory. Sadly, when Jesus did not meet their expectations they rejected him, crucified him and so called down on their heads the coming judgement - the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and horrendous damage to the nation – that came in 70 A.D.

Some may have certain expectations of God and of Jesus and sometimes when these are not met, the result is anger, cynicism and rejection of everything to do with Christianity. How can we make sure that we have the right impression of God?

But for now the “very large crowd” responded by waving palm branches (traditionally used in celebrations of victory) and spreading their cloaks on the road – an act of royal homage. Little did they know that this was a foretaste of Christ’s great victory at the culmination of the age, as written in **Revelation 7:9** – “Before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” The budding belief in Jesus as their Messiah, burst into joyous blossom as the crowds shouted their welcome – Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! Later, disappointed to see Jesus not leading them to victory but standing trial like a criminal, they were to shout out instead, “Crucify him!”

The reaction of Jesus.

Matthew 23:37,38; Luke 19:41-44. It is small wonder, then, that at the end of that triumphal procession, Jesus would be overcome with sadness. Matthew records His sorrow as that of a grieving father – “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.”

But it is Luke who tells us that Jesus wept – and the Greek word signifies strong crying, wailing, or sobbing – “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.” Jesus went on to foretell their judgement – that they would rebel against the Romans, who in A.D. 70 did indeed build an embankment to besiege Jerusalem, destroying the temple and prising apart every stone - as Jesus said they would - in order to garner the melted gold embellishment that had run in between each stone. The death toll was 600,000 Jews.

There is something of very great significance in this passage. In **verse 42** Jesus says, “*on this day*” and in **verse 44**, “*you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.*” Sir Robert Anderson, (1841-1918), British barrister and writer in law and theology, made a startling calculation which he set out in his book “Daniel in the Critics’ Den.” **Daniel 9:25ff** records a prophecy made to Daniel by Gabriel the archangel, detailing the time span from when the temple was ordered to be rebuilt, to the time when “the Anointed One will be cut off” – an obvious reference to Christ. This would amount to a total of 173,880 days. Because Luke was a historian, he records the exact year when Jesus began His ministry, and that the day He rode into Jerusalem was 6th April, 32 A.D. Taking into account the different dating system, the number of days from 14th March 445 B.C. (when the order to rebuild the temple was issued) to 6th April, 32 A.D. is exactly 173,880 days! So Jesus’s words “on this day” have the greater impact. If the teachers of the law had taken to heart their study of Daniel’s words, they would have known that Jesus was indeed the prophesied Anointed One! They sealed their own doom.

We are not apt to think of God as a mathematical genius - but Who else could have created our universe with all its complexities? In all the uncertainties of life, it is a great comfort to know that God has a timetable – not just for the world, for the universe, but for us as individuals. Sometimes the waiting seems interminable, but it is for us to put our trust completely in God, so that we recognize “the time of God’s coming” to us and can enjoy the blessing of His fulfilment within our own lives and experience.

What is the best way to handle stress? Do you find strength and comfort in knowing that you are fitting in with God’s timetable for you? He has a timetable for the universe – and the perfect timetable for us!

“My Father’s House!”

Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45,46 Once in Jerusalem, Jesus went right into the Temple; while he could weep with sorrow for his people, he did not shirk from passing judgement on them. In this episode we see that he was not only Master of the animals; he was Lord of the Temple.

The temple area covered the top of Mount Zion and extended to about 30 acres. There was a wide outer space called “The Court of the Gentiles”: anyone, Jew or Gentile, could come into this, but for any Gentile who went beyond the wall separating it from the rest of the temple, the penalty was death. Hence this was the only area into which any God-fearing Gentile (and there were many at that time) could come and worship. Next was the Court of the Women and then for the “privileged,” the Court of the Israelites. The thousands of pilgrims who came for Passover from other countries, needed to have their foreign currency exchanged into the only currency that was accepted for the annual temple tax and for the payment of sacrificial animals. Thus the money changers could easily outwit the strangers by charging an excessive exchange rate with which the hapless foreigners were incapable of arguing. Doves for sacrifice had to be, like all sacrificial animals, perfect: any doves brought in from outside could easily be rejected by the priests as imperfect, causing the foreigners to have to buy others from the temple sellers at exorbitant prices. On top of this, the noise of the animals and the turmoil of buying and selling, made it impossible for any Gentile to worship God in the one and only place in the temple accessible to them.

The utter corruption of the place meant to be sacred to the worship of God, was what aroused the anger of Jesus. It was His Father’s house: how dare they pollute it with their evil practices! In fact, His anger was a reflection of God’s feelings as expressed long before in **Jeremiah 7:1-15**, where the temple of Solomon was destroyed because of the hypocrisy and infidelity of the Jewish nation. Jesus knew that history was soon to repeat itself for the same reason, when the Romans would destroy the temple in 70 A.D. Even as He lashed out at the traders He referred (**Matthew 21:13**) to God’s words in **Jeremiah 7: 11** – “Has this house, which bears My Name, become a den of robbers to you?” Mark makes a further point to record (**Mark 11:17**) that Jesus also quoted **Isaiah 56:7**, “My house will be called a house of prayer *for all nations.*” Jesus’ anger was not only on behalf of His Father: it was also for the sake of the Gentiles to whom the worship of God should have been offered freely. The money changers, the merchants and even the priests who allowed such practices, were all classed by Jesus as robbers because they were stealing from others not only material goods, but more importantly, the opportunity to come close to the one true God.

What hindrances to worship occur in our churches today? Is it always easy to worship God first and foremost in our services? How can we contribute to the sense of worship?

It is ironic that the reaction of the chief priests was to look for a way to kill Jesus: it was the death of Jesus that opened the way at last for the Gentiles to have full access to Him! But that does not mean that we Gentiles can take for granted our freedom to worship God or become casual in our approach to Him. We do well to heed the warning in **Hebrews 12:28,29** – “Worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” Here we see Jesus himself demonstrating that cleansing fire.

Matthew stresses a lovely point in **21:14**, “The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them.” Jesus’ anger was not a negative thing: with His anger also went His positive deep compassion for the needy. While the traders fled from Him, the blind and the lame gathered fearlessly around Him. Even the children gladly carolled Him with their song of “Hosanna to the Son of David” or in other words, “Son of David, save us!” In the midst of all this we look with wonder at the sheer courage of the human Jesus, who did not flee from His enemies, but stayed right in the temple to teach and to heal.

Do the “blind and the lame” find a welcome in our churches? Do we introduce them to the Great Healer? Do we have an attitude of positive outreach to those with a variety of needs?

John 2:13-22. John records a similar cleansing of the temple by Jesus, but at the beginning, rather than at the end, of His ministry. Here Jesus made a whip with which He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the coins of the money changers and shouted to the dove sellers, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father’s house into a market!” John always emphasised the divine nature of Christ in his gospel, and in verse 19 Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” The Jews scoffed at this: after 46 years, the embellishments that Herod the

Great had started were still being carried out. But Jesus of course was speaking of His own body, which indeed was raised again in three days, and He is now the Head of His body, which is the Church.

To Die for All.

John 12:20-33. These Greeks were probably God-fearers, (there were many) who were impressed with the purity of the Jews' religion and had decided to worship the one true God. They had come to worship at the Temple and were curious about this new Rabbi. They came to Philip who with his Greek name would be more likely to listen to them, he in turn told Andrew, and both of them took them to Jesus. This called from Jesus a clear announcement of his mission and coming death. Troubled as he was in spirit, he knew he was approaching the very climax of his time on earth, and all he sought was to glorify God. The answering voice from heaven validated his claim. Jesus went on to utter an amazing prophecy, in **verse 32**, about his crucifixion, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* to myself." While there was unbelief all around him, there were many who did believe in him, and John tells us **in verse 42**, "Many even among the leaders."

After the stress of the day Jesus went out to Bethany for the balm of an evening with His beloved and understanding friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus: their ministry to His human needs at this time cannot be over-estimated.