

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

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Date: 29 October 2023

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[0 : 0 0] We are working our way through Mark's Gospel, and the past couple Sundays Jesus had started to walk towards Jerusalem.

And in the passage, Miriam just read for us, he actually enters Jerusalem. And so this moment, chapter 11, is the beginning of the Passion Week, so the week that will inaugurate Jesus' march all the way to the cross on Friday.

So today, this day in Mark 11, is Sunday, and this is typically called the Triumphal Entry passage, often known as Palm Sunday.

So some people will preach this text or look at this text on Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter every year. And it's called Palm Sunday because the other Gospels were told they lay down palms here, it says they lay down leafy branches before him.

And the people shout, before he enters Jerusalem, Hosanna, which means, that's a direct just transliteration from Hebrew, and it just means, save us, I pray, or save me please, something like that.

[1 : 0 4] And the question of this passage, which is the rest of, really the question of the rest of Mark's Gospel is, how can people on Sunday say, Hosanna, save me?

And then on Friday, say, crucify him. How do you get from Sunday to Friday? The very same people. That's the question. Well, the rest of Mark's Gospel tells us how that happens, but it's actually all right here too in this passage.

It's a shout out. And so let's think about it together. And to see it, there's really three things to see. There's always three, right? Of course. There's three things to see here, and it's the irony of his entry.

And then the praise of the people, and then the untamed cult. All those things help us to see how we could move from Sunday to Friday. Okay, so first, the irony of his entry.

Mark tells us that they come to Bethpage and then Bethany near the Mount of Olives. Now the reason for that, that they're telling us, he's telling us about the geography, exactly where they are on the map, is a number of things.

[2 : 1 1] One of the things is that the Mount of Olives becomes Jesus' home base during the Passion Week. So most days, Jesus is going to go into Jerusalem and then come back out and stay at the Mount of Olives.

This is now home base for the end of his life. It's about a kilometer away from Jerusalem. And another reason, a theological reason, is that Ezekiel had had a vision in Ezekiel chapter 11 that one day the glory of the Lord would leave the temple and rest on the Mount of Olives.

And so in the first century, people have an association that there's a messianic promise that when the Messiah comes, you will see the glory of the Lord move from the temple to the Mount of Olives. Well, here it is. And that sets the tone for the rest of the passage in the details. When you look at the details, Jesus is different in this passage than he has been so far in Mark's Gospel.

Look at what he says. Go into the village in front of you and immediately as you enter, you will find a cult. Now he's saying here that there's a village, Bethany, that we have yet to come to.

[3 : 2 1] And when you two disciples, whoever they were, go, you're going to find this cult. He's going to be tied up. Now Jesus knows where the cult is. They've not seen the cult yet. But he knows the cult is there.

When you get there, you will untie it. He probably knows what the knot they used is to tie the cult up. And people are going to even say to you, why are you taking this cult? And you just tell them the Lord has called for it.

And the people are going to say, okay, what Lord? I don't know. The Lord has spoken. Whatever. He's spoken. You see, Jesus here comes to us in a different way than he's come in the rest of Mark's Gospel.

When he says, tell the people that the Lord has asked for it, he's talking about himself all of a sudden. And this is a self-reference that he's not really been openly using throughout most of Mark's Gospel.

So in the beginning of Mark's Gospel, you might remember he heals a paralyzed man. This is one of the first things he does. And he tells the man, do not tell anybody. And yet the man goes into the village and tells everybody, and Jesus is not able then to enter the village.

[4 : 27] And so the whole of Mark's Gospel, he's been keeping what we call the messianic secret. Don't tell anybody who I am. And now all of a sudden, when he sets his face to enter Jerusalem, he says, I'm the Lord and when you go and use my name in front of people who have no idea what's happening, they will know, they will obey.

He's got this moment here where he takes control. He unveils in a way. Maybe you've had the experience, many of you will have, where you play sports with children.

And when you play sports with kids, you do the responsible adult thing. You hold back. You're playing football maybe with a child. And no matter how good the kid thinks he is at football, this may or may not have happened at my house.

Eventually, you let them take the ball. You trip over the ball. You fumble the ball. You mess up and you let them run with it and score a goal.

But then all of a sudden, if you've been playing for a little while, there's that moment where you do the Maradona turn. You rainbow flick. You volley into the upper right 90 if you're able.

[5 : 40] And the people, they see, the jaws drop. They see, wow, look at that. Look at the ability. The glory is unveiled.

You've been holding back. And it's sort of like this. That's a poor illustration. But Jesus Christ has concealed his glory so far in Mark's Gospel.

From the children, from the disciples, from everybody around him, and now he's not hiding. And he says, the Lord needs the cold. I know where the cold is. Go get the cold.

This has been my plan. And they go and they get it. You can imagine that when you go and say to somebody, you know, I'm taking this cold. This, by the way, it's a donkey, Matthew tells us, a baby donkey that belongs to somebody else.

And you just say, well, the Lord needs it. And there's no explanation here. They don't have a choice. They just say, OK, OK. He's externalizing his authority. He's unveiling.

[6 : 36] He's showing who he really is. And a few other details. We're told here that this cold was never ridden upon before. It's untamed. And James Edwards, one of the commentators who was actually in Edinburgh this past week, lecturing, he talks about how in Numbers 19 and Deuteronomy 23, there's a reference that a animal, a beast of burden like a donkey that's never been used before, has a particular purity about it.

And that's why in the temple sacrifices that were made needed to be at their best, unused animals, animals that had never really been used.

And there's this Hebrew idea, this Old Testament idea, that this untamed cold has a purity, a purity that's fit for a king. But even more than that, the tradition develops, and across the whole ancient Near East in the culture, this is recorded in rabbinic literature in the Mishnah, it said that no one can ever ride a king's horse.

So if anybody ever sits on a king's horse, that horse has to be gotten rid of. A new horse has to come. Only the king can ride on the king's horse, and only the king can ride on the king's donkey. It has to be unset on before. And you see this image just gathering. Jesus is unveiling. It's saying, Jesus is king. Jesus is king. You keep going, verse eight, they then lay down their cloaks and their leafy branches and their palms.

[8 : 01] And this is not the first time this has happened in the Bible. They did this for Jehu in the Old Testament and the book of Second Kings. They lay down their cloaks and branches for Jehu, the king to walk on in Israel.

But even more significant than that is the historical moment that every person in this time knew about. So if you went to school in the first century, you learned about your history.

And your history included that 175 years before this, a man by the name of Simon Maccabees had defeated the Syrians when they occupied the land here.

And he had marched his army back to Jerusalem. And when he did that, they blew the trumpets, they laid down their cloaks, they laid down palm branches.

And he entered Jerusalem on a mighty steed. And this was a great moment in their history and they remembered it. And every single commentator says there's no doubt that everybody's thinking of Simon Maccabees as Jesus enters the picture here.

[9 : 03] It's on their mind. And that's when you realize the distinction. He is unveiling himself. He is a king. And every thing about this passage says that they're thinking again, Simon Maccabees, he rode in in power with a great army blowing the trumpet on a mighty stallion.

And it's been pointed out by others that this passage, the triumphal entry, has a connection or is at least maybe being thought of in Revelation chapter 5, verses 5 to 6, where we've got this dichotomy put together where it says in Revelation 5 that Jesus Christ is the lion, the lion of the mighty tribe of Judah, and he's the lamb who came to be slain and that those things go together.

John puts it like that before us in Revelation 5. And you see here, Jesus Christ is clearly saying he's coming into Jerusalem as a king as the mighty lion of the tribe of Judah.

And then you realize he enters not on a mighty steed, but a baby donkey. And this baby donkey, have you seen a baby donkey? A colt.

They are steeds actually fit for hobbits. If you were to, a full grown adult, you drag your feet.

[10 : 23] If you ride on a baby donkey, your feet are going to be dragging the whole way along the road. This is not an appropriate animal for Jesus' entry. They're reminded of Simon Maccabees, but he is not like Simon Maccabees.

He is truly greater in himself, yet visibly lesser as he enters. Simultaneously, there's two things being fit together at the same time here.

Simon Maccabees came in on a mighty steed. He would have never ridden a donkey. Yet at the same time, Simon Maccabees could have never told his followers in the next town, there is a donkey tied up that I know about even though I've never seen it before.

He comes in true power, and yet at the same time, he's visibly lesser. And those two things are being put together. Now, Matthew, Luke, these other gospels that talk about this, they make this really apparent and visible for us because they say that this moment is the fulfillment of Zechariah 9.9.

And in Zechariah 9.9, Matthew quotes, it says, here comes a rider, the king. But when Matthew and Luke quote from this prophecy, they cut a sentence out.

[11 : 37] So in Zechariah, the original prophecy says that the king comes to you righteous and bearing salvation, riding on a donkey.

That's the original prophecy. But in Matthew, Matthew says, the king comes to you riding on a donkey. He cuts out the middle bit that says righteous, full of salvation, visibly.

And because Matthew's trying to show you the two things that go together, that Jesus Christ is the lion and the lamb. He's the king, and yet he comes in humility.

This is a kingly processional, a triumphal entry, but it's not triumphal at all. He's coming in on a baby donkey. And actually, there's probably not that many people gathered around him, not nearly like the memory of something like Simon Maccabees.

It's striking in verse 11 that as soon as he enters the city, he goes up to the temple and Mark very deliberately gives you a tone that everything's just quiet now.

[12 : 39] There's no more fanfare. As soon as he crosses the threshold of the gate, there's nobody celebrating anymore. It's gone quiet. He's not being celebrated as the king when he actually enters into the heart of Jerusalem.

Now that means we're being told something very simple, incredibly obvious in a way that Mark's been saying the entirety of Mark's gospel. And it is this that Jesus Christ is majestic and royal and kingly and gentle and lowly and meek and mild.

He is the lion and he is the lamb simultaneously. And there is no other person in all of human history that can be both, except the God-man, the exalted one who made himself low.

And what Mark is telling you is that the heartbeat of the Passion Week, and we've said this 50 times already in this gospel, is that he enters into the city in a way that is telling us exactly why he's come.

He enters into the city in a way that says the king has come to humble himself all the way to the point of death. That's the pronouncement of his triumphal entry.

[13:54] It's not really that triumphal. And the reason is because in his triumphal entry he's coming to say that he's coming to die. He's coming to humble himself. He's riding on a donkey to pronounce that he's come for Friday.

That's the very point. You see, the irony of his entry is the irony of the whole of Mark's gospel. And it's that the way to glory is death. And the way to kingship for him to be exalted is to go down as a slave, to go down as a crucified criminal, and it means that this entry is not all that triumphal. Here's the lesson for us. The lesson for us is that we're being asked here to really look at, to really look at, no matter how long you've been sitting in the church, to really look at today, the infinite God who became a finite human, the king who came to be so low, the true king who came to ride on a little donkey.

We're being asked to see that the way of the cross is actually for us also the way of salvation. In that in the same way that Jesus Christ came to be exalted by going all the way to the bottom, by becoming low, that's exactly how we receive salvation.

If you want to receive the power that he came to give to be exalted, to be glorified, we saw in the last couple of weeks to become great, truly great, you've got to humble yourself too.

[15:29] See, that his entry actually tells you the condition of the acceptance of his power, that you've got to become humble, you've got to become low, like he came, he came riding on a donkey, and he got to say, I don't belong on a great steed, I know who I am, I belong on a donkey.

I've got to go low like he went low to receive the power that he claimed when he went all the way to the bottom of the cross. So it not only preaches the fact of the cross, but the way of salvation as we receive it.

In other words, his entry is telling us, I'm not, I know, I have to know that I'm not today accepted by my works. I'm not accepted by my greatness. I'm not accepted by my accomplishments.

I'm not accepted by anything that I could do that the only way to glory is actually the path of humility, to humble yourself in a similar way that he did, except when he did it, he went to claim all the power.

His lowliness becomes his exultation, and that's power for us. Now, secondly, let's make that more specific. That's pretty general.

[16:37] And the more specific way you can see that is by looking at the praise of the people here. Secondly, and much more briefly, the people say from verse nine, Hosanna, remember that's a Hebrew word that means save us please.

So they cry out, Hosanna, save us please. And we're told here that they came, they said, you are the one, blessed is he, Jesus, who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed is the one who brings or blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David. Now these are tricky sayings, because when you read the commentators, and they seem to largely agree about this, the suggestion is that they are not saying anything in these statements that show that they think he is coming to save them from their sins.

Instead, the commentators say that actually they are praising him because they have hopes for either a military conqueror or just another great prophet that is signaling the coming of the end. And so when they say things like, Hosanna, save us, it's possible that they have in mind the history of Simon Maccabees, or when they say, a blessed is the coming of the kingdom of our Father David.

[18:02] It's not that they're attributing this lineage to Jesus himself in this moment. They're just saying at this moment we think this could be a person who might signal the end for us, a coming of salvation of some way, shape, or form.

And so the commentators will say that you realize actually when you read the details and you read it in the light of the other gospels that this was not as big of a deal as it first comes to us on the surface.

And the reason we know that is because the Romans aren't triggered by it. The Pharisees aren't triggered by it. The Sadducees aren't triggered by it. Nobody comes out upset.

Nobody's angry. They will be a couple of days later after they realize the claims he's actually making. But at this point, nobody's mad. And it's because there's a recognition here that most of the people probably don't realize why he's coming.

And so they're attributing to him something that maybe he did not come for. He came for something so much bigger and they can't yet see it. And so you see that when he goes to the temple in verse 11, there's a juxtaposition here.

[19 : 05] He goes to the temple. That's the very first thing he does. And James Edward says that Mark is here suggesting that he doesn't go in and go straight to the Roman fortitude, the Roman garrison.

He goes to the temple because he's coming to pronounce the precise reason why he's coming to the city. In other words, Mark is signaling for us that Jesus Christ has come to be the temple. He's coming to fulfill something, his entry, but what is it that he's fulfilling? And we're being told here that what he's fulfilling is that he's come to be the fulfillment of the temple itself. This is the place of sacrifice.

This is the place of atonement. This is the place of worship. And that's why he goes straight there. And that's where people are going to get so mad at him. That's how we move from Sunday to Monday because they realize that he begins to teach later, I've come to be the temple. I've come to be the object of worship. I've come to be the fulfillment of the entire sacrificial system. Something so much more than what they thought when they were saying, Hosanna, the coming of our kingdom through the lineage of David.

[20 : 13] Here it is that they couldn't see yet what he had really come for. Now let me give you three practical things that that means for us. The first is this. That means that it is very possible that you can praise him.

We can praise him and not understand him. We can shout Hosanna and not really see who he is and what he came to do.

And let me say it this way. Another way to say it is they are shouting this because they are crying out for help in the midst of heart circumstances.

And one of the ways that you can praise him and not really see the whole of what he came for is by examining whether or not in your life you have maybe an on again, off again relationship to Jesus and the on again, off again switch.

The reason it's on again and off again is because we often approach him only when we have deep needs because our circumstances are really hard.

[21 : 17] So a lot of times in life we are off from him until the need, that moment, that issue, that relationship that's broken, that job that fails comes into our life and then all of a sudden we enter back into prayer.

And if that's the case then that means we're struggling in a similar way with saying Jesus exists to meet my needs in the midst of hard times.

Another way of saying this is that it's a type of relationship you can have with Christ where we treat him more like a genie in a bottle rather than the Lord of the cosmos, rather than the fulfillment of the temple.

And it's where we call upon him and use him for our three wishes whenever it's time, whenever we really need a genie to get us out of something hard.

And that's one way that it's possible to follow him and yet not see him for who he really is, that he came to be the fulfillment of the deepest, deepest things that we need and to be the Lord of the cosmos for us.

[22 : 25] Now let's get more specific, secondly, than that. One way maybe this works out is that what we're being asked here I think is to see that what we want is not really what we need.

And we've said this several times in this series, but our strongest desires as human beings are not our deepest desires. That what we want on the surface to get out of the circumstance that we might be in is not, is probably not, maybe not the deepest thing that we need.

It doesn't correspond to our deepest needs and our deepest desires, our desires underneath the surface. They shout, they shout, save us, I pray.

And when we come to God in prayer, we can say, save me, save me from this, save me from this circumstance, save me from this. I had a plan, I had a plan and I've never gotten the relationship that I wanted.

I had a plan and the job ladder that I had hoped to climb has not worked out and I'm completely unfulfilled. I had a plan and I got a cancer diagnosis at age 40.

[23 : 29] I had a plan, save me from this, right? We can shout that and then we can turn and say on the flip side, why is God answering my prayers like that? Or why has he not answering my prayers?

It feels like he's not answering the prayers I've been praying for my circumstances to change and he goes to the cross here. They're shouting Hosanna, but they're not shouting it because they know the reason he came or even the need that they really have.

When he goes to the cross, the king become humble and gives us what we need even when we didn't ask for it.

It's been said like this, I'm not sure who originally said it like this, but it's a very famous quote now that you hear from preachers. When we pray and we ask the Lord to help us, he gives us what we would have asked for if we knew all that he knows.

You say, why aren't you answering my prayers? Why aren't you changing things in my life? Why has my life turned out this way? He gives us what we would have asked for if we knew everything that he knows.

[24 : 40] He comes to meet the need we actually have even when we don't know we need it. That's exactly what he did when he passed through the gates of Jerusalem. They didn't know the need that they had.

They think he's come for a different reason, but he goes to the cross. They are crucified, criminal. This could not be the plan. But he came to meet the need that they really had.

Now one more thing, even more specific. What we learn here is that that means that there is nothing more fickle, one very specific application. There's nothing more fickle than the praise of human beings.

He enters into the city and they shout, Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest. On Friday, the same people are going to say crucify him in deadly anger.

That has to tell us that one of the things we don't need, even though we think and we feel like we do, is the consistent praise of other human beings.

[25 : 41] In other words, we learn here that we cannot build our life on people's opinions. You can't build your life around what people think about you. This is a hard saying and a hard, hard lesson.

That if Twitter, ex formerly known as Twitter, has taught us anything, it's that you can be king or queen on this day and be canceled and thrown out the next day.

That people's opinions are always changing. And that following the opinion of the crowd, the opinion of the populace is never a good idea. And you can't build your life on it.

You can't rely on it. And Jesus Christ was loved and he was hated the very next day, and that's always the case. That's the problem of the allure of celebrity.

As the deep, deep desire, we all have to be praised by other human beings. And it's fickle. Matthew Perry died yesterday. Very famous actor. Maybe you haven't seen that yet. In the news, many of you will know who he is.

[26 : 40] Matthew Perry died yesterday and they posted on the New York Times an interview that he had done some years ago. And this is what he said. He was a guy who wanted to become famous.

There was steam coming out of my ears because I wanted it so badly. I wanted the attention. I wanted the money. I wanted the best seat in the best restaurants.

And I did not know the repercussions. I did not know what it would cost me. We all desire the praise of the praiseworthy. That's the reason celebrity exists. And then we desire it in a thousand degrees less underneath the level of celebrity.

We want to be praised. We thought well of this passage shows us where we need it. We need the praise of the praiseworthy. We need it. We can't live without it actually, but it's not in the crowd.

Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, he had become a person through all his trials who could say, I don't care what people say about me.

[27 : 42] He writes, I don't care what the court says about me. I don't even say, I don't even care what I say about me. That's what he says in 1 Corinthians 4. That is not my identity.

And he says, all I care about is what Jesus Christ says about me. The praise of the praiseworthy is above all reward. And we need it desperately. But listen, go to Jesus Christ, the King who became so humbled for you to hear the praise of the praiseworthy.

To say above you and before you, you're mine. I'm not going to let you go. You're a child, you're a brother, you're in the family of God. It's better than all the rewards of the praise of the crowds. Now lastly, we need then, that means very briefly, the preaching here that we're being given in the message of the untamed cult.

There's a cult here. Remember a donkey, a baby donkey. And that cult has never been set upon. It is untamed. This tells us a couple things as we close, and this gives us all the strength we need, I think.

[28 : 46] This is what it tells us. James Edwards, again, he says the overwhelming feature of this text is one thing. When you read verses one to six, that there's an unveiling of Jesus' precise foreknowledge of everything that's about to take place.

Now that's what we saw at the beginning. Everything that happens, Jesus knows and he's planned. And this is the point of this story, the triumphal entry. It's all to plan.

Jesus knows, Jesus is not passive in this. This is what Jesus has decided. This is what Jesus has come to do. He's made the plan. Now he's doing it and he's unveiling that plan before us.

When you come later in the week, this passion week to Thursday, the Roman soldiers are going to come and arrest Jesus. And when they do, he speaks his name before them.

They fall down on their faces and he has to tell them, come on, this is the time. It's your time to arrest me. Get on with it.

[29 : 45] Jesus Christ is not passive. He has planned all this. He's decided how this is going to go. He's the one that's chosen to be this. He is the lion that has decided to become the lamb who would be slain.

That's what we see across the board in this passage. Now here's one very specific thing that that means when Jesus calls for the untamed colt, a colt that has never been ridden upon a baby. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been around baby horses, colts, baby donkeys? I've done a stint in a season of life where I was around this.

And if you've ever tried to get on a horse or a colt of any kind that is not tamed, do you know what happens? They're going to throw you off in a heartbeat and they're going to kick at you and it's dangerous and you have to be a professional wrangler to be able to deal with this.

This is very difficult. And D.A. Carson and his commentary on Matthew's account, he points out that a colt that's never been ridden upon cannot be ridden upon.

[30 : 52] A colt that is untamed cannot be immediately tamed, not at all. And in the beginning of Mark's gospel, it says that Jesus, when he was tempted, he was driven into the wilderness and he was there, Mark adds this one little line, with the wild animals.

And here he is again at the end, the beginning of the Passion Week and he's with a wild animal who has not been tamed. Why? The reason for this is Mark is trying to help us to go all the way back to the beginning and remember that in Genesis chapter two, Jesus, Jesus, God, God the Father, Son and Spirit gave Adam and Eve dominion over all of creation.

And that meant that Adam had the ability to call all the animals to him and name them. And that act of naming was an act of authority. It was an act of control. It was that the animals were for him and with them and underneath them and there was perfect harmony and peace between them and as soon as Genesis three comes around, it's all broken.

And now we have, for the first time, wild animals. And you can go through the Old Testament and read the very specific stories of the wild animals. It's a real motif, like the bears that come out of the woods.

Why? Why is that there? Why is that in the Bible? You come to Mark and Jesus goes and he lives for a season with the wild animals. He comes to the end, the beginning of the Passion Week and he sits on the donkey that was never tamed and yet it serves him beautifully.

[32 : 22] And you see that it's saying that Jesus Christ has not only planned this, every bit of it, but he is the Lord over everything. He is the second Adam.

He has come to be what Adam never was. He has come to be what every person in the Old Testament never could have been. He has come to fulfill every promise. He has come to be all that humanity needed, but never could have had a part from God become human being.

The King who became humble, the King who went all the way to the bottom, Jesus Christ's entry on this untamed cult that was immediately tamed when he sat on it says to you, God is holding all things together for your good, no matter what's going on.

It says that he is the King of new creation and it's coming, the time when the animals will stop kicking at us. He's the one bringing that about and that means today whatever is going on in your life, you've got to remember that he is the God who came to this world and told the storm to cease and turned around and then fed the hungry.

He does both. He will stop all the storms and all the conflicts and he will turn around and he will feed the hungry. He is in charge of everything, every conflict and there is nothing out there, but the hope that all things are really, truly working together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

[33 : 49] He really is that powerful. He really does have that much authority. Your hope is not in your circumstances. Your hope is not in the praise of people, the crowd.

It's in him, his power. I'll leave you with Job 1315. One of my favorite hymns is written from this text. Job 1315, Job says, though he slay me, though he slay me, I will trust him.

Let's pray together. Lord, whatever is going on in our lives, whether it's a deep longing for better circumstances or a deep sadness, we turn today to look upon the rider on the donkey.

The one who entered Jerusalem to become the lamb who would be slain. We really do today ask, Lord, that you would break through our cold and hard hearts and give us a real hope and a real victory and a real promise that you are for us all the way to the end.

We need that so much right now as we look out and see the pain that so many people in our world are experiencing. This is our hope. We pray this so much.

[35 : 09] So teach it to us. Help us to really believe it today. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.