

# **CROSSROADS: CHRIST ARRIVED**

## **(Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, John 12)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

At the end of the Oscar-winning 1970 film, "Patton," actor George C. Scott said the following lines in a voiceover, as the title character he played walked his dog over a vacant European field: "For over a thousand years, Roman conquerors returning from the wars enjoyed the honor of a 'triumph' - a tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeters and musicians and strange animals from the conquered territories, together with carts laden with treasure and captured armaments. The conqueror rode in a triumphal chariot, the dazed prisoners walking in chains before him. Sometimes his children, robed in white, stood with him in the chariot or rode the trace horses." In the time of Jesus Christ, that was the meaning of a "triumph."

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday, we are looking at a different kind of triumph. While this day traditionally celebrates Christ's "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem, setting in motion all the events that we know as Holy Week, this moment reveals many other aspects of Jesus Christ as he prepares for his triumph over death, sin and Satan at a cross and an empty tomb.

Since this moment in Christ's life is given a great amount of narrative space in all four of the gospels - in Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12 - I am going to attempt to harmonize them all together into one all-inclusive story. So, let's begin - first by summarizing all that Jesus had been doing since, as we talked about last week, He "set His face" and resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

He began His journey to this day while still in the north of the country, around the area of Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. Since that moment, He had been busy with ministry - both in His words and in His works:

- 1) In terms of words, He had given us the unforgettable stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. He had taught indelible lessons: concerning judging by means of the woman caught in adultery, concerning what really matters in our lives while visiting Mary and Martha, and teaching His followers how to pray. Jesus famously identified Himself as the Good Shepherd, and also brought salvation into the life of the tax collector Zacchaeus.
- 2) In terms of works, Jesus healed a man blind from birth, declaring his condition not to be one of judgment due to sin, but rather an opportunity for the glory of God to be displayed. In one of the most amazing revelations of His power, Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. As a result, many believed, but some left that scene to report to the Pharisees what had happened, resulting in the determination by the Sanhedrin to put Jesus to death. Also on this journey, Jesus healed 10 lepers, but only one came back to offer his thanks, Jesus making that point to underscore the value God gives to

a grateful heart. And lastly, Jesus healed a blind man named Bartimaeus.

All of this leads us to the events of what we celebrate today as Palm Sunday. Let's begin telling that story.

**STORY (harmonizing of gospels):**

As people began arriving in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the question was on everybody's lips: "What do you think? Is Jesus even going to come?" For the word was out from the Pharisees that, if anybody knew His whereabouts, they were to report to the Sanhedrin so that Jesus could be arrested. Jesus Himself arrived in Bethany (about two miles away from Jerusalem); this was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, their brother, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Because of this, many people also went to Bethany, not only because Jesus was there, but also because Lazarus, the guy once dead and now alive, was there. Because of this miracle, which was standing right there in front of them, many people placed their faith in Christ. For that reason, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus, because his mere presence confirmed for many who Jesus really was.

The next day, as Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, He sent two of His disciples into Bethphage (bayth-fag-ay), a small hamlet just south of Bethany, telling them that, going into that village, they would find a donkey tied up there, with her colt - an animal which no one had ever ridden. They were to untie them and bring them to Jesus. If anyone asked what they were doing, they were to tell them that the Lord had need of them, and that they would return them quickly. Matthew uses the Greek word **KURIOS** (koo^-ree-os), which means Lord or master. It often was associated with a rabbi but, as it is Jesus using it about Himself, it is likely understood as referring to His omnipotence and sovereignty as God. By now He had revealed His true identity to His disciples, so they very well may have understood very completely what He was saying. Anyway, it all happened exactly as Jesus had said, and the owners of the animals let them be taken.

Once the colt was brought to Christ, they placed their cloaks on the animal, and then Jesus sat on it (the only time in the gospels that Jesus is recorded as riding on an animal). This was a profoundly direct fulfillment of an ancient Scripture: ***Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey"- Zechariah 9:9.***

As Jesus began to ride toward Jerusalem, a crowd began gathering and, as He came closer, they grabbed palm branches and went to meet Him, shouting as they gathered: "Hosanna!" (which means, "Lord save us!", which is a very cool parallel to the meaning of Christ's own name: "Jesus," which means, "the Lord saves") "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (those being quoted from Psalm 118:25a, 26a.) The disciples really didn't comprehend the significance of all of this until after Christ had risen; then they understood that all these things had been specifically written about Him.

Among those in the crowd were those who had witnessed Jesus call Lazarus out of his tomb. Seeing Christ now caused them to continue to spread the word concerning this miraculous sign to everybody they saw but, for the Pharisees, they saw their plans becoming more and more difficult to accomplish, complaining that ***the whole world has gone after Him -John 12:19b.***

As the triumphant, jubilant celebration proceeded, the crowd continued its shouting, mixing in some decidedly Messianic themes: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David," and "Hosanna in the highest!" This aggravated the Pharisees to such a degree that they literally complained to Jesus: "Teacher, tell Your disciples to shut up!" His response? "If they go quiet, the rocks will shout!"

And then a curious thing happened, but only Luke's gospel records it: ***As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you"-Luke 19:41-44.*** It brings to mind another time when Christ was coming to Jerusalem; when thinking about what lay ahead for Him there, He had said: ***"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, and you were not willing" - Jesus Christ, Luke 13:34.*** That rejection, that the apostle John made note of, that Jesus came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him-John 1:11, was His constant companion.

Upon fully arriving in the city, Jesus went to the temple, where the blind and lame in the crowd found gracious healing. But as the calls and shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David," now carried on by the children in the crowd, accompanied these miracles, the chief priests and teachers of the law again protested: "Jesus, do you hear what these children are saying?" I can almost see Jesus looking them straight in the eyes and saying, "Yes, I do. And by the way, do you hear what the psalms are saying: ***'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?***" -Matthew 21:16 (quoting Psalm 8:2). And seeing that it was late in the day, Jesus and His disciples returned to Bethany.

## ANALYSIS

While this moment seems like a time of great celebration, for the disciples, it must have been a moment of very mixed feelings, for it occurred against the drumbeat of very ominous warnings from Christ Himself that He shared at least three times that we're aware of, captured so clearly from Matthew's memory: ***From that time on (when He revealed Himself to actually be the Messiah) Jesus began to explain to His disciples***

*that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life-Matthew 16:21.* After all the opposition the religious leaders had declared, to be at this moment in "the enemy's backyard" must have caused the disciples great concern, even to the point of feeling that things were spinning out of control. With the anger of the leadership and the unpredictability of the crowds, who knew what would happen?

But Jesus knew. In fact, far more than just know - Jesus was in charge of all these events. He knew the plan that was waiting for its fulfillment on the other end of this week. He was committed to it and now, He had Himself in place to bring it to pass. In fact, over the course of this momentous event, we see in no uncertain terms the divine character of this One who had just ridden into Jerusalem:

- 1) In Christ's directing two of His disciples to the donkey and colt - to the place where they were and to the response they would receive from the owners of these animals, we see Jesus' omniscience, His "all-knowingness" of every detail of their obtaining of those animals.
- 2) In Christ's easily sitting on a colt previously unriden, and therefore unbroken, we see Jesus' authority as both the Ruler over all creation and as a man as described by David in his praise to God: ***You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea - David, Psalm 8:6-8a.***
- 3) In Christ's riding into Jerusalem on a colt, we see Jesus as the Prince of Peace. He is not riding on a magnificent horse as a military conqueror eager to show His power and authority. He is riding on an animal understood as a symbol of peace. Jesus still absolutely desires to rule, but by bringing peace to the human soul by conquering the power of sin and death - all the power of Satan that he has used to imprison people since the Garden of Eden - reminding us of Isaiah's words concerning the Messiah: ***[H]e will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end- Isaiah 9:6b-7a.***
- 4) And lastly, in Christ's arrival in Jerusalem, we see his presentation to the nation of Israel as their Anointed One - their Messiah. This arrival in fact completed a process of Messianic presentation that had been ongoing since the very beginning of Christ's ministry:
  - a) Jesus' identification as the Messiah occurred at His baptism courtesy of His Heavenly Father: ***As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"- Matthew 3:16-17.***
  - b) Jesus' being authenticated as the Messiah occurred at His temptation in the wilderness; as soon as Satan's testing Him was ended, Matthew tells us:

*Then the devil left Him, and angels came and attended Him - Matthew 4:11.*

- c) Jesus' being glorified as the Messiah occurred at His transfiguration, as witnessed by Peter, James and John, and attended by Moses and Elijah: *Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus....a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased Listen to him!"-Matthew 17:1-3, 5.*

And now, by means of this "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem, Jesus is undeniably presenting Himself as the Anointed One that had long been promised by God to the world. And we can know this because, contrary to previous moments where Jesus had explicitly told people not to tell what He had done or, in the case of His disciples, tell people who He was, at this moment of arrival in Jerusalem He is welcoming and accepting the praises being shouted from the crowd that is clearly recognizing Him in Messianic terms: "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!" And, as the religious leaders are angrily advising Him to get his followers to quit saying these ridiculous things, Jesus responds with words that tell them that, not only is this praise inevitable - including little kids and infants, and even from the rocks and stones if needed - but the truth behind their praise is undeniable, meaning the truth behind their praise will not be stopped, calling to mind a Scripture that the religious leaders would have known and even studied: *"Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By Myself I have sworn, My mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before Me every knee will bow; by Me every tongue will swear. They will say of Me, 'In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength. 'All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the Lord and will make their boast in Him - Isaiah 45:22-25.* That deliverance had just arrived -but they chose to close their eyes.

## **APPLICATION**

There is really only one meaning for all of what we read and celebrate on Palm Sunday - and it's this: Many times, we have heard that, when Jesus was on the cross, we were there too. And why not? He was our substitute, dying in our place, for our sins. Well, the same holds true on Palm Sunday: When Jesus rides into Jerusalem, humbly entering on the back of a donkey's young colt, yet at the same time arriving as God's "anointed One," as the Messiah, the Christ, we are in the crowd that day. Jesus is presenting Himself as the Messiah to us - to us personally and to the world in which we live. He is still the Messiah; He is still God's chosen One, presenting Himself as the only one who can take away our sins, and replace our burdened, imprisoned hearts with the peace, satisfaction and new life that can only come through the washing of our sins by the Prince of Peace.

And for those of us who have surrendered to that Prince of Peace, our roles are now to turn to the crowds around us - friends, neighbors, family members, acquaintances, everybody we can think of - to share both our stories of surrender and Christ's ongoing presentation of who He is and why He is needed, and why He is the only way to the peace for which the world continues to seek. To borrow from the moment, we are to become like the kids that day, and even like the rocks that day, willing to shout His praises even if everything else is stilled. His presentation must also become ours.

## **CONCLUSION**

It was a magnificent day - with an incredible message: Jesus coming into a world that so desperately needs Him, saying, "I am here. You need wait no longer; you need look no farther. I am here." And did you notice the promise of His power to spread His message? He would enable even the rocks to cry out. Do we really grasp what that means? It means that He can, and will, enable anybody and everybody to become messengers of His word. Nothing more is required than surrender to Him. If we become surrendered to Him, we become empowered by Him. Even if we see ourselves as only "rocks," wondering if we even have a place in ministry, the story of His triumphal entry should tell us without condition that we will all be given all that is needed to tell His story.

In the meantime, we live in the middle of a great crowd of humanity to which Jesus has presented Himself as Messiah - God's anointed One - to save all who come to His cross for forgiveness of sins and new life in Him. One of the great ways to tell His story to the crowd around us? Tell our story - of what our lives were before, and the eternal difference He has made since we surrendered to Him.

Now we live in strange days - at least strange in how some of our day-to-day ways and means of doing things has changed. But our mission hasn't. It's still the same - reaching the unsaved with the saving, life-changing message of Jesus Christ. So now we can maybe try some different kinds of connecting: we can add in letter-writing to each other, and send "thinking of you" greetings cards to people, and add telephone calls - even making appointments for when you can call to make sure you make that connection. Design "care packages" to drop off at somebody's door. God can use anything and everything to plant a seed in somebody's heart- and that's what we're in business for.

Never has anybody triumphed over anything as Jesus Christ did over sin. His victory is packaged to be claimed by us, for all eternity. This Easter is no different in that that necessary message is the same one it has always been - the same one that people will always need to be hearing. Jesus arrived- Jesus saved- Jesus won! His triumph is ours. Now let's go and help His triumph become somebody else's as well. Let's pray!