

Sermon



Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-17

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Who is this man? Through the three years of his ministry, Jesus generally did not say who he was. As he got towards the end of his ministry, he seemed to become more direct. With this in mind, let's look at the ride into Jerusalem named the Triumphal Entry.

Jesus normally walked everywhere but this time he chose to ride – why?

It was to make a claim; it fulfilled prophecy. Matthew is keen that we understand when Jesus fulfilled prophecies of the Messiah. He says here in verse 5,

"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

This is a combination of two Old Testament verses. "Say to the Daughter of Zion" occurs only in Isaiah 62:11:

The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Saviour comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'"

The word Saviour is in Hebrew *yeshua* which David Stern wrote in the "Jewish New Testament Commentary" is the same word as *Yeshua* – the original, Hebrew of Jesus. He wrote, "Salvation is a person and not just any person, but God – since a person who is salvation must be God."¹

Matthew, then took that part of Isaiah 62 and combined it with Zechariah 9:9,

¹ Stern D.H., 1995, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Jewish New Testament Publications Inc., Clarksville, Maryland, page 61

See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Here it is the 'king' who comes. Matthew is indicating that the king, salvation, Jesus, God are all the same person.

Festal Celebration

We all remember that the people carried branches in procession and put them on the ground in front of him. They put their cloaks on the donkeys and on the ground before him – this was an acknowledgement of royalty – it is a custom described in the Old Testament when Jehu was declared King, they took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!"²

We saw the same custom in Tanzania when the Bishop approached a village and the people came out to welcome him. They waved branches and cloths and sang as they walked in front of the car towards their village. I asked a priest there whether this was copied from the Triumphal Entry or a custom among non-Christians too. He explained it was a cultural custom to honour people but Christians would, of course, be aware of the parallel to the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

They called him "Son of David" which was a royal title – the Messiah was to be a descendent of King David who would rule with justice.

The crowd were proclaiming him as Messiah and King.

He rode into Jerusalem, on a donkey not a warhorse. Normally kings entered cities on a horse as conqueror.

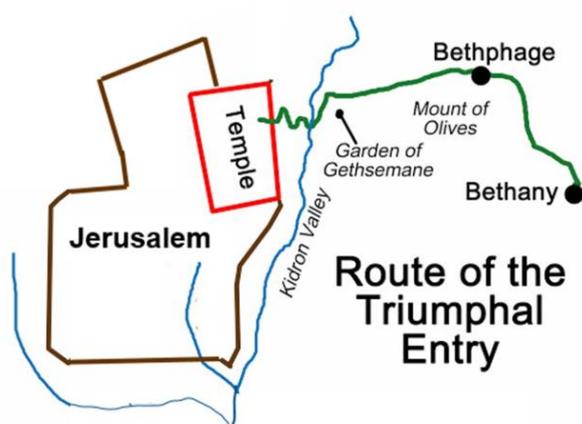
Contrast that with Jesus' entry. We see a deliverer rather than a conqueror; a king of peace rather than a warlord.

It was not even a donkey but the foal of a donkey. Mark and Luke make it clear that it was the foal he rode – the weaker of the two animals and one which had never been ridden before – a combination of humility and while showing his subjection of nature.

By riding into Jerusalem he claimed the title of King. The people gave him that title but also prophet. They said of him, "This Jesus the prophet from Nazareth."³

Golden Gate

The route Jesus followed into Jerusalem from Bethany was over the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley and into the city. The Eastern Gate was the main entrance into the Temple area. It faced towards the



Mount of Olives. It was the gate that Jesus entered on a humble donkey in His triumphal entry. Once again, Psalm 118 mentions opening the gate to go into the temple:

Ps 118:19-20 Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.

According to Jewish tradition the Messiah will enter Jerusalem from the east. The gate has a special holiness; legend has it that the Shekinah (Divine Presence) used to appear through this gate and will appear again, and that

² 2 Kings 9:13

³ V11

in the meantime it must be left untouched. This would be based on Ezekiel seeing the glory of the Lord enter the temple through the East Gate.⁴

Around 600BC, Ezekiel had a vision of a new temple:

Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut. The LORD said to me, "This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no-one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it. (Ezekiel 44:1-2)



It is interesting that this gate is the only one of the eight gates of today's Jerusalem that is sealed. The Arabs believe that since the Jews expect that Messiah would come through this gate they would try to prevent any possibility of His return, so in 1530 they walled it up with great stones and established a cemetery in front of it thinking that the Jewish Messiah could not set foot in a cemetery and therefore would not be able to come. This was to stop the Jewish Messiah from coming into Jerusalem – however they were about 1500 years too late – he had long since come. The gate he came through was

destroyed in 70AD by the Romans. Ezekiel's prophecy had also been fulfilled on the first Palm Sunday.

The Messiah had gone in through the East Gate into the temple - they could hardly have realised that this procession was indeed to the altar in the sense that Jesus would offer himself for the sins of the world on the Friday to come.

Cleansing the Temple

Having reached Jerusalem what does he do? If we read on from verse 12, we find he goes to the temple and drives out the money changers and those selling doves.

He quotes several verses of scripture. I remember hearing the then Vicar of Lancaster, Peter Guinness, saying of this passage that when a rabbi quoted a text he meant the whole passage not just the words quoted. So when he says that his Father's house shall be called a house of prayer, he is quoting from Isaiah 56. It is a passage about foreigners who seek God having the access to him although they are not Jews. Jesus is asserting that gentiles are welcome to worship God.

He says, "But you have made it a "Den of Robbers" which is a quote from Jeremiah 7:11. That passage is about judgement on Israel for not keeping the covenant. They were warned not to put their trust in the temple itself. Not to think they could sin with impunity and come back to the temple and worship regardless. They were warned that the destruction that had been visited on the Tabernacle site at Shiloh would come upon the temple they valued. Jesus was warning the Jewish leaders of the coming judgement on Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple.

In taking control of the temple courts, he acts as a priest. In his declarations he functions as a prophet.

⁴ Ezekiel 43:4

Then we are told some blind and lame people came to Jesus and he healed them - this on the day of the Triumphal entry with irate Pharisees and Sadducees around him. Those leaders then turned on him with the accusation that children are singing "Hosanna to the Son of David" of him. His response is revealing: "From the lips of children you have ordained praise." It is a quote from Psalm 8 about the praise of ... God! That was not a random quote from the Old Testament with the word praise in it. In saying it, he claims to be worthy of the praise for God ... to be God.

In one day, he has been feted as Messiah, King and prophet, he has asserted the right of Gentiles to worship God, warned the Jewish leaders of potential judgement and claimed to be God.

Prophet, Priest and King

Jesus entered Jerusalem as the King not to establish a monarchy over them, but to bring peace between God and humanity through his own death.

Jesus came to the temple not simply to restore the integrity of the temple worship but as the priest who would offer the final sacrifice to open permanent access to God for all people through himself.

Jesus pronounced judgement on Israel like the prophets of old, not simply to restore order. He functioned as the Prophet who had fulfilled the Old Testament and now would enable his disciples to live kingdom-empowered lives as his witnesses.

This was the day of publicly laying claim to his position. This was quite a day! This is quite a man!

What do you make of this man Jesus?

What is your response to this Priest who offers you access to God the Father?

What is your response to this Prophet who would calls you to walk in the power of the Spirit as his witness?

What is your response to this King who would rule those who respond and lead them into harmony between God and man?

What is your response to this God?

Who is this man?

He is Prophet, Priest and King - He is God. **Follow him!**