

# Matthew 21: The People of Judea

## Introduction

The opening verses of Matthew 21 record Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Nowhere else in the Scripture do we read of Jesus riding an animal. It seems that he and the disciples walked everywhere ... which was common for people of Jesus' social class. Only the wealthy and high people rode from place to place. Now, only a mile or two from the city, Jesus chooses to ride in ... thus proclaiming his claim as the Messiah. In other words, it is a planned, intentional act and not something spontaneous. It appears the arrangements for the colt were made in advance. Jesus instructs two disciples ahead to a village where they would find a donkey and her colt. Luke says the owners gave them permission to take the animals and giving Jesus a colt that had never been ridden (Mark 11.2; Luke 19.30), was a great sign of honor and respect. All of this was done to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey, Zechariah 9.9.

In the prophecy, the daughter of Zion is Jerusalem. Note how the prophet, 500 years before, describes Jesus as righteous, victorious, humble, and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey. That a King would enter the city on a beast of burden on the day of his triumphal entry was extremely inappropriate. Mighty emperors and kings of the Greco-Roman period would have come in with as much pomp and circumstance as possible, riding on a white stallion with military troops marching and weaponry on display. He comes in poverty and meekness. There is no display of power. By worldly standards this was a moment of humiliation ... not exaltation. He is a peaceful King of God's people – not a political revolutionary wanting to conquer the world.

Matthew identifies Jesus' location, the colt, the association with Old Testament prophecy, and with Jesus as the prophet from Nazareth, v. 11.

Why have a triumphal procession?

Jesus knows his earthly ministry is ending ... within days his earthly life will end on a cross, finishing the mission God gave him to do. For Him, nothing remains except the final act – being the sacrificial lamb of God – who would take away the sins of the world, John 1.29.

## The Crowd

Some believe that the crowd identified as Matthew 21 opens is the same large crowd that followed Jesus from Jericho to Jerusalem, 20.29. That appears likely, although no doubt there are people from the Jerusalem area who must have joined up as the city came into view. Matthew 21.8 says it was *a very large crowd* that accompanies him in this triumphal procession. The whole scene has a feel of a royal conqueror returning to his city. Loud cries and praise are all around. *The whole city was in an uproar*, 21.10. This is far different from how he had conducted the early part of his ministry ... desirous of

secrecy. Now the time had come to go public with as much exposure as possible. What was about to happen to him was *not done in a corner*, Acts 26.26, it was going to happen completely in the open. J.C. Ryle has written, *Before the great sacrifice for the sin of the world was offered up, it was right that every eye should be fixed on the victim. (It) was a public entry (where) he attracted himself to the eyes of the wondering multitude (so that all could see) the atoning blood be shed.*<sup>20</sup>

As we go back to 21.10, we want to focus on the entire city of Jerusalem being in an uproar. The word *uproar* comes from the word we use today, *seismic*. The word picture painted for us is that the whole city was quaking ... emotionally ... as Jesus comes into town. This might be very similar to the uproar Jesus caused on his birth, Matthew 2.3. This was not a good thing. Jerusalem was under Roman rule and any connection with a *king* would spell trouble with the authorities. ... especially with Jesus being from Galilee (which was still under the rule of Herod), some might have thought Jesus was all about revolution. Thus, some in the city were quick to identify Jesus as the “prophet” from Nazareth in Galilee. Those in the city were afraid there would be trouble coming when they see a Galilean man being hailed as “king”, coming into town in a royal procession.

### ***The Worthlessness of Human Praise***

Of the very large crowds crying out “Hosanna” in 21.9, not a one of these people stood in his defense just a few days later when he was on trial. As he approached Jerusalem the crowds called out, *blessed is he who comes in the Lord’s name*. They identify him with David and call him a king. To shout “Hosanna” was a shout of praise, much like the word we use today: “Hallelujah.” From all appearances it seems like many in that crowd believed that Jesus was not just any king – but the expected Messiah to whom the prophets had looked forward.

But none of that praise endured on the day before the Passover as Jesus endured a very public trial. It is very likely that some of the same people who cried “Hosanna” on Monday were crying “Crucify Him!” that Friday morning. Why?

Going back to 21.9, the word “Hosanna” means *save now*.<sup>21</sup> So, the crowd is essentially saying, “Jesus we want you to overthrow the Romans now. We want a better economy. We want a great and powerful military leader. Save now!” As the week goes by, and they begin to realize that Jesus will fulfill none of these aspirations, they turned against Him.

What does that say about the value of human praise? Nothing is more uncertain and superficial. Popularity is here one moment and gone the next. Truly, it is evidence of building on the sand, Matthew 7.26-27. Every person needs to heed this warning. Instead, we need to rely on the unchanging God, whose praise will endure throughout eternity.

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<sup>20</sup> Ryle, J. C. *Matthew*. Crossway Classic Commentaries. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993, p. 190.

<sup>21</sup> Courson, Jon. *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003, p. 155.

## What About Us?

How do you view Jesus? Is He simply a “get out of jail” card ... or merely a “good luck charm?” What if things in life don’t work out as expected? Will we blame Jesus? Do we enter Christianity with the expectation that our financial woes, physical, social, or career problems will magically be solved? Do we set ourselves up for disappointment if things do not go the way we expect? Many of us may have seen cases where things didn’t work out for someone with a problem they faced and instead of embracing Christ, they rejected him ... turning against him and all who represent him.

Let us all be reminded of the mission of Christ:

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many, Matthew 20.28.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost, Luke 19.10.

Jesus’ purpose in coming was to save you from your sin. His death on the cross was your redemption. Courson writes,

If He never does anything else in this life presently, that is more than enough to merit our loyalty, our affection, and our devotion eternally. If He never does another thing for me, if He never gives another blessing to me, I owe Him my life because of what He did on Calvary.<sup>22</sup>

How strong is your devotion to Christ? Is it fickle like the crowd ... or is steadfast and sure?

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<sup>22</sup> Courson, p. 156.