

## **The King of the Kingdom Enters Jerusalem**

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The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 11:1-11/ March 24, 2024

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### **Introduction:**

Our study of the gospel of Mark brings us to the first day of passion week, or holy week, known as “Palm Sunday,” where Jesus enters Jerusalem on His road to the cross. This moment is often called the triumphant entry, but we will see it is far less triumphant than we would imagine. The final week of Jesus’ life in Jerusalem looks even less triumphant when compared to some of history’s greatest conquerors. Attila the Hun, known for his brutality, is estimated by some to have conquered around 1.4 million square miles, building an army of between 100,000-200,000 soldiers. Cyrus the Great is said to have conquered around 2 million square miles amassing an army of around 196,000, where Alexander the Great conquered over 2.1 million square miles with about 30,000-50,000 soldiers. Arguably the greatest conqueror was Genghis Khan, who is said to have grown his army to over 100,000, establishing the world’s largest continuous land empire conquering around 4.8 million square miles during his reign. Jesus, by contrast, rode into Jerusalem mounted on a colt with a humble following led by 12 apostles, all of which abandoned Him during His trials and crucifixion. Then, while in Jerusalem, He was betrayed by one of the twelve, rejected by His own people, and crucified on a Roman cross. Yet, though Jesus Christ may not have experienced the same kind of political and military triumph, we discover that when the King of the kingdom enters Jerusalem it is loaded with far more significance than any of their reigns. To see this, let’s observe this story together in 3 scenes. First, in verses 1-6, we discover,

### **A Preparation with Prophetic Significance**

Mark uses six of the eleven verses in this scene to highlight the preparation Jesus made before He entered Jerusalem. Look at verses 1-3, “Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, ‘Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” say, “The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.”’” These verses are loaded with prophetic significance, from placing Jesus near Jerusalem, “at the Mount of Olives,” to the specific act of finding and untying a colt for Him, “on which no one ever has sat.” To understand the significance, let’s survey the Word of God together. First, the Mount of Olives has several links to God’s prophetic promises. In Ezekiel 11:23, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of seeing the glory of the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives, saying, “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.” Later, the prophet Zechariah establishes the Mount of Olives as the site of God’s final judgement in Zechariah 14:4, saying, “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east.” Many rabbinic writings and the Jewish historian Josephus also link this location specifically with the coming of the messiah (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 334). Because Mark rarely mentions name of places, this careful identification is most likely designed to connect with these messianic connotations. Second, it is no accident that Jesus requests a colt that has never been ridden. In Numbers 19:2, Deuteronomy 21:3, and 1 Samuel 6:7, an unyoked animal carries a sacred and sacrificial significance. But this detail also holds several connections to the coming Messiah. There are some minor connections worth mentioning like how the Mishnah, a collection of Jewish oral traditions, declares that no one else can ride the horse of the king (m. Sanh. 2:5). There may also be an allusion being made to Solomon riding on David’s mule during his enthronement in 1 Kings 1:38-40. But the greater significance comes from its connections to two important prophetic words. When Jacob’s prophesy over Judah in Genesis 49:8-12, he points to a ruler coming from the line of Judah. Listen to what he says in Genesis 49:10-11, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine.”

However most importantly, as Matthew and John make explicit, is how Jesus' request is setting the stage for His fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9-10. There the prophet Zechariah says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." The moment Israel has been longing for, for over four hundred years, is unfolding before their eyes and Jesus is orchestrating everything to show His fulfillment of it all. Note one more thing from verse 3, "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" Who is "The Lord" referring to? The term could simply mean "master" or "owner," leading some suggest the owner of the colt is with Jesus and He is simply telling them to say the owner has need of it. This is not likely, though, because Mark exclusively uses this term for God or Jesus in this gospel. I am persuaded Jesus is referring to God as the one who needs the colt to usher in the coming kingdom, while hinting to His own divinity as well. Church, though Mark may be more subtle than Matthew or John, make no mistake, he is drawing out hearts to see that God is sending His messianic King to gain victory over His people's enemy and establish His rule and reign. Look, then, at how everything happens exactly as Jesus said it would in verses 4-6, "And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go." Everything takes place in the exact way Jesus directed. In verses 1-2, Jesus sends two disciples away to find and untie a colt. In verse 4, they went, found the colt and untied it. In verse 3, he tells the disciples what to say if someone asks what they are doing. In verses 5-6, someone asks what they are doing, and they tell them what Jesus said. Jesus has sovereignly orchestrated every detail of this preparation to fulfill its prophetic significance. Family, see the King of Glory preparing to enter Jerusalem and let this moment build the anticipation in your heart of what this means. The next thing we see, in verses 7-10 is,

### **A Procession Filled with Joy in the Coming Kingdom**

Up to this point Jesus has travelled by foot, but after purposefully arranging a different means of travel, those following him appear to at least pick up partially on its significance. Look at verses 7-8, "And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields." People entering Jerusalem around this time wouldn't have been unique, as many would be coming for the Passover. However, someone riding in on a donkey was likely very unique. In his commentary, R.T. France points to evidence from the Mishnah that indicates people coming to Jerusalem for the Passover were expected to travel by foot if they were able, suggesting Jesus is intentionally aiming to be noticed (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 429). The disciples using their cloaks as a saddle wouldn't be out of the ordinary, but the spread of cloaks and leafy branches on the road were noticeably extravagant. We might note the apostle John is the only one to describe these as palm branches, typically waved as a symbol of peace. However, notice these are not waved but placed on the road ahead of Jesus. The scene bears a striking resemblance to king Jehu's inauguration in 2 Kings 9:13 where we read, "in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, 'Jehu is king.'" Those following Jesus appear to recognize the significance of this moment and the beginning of their procession alone screams of celebration. As Danny Akin says, "It was a festive time of celebration as they welcomed this King. Coming in this way our Lord now proclaims openly what He has forbidden until this moment: I am your King!" (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 245) Their pointed enthusiasm only grows when we get to their proclamations. Look at verses 9-10, "And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, '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!'"

The first two lines of their shouts are common to each gospel account, drawing from the words of Psalm 118:25-26. “Hosanna” means “save us.” The second two lines are unique to the gospel of Mark. Note their focus. Mark records the crowd saying, “Blessed in the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest,” which is not part of any psalm. If you have been with us in our study of this gospel, you will recognize how the kingdom of God has been a focal point for Mark. Jesus’ first proclamation, in chapter 1, was “the kingdom of God is at hand.” He would then speak of the kingdom of God in chapters 4, 9, and several times throughout chapter 10. But, this is the first time there is any mention of the kingdom of David. This phrase conveys the political and nationalistic expectation of those present with Jesus. Now, when we read the gospels, we have to remember to observe them through two points of historical context. First, the context of those in the story. Second, the context of those first receiving the gospel. For those in this story, their expectation is clear. They were expecting Jesus to enter Jerusalem, save them from the oppression of Rome, and sit on David’s throne there in Jerusalem. What about the context of the original recipients, who were likely being Roman Christians, reading this after Christ had died, resurrection, and ascended into heaven? Sinclair Ferguson helps us consider their perspective, saying, “Think, for a moment, what Mark’s record would convey to those who read it first—the Christians in Rome. No doubt many of them had seen generals enter Rome in triumph to receive the accolades of victory. How stark the contrast between Roman glory and Jesus’ humility must have seemed. How mighty and powerful the sword and political power by contrast with King Jesus!” (Sinclair Ferguson, Mark, 181) Think of how Jesus’ humility would stand out to them. Yet, like us, they would be able to see that far more was taking place through the coming kingdom. Christ was here to release His people from a far greater captive, and He was here to establish His rule and reign over all things. This moment does point to the coming kingdom arriving in the person of Jesus, as Ferguson says, “We know that his kingdom was established, while the glory that was Rome disappeared into oblivion. We know that what Jesus did in Jerusalem established a kingdom which would outlast all the kingdoms of this world and break in pieces every man-centered kingdom which sets itself against it. Jesus had come to take his throne—but had committed himself to begin his reign from a cross” (Sinclair Ferguson, Mark, 181). Church, during this final week of Christ’s life, which we reflect on each year, He would disarm the powers of darkness by becoming the substitutionary atonement for our sin. His death on the cross atoned for the sins of all who place their trust in Him, reconciling them to their creator. His resurrection would bring new life to those who believe and would inaugurate a kingdom whose scope would extend beyond what anyone could imagine, one day to be consummated at His return. Family, we should rejoice like those who followed Jesus, but we should rejoice over the true salvation He brought. This moment is ultimately intended to point our hearts to Christ as the one true King come to conquer our greatest enemy. We are meant to have this launch us into the final week of Jesus’ life to His see death and resurrection securing the greatest joy imaginable, our forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life with Him. Do you believe that He is the promised Messiah? Do you know that His death on the cross was for your sin? Are you trusting in that as your only hope for salvation and eternal life with Him? Those are the primary questions this passage is calling your heart to answer. Yet, there is one more thing we discover in our passage, as Mark ends this scene in a very interesting way. In verse 11, we see,

### **A Postlude of Surprising Simplicity**

Before we read this verse again, I want to pause and imagine what we would expect to happen when Jesus entered Jerusalem. How would you expect people to respond? Maybe with a warm welcome? Perhaps with even more exuberant rejoicing? at least with whispers and wondering about what is taking place, right? But look at verse 11, “And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” Church, this is a shocking conclusion to all of this and doesn’t look like a triumphant entry at all. With very little detail Mark describes Jesus entering Jerusalem, going to the temple, looking around, and leaving to Bethany because it was late. There is no fan fair, and no mention of any kind of reception in the temple.

Jesus is almost depicted like a tourist, looking around at the pretty building before leaving. We will discover there is something taking place in this survey of the temple when we pick up in the next section of Mark's gospel, but I believe Mark intentionally wants us to feel the anticlimax of this moment. Put yourself in this moment. The crowds have gone missing, and the appearance of any inauguration is completely out of sight. The joyful proclamations on the road into Jerusalem were short lived and the celebration has faded. It is as though when the reality sets in that Jesus' purpose is different than imagined, their enthusiasm had subsided. James Edwards provides an interesting implication to consider from this moment, saying, "Mark's account is noteworthy for what does not happen. The whole scene comes to nothing. Like the seed in the parable of the sower that receives the word with joy but has no root and lasts but a short time (4:6, 16-17), the crowd disperses as mysteriously as it assembled. Mark is warning against mistaking enthusiasm for faith and popularity for discipleship. Jesus is not confessed in pomp and circumstance but only at the cross (15:39)" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 338). Family, what does your faith hinge on? Is the joy and enthusiasm of our faith tied solely to what Christ can do for you in this world? Is all of your hope banking on changing the world around us? If that is the substance of your faith, you will wrestle with faith when things don't go as you hoped and the world around us continues to follow the path of the evil one. Or is your faith firmly grounded in what Christ has done for us on the cross, the peace He has brought with God, and the hope of eternal life? The Roman Christians who first received this gospel were under oppression from the world around them like we have yet to come close to experiencing. Mark writes to them to give them, and us, hope in Christ's ultimate victory over sin and death. What about the call of discipleship? Has the enthusiasm of our faith faded as you have discovered the true call of discipleship over this past month? The parable of the sower and seed reveals many things that distract us from bearing fruit as we follow Christ, whether it is persecutions that will come from the world, or the cares of this world and deceitfulness of riches that cause us to turn away. Family, Mark, in this moment, is holding out the true joy of the kingdom found in embracing the gospel and following Christ fully in discipleship.

### **Conclusion:**

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of response, how is the Lord leading you to respond? Maybe He is calling you to trust in Christ as your king and the one who died for your sins, calling you to cry out for the mercy He provides and trust in Christ's death and resurrection today. Maybe the Spirit of God is pricking your heart to consider whether your faith is anchored to the wrong things, calling you to receive Christ for who He truly is and find your joy in Him. However the Lord is leading you to respond, press into His leading. You are welcome to come and kneel before Him, sit and reflect as long as you need, or stand and sing for your heart and those around you. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you who you will find worshipping on the front rows or the bottom of the stairs in the back with lanyards on. Let's press into God's grace together and see what He has for us as we respond to His Word. Would you pray with me?