

THE KING HAS COME!

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, April 9, 2006

Jesus' return to Jerusalem near the end of His life, commonly known by Christians as His Triumphal Entry — is recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — it is in all four gospels.

This day, known to us now as Palm Sunday, was the day that ancient Jews selected their ceremonial, unblemished lamb for the Passover.

For the Church it is also a significant event, because it reveals the height of His popularity and the naïveté of those who worshiped Him, against the backdrop of the intense climax of His life purpose: to introduce the Kingdom of God.

Let me read to you the story, combined from the pages of all four gospel accounts, by the excellent effort of Johnston M. Cheney. As I do, I want you to do three things: (1) feeling the crowd's swelling excitement, pay attention to who they *really* believed Jesus was, (2) note how Jesus fulfilled ancient Jewish prophecy about the Messiah's arrival, and (3) ask yourself, "How appropriate were Jesus' reactions to the events of that afternoon?"

¹WHEN THEY APPROACHED Jerusalem ⁴the next day and ¹came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent out two of His disciples. "Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a donkey tied up. Tied with her will be a ²colt which no one has ever ridden. ¹Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything ³or asks, ²'What are you doing?' say to him, 'The Lord needs them,' and he'll immediately send them here."

³Those who were sent left and ¹did what Jesus told them. ²They found a young donkey tied outside the door in the street ³just as He had described, ²and they untied it.

³The owners were standing there and said, ²"What are you doing? ³Why are you untying the colt?"

³"The Lord needs it," they said, ²repeating what Jesus had told them to say.

²Then the owners let them go. ¹So they brought the donkey and the colt ³to Jesus, threw their clothing on them, ^{2,4}and sat Jesus on the colt.

³As He rode along, ^{1,2,3}they began to spread their articles of clothing on the road. ³When He came to the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, a large crowd of disciples began to shout for joy and to praise God loudly for all the miracles they had seen. "Blessed is the King who is coming in the name of the Lord!" they shouted. "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!"

⁴A huge crowd had come to the feast. When they heard that Jesus was entering Jerusalem, ^{2,4}they cut down palm branches, ⁴went out to meet Him, ^{1,2}and spread the branches on the road. The crowds who followed Him as well as those who went ahead of Him ⁴kept shouting, "Hosanna! ¹Hosanna to the Son of David!" ⁴"Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" ²"Blessed is the kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

*¹All this happened to fulfill what the prophet said:
Tell the daughter of Zion, "Don't be afraid!
Look, your King is coming to you,*

*humble, and riding a donkey,
even a colt, ⁴the foal of a donkey.”*

⁴*The disciples didn't understand these things at first. But after Jesus was glorified, they remembered these predictions about Him and that they had done these things to Him.*

The people who were with Him when He raised Lazarus from the dead and called him from the tomb were telling others all about it. That is why the people went out to meet Him; they heard that He had performed this great miracle.

³*Some Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, restrain Your disciples.”*

³*But He answered them, “I'm telling you, if they were to keep quiet, the very stones would cry out!”*

When He came near and saw the city, He wept over it. “If only you—yes, you—had known on this special day the things that would bring you peace! But now they are hidden from you. The days are coming when your enemies will build a siege ramp around you and encircle you and hem you in on all sides. They will level you to the ground—with your children inside you—and will not leave one stone upon another. This will happen because you didn't recognize the time of God's coming to you.”

¹*The whole city was aroused when He entered Jerusalem. “Who is this?” they asked.*

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus the Prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

⁴*Then the Pharisees said to each other, “See, we are accomplishing nothing. Look at how the whole world has gone after Him!”*

(¹ Matthew 21:1-11, ² Mark 11:1-11, ³ Luke 19:29-44, ⁴ John 12:12-19)

The enthusiasm of Christ's followers snowballed with every step, as the procession rolled down the road toward the City. Not even His closest disciples seemed to recognize the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy at the time, responding instead to the recent miracle of Lazarus' resuscitation and declaring their real belief that He was simply a local prophet.

Their excitement was contrasted by their celebration's bitter irritation of the religious leaders, who urged Jesus to shut down the party and stifle the worship of His followers. His response is remarkable: He found their worship was minimal; if they became still the very stones along the road would cry out! Evidently, the worship He truly deserved was beyond anything they witnessed that day, and would stir the most inanimate elements of His creation to a most uncharacteristically vibrant celebration of His majesty. The tragedy of that day was this: rocks cannot praise Him; only people can. *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”*

The people who laid down their garments and palm branches at His feet missed the real significance of that event, because they were unfamiliar with the Scriptures. Their lack of familiarity with God's Word prevented them from connecting the dots. *“The disciples didn't understand these things.”*

Even those who followed Him closely were thinking narrowly of themselves and their immediate circumstances. They imagined that His coming was primarily for the immediate improvement of their condition. This view of the Kingdom of God is too constricted. It is not about us; it's about Jesus, and His purpose — His grand and glorious purpose.

During His first appearing among us, Jesus fulfilled hundreds of specific prophecies about the coming Messiah. And hundreds more direct our gaze to the horizon of His return. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Will we do any better than they did at recognizing the signs of His return? Or will we be consumed and blinded by our own interests?

Their blissful ignorance was a cause for alarming disappointment on His part. This was one of only two times Jesus was recorded to have wept. *“If only you—yes, you—had known on this special day the things that would bring you peace!”*

And their shallow excitement was the precursor of a painful awakening on their parts: *“They will level you to the ground... because you didn’t recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”*

For these reasons we must familiarize ourselves with the nature and purpose of Christ’s Kingdom. It is not about “pie in the sky by and by;” it is for today, for the King has already come and His Kingdom is now among us.

Neither is it simply about removing every inconvenience and discomfort of this life, but about incorporating all the circumstances of your life and infusing them with a purpose that extends beyond this shrinking world — a cause you would be willing to give your life to.

What can we learn of this Kingdom from the Scriptures?

First, the Kingdom of God does not come as a heavenly spectacular, but as a silent awakening of the heart — one heart at a time. Just as the King arrived the first time as an unnoticed infant in an obscure Middle Eastern village, so He begins His life in you gently, gradually, but persistently.

Second, the Kingdom of God must be experienced. It cannot simply be learned through reading or instruction; every individual must taste it for him or her self. Jesus said, *“Don’t be surprised when I say to you, you must be born again.”*

Third, the Kingdom of God is not marked by geographical or political or cultural boundaries. It embraces every people group and every language, both rich and poor together. It is not partial to human rank or class. Wherever the influence of the King is received — wherever He is welcomed and praised — is His Kingdom. And whoever He touches in such a way is family to us all.

And fourth, the Kingdom of God must be lived to be seen. Words alone, even the words of Scripture, cannot tell the story adequately. It takes a human life — a life governed and led by the Holy Spirit. That is the first reason that Jesus had to come to Earth. We needed to see Him. We needed to hear His voice. We needed to feel His touch. Only then can we begin to declare Him.

“He who was from the beginning, whom we have heard, whom we have seen with our own eyes, whom we have observed, and our hands have handled...we declare to you” (1 John 1:1-3).

Finally, know this: His entry is always only the beginning. His influence expands and His Kingdom increases without end — first in you and then, around you. Today, welcome your King. Walk with Him. Make Him known!