

Triumphal Entry

HN/SS 27/11/05am

Reading: Zechariah 9:9f, Luke 19:28f

Study Text: John 12:12–19

Sing Psalms: 118:1–6; 118:16–28; 118:24–29; 92:12–15

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her (Luke 13:34). *Jesus was coming to Jerusalem* once again (12:12). Remember the last time he was in the holy city. The Jews tried to arrest him but he escaped (10:39). And before that time they tried to stone him as he stood in the temple precincts. In fact at the previous Passover Jesus went up in secret, for his time had not yet come (7:10).

Jesus was a man with a price on his head but still he is going up to Jerusalem. He is going up openly into the territory of the religious leaders who hated him and wanted his dead. Why? Why was Jesus risking death by going up to Jerusalem?

Jesus could hardly have expected a warm welcome as he came again to this city. Yet in the providence of God we see he was briefly accorded a fitting welcome, a welcome fitting for a king, for a conqueror.

My Father's House

Jesus was going to Jerusalem because in this city was the temple, the house of God. Jesus called this *My Father's house* (John 2:16). Directly after Jesus entered the city he went to the temple and drove out the money changers (Luke 19:45). The religious authorities tolerated, and were probably profiting from this commercial practice in the house of God.

The temple was 'my house' as far as Jesus was concerned. This city was rightly his city. Jesus was the son of David; he was the one who had come to fulfil the promises made to David. *Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever* (II Samuel 7:16). Jesus was coming to claim the throne, the eternal throne promised to David.

Multitudes were following Jesus at this time, especially after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. He could have led them out into the desert and established himself as the leader of another sect. But no! He was coming to Jerusalem to take possession of what was rightfully his as the only begotten son of the Father. He was sent by the Father according to the promises given first to Abraham, then to Moses and to David. Jesus was the Messiah spoken of by the prophets. He had come in accordance with the Scriptures.

Remember the parable Jesus told about the vineyard that was rented out by the owner (Luke 20). The owner sent his servants and then his son to collect the rent. God the Father was the owner of this vineyard. Jerusalem belonged to God and the people of the city were his people. They were children of Abraham. The parable was told against the religious leaders, the chief priests and Pharisees, who had usurped that which belonged to God and to his son Jesus Christ.

Jews who continue to reject the Messiah who has come are usurpers. They are holding on to what is not rightfully theirs. To them were *committed the oracles of God* (Romans 3:2), a great privilege they once had; but the Scriptures no longer belong to them. They are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth came to take possession of what was rightfully his, what was given to him by his Father – the house of God and the people of God. He came as king to rule over this possession. Those who refuse to honour him as king will suffer the wrath of God as the parable clearly indicates.

Prophecy

A great multitude came out of the city to welcome Jesus – this was on the day after the Sabbath, what is often called palm Sunday. These people had come from all over the world to attend the Passover. They had heard what Jesus had done in Bethany in raising Lazarus from the dead. Now they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, so they went out in vast numbers to see him.

They were moved to take branches off the palm trees that lined the roadside and to wave these as they cried out *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The king of Israel.* Hosanna means ‘to give salvation’ or ‘to save’. Then they proceeded to praise in the words of Psalm 118:26, one of the Hallel Psalms. They saw Jesus as coming in the name of God. They saw him coming as their deliverer, as their king. Parallel accounts in the synoptic gospels do not record the words ‘The King of Israel’ but have other words of praise.

What moved these people to take palm branches and burst into praise we are not told. The waving of palm branches was part of the celebrations at the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40). Palm branches also came to be symbolic of victory. When Simon the Maccabee drove the Syrian forces out of Jerusalem in 141BC he was welcomed with song and the waving of palm branches.

Many Jews were expecting Messiah to come and deliver them from Roman oppression. They needed a powerful deliverer and Jesus had demonstrated great power. Previously some had tried to take Jesus and make him king by force (6:15). Now they thought he was coming to be the king of Israel who would set them free politically.

But as so often in this gospel the people did not understand what they were doing and saying. The irony continues. They thought they were welcoming an earthly king but the truth was that Jesus was a heavenly king. *My kingdom is not of this world* Jesus told Pilate (18:36). He was a king but not one to challenge the jurisdiction of Pilate.

As Jesus was walking along the road from Bethany he *found a young donkey and sat on it* (12:14). The other gospels give more detail telling how he sent his disciples ahead to a village where they would find a colt. He told them to bring it to him. They spread their cloaks on this animal for Jesus to ride. A donkey was a faithful beast of burden. It was ridden, but more as a symbol of peace than of war. The crowd of Jews would have preferred to see Jesus on a stately war horse as they cried out King of Israel.

But here he was on a donkey, the colt of a donkey. He was coming as the Prince of Peace. He was coming according to the prophecy of Scripture as found in Zechariah 9:9. This Scripture,

written some 500 years before the time of Christ, is amazingly specific. It tells of a coming king, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt the foal of a donkey.

Jesus knew this Scripture but his disciples did not see the connection until after Jesus was glorified. How wonderful it is to see Scripture being fulfilled, even in the minutest detail. Not one promise, not one word of a promise that God had spoken will fail to be fulfilled.

A man sitting by the roadside had a small bird in a cage, and laid out in front of the cage were some cards. The idea was that when let out the bird would jump onto a card and that card told the future. How interesting! You had to pay for him to let the bird out of course. People today are seduced by all sorts of self proclaimed prophets and fortune tellers. They are impressed if just one vague prediction appears come true. This is a great deception of the Devil. Why do people not listen to the One whose every word comes true, in every detail?

Remember how God revealed the future to Joseph and to Daniel. What they said came to pass because God gave them the revelation and they believed him. In the past God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2). Will you listen to his word? Will you believe his word? Do not listen to false prophets, even though their numbers are increasing in these last days.

Love

Jesus was not being led to Jerusalem as a prisoner, despite the resolve of the Jewish leaders to arrest him and put him to death. He was going up to Jerusalem voluntarily. And He knew what awaited him there. His hour had come. His enemies were becoming more desperate (12:19). They were determined to kill Jesus. But still he went up. Why?

Jerusalem was rightfully his place, and he was fulfilling prophecy, but he was also going up because of love, love for you and for me. He was compelled by love for the lost. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). How would he save them? He must die. He must offer himself as a sacrifice for sin. This was the way his Father had planned; this was the only way.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (3:16). Jesus loves all those whom the Father loves. Now he was showing the extent of his love. He must go up to the place of sacrifice; he must go up at the time of sacrifice. He must offer himself as the Passover lamb, the lamb to be sacrificed to take away the sin of the world.

By this we know love, because he (Jesus) laid down his life for us (I John 3:16). Jesus went up in full knowledge of what awaited him there because he loved you. He went up knowing that death awaited him because he knew that this was the only way he could save you from your sin.

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