

“Entering Jerusalem”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 7/7/19
Mark 11:1-11, at FBC of Newport, NH

//11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10 “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.//

—Mark 11:1-11 (NIV)

I find it interesting how God marks special events and occasions. He doesn't just let them slip by unrecognized, by Him at least, and by those paying attention to him. The rainbow is a big one, reminding us of the Flood and the promise of relative stability until the final day of judgment. The Passover lamb and supper is a very big one, reminding Israel of her birth as a nation and the type of sacrifice necessary for it. There are also smaller things, like the memory stones marking Jacob's dream of a “stairway to heaven” (the original “rock n' roll”); the crossing of Israel into the Promised Land; and one might even say the stone tablets of the Law of Moses are one of the best memory devices for the occasion of God's presence with Israel on Mt. Sinai. And, of course, we're familiar with the way God has established the New Covenant through the body and blood of Jesus as he reminds us of it by having transformed the Passover meal into the Last Supper, which we will be having today.

But our passage today is simply about Jesus entering into the city of Jerusalem. What's the big deal about that? We don't have to commemorate and celebrate everything do we? I just got the title to my car in the mail last Friday. I thought about celebrating the fact that I now officially own my own car. I thought of posting it on Facebook. I thought of going out to eat. But I decided to just get a Subway sandwich and call it good. I already had a great birthday party. The country just had one too. I figured the world might not need to focus on the title of my car this time around. Yet, Jesus decided to go out of his way to do something memorable for the occasion of his entering into the city of Jerusalem. Why? He'd surely been to the city a number of times before. What's different? What's so important about it now?

What's *not* important?

Jerusalem is the city of God and located on the mountain of God, Zion. It is the place where Abraham went to offer his promised son as a sacrifice to God. It is where God chose for his temple to be built, and where the people of Israel must gather in pilgrimage and festivals. It was the first place to be rebuilt after the 70 years of exile.

And then there's Jesus. I could start right out by simply saying: You've got the city of God, and Jesus ... he's God. It's his city. And he's coming in the capacity of ownership. He's the King. The King of kings, in the royal line of king David, whose house God said would always be associated with his name and whose kingdom would never end.

But we have to keep in mind that the matter of Jesus' importance was one of those hot button issues of the day. So it was hugely important for people to see Jesus making a statement to the world by this act of his official entry into the holy city of God. As Jewish people were gathering from all over the Roman world for the Passover and for Pentecost, Jesus was not going to enter this city just by strolling through the gates like anyone and everyone.

Think how we treat important people when they come to a little city like Salem, New Hampshire. Vice President Pence was supposed to speak there on the topic of drug addiction but canceled at the last minute. Even so, you could see on the news report that even the Governor of NH and other dignitaries had gathered at the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport to welcome the Vice President had he arrived on Air Force Two as expected.

Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, was coming to the city of God. And God was going to make sure it was a memorable occasion.

However, Jesus knew it wasn't going to be marked by the highest dignitaries of Rome and Israel standing there to welcome him. As mentioned earlier, the Jewish authorities had an arrest warrant out for him. They feared his popularity and demonstrations of power. They believed he was important, yes. But an important threat. They wanted to kill him. And Jesus himself knew Jerusalem had one more reason for being important. He said Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets.

So, this was an important event. It just had to take place in a way that was appropriate and memorable. But it would be in spite of, not because of, the city's officials giving Jesus and Jerusalem the recognition they should have had for the man and the occasion.

This explains why so much of this passage in Mark 11 is taken up by special instructions, even code words, for Jesus' disciples to follow as they secure a donkey's colt. According to Matthew there was also the colt's mother, but Mark just focuses on the colt. It was to be a fulfillment of Messianic prophesy, Zechariah 9:9 (*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*). And it was to be a sign that this Messiah-King was coming in a humble, peaceful way.

This peacefulness, though, was only one sided so Jesus had to keep it a secret as to how and when he would be entering into Jerusalem. But enter he did, not on the sly, this was a parade! And a parade Jerusalem style. No fire trucks, no tiny go-carts. But lots of people cheering, “Hosannah!” and “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Jesus was on the donkey’s colt, the mother of the colt probably alongside or just ahead, his apostles around him, the other disciples and the cheering crowd of people all around throwing their cloaks in front of them to be walked over and palm branches cut from nearby trees waving overhead and being laid down on the roadway to Jerusalem.

By this time Jesus was at the peak of both his popularity and unpopularity. And right now his popularity was winning. Especially as people recognized Jesus and saw this as his open declaration of being the Messiah-King of Israel. Jerusalem was overflowing with pilgrims and the authorities would have been helpless to stop this parade for fear of a riot. Luke 20 tells us some Pharisees in the crowd tried to get Jesus to rebuke his disciples for encouraging all this cheering of the King entering Jerusalem. But Jesus said if the crowd didn’t cheer the stones themselves would cry out instead.

This was more than a memorable occasion. This was a message. The Messiah and King of Israel was coming in peace to the capital city—and his name was Jesus of Nazareth. By the end of the day the whole city was buzzing about what had happened. We can just imagine the conversations over the supper tables that evening.

Random Jewish man: “Did you hear about that preacher from Galilee? He came into Jerusalem like he was the King of Israel—and no one touched him! Do you think it might be true? Are the authorities finally accepting him?”

Random member of the Sanhedrin: “I can’t believe the arrogance of that Jesus of Nazareth. He deliberately incited the ignorant crowds, gathered for Passover, to engage in blasphemous praise and cheers for him as the Messiah! He knows full well what he’s doing. And he knows full well he can’t take on the Romans with an army of sinners and tax collectors. He’s going to get us all slaughtered when the crowds—and the Romans—take him seriously.”

Random Roman soldier: “Did you hear what got the Jews all excited today? Some guy came riding in on a jackass like he was some big dignitary and they lined the pathway for him with their clothes and palm branches. Now I hear the place is abuzz about him. What a weird bunch a people these Jews.”

But you know what? That buzz didn’t stop there. When God wants to make something memorable, he has the long game in mind. He’s got the whole world talking about just who this “Jesus” is. He may have entered what seemed to be an insignificant city in one of the rough neighborhoods of the world, but God has managed to make this a procession for the whole world to ponder.

This is because God wants Jesus to be introduced to the whole world. First to the Jew, but also to the Gentile. He wants it to be done properly and peacefully. He really is the King of the Jews, their Messiah, and the Savior of the whole world. So he enters Jerusalem in a way truly fitting for a king and in

complete fulfillment of the scriptures. He hasn't come with an army in power and in a position that would demand a bended knee and force tongues to confess him. Here he's left room for people to ponder this lowly figure, rightly or wrongly. There will come a Day when he will come on a stallion, a white one, and he will bring an army. And there will be no room for choice as to how one will respond. As Paul says later to the church in Philippi:

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

—Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV)

But after all, now, here in Mark 11, this is just an introduction, not a conclusion. It's not the whole story. There's a lot that has gone on beforehand and there's a lot that carries on afterwards. But right now this is Jesus making the Jewish world, the Gentile world, your world and my world pause, even briefly, to consider just how he will be received in the first place. Will he be welcomed, rejected or at least puzzled over?

For the most part, even though this entry brought memorable cheers and expectations, for the most part he was rejected. We know what comes next: the trial, the parading him through the city streets on his way to the cross, the public execution. But don't jump there too quickly. Consider the importance of what Jesus did right here on this particular day as he entered Jerusalem. He came properly and peacefully.

This is how he wants to come to everyone. He does not want to come in a way that would force people to believe in him, nor does he want to come in a way that would leave everyone condemned. Jesus wants to come into the life of every person simply so they will have an opportunity—to praise him, to criticize him, to ponder him ... or even to put him on trial if that's what they think they must do. He is willing to even be judged wrongly and condemned for whatever crime one thinks he has committed. Because, after all, it's only an introduction. There is room here for learning more, seeing more and having a change of heart as he invades the walls of your life peacefully, like a King who deserves your heart's throne more than you do, like a Savior who loves you more properly than you can even love yourself.

Such an introduction should always be memorable forever.