

The Lord's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

John 12:12-19

John 12:12-19 - *"The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!'"* ¹⁴ Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ *"Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt."* ¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

¹⁷ Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸ For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹ The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

Background Notes

In verse 12 we read that Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem took place on "*the next day*" (v12). This does not mean the day after Mary anointed the Lord. It refers to the day after verses 10-11, when "*the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.*"

In fact, Mary's anointing of Jesus actually took place **after** the triumphal entry. The Holy Spirit had John place the account of the anointing before the triumphal entry because, in the John 12 context, we can see the different reactions to the Lord's great Sign Miracle of raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Throughout the Bible we can see that God does not always put biblical material in chronological order. Sometimes the material is placed in a topical arrangement, in line with a particular purpose of the Holy Spirit for that book or portion of Scripture. However, when the Bible **says** it is chronological, you can be sure that it **is** chronological!

So - when we read "*The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem...*" we can be sure that it was the next day after the evil plotting of the religious leaders in verses 10-11. The Lord was in and out of Bethany for the whole week leading up to the crucifixion, as we see from verse 1, and the dinner in Bethany, when Mary anointed the Lord (v2-8), took place sometime during the middle of that final week.

The Lord's "triumphal entry" is, of course, the event we celebrate on Palm Sunday. The palm branches the people used were likely branches from date palm trees. In that culture, palm branches were symbols of victory. This showed that the people were hoping for a political Messiah – a military hero, who would lead the people out from under the Roman occupation and oppression. In fact, that is what most of the people in the crowd meant when they cried out "Hosanna!" Hosanna means "saved" or "save now." They were saying, in effect, "Save now, we pray – save us from the Roman oppression!"

The people were quoting Psalm 118:25-26, which says: “Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” Psalm 118 is a Messianic psalm and worshipers coming up to Jerusalem for the Passover season sang this psalm. So these people were applying Psalm 118 to the right person - the Messiah, the Lord Jesus - even though, for most of them, it was applied to Him for the wrong reason. The Lord was not coming into Jerusalem as a conquering military hero.

Another background note: the “people” mentioned in verse 17 were distinct from the triumphal entry crowd: “*Therefore the people who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness.*” The people in verse 17 were those who had been privileged to see the Lord raise Lazarus from the dead. Now they were sharing the news of that great Sign Miracle with the crowds from Galilee who had come into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

The “people” in verse 18 were the crowds of people who had come for Passover: “*For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.*” The folks from Galilee already knew of Jesus and His miracles. They knew that, up to this point, Jesus had refused to be recognized as a political Messiah. But when they heard He was coming to Jerusalem, maybe they thought that He had changed His mind.

Maybe they thought the right time had finally come, and they were welcoming Jesus as a political Messiah who was making a triumphal entry into Jerusalem as a military hero. Verse 19 indicates that the crowds were quite large: “*The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”*” There’s no doubt this comment indicated great crowds!

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The triumphal entry was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy.

“Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.” (v14-15). Here John was quoting the Messianic prophecy from Zechariah 9:9: “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.*” The phrase “Daughter of Zion” was a figurative expression for the Jewish people. Zechariah wrote this prophecy more than five hundred years before the coming of Christ - and it was fulfilled exactly as predicted!

Now if you were to use this fulfilled prophecy to show your non-Christian friends how Jesus accurately fulfilled the Bible’s prophecies, what do you think they would say? If they’re skeptics, they will surely say, “That’s not a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Jesus knew of the prophecy, so He just did what was predicted. He made sure He fulfilled it to the very last detail. In fact, He **artificially** fulfilled it!” Now what would we say in response to that?

We would say, “Well, of course the Lord knew about this prophecy. However, just because the Lord knew of this prophecy doesn’t mean that He fulfilled it **artificially**, any more than He artificially fulfilled any of the other Messianic

prophecies." Of course He knew all of the Messianic predictions - and every one of the prophecies about the Messiah's first coming was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

By the way, notice the contrast. The disciples didn't seem to know of Zechariah 9:9. "*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.*" It was only when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church that the disciples were enabled, through the Spirit, to put it all together!

I always tell my students this: when using fulfilled prophecy as evidence for the Christian faith, it is better to use prophecies that the skeptic can't escape from. There are plenty of those in the Bible! For example, in reference to the life of Christ there are a number of prophecies dealing with His lineage and birth. How can you artificially fulfill a prophecy about your lineage and your birth?

Take Micah 5:2, for example: "*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me, the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.*" This passage predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and that's exactly where Jesus was born. It's pretty difficult to "artificially" control the place of your birth!

But the skeptic may attempt to say that the Micah prophecy was inserted into the Bible after Jesus' birth - to "create" a prophecy. No way. The book of Micah, including the prophecy in Micah 5:2, is included in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and they were written down well before the birth of Christ. So the birthplace of Jesus is a prophecy that was definitely made long **before** Jesus was born - not a later insertion put into the manuscript by the early followers of Christ!

All the prophecies about the first coming of Christ were fulfilled in every detail, right on schedule - and the prophecies about the second coming of Christ will be fulfilled in detail as well! Look again at Zechariah 9:9, and also verse 10: "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'*"

The prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 refers to our Lord's first coming, and verse 10 refers to His second coming. When the Lord returns to this earth, war will come to an end, peace will spread to the ends of the earth, and Jesus Christ will reign as King. Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled literally at Christ's triumphal entry. And Zechariah 9:10 will be fulfilled literally at the Christ's second coming!

2. The triumphal entry was a foretaste of the "New Testament program."

Not only was the triumphal entry a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, it was a foretaste of the Lord's "New Testament program." The fact that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not on a warhorse, was very significant - and very symbolic. The donkey was a sign of peace. It was an indication that the Lord was not coming as a political Messiah or a military hero. That was not His program.

The contrast is quite striking in the prophecy in Zechariah 9. Zechariah 9:1-8 predicted the future victories of the famous Greek military leader, Alexander the Great. Zechariah prophesied in the 6th century BC, during the days of the Persian Empire. His prophecy about Alexander the Great was made a couple of hundred years before Alexander was born!

Now here's the point: in distinct contrast to the great military victories and accomplishments of Alexander the Great, Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would come as a Man of peace - lowly, riding on a donkey! He was bringing **salvation from sin**, not victory over Rome. **That** was the Lord's program! The crowds were hoping that He would deliver them from the Roman occupation and oppression, but that was not His program. He had come to **deliver them from their sins** – “*just and having salvation.*” That was His program. The triumphal entry was a foretaste of the New Testament program.

Practical Application

Let's get with the program!

Have you ever heard this expression spoken to you when you're doing your own thing? “You need to get with the program!” Well, very few people were in tune with the Lord's program when He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowds wanted a political king and a conquering military hero. They were not with the **Lord's** program.

Yes, Jesus had announced that His prophesied kingdom was at hand, and there was an earthly political aspect to that kingdom, but the setting up of His kingdom hinged on the nation of Israel repenting of their sin and accepting Him as their Messiah, Savior and God. Sadly, the nation rejected Him as their Messiah. They didn't get with His program. Even the triumphal entry crowds faded away when they realized that the Lord's program didn't line up with their program.

This is still true today. The Lord's program for us is to trust in Him as Savior, and then to join Him in living “*outside the camp, bearing His reproach.*” Hebrew 13:13 says, “*Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.*”

Lots of people celebrate Palm Sunday and Easter and Christmas, but they don't want to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. What about you? Are you “with the program”? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Some Christians have gone only part way with the Lord's program. Yes, they have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, but they are unwilling to live outside their cultural norms – unwilling to “*bear His reproach.*” They want **their own** program for their lives. They want to be successful and popular. They're unwilling to suffer any kind of loss of success for the sake of living out **the Lord's program**.

Are we with the Lord's program? Let's get with the program!