



Speaker:  
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## The Black Parade

◀ Series: The Gospel of Mark · 38 of 38

2/28/2021 (SUN) | Bible: **Mark 11:1-11**

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples and saith unto them, "Go your way into the village over against you, and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat. Loose him and bring him. And if any man say unto you, 'Why do ye this?' say ye that 'the Lord hath need of him, and straightway he will send him hither.'"

And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met, and they loosed him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, 'What do ye, loosing the colt?' And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded, and they let them go.

And they brought the colt to Jesus and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way. And others cut down branches off the trees and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed cried saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"

And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple. And when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

We left Jesus and the saints last week on the road to Jerusalem. You remember there was this great healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus. And we saw that not only was this healing a waypoint in Mark's biography, but it also provided us with some powerful symbols of God's salvation of men and women.

The journey to Jerusalem is now almost over. Jerusalem is on the other side of a large hill, the Mount of Olives no less. And it's the purpose of Jesus to enter Jerusalem not on foot but riding an animal. This is why he sends two of his disciples to go and collect one. I'm not sure whether Jesus has made prior arrangements with the owner of the donkey or he's exercising control of the owner's mind from a distance. Mark doesn't seem too concerned with that detail.

Before we look at some of the aspects of Jesus's approach to Jerusalem, I feel I should explain the title of this message. Perhaps you'd expect something more like "The Triumphant Entry of Jesus", or "The Great Victory Parade of Christ". But I've given it a title *The Black*

*Parade*. Not that titles are of much importance in sermons but, since I use them, they should reflect something of the tone of the message.

And what I want to bring to your attention today are the *contrasts* seen throughout this account. Yes, the Son of David was indeed arriving at the City of David. The King was indeed coming to set up his Kingdom. **But the stark reality was Jesus would be dead within the week.** This *was* a parade. But there was a black cloud overshadowing it. A cloud of the vengeance of God that would bring a storm of anguish into the soul of Jesus. A “black parade”.

## Sovereign yet humble

Jesus has arranged for a young donkey to be brought to him. It would’ve been seen as an unusual request. Pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem were meant to go on foot. It’s clear Jesus is intending to make some kind of statement, but what is it?

One small point that’s worth noticing is it was a donkey that had never been ridden. This is of interest because, according to the Mosaic Law, animals dedicated to the service of God must not have been previously used as working animals.

**He wants to be noticed.** The unveiling of his identity and purpose is continuing. Last time we saw how he was addressed as “Son of David” and didn’t object. And now he’ll go even further and give clues to his kingship, his sovereignty. Listen to this reference in 2 Kings:

Then they hasted, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, “Jehu is king”.

2 Kings 9:13

It was common practice to create some sort of pathway for a noble figure to make a grand entrance. Think of the red carpets rolled out to VIPs in our day. But the noble figure here is none other than THE King, Jesus Christ. Even more relevant is this prophecy from Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass...

Zechariah 9:9

There’s no doubt in my mind that **Jesus was fulfilling this exact prophecy.** Their king WAS coming to them. He WAS just. And in His purpose of dying for the sins of his people, it’s rightly said he HAD salvation.

But the great contrast in that prophecy is exactly my point today. The verse starts by talking of a king—more so, the King of Kings. But it calls him “lowly”. Lowly? And riding on a donkey? Where was the white horse? Surely nothing less would be fitting for the King of Kings!

And here is that contrast, that paradox. Yes, the prophecy was about the King of Kings. But it portrays him as *humble*. This is something that would make no sense to the kings of this earth. We said last week how bizarre it would be for a king to do all his own housework. And we concluded this is the type of king Jesus is. He’s a servant as well as a king.

The picture that was prophesied, and which was fulfilled in Jesus here, is one of a very special kind of King. One who knows he's both absolute ruler of the world but also a servant of his brethren.

And in this unique stance he sets us a great example. We who are believers are called "kings and priests" unto God. It says we rule with Christ, even now. Yet we're urged to find true humility, always assuming our brothers and sisters in Christ are better than us. That's tough. We find it much easier to spot sin in others. And in those times, we secretly rank ourselves on the godliness scale, we never put ourselves at the bottom! But we must convince ourselves all that unearthed sin in us we're not even aware of would relegate us to the bottom of any list.

Anyway, the crucial difference with Jesus's humility is his ultimate act of service was to give his very life so we can escape the damnation that was due to us.

### Triumphant yet saddened

If we viewed this episode from another standpoint, we may well rightly call it the "triumphal entry of Jesus". Many of the commentators use this exact phrase as headings for this account in Mark.

Now I don't want us to think that this wasn't, at least in one sense, a truly triumphant entrance by Jesus Christ. He was, after all, *riding* into Jerusalem rather than walking. He'd have been the only one in the crowd to be riding in (unless there were disabled people doing so). His disciples had used their own clothing to provide a more comfortable ride even. And then there was the wider circle of people which was creating this special entrance into the city for him.

There's another prophecy in Zachariah which I believe is applicable here:

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east. And the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west. And there shall be a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, And half of it toward the south.

Zechariah 14:4

Now I will say the bulk of Christians have been attracted by explanations of prophecy that are more exciting to them. I made this point many times when we were working our way through the Book of Revelation. This means there are those who interpret the whole of this prophecy in Zechariah quite literally. So rather than seeing this as a reference to Jesus being at the Mount of Olives as he travels to Jerusalem during his incarnation, they see this instead as a reference to *the second coming* of Jesus with earthquakes and movements of entire mountains from one place to the other. The prophecy was about the lead up to the atonement, and these fantastic interpretations undermine this.

I've no intention today of trying to explain what those descriptions of geological upheavals mean symbolically. But I'm hoping you've come to see **prophecy is about the coming of the kingdom with the first advent of Jesus**, not his second advent.

This prophecy, then, adds to the picture, and adds to the triumph of Jesus's arrival at the great city. Centuries of prophecies were coming to a head. The atonement to end all atonements was about to take place. The Saviour of Israel had come!

Satan had tried to stop Jesus getting to this point. He tried to have Jesus killed as a toddler. He'd thrown temptations his way, trying to get him to lessen his trust in his Father. He'd manipulated religious people to try and stop Jesus's mission and even kill him. He'd even influenced one of Jesus's own disciples to disrupt his divine purpose.

Despite all this and much more, Jesus is here. He's arrived. And in fulfilment of prophecy, he travels over the Mount of Olives and enters the city on the donkey. There **was**, clearly, an element of great triumph in this entrance of his.

But think about the future of this great city. It had been the centre of Jewish religion for centuries. Yet soon it would be invaded, razed to the ground and the temple obliterated. The coming destruction was all of God; but how sad that it'd come to this!

Far more importantly, we must remember that his struggle to fulfil his mission *was to end in his own death*. Calvary was no longer something far away, on the horizon of Jesus's life. The great suffering was getting closer by the day, and I expect Jesus felt it was accelerating towards him. I can imagine he rode toward the city feeling both a sense of excitement at fulfilling his grand purpose and just, perhaps, a desire that the donkey would walk a bit slower.

We know Jesus, as a true man, recoiled from the thought of being put through so much suffering. But being the son of God incarnate, his will was always in humble obedience to his father.

And remember, brethren, this wasn't a bare obedience to his Father. He himself was motivated by love for us. What kind of love Jesus has for us!

If you don't belong to God, **you have no right to think God loves you**. You can only assume he can't *stand* you—that you **disgust** him.

If you're one who's seeking God today, we urge you to come to him and experience for yourself what it means to be in the love of Christ.

## Praised yet abandoned

I think there are two mistakes made by some when they comment on this episode.

On the one hand, you have the more common view: that this was nothing less than a victory parade. The people had finally accepted him as Messiah! And they escort him in this most glorious entrance. On this view, all the people involved knew who Jesus was and what his real mission was.

On the other hand, we have the view of a few other commentators. They make out all this noise and activity has almost *nothing to do* with Jesus.

So let's try and make sense of all this. Let's see if we can get a better understanding of what all these people were doing.

The first thing we should acknowledge is this act of singing on the road to Jerusalem was common. During major festivals or on pilgrimages, the Jews would quote from the Psalms. It was likely they were using some form of intonation—very basic type of singing, if you like.

But here's the question: were they singing these things today the way they always had, or were they making reference to Jesus as the Christ?

The word "hosanna", which is pretty much the same in Greek and Hebrew as in English, means "Save us!" or "God saves!" But again, this was used in Jewish praise *before Jesus came*.

And it's difficult to make the case for a "victory parade". When everyone arrived at Jerusalem, the people seem to have just dispersed. Jesus had a brief look around the place, then everyone went home. Had this been the big, majestic affair some imagine, the Roman authorities would've treated it as an insurrection and clamped down on the whole thing.

But neither can we say all this had nothing to do with Jesus. People were laying out the red carpet for him. And we get a clue from elsewhere in the gospels. We read the Pharisees were telling Jesus to stop the people saying all these things about him. So it does appear that at least some of the praise was being expressed with reference to Jesus.

So hopefully now you're beginning to see the real picture. These pilgrims were excited—a state of *religious* excitement. The Passover was near. And the nearer they got to Jerusalem, the more excited they became. And I believe we have here a mixture of attitudes. For those disciples of Jesus walking with him, their praise would've been directed to him. Others would be making reference to Jesus but in a less confident way. And still others would be worshipping God the way they'd always done, with no idea that Jesus, the one just yards away from them, was the very saviour they were singing about in their psalms.

Few I'm sure would have recognised in Jesus the fulfilment of Zacharias's prophecies, even though he was there in front of them, sitting on a donkey! And for some, even if they suspected something significant was going on, it seems they soon forgot all about it.

This picture of the crowds having a variety of understandings fits in well with the rest of the passage. We've seen the contrast between Jesus displaying his sovereignty whilst at the same time showing his humility. We've seen that his approach to Jerusalem was in some ways triumphant but in other ways a cause of great dread in Jesus. And even in the praises of this procession, we see a mixture of those who know Jesus and those who don't.

Considering those who were temporarily moved, those who for a moment believed Jesus was the Messiah, we can learn a useful lesson. No matter who you are, it's easy to be swayed by the behaviour of the group you belong to. Mobs are easily created *because* it's within human nature to copy the behaviour of the people in the group.

In our own experience of this world, we see people excited for a short while by the things of God. But it doesn't last. It was never going to last because it wasn't based on a sincere act of repentance. I fear when I see people become religious without signs it's genuine. I ask questions about sin, such as "When did you realise you were utterly vile in God's sight?" Their response can give you a clue where they stand. Have they met with God, or do they just fancy something new?

And we can see this tendency within the church too. As part of a congregation, it's very easy to be swept along with the beliefs and practices of the majority, especially in larger congregations. And sometimes those things are wrong.

Christians **must** take part in group activities. We belong to a body of people. And we don't do things together because we have to; we *love* to do these things. The Christian likes nothing better than being in the company of other believers, especially in the worship of God. But the believer must find a balance between group involvement and personal self-examination.

Although our little story today seems to end in a bit of an anti-climax, we should remember it's all part of God's quiet, unswerving purpose.

The sun's going down. The crowds are dispersing, making their way to their accommodation. All the excitement of the day has ended. We're left with this out-of-place figure of Jesus, taking a look around a temple. Surveying it. Observing what's going on.

But he's coming back. We'll see in the next week or two how he begins to ramp up his message and go face-to-face with the religious leaders.

But it's been a long day. They've walked many miles, and most of it has been uphill. Even Jesus needs to go to bed and get some rest. And knowing what he had to do over the next few days, he needs it.

You know even this minor detail of him surveying the temple has some significance. Listen to what the prophet Malachi says of this day:

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. And the Lord, whom ye seek, **shall suddenly come to his temple**, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:1

*He shall suddenly come to his temple.* He's COME to his temple. This is it!

What a character Jesus Christ is! The ultimate sovereign, but the ultimate servant. One who won the greatest victory in history, yet a victory that involved subjecting himself to terrors. One who has an extreme love for his brethren but who will judge everyone else with extreme fury.

We've hovered over this story today and hopefully gained a better idea of what was happening. But I hope you can also take something to apply to yourself.

I've encouraged you, while understanding you're a member of a body of people, to remember your individuality in Christ. You need to examine your *own* spiritual health. You need to take time to get into the scriptures *by yourself*, as well as with others. And although you're to learn from those God has placed in your life to minister the word to you, you have to *individually* have a good conscience about the things you believe. We've seen an example today of how group excitement can lead to temporary, shallow beliefs. The doctrinal positions you come to must be more solid than that.

I'll finish by saying just one more thing. Something else we can take from this passage. The real victory of Jesus was not this procession on a donkey. **It was at the cross.** And that has an application for us. Those who wish to confess Jesus Christ as their saviour must understand that to walk the narrow way which leads to eternal life involves "carrying your cross".

If you want to follow Jesus, you will suffer with him, one way or another. Jesus's time in this world was peppered with trial and suffering. But remember: **our walk is not the same as his.** He was a man of sorrows precisely because of what he had to face. And because he faced Calvary, you and I—believers—don't have to! We're not meant to be men and women of sorrows. We should expect trials in this life, but we must always remember that the norm for us should be the experience of Holy Spirit fruit: love, joy, peace and so on.

Keep going, brethren! Keep in God's word. Keep praying. Maintain fellowship. And understand that, no matter what you go through, God is in it all, and he'll deliver you and restore unto you the joy of salvation.

**AMEN.**