

STUDY FIVE

The Action and Events of Christ—3

THE END EVENTS The

Entry into Jerusalem

The King now entered Jerusalem. That is the thrust of the triumphal entry accounts. We need to read the passages of John 12:12–19, Matthew 21:4–9, Mark 11:7–10, and Luke 19:35–38. Out of these we draw the following conclusions from the affirmations of the welcoming crowd. He is King, the King of Zechariah 9:9, and is acclaimed as such. The accusation the leaders made to Pontius Pilate was that he claimed to be this King. Even to Pontius Pilate Jesus did not deny this. In John 18:33–38 he clearly affirms it, although his kingship is of another order than these world rulers conceive. It is worth looking at the statements.

Matthew 21:4–5 quotes Zechariah 9:9. The crowds cry, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ (21:9). Mark 11:10 has, ‘Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!’ John

12:13 has, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’ Again Zechariah 9:9 is applied to the event. If we add to this the Messianic Psalms, and their references to the Davidic King, especially Psalm 2:6, ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill’, then we have a complete picture of the Messianic King, as expected by the people.

The leaders of the people are dismayed. The Pharisees said, ‘You see that you can do nothing; look, the whole world is gone after him’. When in Luke 19:38 the people cry, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’ the Pharisees try to get Jesus to quieten them, but he says it is impossible. If this were done the very stones would cry out. The entry then, is very important.

Its importance is underlined by what Messiah now does in the temple. He drives out the moneychangers and those who traffic in the animal sacrifices, and so claims he is Messiah. He says, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer”, but you have made it a den of robbers’. In equating the Father’s house with his house, and taking authority to cleanse it, he was claiming Messianic status.

The End Teaching, and the Teaching of the End

In Matthew 23 Jesus upbraids the scribes and the Pharisees in very strong terms. They have failed the nation as those who should have given true spiritual and moral leadership, not because much of their advice was not good, but because they did not themselves practise it, and laid heavy burdens upon those who would. This reproaching was enough to anger the Pharisees and scribes. In Luke 20 we read of the conflict between the leaders and

Jesus. Not only does he easily refute them, but goes on to tell the story of the vineyard and the tenants who do not pay the dues. They kill the messengers of the Owner (God), who in fact are the prophets, and then ultimately they kill the Son. From them the kingdom (vineyard) shall be taken and given to others. In Luke 21, and Matthew 24 and 25 (cf. Mark 13), Jesus tells of the end-times, of the great eschaton when the judgement of the faithless will take place, and the salvation of the righteous. His description includes two events—the first being the destruction of Jerusalem which will be a judgement of their rejection of Messiah, and the second event which will be the return or appearing of Messiah in the new world.

In this final teaching Jesus has two audiences. One is that of the disciples and close followers, and the other is that of the crowd and those who oppose him. To the first Jesus gives much practical and helpful advice and guidance. To the second there is mostly warning. These events help to seal his death. Jesus' eschatology is always a matter of debate, particularly where his pictorial language is made literal, and events he predicts are put into a certain theological and prophetic grid. Nevertheless no one was in doubt about the general message—the saved would be those who endured to the end, and the lost those who would not believe and obey. God, however, would be vindicated especially in and by His Messiah.

The End Events

The Night of His Betrayal

The arrangements for the Last Supper are unusual (Mark 14:12–16), but they are made to coincide with the Feast of

the Passover. The exact times, and even the nature of the meal, have been a matter for debate amongst scholars. The debate does not greatly matter. Christ has to effect the exodus. He is made our Passover. Yet what does matter is what he says in the last hours before he enters Gethsemane. The discourse in the synoptic Gospels speaks of the kingdom. He now appoints the kingdom to the disciples (Luke 22:28–30). He will not drink wine until he drinks it afresh in the kingdom. He enjoins meekness and service of others, and then announces that his blood is shed for many for the remission of sins.

In John chapters 13–17 we read a great deal about those last hours. He first serves by washing the disciples' feet. He then gives his famous discourse on going to the Father, on the Father Himself, and on the Holy Spirit, but mainly to the fact that his work will end with the cross and the resurrection. The Spirit will come and apply these events, bringing them through as truth. Finally he prays to the Father for the church, and its future unity. In the synoptic Gospels we read of him in Gethsemane, in some way seeming to be in conflict with what appears to be the will of the Father. However that debate may resolve itself, there is no doubt that he will do the Father's will: 'Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done'.

These events conclude with his arrest. The leaders send soldiers and other rabble to take him prisoner. He accepts the arrest without resistance, and is taken to be judged.

The Judgement of Jesus

Jesus seemed to the Jewish leaders to have appropriated to himself the great powers of the mighty Messiah. This, to them, was a horrible blasphemy, a claim so high that it seemed like a claim to deity. The two occasions in which

Jesus had cleansed the temple, once at the commencement of his ministry (John 2:13–21) and the other at its conclusion, had brought a strong reaction of hatred. John's Gospel especially spells out the growing rejection of Jesus. For the leaders to be called 'of your father the devil' by Jesus (John 8:44) and to have the common people of Israel following him, was a threat to the whole sacrificial and ritual system of the temple, which was the core of the inner government of Jewry.

Whilst the Romans held the reins, the Sadducean party was content to make its own commercial gain, and hold the power within the nation. Jesus and his followers seemed to pose a strong threat to that power.

The death of Lazarus seemed a harmless enough event, and it was one which Jesus deliberately allowed to happen (John 11:1ff.). However, he did this in order to show forth the glory of God, and of His Son. He raised Lazarus from the dead. This event was reported to the Jews and precipitated their action of judgement. They said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, *every one* will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' At that point Caiaphas counselled them to destroy Jesus and save the nation. From that point they looked both to judge and to kill him. In the last week we see their various unsuccessful manoeuvres to bring this to pass.

The fact was that they needed a time and place where the common people did not surround Jesus, and through Judas they discovered this, and so apprehended the Messiah in Gethsemane. To their utter astonishment he allowed them to take him. The events of the judgement have been examined by lawyers who say that justice was not given according to current principles in Judaism. A

series of events took place by which Jesus was passed, like a shuttlecock, between the High Priest, Pontius Pilate and Herod. His judge, Pilate, saw no fault in him. Under political pressure he gave way and passed Jesus over for crucifixion. The truth is, he was judged by the leaders of the Jews and sent to destruction.

The Event of the Cross

Later, when we examine the work of the cross, we shall see how indispensable it was for the salvation of mankind and the defeat of evil, but to all appearances it seemed like a dismal failure. The disciples had fled once Jesus was apprehended, and although we are told John was present (John 19:25–27), the presence of other disciples is not described. The ability of the elders and other leaders to inflame the population against Jesus, and the cruelty of making him carry his cross, as well as the events of dividing his cloak and gambling for his possessions, are elements of the ignominy he suffered. The blood-lusting crowd cried against his claim to be the Son of God, and his naked body was spat upon, so that both blood and spittle formed a fearful robe. His companion thieves also cursed him, until one of them heard his initial cry to the Father for forgiveness. From that point onwards the thief was a changed person.

The other words Jesus uttered and their significance must have made their mark upon many of the watchers, so much so that the Roman soldier standing by said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’ The full action of the cross must be traced by the seven utterances Jesus gave, for they alone disclose the events as Jesus experienced them. The first is the cry for forgiveness. ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’. The second is to the

thief, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise [in a garden]'. To John and Mary he says, 'Woman, behold your son!' 'Behold your mother!' Then comes the cry of desolation, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Then followed the cry that revealed his thirst, primarily spiritual, after the great desolation—'I thirst!' Then the cry of victory, 'It is finished!' Finally he utters the quiet word of submission, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit'. Those who study the work of the cross see the development of his suffering, then of his triumph, and finally of obedience unto death.¹

His death was that of a man. Yet he surprised the ones who came to break his legs and make sure of his death before sundown. He had given up his spirit, reminding some, 'No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father' (John 10:18).

The Event of the Resurrection

There is no indication that any from the band of disciples, nor even from the women who had been most faithful of all, had a conviction that Jesus would rise from

¹ There are other elements of the cross which must be significant (Matt. 27:45–50). The first was the three hours of darkness across the whole land. There is an apocalyptic reference to such in Amos 8:9. Doubtless this was a divine visitation, and concerning the terrible moral–spiritual suffering of Christ, the weight of evil he was bearing, and also the conflict with the powers of darkness. Matthew 27:51–54 is a little difficult to understand. The curtain of the temple splits in two, graves open and some saints emerge. It is not easy to determine whether the graves opened at that point of his death, or when the saints emerged. Was it after his resurrection or at the time of the crucifixion? Whatever may be the order of events, they are deeply significant. Death has been defeated. A struggle has taken place, and Christ is Victor.

the dead. The women had helped to place him in the grave, with some of the anointing for death and the wrapping of grave-cloths. The same women came early to the tomb when the Sabbath was finished. The subsequent appearances to women and disciples, the times and the events surrounding and relating to the resurrection, are not absolutely clear. Doubtless they fit, but what is undeniable is the fact of his resurrection. The women see him early, and Mary Magdalene certainly had conversation with him. In any case, the women were given the message of resurrection by angels early in the day.

In Matthew 28, when the women meet Jesus, he gives them a message to be given to his disciples. A similar message is given by the angels to the women in Mark's Gospel. In Luke's Gospel, the women tell the disciples the message of the angels, and presumably that of Jesus. However it is not well received. In John's account, the disciples Peter and John go to the tomb, and John is said to believe, apparently from the way he saw the cloths were lying.

It is later in the day that Jesus appears to the disciples. He walks with two of them on the road to Emmaus. He discloses himself to them and then disappears. He appears in the upper room where the disciples have locked themselves in against those who might take them as followers of the crucified one. The accounts in John 20 and Luke 24 seem to be of the one event, and can be conflated to produce a full account of that happening. His resurrection is not doubted by any present and its implications seem to come through powerfully. He speaks to them of the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel, especially of the forgiveness of sins. They simply see a man standing with wounds that were inflicted three days previously. They

scarcely need any heavy 'theology of resurrection' for the facts are apparent. This man was on the cross three days previously. Now he is alive. Therefore he is stronger than death, and thus stronger than sin. He is Lord of life and death. He is deliverer from sin's outcome, death. He is the Saviour of the world, the Messiah of the kingdom.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, speaks of the occasions in which Jesus appeared and to whom. In Acts 1:3 we are told that he appeared many times in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, and taught them most valuable matters. On the basis of these they must have formed the apostolic message.

Related to this, Jesus prepared the apostles for his ascension and their own future ministry.

The Ascension

There is very little spoken on this in the Gospels. Its significance is certainly dealt with in the Epistles. In John 14–16 Jesus spoke of his going away. The ascension makes little sense except in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. By this we mean that Jesus' going seems without point if the work he has been doing is now abandoned. However it is not abandoned. Jesus goes but another takes his place, with a similar ministry (John 14:16–18). It is clear from the teaching of Acts and the Epistles that Jesus' ascension to the Father is the fruit and climax of his saving work. His being seated at God's right hand is the sign of his acceptance as Lord, and the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies, for example, Psalm 110.

Prior to his ascension he commissions his disciples to proclaim the gospel in the whole world. In Acts, when they do proclaim it, they constantly emphasise the fact that not only did he rise from the dead, but that he went to

be at the right hand of God and so to be acclaimed as Lord and Messiah. This is most important. The mode of his going is simple; a cloud receives him out of their sight. It is explained that as he has gone in clouds, so he will come again in clouds. In fact the clouds are the cloud of Shekinah glory, not merely some celestial lift!

This magnificence of ascension climaxes the events and actions of Christ. It remains for the Holy Spirit and the followers of Christ, under the same Spirit, to rationalise the events of Christ in the light of the Old Testament prophecies, and then the Old Testament prophecies and teaching in the light of the actions and events of Christ. This was what came to be called 'the apostles' doctrine'. Its crystallisation eventuated at Pentecost. Its formulator was the Holy Spirit. Its exponents were the people of God.