

# The Triumphal Entry

*Matthew 21:1-11*

*With Study Questions*

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Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose *them* and bring *them* to Me. <sup>3</sup> And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." <sup>4</sup> All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: <sup>5</sup> "*Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'*" <sup>6</sup> So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set *Him* on them. <sup>8</sup> And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road. <sup>9</sup> Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "*Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!*" <sup>10</sup> And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matthew 21:1-11)

## Introduction

Next week (on what is traditionally called Easter) we will dial our thoughts in on our eternal hope in Christ, which is the glory of the resurrection. The "**firstfruits**" of resurrection is Christ, but then, at His Second Coming the resurrection of "**those who belong to Christ**" (1 **Corinthians 15:20, 23**). But today, as in the passage above, there is, I believe, a great error made by people within the Christian community.

The error above was that Jesus would somehow cataclysmically depose tyrants and despots upon His entry into Jerusalem as He stood upon the Mount of Olives. The error so very prominent today is very similar – that Jesus will cataclysmically (and by cataclysmic I mean powerfully and immediately) depose ungodliness in the world at His Second Coming. The error is the same, the time frame is different.

One of the great tragedies of this error is its tendency to encourage lethargy in the church regarding its call to be a blessing in all the earth (Psalm 110:1; 22:27, 28; Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:9). Instead of working toward that blessing we pine away to be raptured in hopes that Jesus will come and complete His yet unfinished labors.

## **Preface**

I would like to make four observations in this passage: 1) The significance of the Mount of Olives; 2) The divisive nature of Christ; 3) A Humble Entry-A Progressing Kingdom; 4) The Conquering Priest.

**Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:1a).**

### **1) The Mount of Olives**

There is a prophecy in the Old Testament (Zechariah 13, 14) informing us that the Messiah will stand upon the Mount of Olives. It is considered a day of the Lord's coming; a day of great division; a day of great terror and redemption – a turning point in history. There is significant disagreement among theologians as to when that day occurs. Some argue that that day is the Second Coming – a day when, they suggest, Jesus begins His kingdom.

Others believe that prophecy was fulfilled here in the Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:1-11). As I read the prophecy below, notice the allusion to another prophecy which was clearly fulfilled at Christ's first coming where Jesus said: **"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matthew 27:31).**

The Old Testament prophecy below culminates with Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives. It is significant to note that we move from the prophecy of the striking of the Shepherd to the Mount of Olives with no significant intervening period – they both happen during the same period in history.

Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion," Says the Lord of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones. <sup>8</sup> And it shall come to pass in all the land," Says the Lord, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off *and* die, But *one*-third shall be left in it: <sup>9</sup> I will bring the *one*-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.' " <sup>14</sup> Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, And your spoil will be divided in your midst. <sup>2</sup> For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. <sup>4</sup> And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, *Making* a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south (Zechariah 13:7-14:4).

People will often speak of Jesus coming some time in the future to set up His kingdom. I respectfully disagree. Jesus is the risen King and at this very moment He is at the right hand of the Father "**far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come**" (Ephesians 1:21). The point here is that Jesus has already placed His feet on the Mount of Olives and the subsequent division began then.

## 2) A Divisive Christ

And in the same way the sheep in the Bible often aren't actually sheep but people (John 10), we shouldn't expect the Mount of Olives to split in two and start moving around. The splitting associated with the Mount of Olives needs to be understood as a metaphor regarding the

person and work of Christ Himself. A degree of the splitting was about to take place. D. A. Carson explains,

**So we see set up the polarization of attitudes to Jesus which during the next week would have some supporting Jesus (21:46) while others shouted for his crucifixion (27:20ff.).<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus foretold this division earlier in Matthew saying,

**Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; <sup>36</sup> and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' <sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>39</sup> He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:34–38).**

This is not to be understood as Jesus being some sort of global trouble. It's the simple nature of the case that truth is divisive. It's divisive in courtrooms, nations, families and our own hearts (Hebrews 4:12, 13).

### **3) A Humble Entry-A Progressing Kingdom**

In the interest of charity we must acknowledge that the idea of Jesus coming in the future to cataclysmically establish His kingdom is an understandable mistake given the apocalyptic language of the prophecy in Zechariah. As mentioned the mistake happening today is very similar to the mistake happening in this scene in Matthew – the idea that Jesus is going to come and cataclysmically depose ungodliness.

The multitude would **“spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road”** which was

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<sup>1</sup>Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Mt 21:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

reminiscent of that which accompanied the Lord's establishing of a king of Israel (2 Kings 9:13).

Seeking to add to the splendor of the moment the multitudes cried out saying "*Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!*" which is a combination praise and petition means "**Save (us) we pray.**" This praise is taken from Psalm 118:25. Similar to the Zechariah passage, we read earlier in Psalm 118 how the Psalmist took comfort in the overpowering nature of God's deliverance.

**All nations surrounded me, But in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. <sup>11</sup> They surrounded me, Yes, they surrounded me; But in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. <sup>12</sup> They surrounded me like bees; They were quenched like a fire of thorns; For in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. <sup>13</sup> You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the Lord helped me. <sup>14</sup> The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation (Psalm 118:10-14).**

Yet in all the excitement of this Triumphal Entry one wonders if the mode of transportation used by the conquering King ever caught their attention. The Almighty conqueror had decreed the availability of a colt.

**...then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose *them* and bring *them* to Me. <sup>3</sup> And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them" (Matthew 21:1b-3).**

He could have decreed the availability of a chariot or even cherubim, but it was a colt (son of a donkey). It is easy for us to neglect passages. It wasn't as if Jesus was changing the program. A thorough reading of the Old Testament would reveal that the great victories accomplished by the Christ would come, not cataclysmically, but gradually through His humility and sacrifice.

It would be a stone that falls upon the image in Daniel which becomes a mountain covering the earth (Daniel 2:35). It would be a small

stream in Ezekiel which would eventually grow to an impassable deluge (Ezekiel 47:6). In Hosea we read,

**I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him. <sup>5</sup> I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily, And lengthen his roots like Lebanon. <sup>6</sup> His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree, And his fragrance like Lebanon. <sup>7</sup> Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; They shall be revived like grain, And grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon (Hosea 14:4-7).**

The advancement of Christ's kingdom is incremental. Perhaps the multitude was more familiar with Zechariah 14 than with Zechariah 9 which Matthew reveals to be fulfilled here.

**All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: <sup>5</sup> "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey' "(Matthew 21:4, 5)**

A standard triumphal entry would find the conqueror riding on a horse, a stallion. But Jesus was not riding on an animal designed for military conquest; He was riding on an animal designed for burden.

**Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).**

I think it is a huge mistake to conclude that the kingdom of God will not advance in such a way as to refine, restore, renew, and redeem every nook and cranny of God's creation. But I think it is an equally monstrous mistake to think that the means by which this restoration takes place is anything other than the people of God proclaiming the death and resurrection of their champion – which brings us to our final point.

#### 4) The Conquering Priest

Jesus was riding into Jerusalem five days before His death. The Passover was on the fourteenth, this was the tenth.

**Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household...<sup>5</sup> Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year...<sup>6</sup> Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. <sup>7</sup> And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it (Exodus 12:3, 5a, 6, 7).**

Let it never escape our attention that the Savior of the world becomes the Savior of the world by fulfilling the offices of the one true mediator between man and God. This portion of the account ends with Jesus coming into Jerusalem.

**And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matthew 21:10, 11)**

Truly Jesus is the Prophet, bringing us the true, perfect and unadulterated message of redemption. Another office, as the crowd so enthusiastically acknowledge is that of King – a King who subdues all His enemies and protects His own subjects who are His family and body.

But Jesus is also our High Priest. And the lamb He is bringing to be sacrificed is Himself. Jesus is the **"Lamb without blemish" (1 Peter 1:19)**. As Paul states, Christ is **"our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7)**. The love of God toward us is revealed here in that He **"did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32)**.

Jesus, for the first time publicly acknowledges that He is King. Unlike earlier times, Jesus does not instruct His followers **"tell no one" (Matthew 8:4)**. But His kingdom, which will endure forever, advances in love, humility, forgiveness and faith in the sacrifice our High Priest **"who**



has passed through the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14), “who sympathizes with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15), “who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26), “who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 8:1), a

**High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. <sup>12</sup> Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11a, 12).**

This conquering King, this Triumphal Entry is far superior to those who merely bring back the loot of their subdued territory or gloat in the temporary expansion of their soon-to-be non-existent empire. Those who trust in this King are said to be “**more than conquerors**” (Romans 8:37) because they have a “**High Priest over the house of God**” that they may

**draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:21, 22).**

As Matthew Henry so profoundly states,

**His government is mild and gentle, and his laws not written in the blood of his subjects, but in his own.<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup>Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 21:1). Peabody: Hendrickson.

## Questions for Study

1. What was significant about the Mount of Olives? When did, or will, the event prophesied in Zechariah happen (pages 3, 4)?
2. In what respect is Jesus divisive (pages 4, 5)?
3. Discuss the humble nature of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. What do you think the people were expecting (pages 5-7)?
4. How will the kingdom of God advance (pages 6, 7)?
5. What time of year did Jesus enter Jerusalem? Why is that significant (page 8)?
6. What are the offices of Christ (page 8)?
7. What benefit is it to us to have Jesus as our High Priest (pages 8, 9)?