

The City and the King: The King's Arrival

Mark 11:1-11

Entrances matter. Over the centuries rulers or war heroes have made symbolic and dramatic entrances into cities. In ancient Rome the re-entry of a Military general into the city was called a Triumph. The general would be decked out in a crown and an all purple, gold embroidered toga while he rode into the city accompanied by his army and with the captives of his victory on display.

In the middle ages rulers would enter the city from which he would rule with a series of festivals and ceremonies including a feast. The ruler was carried into the city and was greeted by the city authorities and paid the appropriate homage.

You can see this mindset reflected today all across our culture. You can find lists online of the best team entrance traditions in college football.

If you really think about it, these different entrances don't really accomplish much. The football teams have actually already been on the field practicing for at least an hour, but they go back in the tunnel and make a dramatic entrance. Why? There's something symbolic about one's entrance. It sets the stage for what is about to happen.

Today we are going to be looking at Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem. This isn't the first time he's been in Jerusalem in his life, but this entrance is unique for a number of reasons that we need to pay attention to. Keep in mind where we are in this gospel. After Jesus's ministry in Galilee where he preached the good news of the kingdom and enacted the kingdom through miracles and signs, he traveled north to Caesarea Philippi with his disciples. Here's a map. At Caesarea Philippi Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, but also didn't fully understand that Jesus would be the suffering and dying Messiah. From 8:27 through the end of chapter 10 Jesus and his disciples were on a physical journey from Caesarea toward Jerusalem while at the same time on a spiritual journey of Jesus teaching the true meaning of discipleship.

The last time we were in Mark we saw this little story at the end of chapter 10 of Jesus healing the two blind men near Jericho. Of course, Jericho isn't far from Jerusalem at all and as we open to chapter 11 we find these words. This begins an entirely new section in the gospel of Mark that we're calling The City and the King.

Jesus finally enters Jerusalem, in dramatic fashion, and this kicks off the final week of his life leading up to his crucifixion. The entrance into Jerusalem that we are going to read about today is more than just an arrival geographically to a city. It's thick with symbolism and we are meant to read this story as Jesus proclaiming who He is through the way he arrives in Jerusalem as the rightful King of the city. So, today, we want to see **2 Demonstrations of Jesus' status as King.**

- His Intentional Authority (vv. 1-6)

Look with me at verse 1 again. These are both little villages or small settlements that are on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem and aren't far at all from Jerusalem. Mark draws specific attention to the fact that Jesus by way of the Mount of Olives.

In the OT the Temple was the center of religious life in Israel and the glory of the Lord dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. In the book of Ezekiel the people had sinned so badly and frequently against God that His glory departed from the Temple and the city and rested on the Mount of Olives before moving on. For this reason the Jews associated the Mount of Olives with Messiah and it makes sense that God would return to His city by way of the Mt. Of Olives.

So, as they are approaching these little settlements and the Mt. of Olives, Jesus gives some instructions to His disciples. Look at verses 2-3. You've heard this story many times, but think about how odd this is. For starters, they are approaching Jerusalem for Passover week. They certainly weren't the only ones on the road leading to the city. As we'll see later there would have been huge crowds making this same journey. But the thing about pilgrims going to Jerusalem for a festival is that they were supposed to walk to the city, not ride an animal.

What animal does Jesus choose? Well, the ESV says colt, but this most likely means a donkey. It's not accidental that he chooses to ride on this animal into the city. There's a key prophecy in the book of Zechariah that talks about how the Messiah would return to his people. Listen to Zech. 9:9.

Of course, it's not just about fulfilling this prophecy for Jesus. We tend to think of the donkey as a lowly animal and not very majestic. In reality, the donkey was the official mode of transportation for the king. OT kings rode donkeys and with no one else on the road, this would have made Jesus particularly noticeable.

Notice also how Jesus describes this donkey as one on which no one has ever sat. No one else was allowed to ride on the Kings animal so this is important for Jesus here. Look at how he obtains possession of it in verse 3. One author said this request was a “royal requisition formula.” This is what kings do. Jesus even uses the title “Lord” here for himself. Now, those who ask about the donkey being taken were probably thinking of this title as similar to “master”, but there’s little doubt how Jesus is using it here as he applies it to himself.

So what happens? Look at verses 4-6. It happens exactly as Jesus said it would and now he has possession of the donkey which he intends to ride into the city. You have to understand here that Jesus is not tired and he’s not haphazard. He’s being intentionally authoritative in arranging all of this. He is God’s Messiah coming to the Holy City and he intends to present himself symbolically as the rightful king of Jerusalem.

This little story that begins the passion week sets the stage for us to understand that Jesus does not stumble into his death. He is not simply a good rabbi who got on the wrong side of the religious and political authorities in Jerusalem. He shows us how he is in complete control of the circumstances that will take place over the next few days. John 10:14-18. He is not caught by surprise. He deliberately presents himself symbolically through this action as Messiah, the King. Apparently, those pilgrims walking the road with him had at least some grasp that Jesus’ actions were an accurate portrayal of who he was.

- His Prophetic Fulfillment (vv. 7-11)

Now that Jesus has the donkey, the scene continues to unfold and nearly every action continues to proclaim Jesus as king. Look at verses 7. Of course, the donkey didn’t have a saddle, but this is not what they are doing here. In 2 Kings when Jehu is made king this is exactly what the crowds do. Verse 8 indicates to us that this is a royal procession.

Now, keep in mind the scene here. Jesus and the disciples went into Jericho with crowds of people. Look back up to verse 46. While in Jericho Jesus heals Bartimaeus, but keep in mind what Bartimaeus cries out about Jesus. Look at verses 47-48. Bartimaeus proclaims Jesus as the heir of David, the greatest King of Israel whom God made an eternal covenant with and the line through which

Messiah would come. Now, when Jesus healed this blind man, do you think the crowds simply melted away and stopped following? Doubtful. Especially when a man who has just received his sight joins them. Look at verse 52.

So, with the Davidic references having just been shouted by a man given sight, and with Jesus riding a donkey, a king's animal, toward the city of Jerusalem, the city of David and with the OT background of Zechariah perhaps ringing in their ears, the people begin to shout. Look at verses 9-10.

What are the people saying? Well, these are not just random phrases they come up with. These words are pulled from Psalm 118 and applied to Jesus. Why? Well, to understand that we need to turn over to Psalm 118 and I need to show you what this Psalm is all about.

Remember how I told you that entrances matter and that Roman military's generals would enter Rome after winning a great victory and there would be a scene of celebration and honor? Often, songs or chants would accompany those celebrations and that's exactly what Psalm 118 is. One author said that Psalm 118 is a "royal song of thanksgiving for military victory." So, this Psalm is exactly what you would sing if you were that general entering the city after a military victory.

Look at verse 1. Now down to verses 10-13. For the nation of Israel, this language of being surrounded but helped by God makes us think that this Psalm was to be sung by a Davidic King. As he approaches the city, he hears the songs of God's people praising God for His help. Look at verses 15-16. Now go down to verse 19. Here he's requesting entrance to the temple so that he can praise God directly for the victory. The temple is the ultimate goal of his entrance.

Once he is inside the temple the crowd joins in praising God as you can see the pronoun becomes plural in verses 22-25. Then the Priests in the temple respond by blessing the victorious king from the temple in verse 26 and verses 25-26 are where the crowds pull their language from in Mark 11:9. Let's go back there.

Why do they chant these words in Mark 11:9? They are watching the events surrounding Jesus unfold with victory over the powers of darkness and disease and he is riding into the city of David on a donkey, as a king would, and they are proclaiming these words from this song because it fits their situation perfectly. Notice what they say in 11:10. The people's words are filled with hope and

expectation that God will re-establish Israel through the king and free them from the Roman oppressors.

It's at this point that in any other kingly procession to a capital city that the leaders of the city would come out to meet the victorious king and pay him homage and accompany him into the city. So, what happens here? Look at verse 11.

It's so anticlimactic. The leaders of the city are indifferent and as we'll come to see, ultimately antagonistic toward Jesus and his kingly claims. This sets the stage for the serious conflict that will happen the very next day regarding the temple. This also sets us up for the next few chapters where we will see the intensity of this conflict grow and grow, but all of it will be centered on the temple as Jesus pronounces judgment on the temple and its curators.

This event remind us of these words from Malachi 3:1-2.

So, what does all this mean for us? When I read this passage and see Jesus present himself as the Messiah who fulfills OT expectations, I cannot help but think about how this puts each of us into the position to ask, what do I really believe about this man Jesus? If Jesus fulfills these prophecies, which were written hundreds of years earlier, and if he actually healed people and cast out demons, and if he rose from the dead, I must reckon with his claims on my life. If Jesus is God, my response to that reality is the most important thing about my life, and it's not even close.

It simply won't do to think of Jesus as just a good moral teacher who had some great things to say but was a bit of an enigma. He intentionally presented himself here as the King who fulfills God's promises. If he's not really the Messiah, then he's a rotten liar and not a good moral teacher.

But if he's really who he presents himself to be, then we must humbly and carefully respond to his call on our life with repentance and faith. I hope you will consider these realities today. Let's pray.