

Title: “Truth from the Triumphal Entry”

Text: Mark 11:1-11

Date: April 5, 2020

Verse 1

The first verse of chapter 11 provides a great transition in Mark’s gospel. It contains an event known as “the Triumphal Entry.” Interestingly, the same story is recorded by all four gospel writers (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; and John 12:12-19). Given its prominence in the New Testament, the event deserves special attention. It certainly has important, heaven-sent truth for us. Many place the events of our text as taking place on the Monday before Good Friday.¹ Others commonly call this event “Palm Sunday.”

Our passage begins – “When they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples” (Mark 11:1). Remember that Jesus had previously been ministering in Jericho (10:46). He has made a trip of approximately 17 miles to the neighboring towns of Bethphage and Bethany. The former is unidentified to this day, but it is known that Bethany was on the southeast side of the Mount of Olives.²

The Mount of Olives was situated to the east of Jerusalem. By standing on top of its pinnacle, or by gazing westward from its western slopes, one could catch a panoramic glimpse of David’s city.³ Later in Mark’s gospel, Jesus will give His famous “Olivet Discourse” from this very Mountain (Mark 13:3-37). It seems that He and His disciples travelled back and forth from Bethphage and Bethany to Jerusalem throughout the holy week. It was a little more than two miles from the western slopes of the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount.⁴ According to prophetic revelation, this particular mount has eschatological significance: “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, forming a huge valley, so that half the mountain will move to the north and half to the south” (Zechariah 14:4).

Though Jesus has ministered in regions near His hometown up to this point in Mark’s gospel, He now sets His sights on the capital city. He will no longer minister in the rural areas of Galilee.⁵ He is heading towards Jerusalem to face His fate. Mark’s transition is undoubtedly designed to evoke thoughts of the crucifixion. Knowing He had come to earth in order “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and understanding He had been foreordained to be “the Lamb who was slaughtered” (Revelation 13:8), Jesus purposefully “approached Jerusalem.” As He and His disciples arrived “near the Mount of Olives,” He gave two of His disciples an order. Mark says He “sent” two of them away on a mission. The word translated “sent” is the Greek word from which we get our word “apostle.” As used in the context of our current verse, it depicts the disciples being commissioned and sent out with authority.⁶ It reveals that the event in our passage is of great importance.

¹ Schnabel, 260.

² Brooks, 178.

³ Brooks, 178.

⁴ Schnabel, 261.

⁵ Ryle, 178.

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

Verse 2

Verse 2 contains an account of Jesus' instruction to His disciples. Our Lord "told them, 'Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it'" (Mark 11:2). Mark simply mentions a "colt," but Matthew gives detail concerning both the colt and her mother (Matthew 21:1-2). There is significance in the fact that Jesus chose the younger of the two animals. He specifically wanted an animal that had never been ridden. Under the Mosaic Law, animals that were previously unused were often a prerequisite for ceremonial and religious observances (Numbers 19:2; and Deuteronomy 21:3).⁷ By requesting such an animal, Jesus demonstrates there is religious significance in His act of riding it into Jerusalem. He gives a preview of His upcoming sacrifice for sins. He will voluntarily offer Himself as a sinless substitute on behalf of sinful humanity.

By using the animal, Jesus also has Messianic intentions in mind.⁸ He intends to show He is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. As early as Genesis, God's Word foretold that the future ruler from Judah's lineage would don a donkey before God's people (Genesis 49:11). The prophet Zechariah proclaimed that the Anointed One would one day appear on such an animal: "Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). By riding a donkey into Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, Jesus made a claim of Deity. He aimed to portray Himself as the Chosen One. One has commented, "It was a deliberate claim to be the One of whom the prophets had so clearly written."⁹

Jesus' choice of a colt also taught an important moral lesson. By riding on a lowly animal, Jesus showed Himself to be a humble, suffering servant. He could have called thousands of angels (Matthew 26:53), He could have summoned the mighty beasts of the field, and He could have amassed an army like no other to usher Him into Jerusalem. However, He chose a rather low-key method of making His appearance.

Some people debate whether or not Jesus' choice of animal was intended to demonstrate His meekness. They argue that the donkey was the choice of Jewish Kings (Judges 5:10), and that Jesus rode the animal to assert Himself as the Messiah.¹⁰ There is no need to arrive at such an interpretation. The donkey was indeed an animal for a Jewish king, but it also had negative connotations for the Gentile world. Romans were known for riding powerful horses. Jesus riding on a donkey probably seemed ridiculous to them. In fact, the church father Tertullian speaks of how Gentiles scorned early Christians, using the word for donkey as a term of derision for the newly formed sect.¹¹

The donkey helped fulfill Messianic prophecy, but it also highlighted the humble, lowly nature of God's Servant. Though many first century Jews waited for a mighty ruler to break the bondage of Roman rule, Jesus came as a lowly servant to serve as a sacrifice for sins. Paul said, "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Of Himself, Jesus said, "...I am lowly and humble in heart..." (Matthew 11:29).

Considering the humble nature of the Lord, Christians should seek a similar disposition of the soul. Hasn't Jesus taught us, saying, "Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the

⁷ Schnabel, 261.

⁸ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

⁹ Ferguson, 180.

¹⁰ Ryle, 182.

¹¹ Ryle, '82.

earth” (Matthew 5:5). In a world in which many jockey to be number one, may we learn from our Lord. The way up is down in the Christian life. We have been called to embrace humility (James 4:10), and we have been instructed to consider others as being more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). It is worth noting that Paul’s great teaching on the humility of our Lord (Philippians 2:8) is tied to his encouragement for believers to pursue humility. We can never fully boast of being true Christ-followers until we have learned to make little of ourselves. Our primary focus should not be on us, our wants, and what others think of it. Loving God and our neighbors should be our number one priority (Matthew 22:37-40).

Verse 3

Knowing some may have objected when His disciples attempted to take the animal, Jesus instructed His disciples: “If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here right away’” (Mark 11:3). It may seem that Jesus empowered His disciples to use something akin to Jedi mind tricks, but that’s not the case. Under Roman law, there were detailed stipulations for official use of personal property for transport.¹² These were catalogued under Roman legislation known as “angaria.”¹³ It seems Jesus had previously reserved the use of the animal.¹⁴ Perhaps He had a follower who lived in the city who had volunteered to help the Lord. This is likely, considering the fact that His close friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were from this area (John 11:1).¹⁵ The animal had been reserved. In order to secure it, the disciples only needed to make it known that they had been sent by Jesus.

Verse 4

Verse 4 tells of the disciples’ journey to retrieve the requested animal. It says, “So they went and found a colt outside in the street, tied by a door. They untied it...” (Mark 11:4). This entire episode is quite foreign to us. We aren’t acquainted with the cultural background. To us, it may seem zany for a seemingly random animal to be tied up in the middle of town, but Jesus’ command wasn’t so strange for His disciples. The more well-to-do homes in first century Canaan had a sort of courtyard in the front of the house. Usually a gate surrounded this open space. Many home owners would tie their beast of burden on the outside of the gate that surrounded their property.¹⁶

From the New Testament, we know Jesus had many wealthy followers (Matthew 27:57-61 and Luke 8:1-3). Quite likely, Jesus had a disciple of means in the area of Bethphage and Bethany. It seems He had made prearrangements for His triumphal entry. He had asked an anonymous donor to leave an animal tied in a conspicuous location. All the disciples needed to do was to go and pick up the animal.

Verse 5

Verse 5 tells of how Jesus’ disciples received exactly the response He had predicted (11:3). They approached the animal they had come to retrieve, and they began to loose it from the homeowner’s gate. At that moment, “some of those standing there said to them, ‘What are you

¹² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

¹³ Schnabel, 262.

¹⁴ Ferguson, 180.

¹⁵ Schnabel, 261.

¹⁶ Robertson, 357.

doing, untying the colt?” (Mark 11:5). Such an outburst could be expected from one who saw a stranger taking hold of a neighbor’s property.

Verse 6

The disciples had no reason to fear the confrontation. The Lord had prepared them. They knew what to say, so they gave their pre-programmed response. Verse 6 says, “They answered them just as Jesus had said; so they let them go” (Mark 11:6). Now that the disciples had possession of the animal, they were ready to take it to the Lord. He would use it for His sovereign purposes.

Verse 7

After securing the beast, Jesus mounted it. Mark records, “They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and he sat on it” (Mark 11:7). Once the animal was secured, the disciples had to create a saddle for it, since it had never been ridden before. They used their own clothes for this purpose.

From our perspective, Jesus’ act of riding the animal may not seem strange; however, it was a tad different than the first century norm. Usually, worshippers who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover made the last few miles of the trip on foot.¹⁷ By riding an animal into the city, He took upon Himself the image of conquering King returning home. Once again, Jesus makes an effort to assert His Messianic identity.

Jesus’ act of riding an animal into the capital city undoubtedly made a strong impression on Mark’s Roman readership. Roman people knew that such an activity was reserved for conquering rulers.¹⁸ It also certainly struck Mark’s Jewish audience as well. Many faithful Jews probably thought of the triumphal return to Jerusalem that David made after his son’s rebellion had been thwarted (2 Samuel 19:40). No matter what the demographic of the readership, the intended message was clear — Jesus is to be regarded as King! Though He has often disguised it throughout Mark’s Gospel, in order to keep the program of redemption on God’s sovereign time schedule (Mark 1:25; 3:12; 4:10-12; and 5:43), He is now intentional to reveal who He really is.

Verse 8

As Jesus rode the donkey into town, people thronged to see Him. Mark records: “Many people spread their clothes on the road, and others spread leafy branches cut from the fields” (Mark 11:8). The blustering crowd was immense. Pilgrims had arrived to the great city to celebrate the Passover. Historians tell us that there were probably around 300,000 people who made the journey with Jesus.¹⁹ The scene is remarkably different than the ones we have seen in Mark’s Gospel so far. Jesus typically avoided loud shows of worship and adoration. He did so to fulfill the prophecy that the Messiah “will not argue or shout, and no one will hear his voice in the streets” (Matthew 12:19).²⁰ Now, however, He receives the adoration He deserves.

By giving Jesus such a hearty reception, the residents clearly regarded Him as a VIP.²¹ Scholars tell us that the scene likely stretched a long distance. It probably involved a two-mile

¹⁷ Ferguson, 180.

¹⁸ Ferguson, 181.

¹⁹ Schnabel, 263.

²⁰ Ryle, 178.

²¹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 92.

jaunt.²² As Jesus travelled, residents of the city threw leaves, rushes, leafy branches, and broken portions of trees onto the road in front of Him.²³ Others flung clothes on to the ground. The crowd's intention was clear. They were receiving Jesus as a king. For first century Jews, the episode was surely reminiscent of famous royal celebrations from the Old Testament (1 Kings 1:32-48 and 2 Kings 9:1-13).²⁴ The scene was undoubtedly a great spectacle. Matthew's Gospel tells us that the crowd was raucous. The decibel levels and the noise caused quite a disturbance (Matthew 21:10).

Verse 9

Along with spreading their clothes and palm branches on the ground, the people also sang loud songs of praise: "Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted: 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Mark 11:9). The word translated "shouted" appears in the imperfect tense. It conveys a continual action in the past. The idea is that the people kept on screaming out repeatedly.²⁵ The words they sang were ones that came from the psalter. They were taken from a famous pilgrimage psalm — "He who comes in the name of the Lord is blessed. From the house of the Lord we bless you" (Psalm 118:26). The word rendered "Hosanna" is one that meant "save us, we pray" or "save us now!"²⁶ Psalm 118 was a song of celebration that gave praise for the Lord's deliverance from Egypt.²⁷ In using it in our current text, God's covenant people were making a request for the Lord to save them from Roman domination.²⁸ The word translated "blessed" conveys the idea of expressing thanksgiving or gratitude.²⁹

Verse 10

The crowd's anthem continues in verse 10: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:10). The words of verse 10 were often sung as a blessing upon those who arrived to the temple courts after a pilgrimage.³⁰

As used in our passage, the song is clearly Messianic, thus the reference to "David." As blind Bartimaeus did back in 10:46, the people recognize that Jesus has a clear stake on the throne, since He is a descendant of Israel's seminal king. As a result, they expect Him to incite a military rebellion. Perhaps many who sang were ready for war. They wanted the Romans to be run out of town, and they wanted the Anointed One to usher in the long-awaited Kingdom. Some of the men were ready to spill blood. Little did they know that it was Jesus' blood that would soon be shed. They were unfamiliar with the Lord's sovereign intentions for the first advent (Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 53:4-9).

²² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 92.

²³ Robertson, 358.

²⁴ Schnabel, 263.

²⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 92.

²⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 92.

²⁷ Brooks, 179.

²⁸ Schnabel, 263.

²⁹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 92.

³⁰ Schnabel, 263.

Verse 11

Mark concludes his triumphal entry narrative by telling of how Jesus “...went into Jerusalem and into the temple. After looking around at everything, since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve” (Mark 11:11). For Mark’s Gospel, this is Jesus’ first visit to David’s city.³¹ Notice that Jesus’ political parade took Him directly “into the temple.” The language refers to the entire temple complex, not the holiest of places. Jesus probably entered through a gate at the south of the Temple Mount or on the eastern wall of the Temple Mount.³² His presence at the temple was important for the prophetic acts of judgment that would follow (11:15-19 and 27-33).³³

The description of Jesus “looking around at everything” seems meaningful. It is a Markan detail that is not included in the other three gospel records.³⁴ One can only imagine what thoughts went through our Lord’s mind as He gazed on the city.³⁵ Perhaps we could tie Jesus’ act of analyzing the city to the rebuke He gives in Luke 19:41-44, or in the outburst of rage He exhibits in Matthew 21:12-13.³⁶ Maybe the gaze was one of judgment. Knowing how they would soon scorn and reject Him (Mark 15:14), our Lord looked upon the city in heart-broken pity. He knew the hearts of the residents, and He knew what they would do to Him. They would reject God’s truth and murder the Anointed One.

Jesus’ act of “looking around at” Jerusalem is instructive for us. We are reminded that He is the holy judge of all creation. He has fiery eyes that will one day penetrate the proudest hearts and the most self-righteous souls (Revelation 1:14). He sees our sin, our wrongdoing, our lust, our greed, our arrogance, and our idolatry. We will one day all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). One day, “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11). Do you know Jesus? Have you confessed Him as Lord? If you are born-again, is there anything in your life that is displeasing to Him? Know that Jesus is the lover of your soul, but He will also one day judge your soul.

³¹ Schnabel, 260.

³² Schnabel, 264.

³³ Schnabel, 260.

³⁴ Robertson, 358.

³⁵ Ferguson, 181.

³⁶ Robertson, 358.