

## The Presentation of the King

<sup>9</sup> Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. <sup>12</sup> The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup> took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!* The King of Israel!" <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: <sup>15</sup> "*Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt.*" <sup>16</sup> His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him. <sup>17</sup> Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. <sup>18</sup> For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. <sup>19</sup> The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12:9–19)

People world over are fascinated by prophecies and predictions. In the last few decades there has been a renewed fascination with Nostradamus and Jeane Dixon, people who supposedly predicted several future events. But often we find that prophecies tend to be vague, unspecific, and seldom tied to a day. Those who venture to give us predictions on a day, often turn out to be dead wrong.

Not many people know that Daniel the prophet actually stuck his neck out to predict the exact day that the Messiah would come to the city of Jerusalem. In 9:25-26, Daniel writes that Gabriel told him that he could start the clock from the day King Artaxerxes of Persia gave the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He said, count 69 sets of seven years, and Messiah the Prince will present Himself in Jerusalem. Now that is not a broad ball park-prediction, it actually names a day. See, we happen to know from history the day Artaxerxes gave the decree to restore Jerusalem's walls – it was March 5<sup>th</sup>, 444 B.C. Add 69 sets of seven years, and you would normally have 483 years. But since this is a Jewish prophecy, it refers to Jewish years of 360 days. Add 69 sets of seven Jewish years and you get an exact number of days – for those of you counting its, 173,855 days. If you add 173 855 days to March 5<sup>th</sup> 444 B.C, you arrive at exactly March 30<sup>h</sup>, A.D. 33. It so happens that March 30<sup>th</sup> 33 A. D. on the Jewish calendar was Nisan 10. Did Daniel's prophecy come true? Did Messiah the Prince appear on that day?

Well, according to our chronology, on March 30, 33, Jesus of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Daniel's prophecy is all about Jerusalem, and this was the day when Jesus formally presented Himself to the city, and to the nation, as Messiah the King. Now not many people recognise how mathematically impossible it is for a prophecy given in around 530 B. C. to locate a single day in history, when the only visible claimant to the title of Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth.

This helps us to see the cosmic significance of this otherwise lowly event. Behind the rather humble scene of a man riding a donkey into Jerusalem, stands a supernatural power over space and time. This great event, known by many Christians as Palm Sunday shows how Jesus began the most important week of His life: the Passion week. It shows how some people received Him with praise, others with scorn. Jesus unambiguously presents Himself as the King to the nation; some receive Him with open arms, some watch with scorn, and a third group is apparently on the fence.

This event is perplexing, because we know that just a few days later, a crowd in Jerusalem is going to be shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Is this the same crowd?

And knowing what we now know, we have more responsibility than even those people on that day to decide if Jesus truly is the King, not just of Israel, but the chosen king of the world.

This is a story that involves a gathering crowd, a glorious reception, and a grumbling rejection.

## I. The Gathering Reception

<sup>9</sup> Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. <sup>12</sup> The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

A large amount of people are gathering. John tells us of two groups that made up this crowd. The first group is those people who were either at Bethany when the miracle happened, or have come to Bethany to see Lazarus or Jesus. Many Jews have come to see Jesus. News of Jesus's raising of Lazarus has only elevated his popularity, and now people have come to see Lazarus. Lazarus is probably experiencing a bit of celebrity fatigue. People from all over come and point, and gawk. Some ask him the same questions again and again, "Did you really die? What happened after you died? Where were you?"

Lazarus's popularity is a problem for the chief priests, who are trying to get rid of Jesus, and Lazarus is only adding to Jesus' fame and glory. Verse 11 tells us that the raising of Lazarus was a direct reason why many Jews believed in Jesus. So they have to hatch a second murder plot; a way to dispose of the evidence that Jesus can raise people from the dead.

There's a second group here, too. These are the many thousands who are in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. They are here for the feast, but they have also heard about Jesus. By now, Jesus is a folk hero in Israel, the talk of every town. Word of Lazarus' healing has likely reached them, too.

We imagine many of the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from the north were staying in Jerusalem itself. News and whispers in the city must be plentiful about Jesus who raised Lazarus coming into Jerusalem after months of avoiding contact with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Perhaps some went from Bethany and told people in the Temple, who were already festive bands celebrating Passover.

This gathering crowd is going to be a protection for Jesus. He has not walked openly among the religious leaders because they are plotting to seize Him and arrest Him. So Jesus very strategically makes sure that His appearance in Jerusalem will be surrounded by crowds, which the religious leaders would not risk upsetting. To try to arrest Jesus in a crowd of supporters risked an immediate riot. So in the last week, Jesus goes to Jerusalem in a crowd, goes to the Temple to teach in a crowd, and then is alone with His disciples in places that are not as visible to watching eyes.

## II. The Glorious Procession

<sup>12</sup> The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup> took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! *'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'* The King of Israel!" <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: <sup>15</sup> "*Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt.*"

Now these two groups unite when they hear that Jesus is finally going into the city. In what appears to be spontaneous, they form an impromptu welcome by waving palm branches, and quoting Psalm 118: Hosanna! "Save now" "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

We know from the other Gospels that Jesus sent His disciples into the nearby village to find a young donkey that had not been ridden before, and the disciples spread their clothes upon it.

Now this had some history in the Old Testament. In 1 Kgs 1:32–40, Solomon is anointed, he rides David's mule, is announced as the king of Israel, and is received with much rejoicing. In 2 Kings 9:1–13, Jehu is anointed as king of Israel. He then tells people, and 2 Kings 9:13 says “every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, ‘Jehu is king’”.

Not only was there this Hebraic background, but likely, they are doing something that was known in the Graeco-Roman world: hailing a king who enters a city. We have the accounts of several “heroes” who achieved a triumph: Alexander the Great, Judas Maccabeus, Antigonus, and Marcus Agrippa. In each of those cases, the following five things happened.

The person had achieved a victory and was recognised as a hero.

They approached the city with a formal, ceremonial parade.

They were greeted and praised, as God was praised and invoked.

They entered the city and then entered the Temple.

They either offered a sacrifice in the Temple, or cleansed away uncleanness in the Temple.

Now as they enact this welcome ceremony for a king, they shout or sing the words of Psalm 118. This Psalm was chanted at “Passover, at the Paschal Supper, and on the Feasts of Pentecost and of the Dedication of the Temple. The waving of the palm-branches was the welcome of visitors or kings, and not distinctive of the Feast of Tabernacles. At the latter, the worshippers carried, not simple palm-branches, but the Lulav, which consisted of palm, myrtle, and willow branches intertwined. The people of Jerusalem also chanted this Psalm to welcome festive pilgrims on their arrival, the latter always responding in the second clause of each verse, till the last verse of the Psalm vv. 25-28 was reached, which was sung by both parties in unison” - Edersheim.

But it was clearly also a psalm about deliverance and victory. Many in this crowd said Hosanna, meaning one thing, but Jesus came to Hosanna in another way. Some said, Hosanna, save now, meaning, save us from political oppression. Save us from the indignity of having Roman symbols, and Roman soldiers, in our holy city. Save us from their taxation, and from this political humiliation. Restore to us our national pride.

Now John quotes Zechariah 9:9 here, and combines it with a phrase from Isaiah 40.

<sup>9</sup> “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He *is* just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

Zechariah predicts a king, who is righteous and having salvation, coming to Jerusalem. He brings peace to Jerusalem and the nations, and his rule will extend “from sea to sea” (Zech 9:10), yet this reign of peace seems to result from war (Zech 9:11–17). So there is a paradox about this king. He brings peace, but He is powerful, He is glorious but he rides a donkey.

When victorious Roman generals entered Rome after a battle, they had what was known as the *triumphus* – the victory parade. The general would be dressed in gold and purple toga, the colour of royalty, or even divinity, with the victor's laurel wreath on his head. He would be standing in a chariot drawn by four horses, with the prisoners and spoils ahead of him, and the army behind him, as they went through the streets to the cheering crowds, until they arrived at the Temple of Jupiter

and the general presented a sacrifice.

Instead of riding in on a chariot, He will arrive riding the humblest of animals – a donkey. Israel was to know their King was not going to be like the Kings of the Gentiles – self-important, glory-seeking, boastful, seeking fame. Instead, he will be riding a donkey.

Though donkeys and horses resemble each other, it is as if the donkey is the humble parody of everything the horse is. The horse has this lofty whinny, the donkey has this grating falsetto hee-haw. The horse has this high-stepping posture, the donkey this self-pitying plod. The horse's eyes look down on life, the donkey's expression looks up, asking not to be beaten. The horse, once broken in, has a strident, confident trot. The donkey has this permanently tired look, plodding, bobbing. The donkey is not the animal you want the president to arrive on for his big speech. The donkey is not the animal you go to battle in. It does not say strength, confidence, power, glory. It says submission, surrender, weakness.

By choosing this animal, what is Jesus saying about the manner of His first coming? He comes in voluntary weakness, in chosen meekness, in surrendered greatness. He is signalling that this is not the moment of triumph, this is not the moment of victory, this is not the moment of power and judgement. This is the moment of chosen sacrifice.

And that perhaps explains why some in the crowd hail Him now, but will call for His death a few days later. They want victory now, triumph now, and the message of Jesus is deeply disappointing to some of them: a message of surrender, sacrifice, self-denial. They want a King, but not a King who serves and calls on His followers to do the same. They want victory now.

I think there are still many today who despise the suffering Jesus, the humble Jesus, the yielded Jesus. They want the Jesus who brings victory, prosperity, blessing. Some of them even have a theology that says, “I’m a king’s kid, a chosen one, I am heir to riches and power”. They don’t understand that the invitation Jesus gives is found just a few verses later:

<sup>24</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. <sup>25</sup> He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. (John 12:24–26)

Now some people are praising Jesus as the suffering Messiah, some people are praising Jesus as the conquering Messiah they hope He will be, but some are simply in rejection.

### **III. The Grumbling Rejection**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. <sup>18</sup> For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. <sup>19</sup> The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”

John really names the three groups here. The people who were with him at the tomb likely believe in Him as Messiah. The people in verse 18 are possibly curious dwellers of Jerusalem who have come out to see Him, but are actually on the fence about Jesus, and ready to reject Him if He is not what they want, or receive Him if He frees them from Rome. Matthew 21 tells us <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 21:10–11)

And then we have the Pharisees in verse 19. They look upon this procession with scorn and contempt, and say to each other, “Look, he is winning! We're supposed to be stopping Him, and instead He is being hailed as the King!” Once again, here are people in stubborn rejection of Jesus, refusing to see in this moment any fulfilment of prophecy.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that some of them tried to stop the celebration altogether.

<sup>39</sup> And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” <sup>40</sup> But He answered and said to them, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luke 19:39–40)

We know from the other Gospels that Jesus went straight to the Temple, and there cleansed it from its money changers, for a second time. He then essentially took over the Temple complex, and for the next three days, He came back and forth from Bethany to the Jerusalem temple to there be examined by the people, teaching, answering questions and objections, and presenting His claims, and His demands, to Israel as its Messiah.

If Daniel's prophecy represents a true supernatural prophecy, then Jesus is the King. Not a king who acts like a therapist, stroking you and affirming you to remain as you are, but a King who can conquer your own sin, who can conquer death, who can bring His rightful lordship over His own creation.

Now Jesus is not riding into Jerusalem today. Instead, 2000 years later, His tomb is empty and His church is full. He is not here physically, but the effect of His first coming is everywhere.

So the question becomes, how will you respond to Him today? Are you like those who want to use Jesus for personal power, prosperity, gain, but will forsake Him the moment things get tough? Are you like those who despise all this praise and hoopla about Jesus, and wish it would stop? Or are you like those who genuinely welcomed Him, ready to receive Him for anything He did? The King came to serve, not to be used. He came to save us from our deepest need, not our deepest greeds. The King comes first to save you from ruling yourself.