The King enters joyful Jerusalem

Text: Mark 11:1-11

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Philippians 2:1-11; Zechariah 9:9-12; Mark 11:1-11

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 211, 485, 118, 268, 72

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#37)

**Theme:** In fulfilment of prophecy Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a young donkey and is welcomed by the crowds who joyfully recognise Him as the promised Davidic King who has come to save them.

**Proposition:**  Joyfully receive Christ as your king.

**Introduction**

Some of us may have seen a royal parade, either in person or on T.V. or the internet. Before the coronation of King Charles III in Westminster Abbey on 6th May this year, there was a procession in which the 1st in line to the British throne travelled from Buckingham Palace in the Diamond Jubilee State Coach. This horse-drawn vehicle looks old, but was manufactured about 10 years ago, complete with electric windows and air conditioning. However, for the return trip and parade, the now crowned king, travelled in the 260-year-old Gold State Coach; seven m long, 3.6 m tall and weighing 4 tonnes.

Large crowds gathered to watch the parade, but not everyone was pleased to see the monarch; some protesting with signs saying, ‘not my king’. In some ways this had been a long-awaited coronation for the 74-year-old Charles who could only come to the throne after either the abdication or death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II. He is a man whose life has been less than morally exemplary and whose authority as a constitutional monarch is symbolic rather than actual. King Charles has an impressive title and much material wealth, but little or no power over the people who are referred to as his subjects.

All this is in stark contrast to the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, a highly significant historical event which is recorded in all four gospels (Matt 21:1-11, Luke 19:29-38; John 12:12-15). Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem as the long-awaited King, a man whose life was morally exemplary in every way; the perfect Son of whom His Heavenly Father said, ‘*with you I am well pleased*’ (Mark 1:11). Jesus was joyfully welcomed by the crowds as He came, not in a golden royal coach or a chariot, but riding a young donkey.

Most of us are familiar with what is often called ‘The Triumphal Entry of Christ’. Some of us may have been to churches that celebrate ‘Palm Sunday’ the week before Easter Sunday. I remember as a child being given a palm leaf at the door of the church as we remembered the day that the King of kings entered Jerusalem and the crowds ‘*spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields*’ on the road in front of Him. Today, as we focus on Mark’s account of

this event, we seek to understand: what the significance of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem was, and how this applies to us today. We’ll do this under two points:

1. The promised Messiah arrives
2. The promised Messiah is welcomed
3. **The promised Messiah arrives**

The domesticated donkey is a hoofed mammal in the species group Equidae – the same family as the horse. A mule is a cross between a horse and a donkey. Mules are sterile and cannot reproduce. Donkeys are mentioned in a number of places in Scripture, for example: do you remember Balaam’s protesting donkey to whom the Lord miraculously gave speech (Num 22:22-30)?

Wealthy people owned many donkeys (Gen 12:16; 32:15; 1 Chron 27:30; Job 1:3). Donkeys were ridden by leaders and nobility during the time of the Judges (10:4; 12:14). Solomon rode to his coronation on a mule that belonged to David (1 Kings 1:33-44). Our earlier reading from Zechariah 9:9-12 was a prophecy about a coming king “*righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*”. The emphasis on ‘the foal of a donkey’ indicates this king would ride a pure bread young donkey, not a mule.

Notice in our text, the careful preparations which Jesus made in order to fulfil this prophesy as He entered Jerusalem. From Bethany, a few kilometres to the east of the city, He sent two of His disciples ahead with specific instructions. “*Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately’*” (11:2-3). It is significant that the colt, the young donkey, had never been ridden before. There was an Old Testament provision that an animal devoted to a sacred purpose must be one that had not been put to ordinary use (cf. Num 19:2; Deut 21:3). Jesus was going to borrow a donkey for a short time in order to ride into Jerusalem as the promised righteous king prophesied by Zechariah.

Jesus was not a king with the worldly wealth of modern-day King Charles III with land, palaces, horses, antiques, and other investments. Neither was Jesus like violent Jehu who rode into Jezreel in his chariot to slaughter Jezebel. Jesus was not like David’s usurping son Absalom; a would-be self-appointed king who ‘*stole the hearts of the men of Israel*’ (2 Sam 15:6). Absalom came to the gate of the city with a chariot and horses and fifty men to run before him (2 Sam 15:1).

Jesus owned no chariots, no horses, no houses, no land, no donkeys; just the garments that He wore. The Roman soldiers who would execute him would later cast lots for these sole possessions of Christ (John 19:24), in fulfilment of the Scripture in Psalm 22:18. {Bible scholars have identified over 1000 details in the life, death and resurrection of Christ in which He fulfilled Old Testament predictions of His coming}. The young colt that He rode into Jerusalem is one of these. In keeping with the prophecy in Zechariah, Jesus is righteous, He does have salvation and He is without pride. He said of Himself ‘*I am gentle and humble in heart*’ (Matt 11:29).

So it was that the disciples went and found a young donkey tied at a door outside in the street and they untied it. However, this did not go unnoticed; some of those standing by said ‘*what are you doing, untying the colt?*’ Today we might call it ‘Neighbourhood watch’ – modern day community groups who helps to protect people and property and aim to reduce the fear of crime in their community. I guess that untying someone else’s donkey was a little like trying to break into and/or hotwiring someone else’s car today. Mark records that the disciples responded to the concerned ‘donkey watchers’ by telling them what Jesus had said, and then they let them go.

Had these bystanders heard about Jesus? Did they understand Jesus to be the promised king? When they heard that Jesus had said ‘*the Lord has need of it*’ did they recognise the word ‘Lord’ as referring to the Messiah? We do not know, but through all the details of this procuring of a young donkey, the perfect plan and purpose of God was certainly being progressively fulfilled in accordance with His Word as previously revealed in Old Testament prophecy. The Creator and Sustainer of the Universe ‘*works all things according to the counsel of his will*’ (Eph 1.11). "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*" (Isa 6:3).

So it was that the disciples spread their outer garments on the donkey and Jesus sat on this young beast of burden as He entered the city of Jerusalem. This was not a great show of worldly power and wealth. It was not accompanied by an army or weapons of war as in a military parade. Jesus is not a man of flawed man of pride, who makes mistakes and has sinned. No, none of these. Jesus entered Jerusalem as the promised King – “*righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*” (Zech 9:9).

Do you see Him for who He is with the eyes of faith? The Son of God, the Saviour, The King of kings? The One who entered Jerusalem about 2,000 years ago not to be crowned an earthly king over Israel, but to die as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, as one from whom men hide their faces and who they despised. This is the true righteous King who calls you to recognise Him as your Lord, your Savior, your Ruler and to come to Him for the help that you need. Have you come? Jesus rode humbly into Jerusalem and He was welcomed by the people there, as we see in our second point.

1. **The promised Messiah is welcomed**

There is a tradition in the western world of having ‘red carpet events’. A red carpet is a traditional way of honouring a distinguished person or a celebrity. For example, before the Oscars event in Hollywood, movie stars are interviewed and photographed on the red carpet. We could say that the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was a ‘red carpet event’, although instead of a literal red carpet, Mark records that ‘*many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields*’ (11:8). The laying down of cloaks in front of Jesus was a sign of homage to honour his coming. It was reflective of the garments that were put under the newly anointed king Jehu as he descended the steps in Ramoth-gilead (2 Kings 9:12). ‘Palm Sunday’ – a traditional day celebrated a week before Easter Sunday in some churches - takes its’ name from the branches that were placed on the road.

In keeping with the call of the prophet Zechariah “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you*” (9:9), the people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem rejoiced at His coming. Those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*” (11:9-10). They took on their lips the words of Psalm 118:25 that refer to the promised Messiah who would bring salvation to His people.

Exactly how much of the person and mission of Christ they understood we do not know. The word ‘Hosanna’ – is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic words for ‘Save us…O Lord’. This is the petition of Psalm 118:25: “*Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!*” The people were calling out for salvation and recognizing, at least in some way, that Jesus is the promised Davidic king and Messiah. Were they thinking of a worldly ruler who would liberate them from the oppressive occupation and rule of the Roman Empire over Israel at that time? Possibly/probably. Did they understand the true nature of who Jesus is and what He had come to do? All the evidence would say ‘no they did not’. Yet they rejoiced to see Him as they enthusiastically welcomed Him.

He had attracted a huge following during His years of public ministry. He was unlike anyone else they had ever known. For example after He healed a paralysed man, the people there were ‘*all amazed and glorified God saying ‘we never saw anything like this!*” (Mark 2:11). He taught with authority and the unclean spirits obeyed Him (Mark 1:27). Mark records that the people ‘*were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well”*’ (Mark 7:37).

Is it surprising then that Jesus was so joyfully, hopefully and expectantly welcomed into the holy city of Jerusalem? No. He had proved Himself to be more than worthy of such honour and homage. Unlike other kings in history, His ‘track record’ was without fault. You may know that Bible commentators have noted that Mark’s account of the ‘triumphal entry’ considered in itself, could conceivably permit a Jerusalem ministry extending from the feast of Tabernacles to Passover, a period of approximately six months. However, John’s account notes that Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover.

The sequence of events is therefore thought by many to be as follows:

* On the Saturday evening before the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the home of Simon the leper in Bethany, as recorded by Mark in chapter 14:3-9.
* On the Sunday Jesus entered into Jerusalem and was welcomed as we have seen. As Mark records in verse 11, He went into the temple and looked around at everything before returning to Bethany with the twelve disciples.
* Four days later on the following Thursday He would institute Lord’s Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room then leaving for Gethsemane that night and being arrested there
* On the Friday morning He would be tried by Pontius Pilate and the crowd there would respond so very differently to those who welcomed Him just five days before into Jerusalem. Mark records this in chapter 15. Pilate asked of the crowd “*Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?*” (v9). The chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead (v11). The crowd then cried out again, “*Crucify him*” (v13).

We’ve seen in the past few months shifts in sentiment by New Zealand voters as measured by the polls leading up to the General Election scheduled for 14th October 2023. Similarly the mood in a crowd can be very changeable, as can the inclinations of the individual human heart. Our affections can often readily be influenced by pressure and persuasion from others. It is remarkable that in the space of five days, the city that joyfully welcomed Jesus in as the promised Messianic Davidic King could so dramatically turn as to reject Him as a wicked criminal deserving of the most cruel of deaths at the hands of the Romans.

However, before we start to wag our fingers at the people of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, we do well, in the light of our text, to examine ourselves. Many of us here today have joyfully welcomed Jesus into our hearts and lives. In the past, perhaps for some quite recently, we have publicly professed our faith in Him, confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9). Are we willing and ready to continue to submit to His good rule in our lives, even when doing so causes us to suffer, be misunderstood, disliked or even hated by those around us? Are we willing to be isolated by the unbelieving crowds around us as we own Christ as our King and Saviour?

As far as we know from Scripture, few in Jerusalem in the week that followed Christ’s triumphant entry into the city were willing to remain loyal to Him. Jesus had said to His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion “*you will all fall away*” (Mark 14:27). We do know that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Salome looked at Jesus as He died from a distance (Mark 15:40). In this age, we see more than they did back then. We know that Jesus died and rose again. We know that Jesus came to save, not the whole physical community of ethnic Jews under Roman occupation in the 1st century AD, but the spiritual community of all those who have faith like that of Abraham who ‘*believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness*’ (Gen 15:6).

So then, brother, sister, friend, welcome Jesus as your Lord and Savior in your heart today and every day. “*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts*” (Heb 4:7). Do not harden your heart in the face of disappointments, distresses and difficulties, instead, daily joyfully yield yourself to King Jesus. He is gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul in Him.

AMEN.