

## Hosanna! Mark 11:1-11

Do you remember “show and tell” in school? You know you brought something to class and before the whole group you explained what you had. The scripture we just read was one of Jesus’ show and tell moments. The prophets of Israel had always had a very distinctive method of getting their message across. When words failed to move people they did something dramatic, as if to say, “If you will not hear, you must be compelled to see.” (compare 1 Kings 11:30–32.) These dramatic actions were what we might call acted warnings or dramatic sermons. That method was what Jesus was employing here. His action was a deliberate dramatic claim to be Messiah.

Jesus had come to the last stage of his journey. There had been the time of withdrawal around Caesarea Philippi in the far north. There had been the time in Galilee. There had been the stay in the hill-country of Judaea and in the regions beyond Jordan. There had been the road through Jericho. Now came Jerusalem.

On the road Jesus took, a traveler would arrive first at Bethany and then come to Bethphage, about two miles from Jerusalem. The elevation at this point is about 2,600 feet, and from it you have a breathtaking view of the Holy City. When I had the privilege visiting Israel in 2005 during the season of Lent, the scene that is most vivid in my mind is the view of Jerusalem for the very first time as we approached from the direction of the Mount of Olives. We knew that we would walk the paths where Jesus and his Disciples walked that Holy week so long ago.

Jesus was about to do something He had never done before, something He had repeatedly cautioned others not to do for Him: He was going to permit His followers to give a public demonstration in His honor.

Jesus sent two of His disciples to Bethphage to get the colt that He needed for the event. Most people today think of a donkey as nothing but a humble beast of burden, but in that day, it was looked on as an animal fit for a king to use (1 Kings 1:33). Jesus needed this beast so that He could fulfill the messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, and riding on a donkey and upon a colt the foal of a donkey.” What the people of that time understood is when a king went to war he rode on a horse, when he came in peace he rode on a donkey.

In fulfilling this prophecy, Jesus accomplished two purposes: first He declared Himself to be Israel’s King and Messiah; and second He deliberately challenged the religious leaders. This set in motion the official plot that led to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The Jewish leaders had decided not to arrest Him during the feast, but God had determined otherwise. The Lamb of God must die at Passover.

Many patriotic Jews from the crowd of pilgrims eagerly joined the procession that proclaimed Jesus as the King, the Son of David come in the name of the Lord. The visitors from Galilee were most prominent in the procession, along with the people who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 12:12–18). These Galilean Jews were sympathetic with Jesus and His ministry.

When welcoming a king, it was customary for people to lay their outer garments on the road, and then add festal branches (2 Kings 9:13). The shout “Hosanna!” means “Save now!” and comes from Psalm 118:25–26. Of course, Jesus knew that the people were quoting from a messianic psalm (relate Ps. 118:22–23 with Matt. 21:42–44 and Acts 4:11), but He allowed them to go right ahead and shout. He was openly affirming His kingship as the Son of David.

But we must note what kind of a king Jesus was claiming to be. He came meek and lowly. He came in peace and for peace. They greeted him as the Son of David,

but they did not understand. They were looking for a king who would shatter and smash and break. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day, he claimed to be king, but he claimed to be King of peace. He came meek and lowly, riding upon a donkey.

The whole picture is of a populace who misunderstood. We see a crowd of people thinking of kingship in the terms of conquest. They were thinking of how Simon Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem a hundred and fifty years before, after he had blasted Israel's enemies in battle. The origin of Psalm 118 helps us to understand what the people were thinking. In 167 B.C. there had risen an extraordinary king in Syria who conceived it his duty to introduce Greek ways of life, Greek thought and Greek religion wherever he could, even, if necessary, by force. For a time he conquered Palestine and to possess a copy of the law or to circumcise a child were crimes punishable by death. He desecrated the Temple courts by instituting the worship of Zeus and offering swine's flesh on the great altar of the burnt-offering. He made the chambers round the Temple courts into brothels. He did everything he could to wipe out the Jewish faith.

It was then that Maccabaeus arose, and after an amazing career of conquest, in 163 B.C. he drove out the Syrian king and re-purified and re-consecrated the temple. At that time Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem with thanksgiving and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and viols, and hymns and songs, because his army had destroyed Israel's great enemy. (1 Maccabees 13:51.) It was a conqueror's welcome they were giving to Jesus, but they never dreamed of the kind of conqueror he would be.

The very shouts which the crowd raised to Jesus showed how their thoughts were running. When they spread their garments on the ground before him, they did exactly what the crowd did when that man of blood Jehu was anointed king. (2 Kings 9:13.) They shouted, "Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes!"

This is a quotation from Psalm 118:26.” This was the regular greeting with which pilgrims were addressed when they reached the Temple on each great feast. “He who comes” or “the One who is Coming” was another name for the Messiah.

Psalm 118 was written to commemorate that great day of purification and the battle which Maccabaeus won. The calls that day were from this conqueror’s psalm. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, but in such a way as to try to show that the popular ideas of the Messiah were misguided. But the people did not see it. Their welcome was one which befitted, not the King of love, but the conqueror who would shatter the enemies of Israel.

So in today’s scripture they shouted Hosanna: Save now! In 2 Samuel 14:4 and 2 Kings 6:26 it is used by people seeking for help and protection at the hands of the king. When the people shouted Hosanna it was not a cry of praise to Jesus. It was a cry to God to break in and save his people now that the Messiah had come.

If you are like me you want to know what the Romans were thinking as they watched this festive demonstration. The Romans were experts at parades and official public events. We call this event “the Triumphal Entry,” but no Roman would have used that term. An official “Roman Triumph” was something to behold! When a Roman general came back to Rome after a complete conquest of an enemy, he was welcomed home with an elaborate official parade where he exhibited his trophies of war and the illustrious prisoners he had captured. The victorious general rode in a golden chariot, priests burned incense in his honor, and the people shouted his name and praised him. The procession ended at the arena where the people were entertained by watching the captives fight with the wild beasts. That was a “Roman Triumph.”

Jesus’ “triumphal entry” was nothing like that, but it was a triumph just the same. He was God’s anointed King and Savior, but His conquest would be spiritual and not military. A Roman general had to kill at least 5,000 enemy soldiers to

merit a Triumph; but in a few weeks, the Gospel would “conquer” over 5,000 Jews and transform their lives (Acts 4:4). Christ’s “triumph” would be the victory of love over hatred, truth over error, and life over death.<sup>1</sup>

No other incident shows the sheer courage of Jesus. In the circumstances one might have expected him to enter Jerusalem secretly and to keep hidden from the authorities who were out to destroy him. Instead he entered in a way that the attention of every eye was focused upon him. One of the most dangerous things a person can do is to go to people and tell them that all their accepted ideas are wrong. But that is what Jesus deliberately did. But he did stop there. In the last verse of our scripture we learn two things about Jesus which were typical of him.

First it shows us Jesus deliberately summing up his task. The whole atmosphere of the last days was one of deliberation. Jesus was not recklessly plunging into unknown dangers. He was doing everything with his eyes wide open. When he looked round everything, he was like a commander summing up the strength of the opposition and his own resources preparatory to the decisive battle.

Second it shows us where Jesus got his strength. He went back to the peace of Bethany. Before he joined battle with men he sought the presence of God. It was only because each day he faced God that he could face men with such courage.

This passage also shows us something about the Twelve. They were still with him. By this time it must have seemed to them that Jesus was committing suicide. Sometimes we criticize them for their lack of loyalty in the last days, but it says something for them, that, little as they understood what was happening, they still stood by him.<sup>2 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mk 11:1

<sup>2</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:155

Today we have to ask the question: where am I in this story? Am I the donkey: willing to be used by God, to bare the burdens placed upon me? Am I the people in the crowd shouting Hosanna: Save Now! Because I need God's help in the situation I am facing? Am I the people responding with "Blessed the one who comes in the name of the Lord. I see that is a great miracle worker, but I'm still not sure what that means in my life? Am I the ones call "Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David: because I want Jesus to give me political power or help me win the lottery? Am I one of the Twelve: in for the duration, learning, observing, trusting?

We, like the crowd, shout Hosanna; Hosanna in the highest heavens: Save us now O God of Heaven. God hears and answers prayer even when it is not the way we expect.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Mark*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 262