

Week Nine reading: Matthew 21 – 25 | Mark 11 - 13 | Luke 19 – 21 | John 12

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

With this week's reading, we formally begin the Passion Week, from the Latin *passio*, which means "to suffer". This one-week period of time takes up about one third of the content of the Gospel writings. The triumphal entry is the beginning of the four-account story of Passion Week. The Christian church celebrates Palm Sunday to remember this specific event.

The importance of the colt, Matthew 21:1-5:

Matthew and John reference the Old Testament passage from Zechariah 9:9-10: *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! 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. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The bow of war will be removed, and He will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will extend from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.*

Jesus' instructions to the disciples were clear that the donkey must be one that had never been ridden. It was set apart, consecrated for a specific use -- for the Master's use. It is no coincidence that in Zechariah's prophecy, the gentle king that comes into Jerusalem riding a young donkey is the same one who will defeat chariots and war-horses and bring peace to the nations. One of the final scenes of Revelation is a picture of the conquering Christ riding a white war-horse (Revelation 19:11-16), but on this day He rides a donkey in hope of peace. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on an unbroken donkey would doubly symbolize His role as Prince of Peace.

Even such a simple decision as choosing the donkey demonstrates God's attention to detail throughout the millennia. And if God can set apart an animal for His purpose, how much more attentive is He in setting us apart for His use? How does Ephesians 1:4 - *For He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight.* – speak to you about this truth? _____

The spreading of the robes and palms, Matthew 21:8:

"A very large crowd spread their robes on the road;..." The symbolism is not lost on the disciples and Jesus' other followers. Spreading clothing to carpet one's pathway was a way to honor the person. When the people were aware that Jehu has been anointed king of Israel, *"Each man quickly took his garment and put it under Jehu on the bare steps. They blew the ram's horn and proclaimed, 'Jehu is king!'"* (2 Kings 9:13).

"...others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road." In Jewish tradition, the palm is one of the symbolic acts during the Festival of Booths as a symbol of rejoicing (Leviticus 23:40). It was a symbol of triumph and victory in the culture of the Roman Empire. In ancient Egyptian religions, the palm represented eternal life. In the late first century, the palm branch became a symbol of Christian martyrs and their spiritual victory over death (Revelation 7:9).

Much of the honor and recognition being lavished on Him that day did not have depth of faith or genuineness of belief. Their branches waved with every wind of doctrine and were soon to be tossed about by those waiting to deceive (Ephesians 4:14). They lacked conviction and personal understanding of the Savior.

We study Him to know Him, and by knowing Him, learn how to better live for Him.

What branches might you have placed at Jesus' feet while speaking praises that lacked conviction? _____

What branches have you placed before Him that as an act of total surrender (cf Rev. 7:9)? _____

He who comes in the name of the Lord, Luke 19:37-40:

Up until now Jesus has been very guarded about His identity as Messiah (see, for example, Mark 8:30). If Jesus had previously acknowledged publicly that He was the Messiah, the political implications would be such that He could not complete His intended ministry of teaching, healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom. But now that ministry is complete. All that remains is to accomplish His "exodus" in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

It was time for Jesus to reveal His relationship to God. And God gives us that same opportunity to identify our relationship with Christ to those around us. Have you had opportunity lately to be open about your relationship with God? _____

While famously referred to as the triumphal entry, this was not a triumphant day in Jesus' mind, just a pivotal one. According to Luke 19:41, Jesus was weeping as He entered the city, saying, "If you knew this day what would bring peace..." He knew many in the crowd were just part of the frenzy; He also knew that most of the crowd envisioned a kind of king that He had no intention to fulfill; and probably most grieving, He knew that these Jews that uttered psalms of praise at His arrival would shout "Crucify Him" just a few short days later.

Each of us have experienced those highs and lows spiritually as we act on our lack of understanding in one situation but grow in our understanding through another situation. Can you think of a pivotal time in your walk when your understanding of the presence of God brought you peace? _____

THE SETTING IN JERUSALEM:

Concerning the crowds, an excerpt from Commentary on John, by William Barclay:

At such a time Jerusalem and the villages round about were crowded. On one occasion a census was taken of the lambs slain at the Passover Feast. The number was given as 256,000. There had to be a minimum of ten people per lamb; and if that estimate is correct it means that there must have been as many as 2.7 million people at that Passover Feast.

Concerning the temple, an excerpt from Mark: The Gospel of Passion, by Michael Card:

Throughout the final week of the Passion narratives, it is important to keep in mind the setting. Jerusalem and its temple complex were not the weathered, beleaguered site we know today. The thirty-five-acre temple complex was the largest sacred enclosure in the Roman world, five times the area of the Acropolis in Athens. The top of the golden dome of the mosque that occupies the site today would have reached only the bottom of the doorsill of the Jewish temple. Some of its foundation stones were larger than any of the blocks of the

pyramids in Egypt. The temple itself gleamed of white marble and pure gold. Had it been in existence earlier, it would have been on Herodotus' list of the seven wonders of the world.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIG TREE AND THE TEMPLE CLEANSING, Mark 11:12-17:

The curse on the fig tree is a disturbing story of the only destructive miracle Jesus ever performs. Its meaning only becomes clear when you realize the story has nothing to do with the fig tree. The tree is only a symbol of both the Temple and the nation of Israel, which outwardly appear fruitful, like the leaves on the tree.

Jesus provided a word picture in the fig tree for the violations in the Temple and then made a demonstration to prove the point. Jesus was outraged at the prostitution of the Lord's house. First, the marketplace had been moved into the court of the Gentiles, impeding their freedom to pray there; that is the connection to the quote from Isaiah 56:7: *"My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."* This court was as close as Gentile "God-fearers" could come to the temple. Yet the Jews had disrespectfully set up a marketplace there.

Second, it appears the sacrifices required for the poor, specifically doves, had been unfairly marked up, correlating to the "den of robbers" quote from Jeremiah 7:11. The Jewish Mishna states that because of greed, the market for birds rose so much that not even the poorer woman of the community could afford them. Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel the Elder, a leading rabbi of his time and a descendant of Gamaliel who trained the apostle Paul as a Pharisee, before Paul had come to Christ (according to Acts 22:3), took immediate action to lower the market price.

We can also find how the fig tree served in the Old Testament as an emblem of the Jewish nation - *Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in Yahweh; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!* (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Israel was that barren fig tree; a fit emblem of a hypocrite, whose external semblance is a delusion and sham. Even Jeremiah penned judgment on the fig tree and the nation of Israel (8:13): *"I will gather them and bring them to an end. This is the Lord's declaration. There will be no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, and even the leaf will wither. Whatever I have given them will be lost to them."*

We find Jesus pronouncing judgment on that generation which John had exhorted, *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (Matthew 3:8). Like the leafy tree, they had given external evidence of being fruitful but on examination, they were seen to be barren and fruitless. Therefore judgment had to come on that generation.

The next morning, Peter expressed surprise that withering had taken place so quickly (Mark 11:21). This sudden withering was significant, for it revealed that the judgment pronounced on that generation would fall quickly and suddenly.

Hosea 9:10 says, *"I discovered Israel like grapes in the wilderness. I saw your fathers like the first fruit of the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal-peor, consecrated themselves to sham, and became detestable, like the thing they loved."* In Hosea, it is God who hungers for the early fruits of His people Israel. In the Gospels, it is Jesus who hungers for the nation to turn to Him for repentance. His curse on the fig tree was a picture of what had already happened in the Temple and with the Jews.

MESSIAH TO ISRAEL

Messiah as the Prince of Peace came on the appointed day to bring peace to the nation. This, then, was the day of Jesus' official presentation of Himself as Messiah to Israel.

- Jesus was **identified** before the nation as Messiah at His **baptism**
- Jesus was **authenticated** as Messiah at His **temptation**
- Jesus' glory as Messiah was **revealed** at His **transfiguration**
- Jesus was **presented** as Messiah at the **triumphal entry**

Leaving the city in conflict over His person, Jesus withdrew to spend the night in Bethany. According to Jewish tradition, this was the day the lamb was selected to be slain and prepared for the Passover. Jesus, then, was presenting Himself at the time that the Jews were selecting a Passover lamb for themselves. How tragic that they should pass by the Lamb of God as they searched for their own Passover lamb.

APPLICATION FOR WEEK NINE

Is there any area of your life where Jesus does not rule as King? _____

What 'branches' can you lay before Him as an act of worship? _____

Lord, we ask for your triumphal entry into our lives this week that we can grow closer to You in faith as a disciple and surrender our wills to our King and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Memory/meditation verse: But the one sown on the good ground — this is one who hears and understands the word, who does bear fruit and yields: some 100, some 60, some 30 times what was sown." Matthew 13:23 (HCSB)

Week Ten reading: Matthew 26 | Mark 14 | Luke 22 | John 13 - 18