

**Luke 19:28-44**  
**Jesus Reaches Jerusalem**

There have been several memorable coronations of kings and queens in history. Charlemagne was crowned the new Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in 800 AD by pope Leo III. The current Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in 1953, the first such event to be broadcast on television. These were magnificent events. They were majestic. They were grand. Typical would be this account of the coronation of Queen Victoria. “The coronation for Queen Victoria was held on Thursday, the 28th of June, in 1838. It was a festive day for England when Queen Victoria went forth from her palace to the coronation, and thousands and tens of thousands of her delighted and affectionate subjects thronged the streets along which the procession passed; at an early hour all London seemed to be alive and long before the time appointed for the procession to move, the platforms and balconies in the line were crowded with persons, among whom numbers of beautiful and richly-dressed ladies were conspicuous, exacting the silent homage of all beholders.” *The World of Fashion*, 1838.

Jesus was a king as well. Though He was not seen by the religious and political leadership as the rightful king, He was seen as such by the crowds that had begun to follow in great numbers as He moved from Jericho to Jerusalem. His procession to the throne was all that any future king could hope for. But Jesus was not going to a coronation, but to a cross. He was not going to be crowned, but to be crucified.

**Setting**

This was the beginning of Passion week. Jesus had just left Jericho where He had healed the blind man, Bartimaeus, and then called Zacchaeus out of a tree and led him to faith. The crowds, which were a good size to begin with, had grown. They lined the sides of the road. The journey from Jericho to Jerusalem was an uphill climb of some 3,500 feet and took the average person six hours or so to complete the fifteen miles. As Jesus and His followers went along, no doubt the crowd was alive with talk of what this new king would do when He arrived in Jerusalem.

The crowd must have sensed that things were changing. Never before had this rabbi accepted the acclimation of the masses. In fact, He had always avoided any public display of kingship, “Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone” (John 6:15). We know that Jesus had wanted to keep matters on His Father’s timetable, but the people only assumed that He had not yet been ready to assume the throne. Now that He was accepting adoration, they wrongfully concluded that this rabbi had decided that His time had come.

Being the time of Passover, Jerusalem and its environs were overcrowded with expectant Jews. This was not lost on the religious leaders, who saw in Jesus only a threat to their establishment, “<sup>47</sup>therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, ‘what are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. <sup>48</sup>If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation’” (John 11:47-48).

But the Pharisees had to be careful. Clearly Jesus was popular among the masses. Discretion needed to be urged. They had to deal with this rabbi in such a way as to not arouse suspicion, so “<sup>3</sup>the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; <sup>4</sup>and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. <sup>5</sup>But they were saying, ‘not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people’” (Matthew 26:3-5).

Jesus, however, would not allow Himself to be done away with quietly. His was to be a public execution. There would be no doubt as to His end. While the crowds thought Jesus was going to Jerusalem to become king, He knew He was going there to die. And the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was just the beginning of a very public death.

### **The Preparation**

Jesus had been teaching about stewardship. He had tried, once again, to convince His disciples that He was not about to establish the kingdom of Israel but that patience would be required and that they would have to be good stewards of what grace they had been given until He returned. The disciples had not understood. Nevertheless, “after He had said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem” (v. 28). About two miles from the city, Jesus arrived at “Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet” (v. 29).

Jesus had been to Bethany before. It was located on the eastern slope of Mount Olivet, and from the city gate it was easy to see Jerusalem, only two miles away. Bethany was the town of Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus no doubt had many fond, and one tearful, memories of the place. Other gospel accounts help us fill in the gaps in Luke’s narrative. Jesus and His disciples arrived on the Sabbath before Passover (John 12:1). The following day, Jesus was the guest of Simon the leper, apparently a man of some distinction in Bethany (Matthew 26:6-13). Jesus entered Jerusalem the following day. There has been a great deal of scholarly ink spilled over whether this meant that Jesus actually entered Jerusalem on a Sunday (what come celebrate as Palm Sunday) or on the Monday following. Those details need not detain us here. What we must address, however, is the significance of the entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus knew His arrival would offend the religious leaders and force the Sanhedrin to speed up their timetable. They could no longer have the luxury of waiting for an opportune time. They would have to act. This would perfectly suit the timing of God the Father. Though about to be crucified, Jesus was in complete control. “<sup>29</sup>He sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here’” (v. 29-30). This unusual request must have surprised the disciples, so Jesus reassured them that “if anyone asks you, ‘why are you untying it?’ you shall say, ‘the Lord has need of it’” (v. 31).

We must appreciate that Jesus had perfect knowledge of every detail that would occur. Fully God in human flesh, Jesus had, when it suited God the Father to do so, understanding beyond His human means. He had demonstrated this attribute before.

“And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25)

“For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.” (John 6:64).

The disciples were probably not being sent into Jerusalem, but into nearby Bethpage. We can infer that the owner of the animal knew Jesus and was friendly toward Him and His ministry. After all, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead not far from there. The intimacy of the relationship Jesus had with Lazarus indicated that Jesus was familiar to the area. It is reasonable to infer that there must have been many in the various villages Jesus visited that had heard of and supported Him. There were many more besides the disciples. Think of the room for the Last Supper. Think of the tomb. Many were ready to be of service. No wonder the religious authorities were so concerned.

But what kind of colt was Jesus seeking? A donkey, a horse, a camel? In classical times, while a king might ride a war horse into battle, donkeys were the animal of a peaceful ruler.

“<sup>3</sup>after him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. <sup>4</sup>He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day” (Judges 10:4).

“The king [David] said to them, ‘take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon’ (1 Kings 1:33).

This act also fulfilled prophecy,

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

Though the authorities, and the masses, saw Jesus as a conquering hero, Jesus had come not to rule but to offer Himself as a sacrifice. One day, Jesus would return in triumph and then He will be clearly seen as a conquering King. But this was not that time.

### **The Praise of the Multitude**

Things unfolded just as Jesus had planned. “<sup>32</sup>Those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, ‘why are you untying the colt?’ <sup>34</sup>They said, ‘the Lord has need of it’” (v. 32-34). That seemed to settle the matter, and without further objections, they brought the animal to Jesus and began to make preparations for the last part of the journey into Jerusalem.

Jesus and His disciples had always traveled by foot. Therefore, they did not have the accoutrements for riding. So, to provide comfort for both the rider and the animal, the disciples “threw their coats on the colt” (v.35). This animal had never been ridden. Even though the animal was domesticated and docile, the colt would have appreciated the gesture. Jesus was helped onto His mount, and the procession began to cover the last two miles into the city.

Among the crowd were the disciples and other genuine believers. There were also those misguided in their understanding of the events they were witnessing. And, of course, there were people along just because it was a crowd. Still, with all these different expectations, at this point the crowd must have been buzzing with conversation. The final entry of the king at last! Jesus was coming to claim His rightful throne. In a sign of adoration, not only were the people “spreading their coats on the road” (v.37), but they “<sup>37</sup>began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen,<sup>38</sup> shouting:

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord;  
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (v. 37-38).

The disciples, themselves, must have been overwhelmed. Clearly, they did not fully understand what was happening. One of the closest eyewitnesses, John, later wrote “these things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him” (John 12:16). The apostle further elaborated,

“<sup>12</sup>On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup>took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel . . .  
<sup>17</sup>So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. <sup>18</sup>For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign” (John 12:12-13, 17-18).

The confused animal made its way through the piles of garments strewn along the path. The crowds praised God and claimed Jesus as king. They spoke of His miracles. Perhaps Bartimaeus was among them giving testimony to his healing. Perhaps Lazarus spoke of what it was like to be dead. The word spread, and others joined in the celebration.

Matthew also recorded that people cut branches from the ubiquitous palm trees to lay on the road before the colt. This, too, had its historical significance. The people knew what this symbolized. During the time of the Maccabees, Jerusalem had been recaptured from the Syrians, and “on the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred and seventy-first year, the Jews entered the citadel with shouts of praise, the waving of palm branches, the playing of harps and cymbals and lyres, and the singing of hymns and canticles, because a great enemy of Israel had been crushed” (1 Maccabees 13:51).

There was significance in what they shouted as well. “Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the Lord” (v. 38) is from Psalm 118:26. This was a Hallel song sung during Passover. It was emphatically Messianic in tone. It manifested a clear voice of expectation of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. But the masses wanted liberation from Rome, not salvation. Their expectation was worldly, and they were soon to be disappointed. Ironically, though the people shouted this praise, they did not comprehend that this was a psalm of the Messiah’s rejection,

“The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief corner stone” (Psalm 118:22).

Finally, the importance of the crowds is found in the public nature of this event. This entrance to Jerusalem was seen by hundreds if not thousands. The atonement was to be witnessed by all. Had Jesus died like John the Baptist, in a king's dungeon, any variety of arguments could be made regarding His death. While its meaning or significance might be disputed, there would be no possible way to deny the historical reality of the events surrounding the death of Jesus.

### **The Criticism of the Pharisees**

However, not everyone shared the crowd's enthusiasm. When Jesus eventually entered at the eastern gate of the city the Pharisees were waiting, and "some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, 'teacher, rebuke Your disciples'" (v. 39). This is the last time we see the Pharisees take an active role in Luke's gospel narrative. From now on, events proceeded without them. The hostility they had presented to Jesus from the beginnings of His ministry had continued unabated for three years. They had as much of an opportunity to express faith as any, but their hard hearts compelled them to refuse to bend the knee.

Jesus' response was insightful, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" (v. 40). Notice that He did not restrain the crowds nor did He deny their acknowledgement of Himself as King. Instead, He quoted a proverb related to Habakkuk 2:11. The word Luke used means literally to scream. The crowds had praised God for giving them a king. The Pharisees could not mistake the implications. The Pharisees had no love for Rome, but they realized that a failed *coup* would only result in oppression and retaliation against all Jews. Of course, if Jesus was successful, then they would lose their place as religious leaders of the community. For them, it was a lose-lose situation.

### **The Compassion of the Savior**

But Jesus was not thinking about the Pharisees. He was not even thinking about the cross. He was thinking of the city. As Jesus viewed the city, the center of the Jewish universe, He "wept over it" (v. 41). The crowds thought of glory, Jesus foresaw destruction. The crowds anticipated a generation of peace, Jesus knew that war and destruction were to come. He saw the future. Instead of humility there would be a hardening of the heart. Instead of repentance, there would be apostasy. Even at He neared the end, Jesus continued to show great compassion for the lost.

Jesus knew that the people would become silent. He knew that their praises this day would turn to cries for crucifixion within the week. Are we really surprised that when Luke next records the crowds shouting, it is "crucify, crucify Him!" (Luke 23:21)? Jesus knew what lay ahead for these masses and the city which they considered the center of their world. He continued His lamentation,

“<sup>42</sup>saying, ‘if you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, <sup>44</sup>and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation” (v. 42-44).

This was a moment of great passion. The word Luke used means not a tear or two, nobly held back with a stiff upper lip, but openly to sob. It is the strongest term in the Greek language for the expression. The crowds wanted political peace, not eternal peace with God. They had such a limited, short-term vision.

Jesus, surrounded by the crowds that had been ‘amazed’ but unbelieving, entered the city remembering the past three years and all the people who had rejected Him.

“The days will come” (v. 43) referred to the Old Testament prophecy of coming judgment against Israel. Though fulfilled in eternity, this would be fulfilled in the near future as well with the coming of a Roman army under future emperor Titus. His army would lay siege to Jerusalem, and in AD 70 the fall of Jerusalem would be a bitter fulfillment of this cry. Sadly, some of those in the crowd would live to experience it.

“While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity, but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those that made supplication for their lives, as those that defended themselves by fighting. The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire” Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:271.

### **Takeaways**

Jesus was, and remains, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let us praise God for such a Savior and, by His grace, strive to be worthy members of His kingdom.