

**11** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

<sup>4</sup> They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup> When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” <sup>10</sup> “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Last week Jonathan told us that the road to Jerusalem from Jericho was busy with Jews going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jerusalem would be crowded

It's estimated that Jerusalem's population expanded to six times its size during Passover each year.

Deuteronomy 16 (v 5-7a) tells us why: *You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, 6 but at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt. 7 And you shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose.*

Jesus is walking along the road with his disciples, with a crowd of followers... which now included Bartimaeus who was blind but now could see because of his faith in Jesus who he called the “son of David”. How well known it was that Jesus a descendant of David is not known, but Joseph and Mary were both descendants of David. One thing most Jews knew was their ancestry. Most were descendants of Judah, but others were descendants of the other 11 tribes. The apostle Paul was a Benjamite. Most of the scribes and Sadducees were Levites, the priestly tribe.

The healing of Bartimaeus takes place as Jesus is leaving Jericho. Mark doesn't tell us this, but Luke records (Luke 19:1-9) that Jesus talked to Zacchaeus the tax collector and went to his house. Remember the crowds were such that short Zacchaeus had to climb a tree to see Jesus at all? Now Jesus is leaving Jericho and he may have caused a stir whilst he was there, such that Bartimaeus has heard the commotion. Luke's account tells us that the blind man heard the crowd and asked what it meant. He's told that it's Jesus of Nazareth passing by. (Luke 18 v 36-37).

This sets the scene for what is to take place. There is a crowd with him. This will not have been the first time Jesus visited Jerusalem, but it's the first time it is mentioned in Mark's Gospel. John's Gospel (John 2:13-25) tells us he cleared the Temple at a Passover feast; he was there at another feast to heal the man by the pool of Siloam (John 5:1-14) and he taught in the Temple (John 7:10-52) and argued with the Pharisees there. This is a different narrative from Mark's which shows Jesus travelling around Galilee, Tyre, Decapolis, and Judea, with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law trailing along, having come from Jerusalem to find fault with him.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem is recorded in all four Gospels. Matthew 21:1-9; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus stays at the house of the tax collector Zacchaeus, before he enters Jerusalem, and in John's Gospel, he has just been to Mary and Martha's house in Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead.

Bethphage (house of figs) and Bethany (house of dates) are just outside Jerusalem. Bethphage is under a mile, a sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem, while Bethany a bit further out was known as a kind of overspill village to accommodate those coming to Jerusalem to celebrate a feast, like Passover. It is probable that Jesus had arranged for a colt to be there for him to ride into Jerusalem. Two disciples were despatched to fetch the colt. Mark mentions that no one had ridden this young donkey. The Greek word for a colt refers to both a horse and a donkey,

but the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 says: *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* The other Gospel accounts say it was a donkey.

The people in the village (in Luke, it says “the owners”) wondered why the donkey was being led away, and were satisfied with the words that Jesus gave the disciples *“The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.”* In Luke, the donkey is there with her foal... the colt the disciples untie to bring to Jesus.

What is the significance of riding on an ass / donkey? A king in those days rode to war on a horse and rode an ass when coming in peace. A donkey wasn't seen as a second class beast of burden as it is today, where we consider a horse a proper animal for adults and royalty to ride. Donkeys are now for children at the beach. In those days there was nothing modest about riding a donkey, it was what everyone did. Jesus is now doing what the prophet Zechariah foretold, using the symbolism of riding a donkey as a king coming in peace. The fact that no one had ridden the colt, was a symbol of its sacredness, unpolluted by others. Actually it's a miracle that an untamed unbroken colt could be ridden on at all, let alone not be spooked by crowds of people shouting and throwing down branches in front of it!

The people who had followed Jesus began by laying palm branches on the road, and even their cloaks, for Jesus to ride over. There is a reference to people throwing down their cloaks before a king – King Jehu was anointed by Elisha to overthrow King Joram, son of Ahab and Jezebel. His followers threw down their cloaks on hearing he was anointed king (2 Kings 9:13).

The crowd went ahead and behind Jesus shouting.

In Matthew 21:9 *“Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest”*.

In Mark 11:9-10 *“Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* <sup>10</sup> *“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

In Luke 19:37-38 *When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:* <sup>38</sup> *“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

In John 12:12-13 the crowd comes out to meet Jesus: *The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.* <sup>13</sup> *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ ‘Blessed is the king of Israel!’*

All four Gospels quote Psalm 118. I will quote from verse 22 to 27 to give some context, because in Luke's Gospel, in response to some Pharisees complaining about what was being said by the crowd and the disciples, said to Jesus *“Rabbi, rebuke your disciples”*. *Jesus replies “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the very stones will cry out.”*

Psalm 118: 22-27 *The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;* <sup>23</sup> *the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.* <sup>24</sup> *The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.* <sup>25</sup> *LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!* <sup>26</sup> *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.* <sup>27</sup> *The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.*

One thing we have to remember is that a lot of people had Scriptures memorised. Very few had books at home and usually only the synagogue would have the scrolls on which parts of the Old Testament were hand written. While boys had to learn the first five books of the Bible before their barmitzvah (son of commandments), they would also hear other Scriptures and remember them.

*Hosanna* means “please save now”, “please rescue now”, “please help now”. This is an expression of the hope of the crowds surrounding Jesus. The word “hosanna” occurs elsewhere in the Bible in 2 Samuel 14:4 (*When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honour, and she said, ‘Help me,*

*Your Majesty!*) and 2 Kings 6:26 (*As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, 'Help me, my lord the king!'*) use this word. In three of the Gospels, this Hebrew word is used rather than a Greek word. Hosanna is often seen as a word used to praise God, but that is a misuse and changes what the people were saying. They weren't praising Jesus, they were crying out to God to save them, rescue them, help them. They wanted a Messiah (the anointed one), a king, a saviour. They weren't looking for a king of love, a king of a kingdom not of this world.

The people believed that since Jesus was now very well known as a prophet, healer, and teacher, that he would lead them as their king. Being revealed as the son of David... they used the word "son of" meaning "descendant of" added to the feeling that Scriptures were being fulfilled. In Mark, Luke and John, the crowd are calling Jesus a king.

At that time there was a psalm of Solomon, that was known to many. It's in the Apocryphal books of the Bible, books that Protestants decided were not quite good enough to be in the Bible because they contain doctrines contrary to what Jesus taught. The Apocrypha were in all Bibles up until the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and are still in Bibles used by the Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic and Ethiopian churches. (As an aside – they were dropped because some texts say salvation is by works, not grace, they mention purgatory where the prayers of the dead are alleged to be heard, and many Jewish scholars rejected them as well. Jesus never quotes them.)

I'll just quote verses 21-25 of the 17<sup>th</sup> Psalm of Solomon

*21 See, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, At the time known only to you, O God, that he may reign over Israel your servant. 22 Gird him with strength, to shatter unrighteous rulers; To purge Jerusalem of the nations that trample her down in destruction; 23 To expel, in wisdom and righteousness, sinners from the inheritance; To smash the sinner's pride like a potter's vessel, 24 Breaking in pieces with a rod of iron all their substance; To destroy the lawless nations by the word of his mouth, 25 So that, at his mere threat, nations flee before him; To condemn sinners by the thoughts of their own hearts.*

The people knew this psalm. They wanted a king to overthrow the Romans. The recent history of Judea was such that only 200 years earlier the Maccabees had overthrown the Greek rulers (descendants of Alexander the Great's generals) of Israel. The Jewish kingdom established was still partly in place, with Jewish kings nominally in charge after the Roman conquest 100 years earlier, but everyone knew that they were subservient to Rome and that the Romans levied the hated taxes to pay for their army of occupation... the tenth Legion.

As we have seen throughout Mark's Gospel, the Messiah was believed to be a king over Israel who would restore its status as an independent kingdom. People were caught up in wanting to believe Jesus was the one. They got that right: he is the Messiah, but only a few days later, the same crowds turned against him because he didn't fulfil their expectations in over-throwing the Romans. In addition the people with authority in Jerusalem were against Jesus as they feared he would overthrow them as well, removing them from their positions of power, influence and wealth.

That's "hosanna".

Next *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

We have already looked at the quote from Psalm 118, *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."* It was a common greeting for those entering the Temple on feast days. "He who comes" was another name for the Messiah, the anointed one of God. The people were now invoking God's blessing on Jesus and calling him a king. This makes the entry into Jerusalem overtly political and a threat to the status quo.

Jesus does something very courageous: he enters Jerusalem fêted by the crowds, knowing he must disappoint them, knowing that he would have to tell them that they had got it all wrong about him, that what they believed him to be – a king, a leader to overthrow the Romans – was untrue and was never going to happen. Jesus was anointed not to lord it over people but to be a servant of the people; not to lead them in battle, but to require them to surrender in peace. Jesus loved them so much that he was willing to die for their sins, giving up his own life so they could have eternal life in a kingdom not of this world. The people loved the miracles, they loved the healings, they loved some of the teaching... but the message of salvation walking the way of love and submission, turning the other cheek, was

not what they wanted to hear. And so it came to pass that their disappointment was such that the same crowds shouted “crucify him” days later. Any man the people mistakenly believe will liberate them, who then tears up their dreams, is going to be in serious trouble. We’ll see later – probably in the new year – how it all ends.

Verse 11 *Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.*

Mark tells us that Jesus made it to the centre of Jerusalem.. the temple. It seems the crowds had dissipated, gone to their lodgings or to get fed or they simply went home. He goes back out of the city, with just the twelve disciples, to Bethany, where Lazarus, Mary and Martha live. Mark records what happened: Jesus enters with a crowd proclaiming him king, a crowd that the Pharisees complained about for shouting the wrong message, and it all seems to fizzle out: the show’s over and a prophecy is fulfilled!

Going on to some points to take home with you which are: (1) **If this story happened today, what would it look like?** (2) **What is this story saying to us today?** (3) **Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?**

### **(1) If this story happened today, what would it look like?**

Today any celebrity, any one who does something heroic, any one who has done things to benefit mankind, any one who is famous and talented, can in a flash be torn down by a false accusation, torn down by a misquote, torn down because of something an ancestor did that was “unacceptable”. One moment the crowds may be cheering an achievement, praising what has been achieved ... and the next moment Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, broadcasters, news reporters and politicians will have cancelled a person for something which is not entirely clear, or even if it is, it will be done without a fair trial, without evidence fairly laid out and tested, and even then the truth will be ignored. Accusation equals guilt until proved innocent, and even then, many will never believe the truth. The tearing down is done by a few angry, envious, bitter, vindictive people who then whip up others into a judgmental frenzy where any who disagree with the unfairness of it all become victims of the same nastiness piled on the person being “cancelled” or “condemned”. The devil is the accuser of the brethren and no one is safe from false accusation by the wicked who always seek to denigrate the good.

Think of Cliff Richard, a Christian entertainer, falsely accused and how the media treated him. The BBC had boycotted playing his records for decades simply because they hated, for no reason, his music, his faith, his lifestyle, his huge fanbase, and his lack of the usual rock star depravity. Then the BBC thought they had a “gotcha” moment, a scoop, and justified their unfairness as “public interest” even though it was all based on false accusations by a fantasist. Footage of the ransacking of his home replayed, hounding by reporters for comment on a matter he knew nothing about, much negative reporting by smug self-righteous folk who believed what they wanted to believe. No one who is perceived to be a “goody-goody” is safe from those who live in the dark and want others to be as depraved and sinful as they are.

### **(2) What is this story saying to us today?**

As Christians, we must be courageous and willing to stand up for what we believe. We will face at some point in our lives, times when people will form opinions about us that aren’t based on reality.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:10-12: *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> ‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus says in John 15:18-25 -

<sup>18</sup> *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember what I told you: “A servant is not greater than his master”. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. <sup>21</sup> They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be*

*guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> But this is to fulfil what is written in their Law: "They hated me without reason."*

### **(3) Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?**

We can be kind and generous and helpful to some who will be grateful, but others, can without warning, become ungrateful, spiteful and reject us. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us. We need God's protection and putting on the armour of God each morning is one way to start the day with the right equipment to avoid being ground down by adversity. In Ephesians 6:10-18 the apostle Paul writes:

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

The next few weeks, we'll see Jesus teaching in Jerusalem and then closer to Christmas, we'll do something Christmassy, before going back to Mark's Gospel, and by Easter we should arrive at the resurrection.