

The Donkey and the White Charger

Matthew 21:1 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage¹, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. 3 "And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" 6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him¹ on them. 8 And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" 10 And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" 11 So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee." (Mat 21:1-11)

When victorious Roman generals entered Rome after a battle, they had what was known as the *triumphus* – the victory parade. The general would be dressed in gold and purple toga, the colour of royalty, or even divinity, with the victor's laurel wreath on his head. He would be standing in a chariot drawn by four horses, with the prisoners and spoils ahead of him, and the army behind him, as they went through the streets to the cheering crowds, until they arrived at the Temple of Jupiter and the general presented a sacrifice. On March 29th, A.D. 33, Romans in Jerusalem watched a very different *triumphus* enter the city. An ordinarily-dressed man, riding on a donkey with clothes thrown over its back, and palm leaves thrown down on the rocky climb up from Bethany into Jerusalem. You wonder what they thought of it. What kind of a King is this? Why a donkey? Why this kind of approach?

We should ask similar questions, because everything Jesus did was meaningful, and planned. And we will really only understand Palm Sunday when we see it for what it is, the first entry into Jerusalem by Jesus, which anticipates a second. After entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus predicted He would enter a second time, but only after Jerusalem had come to faith: “ 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 "See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"= (Mat 23:37-39) ”

Palm Sunday is the first half of a two-phase entry into Jerusalem. We can only understand the one, when we lay it side-by-side with the other. When we do that, we will not only understand the difference between His first and second comings, but we will see so much more of our Lord Jesus Christ, more of His attributes. So we wish to see two entries today: the manner and meaning of His first entry – symbolised by the Donkey – and the manner and meaning of His second entry – symbolised by the white charger.

I. The Manner and Meaning of His First Entry

We can see three truths about the manner and meaning of His first coming.

The text is Matthew 21. Our Lord Jesus has been travelling with a group of pilgrims coming up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Jesus has been setting the stage for this event. He travelled for several weeks with a band of pilgrims. He worked miracles among them, He taught parables, He rebuked the Pharisees, and so these pilgrims had a heightened expectation of Jesus presenting Himself as Messiah. On the Friday, He arrives in Bethany, spends the Sabbath there, and then on the Sunday, the first day of the week, he sets these things in motion. Probably during this time Jesus made some preparations with the owner of the donkey. He does it very deliberately, very strategically, because He wants everyone in Jerusalem, which is going to be most of the nation, to know that He Himself is the Promised Messiah. And He wants them to grasp the meaning

of His coming through the manner.

Zechariah 9:9 told of the manner of how the King would come:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

1) Humble

Instead of riding in on a chariot, He will arrive riding the humblest of animals – a donkey. When Messiah arrives, Israel should expect a paradox: this great and glorious King, riding on a humble animal. Israel was to know their King was not going to be like the Kings of the Gentiles – self-important, glory-seeking, boastful, seeking fame. Instead, he will be riding a donkey.

Though donkeys and horses resemble each other, it is as if the donkey is the humble parody of everything the horse is. The horse has this lofty whinny, the donkey has this grating falsetto hee-haw. The horse has this high-stepping posture, the donkey this self-pitying plod. The horse's eyes look down on life, the donkey's expression looks up, asking not to be beaten. The horse, once broken in, has a strident, confident trot. The donkey has this permanently tired look, plodding, bobbing. The donkey is not the animal you want the president to arrive on for his big speech. The donkey is not the animal you go to battle in. It does not say strength, confidence, power, glory. It says submission, surrender, weakness.

By choosing this animal, what is Jesus saying about the manner of His first coming? He comes in voluntary weakness, in chosen meekness, in surrendered greatness. He is signalling that this is not the moment of triumph, this is not the moment of victory, this is not the moment of power and judgement. This is the moment of chosen sacrifice.

2) Predicted to the Day

Daniel 9:25-26 tells us the moment of the King's presentation. Gabriel told Daniel that he could start the clock from the day Artaxerxes gave the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He said, count 69 sets of seven years, and Messiah the Prince will present Himself in Jerusalem.

If you take 69 sets of seven years, and you make them Jewish years of 360 days each, you end up with 173,855 days. The decree to restore Jerusalem was given on March 4th, 444 BC. If you add 173,855 days to March 4th 444 B.C, you arrive at exactly March 29th, A.D. 33, which according to the U.S. Naval Observatory Astronomical Applications Department, was a Sunday. It was Nisan 10, and five days later, on April 3rd, He would be hanging on a cross.

Here is something very different about the first entry into Jerusalem. It was not only predicted, it was predicted to the day.

3) Coming to Save

The Lord rides in slowly, with people in front of Him, and behind Him, calling out the words of Psalm 118: Hosanna – save now! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. They refer to the kingdom of their father David, and recognise this is His Son. They are praising Him, lauding Him. They understand the image. They know Zechariah 9:9. They know His claims. Many of them have seen His miracles. They know that He is playing the full part of Messiah and they respond with joyful praise. They understand – this is Messiah, coming to His capital city, the son of David coming to the city of David, and they give Him the welcome He deserves.

Many in this crowd said Hosanna, meaning one thing, but Jesus came to Hosanna in another way.

Some said, Hosanna, save now, meaning, save us from political oppression. Save us from the indignity of having Roman symbols, and Roman soldiers, in our holy city. Save us from their taxation, and from this political humiliation. Restore to us our national pride. But as Jesus made it clear in the next few days, He didn't come to save from Rome and be King politically. He came to save them from their sin, from their rebellion to God, and to be the King over their hearts and lives. He came to save them not from poverty, or grinding circumstances, or Gentile domination. He came to save them from themselves, from their lusts, and greeds, and pride, and covetousness, and lying, and thievery.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die!
O Christ! Thy triumph now begin
Over captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty!
The wingèd squadrons of the sky
Look down with sad and wondering eyes
To see the approaching sacrifice.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, Thy power, and reign.

Hosanna to the King! Save us, King Jesus! But from what? Save us from our poverty. Save us from our unemployment. Save us from our political opponents. Save us from bad government. Save us from disease. Save us from depression and difficulty. Save us from a standard of living we might find uncomfortable. But that is not why He came, and not what He came to save us from. He came to save us from our rebellion, from our God-hatred, from our creature-worship. The King came to serve, not to be used. He came to save us from our deepest need, not our deepest greeds.

Five days later He would be doing that saving. Not by defeating enemies with a sword, but by groaning under the guilt and burden of our sin as the Father loaded every sin onto His shoulders on that Cross. On Friday afternoon, He, who knew no sin, would now become the Consummate Sinner, the Sinner of Sinners, in a sense, the most Evil of All, bearing (without being) all the evil of the world.

One week from Palm Sunday, He would be raised, and forty days later, ascend, doing High Priestly work and awaiting the day of His return.

II. The Manner and Meaning of His Second Entry

1) Majestic

11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (Rev 19:11-14)

Here we see the coming of the Lord Jesus, and it is a very different scene. What is the animal ridden

this time? He is on a white horse, a charger, a warhorse. Gone is the grey donkey, with the garments thrown over it as a makeshift saddle. Here is a battle-horse, pawing the ground, and snorting in anticipation of the charge. Here is a majestic animal rearing for battle.

And who is sitting on Him? The One John saw at the beginning of this book, whose eyes are like a flame of fire. He is not a peasant carpenter, he is crowned many times over. He is no longer simply Yeshua haNotzri. He has the names of Yahweh – Faithful and True, the Word of God.

He is no longer empty handed, but now He has a Weapon, a sword, a sword which He need only speak for it to destroy, the very power of His Word. And He is no longer a solitary figure, winding his way up the path from Bethany to Jerusalem. He is at the front of a vast military force. Not army singular, but armies, are following behind Him. Warriors. Angelic, and perhaps redeemed ride behind Him, following Him.

This is everything Israel wanted the first time: majestic, powerful, conquering, glorious, victorious, indomitable. But this kind of entrance to Jerusalem only happens because of the first entry.

2) Predicted but No One Knows the Day

4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south. (Zec 14:4)

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. (Mat 24:36)

In Christ's first coming, it was possible for a careful Bible scholar to calculate to the day when He would enter Jerusalem. But Jesus warns that no man knows the exact day when He will come again. Even though Paul says that when the man of lawlessness appears we will know that the time of Tribulation has come, and even though many Scriptures divide that Tribulation into two sets of 3 and a half years, we are told no one will be able to calculate the exact day. Paul says that believers need not be overtaken by that day like a thief, so watchful believers may be aware of the closeness of the day, of the ever-approaching nearness of the day. But no one, I repeat no one, will be able to give you the day. So when some Bible teacher claims he's figured something out through the Jewish festivals, or the Year of Jubilee, or the blood moons, or the Torah Code, or the hidden Hebrew in Daniel, or anything else, remember the words of your Lord, "No one knows the day."

He will come, but He has left the day unknown, both to surprise His enemies, and to keep His children watchful.

3) Coming to Judge

15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. 17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, 18 "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Rev 19:15-21)

This is not the Jesus of the flea-market paintings, the New-Age Jesus of personal spirituality, the ecumenical Jesus who is loved by all religions. This is Jesus is coming to fight. He is coming to wage war. He is going to put enemies to death. He is going shed blood, the blood of His sworn enemies.

Verse 11 - *He judges and makes war.*

Verse 15 - *should strike the nations*

Verse 17 to 18 is a metaphor for how great the slaughter in this judgement will be – vultures and meat-eating birds are invited to a feast – the feast of the slain bodies of God's enemies that will litter the landscape. Jesus is going to return, and he will not return to a world welcoming Him because they have all been Christianised. He will not return when everyone has been zapped out of their bodies and are all standing in front of His judgement seat. He will return to the Earth in time and space, to Jerusalem, where armies have been gathered to destroy it, and to oppose His people. And He will return and wage an actual physical war on the Earth.

2 For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. (Zec 14:2-3)

His Second Coming to Jerusalem is to judge. He is coming to save a remnant, but it was the first entrance where He came to save from sin. The second is about judgement, vengeance.

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2Th 1:7-8)

One poet imagined the scene of Jesus on the Earth, right after this battle, what it would look like, what the Lord would do.

As far as any eye could see
There was no green. But every tree
Was cinder black, and all the ground
Was grey with ash. The only sound
Was arid wind, like spirits' ghosts,
Now gasping for some living hosts
In which to dwell, as in the days
Of evil men, before the blaze
Of unimaginable fire
Had made the earth a flaming pyre
For God's omnipotent display
Of holy rage. The dreadful Day
Of God had come. The moon had turned
To blood. The sun no longer burned
Above, but, blazing with desire,
Had flowed into a lake of fire.
The seas and oceans were no more,
And in their place a desert floor
Fell deep to meet the brazen skies,
And silence conquered distant cries.

The Lord stood still above the air.
His mighty arms were moist and bare.
They hung, as weary, by his side
Until the human blood had dried
Upon the sword in his right hand.
He stared across the blackened land
That he had made, and where he died.
His lips were tight, and deep inside,
The mystery of sovereign will
Gave leave, and it began to spill
In tears upon his bloody sword
For one last time.
And then the Lord
Wiped every tear away and turned
To see his bride. Her heart had yearned
Four thousand years for this: His face
Shone like the sun, and every trace
Of wrath was gone. And in her bliss
She heard the Master say, "Watch this:
Come forth all goodness from the ground,
Come forth and let the earth redound
With joy." And as he spoke, the throne
Of God came down to earth and shone
Like golden crystal full of light,
And banished once for all the night.
And from the throne a stream began
To flow and laugh, and as it ran,
It made a river and a lake,
And everywhere it flowed a wake
Of grass broke on the banks and spread
Like resurrection from the dead.
And in the twinkling of an eye
The saints descended from the sky.

I don't know if the Lord will return to Jerusalem on a Sunday, as He did the first time. I don't know if the Lord's Day will become the Day of the Lord. But I do know we live in between those two days. We live in between the time when He came on a donkey, and when He will return on a charger. We live in between the time when He came humbly, and when He will return majestically. Most importantly, we live in between the time when He came to save, and when He will return to judge.

And since we do not know when that will be, and since there is no second chance when He returns, now is the time to move from being His enemy to being His loyal subject. Now is the time to accept the Jesus, lowly riding on a donkey, willingly heading up the Cross to die for your sins. Now is the time, when His mercy and compassion continue to patiently call you, to turn from self-rule, turn from sin, and embrace Him as Lord and Saviour.

Now is the time to say to Jesus, Hosanna – Save Now. Save me, not from poverty, or depression, or loneliness. Save me from myself. Save me from living for my own glory. Blessed are You, Jesus, who come in the name of the Lord.