

## Mark 11: 1 – 11. What a difference 5 days make.

(05.04.09am)

[Read passage]

At the start of this week, and as we anticipate celebrating Easter next Sunday, we're going to be looking at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem this morning. You will remember this took place at the beginning of the week, which would end with Jesus dying on the Cross. These are days which changed the course of history, because the events of those few days have made it possible **once and for all** for man's relationship with his creator God to be restored. What a difference 5 days make.

I want us for a few moments to look at **Jesus** himself, as he rides into the city; to look at the **crowds** as they welcome him; and to look at the **disciples** as they accompany him.

Jesus entering Jerusalem at this time and in this way is important. We can see that this event is important because it is recorded in **all four** gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John **all** wrote of this triumphal entry.

As we read through the gospels, we often see Jesus **withdrawing** from the crowds, **escaping** their attention and their recognition. Sometimes when he has done miraculous things, he has told people not to say what he has done. So **here** is something totally different from those times. **Here** is something that **everyone** needs to know about. **Everyone** needs to know that he has entered Jerusalem, and everyone needs to know **why** he has entered Jerusalem.

He enters Jerusalem at a time when all Jews would be preparing to celebrate the Passover – this was the festival when they celebrated how God had set them free from captivity in Egypt, which we read about in the book of Exodus; when they were rescued from Pharaoh, led by Moses out of Egypt to the Promised Land. So Jews from **all over** would have flocked to Jerusalem at that time. Jesus knew that there would be hundreds, even thousands of Jews in the city when he made his entrance. Jesus **knew** what he was doing when he chose the time of his entrance.

No withdrawing from the crowds any more. By making such a public entrance, Jesus was saying that everyone needs to pay **special attention** to what was going to happen in the next few days. Jesus calls for **everyone's** attention. Matthew in his account in chapter 21 says that the "*whole city was stirred*". Jesus here demands that everybody sits up and takes notice. So I hope you're paying attention!

The account of how the disciples got the donkey's colt for Jesus to ride on is also important. Firstly because it shows us that it was a fulfilment of a prophecy from the Old Testament, and the book of Zechariah 9:9, where we read,

*“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Jesus didn't arrive on a chariot with magnificent horses, with trumpets blaring – he arrived on a donkey, righteous and bringing salvation. These things happened so that the prophecy would be fulfilled, and the crowds would **recognise** that.

But also the way that the disciples collected the donkey shows us something about Jesus, how he is in complete control of the situation. Jesus sends two disciples to the village ahead; he knows exactly where the colt will be tied in the street; he knows the exact one, that it hasn't been ridden; he knows what the owner's response will be, they will ask what the disciples are doing. And all they need to say is, *“The Lord needs it ...”* Jesus knows. Jesus is in control. Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth.

Isn't this wonderful to know if you are a Christian? Jesus is the Lord of all of us, whether we recognise it or not. He knows all there is to know about each one of us; he knows about every situation we face; his timing is perfect; he is in control of our lives. How reassuring, how comforting. **Jesus is in control.**

Let's turn our attention to the welcoming crowds then. As we've already seen, the number of people in Jerusalem is swollen at that time because they have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival. So they are already in celebratory mood, ready to praise God for what He did in Egypt. And then comes Jesus. They have heard of the miraculous things he has been doing over the past 3 years – he has power over illness, disease, even nature itself.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the crowds are welcoming a king. This is shown in what they are doing and what they are shouting. They are excited, even ecstatic. Although Jesus doesn't come on a chariot with horses and soldiers and all the regalia of a king, they still treat him as king. They spread their cloaks before him (verse 8). This is the customary treatment of a king – if we look at 2 Kings 9:12-13 we read of when God tells a man called Jehu that he is to be the king of Israel: *“This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king over Israel.’ They [the people around Jehu] hurried and took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew their trumpet and shouted, ‘Jehu is king!’”*

Lots of things are coming together here – the Jews will have been mindful of lots of Scriptures being fulfilled here, adding to their excitement at the arrival of the king.

They spread branches in front of him – John (who was actually there, of course) tells us that they were palm branches. And they shout, “ ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ” (verse 9). You will see from the footnote in the NIV that ‘Hosanna!’ is a Hebrew expression meaning ‘Save!’ and this has become an exclamation of praise right down through the centuries to now, still used in our hymns and songs today. We sang it a few moments ago. God saves.

This verse is a quote from Psalm 118;25-6, where we read, “*O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*”

The waving of branches, and the shout of Hosanna! would have been part of the Passover festival – now the crowd are using them to welcome Jesus. So this was recognising that he was the fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9: “*See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, ...*” – Jesus the king, anointed by God, come to save.

The huge crowds are shouting the right things. They are sure that freedom, liberation is near. When they shout in verse 10, “*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*” they are remembering God’s promises to their forefather king David, which we read in 2 Samuel 7:12-14: “*When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ...I will be his father, and he shall be my son.*” Jesus is a descendant of David, he fulfils the prophecy.

Of course many will have heard of this man Jesus and what he’s achieved, but in Matthew’s account we read that there are some who haven’t heard, and are asking “*Who is this?*” Matthew 21:10. The crowd replies, “*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.*” They will have been reminded of how he was born, how even kings came to worship him. They will have been told of all Jesus had said and done – all he had said about the coming kingdom of God, all he had done to show he was and **is** the Son of God.

They will have remembered those words in Isaiah chapter 9, “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be **no** end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever.*” Isaiah 9:6-7.

It all fits. Jesus fits. He matches the prophecies of Scripture. He is the coming king who will reign with justice and righteousness forever. Jesus is the Messiah – he will save his people. The crowd is ecstatic. They recognise their king – Luke’s account tells us they shout, “*Blessed is **the king** who comes in the name of the Lord!*” Luke 21:38. And in John’s account the people cry out, “*Blessed is the king of Israel!*” John 12:13. In today’s words they are shouting, “Long live the king!”

Jesus does not **discourage** this, he **allows** it to happen – they are **right** to recognise him as their king, to praise him; for the first time Jesus’ glory is recognised on earth.

We’re told (again in Luke’s account) that those against Jesus – the Pharisees – tell Jesus to rebuke his followers for praising him in this way. But Jesus turns round to them and says, “*I tell you... if **they** keep quiet, the **stones** will cry out.*” Luke 21:40. The people are **right** to proclaim Jesus as the king of their everlasting kingdom.

But the crowd are getting carried away, the people are carried along with the excitement of the group – no doubt there were some there joining in the joyful waving and shouting without really understanding what they were doing, they were just getting swept along with the crowd. Perhaps their feelings are not true feelings of the heart. They don’t really understand what is happening.

We must beware of this too, our experience as a group of God’s people is no substitute for our experience of God **as an individual**. We mustn’t just be going along with the crowd, we must be informed **individually**, our experience must be real and meaningful to us as an individual. You can’t have second-hand faith. Is your faith **real**, or are you just going along with the crowd? Make it real.

The crowd is overjoyed. **The crowd proclaim their king.**

But what about the disciples, those closest to Jesus in those days, what were **they** thinking as they followed Jesus into Jerusalem? Remember they have been with him, seeing all he has done, hearing all he has said during his ministry over the last three years, a ministry now approaching its conclusion.

As they approach the outskirts of Jerusalem, they come to Bethany on the Mount of Olives, a place which would have great significance later on in the week. Jesus sends two of them to collect the donkey’s foal. And off they go – there’s no questioning, no raised eyebrows to say “What do you want with a **donkey**?” No, they go just as he asks them to.

When they are confronted by people asking what they are doing taking the colt in verse 5, they say exactly what Jesus tells them to say – no elaboration, no further explanation, just exactly what Jesus told them to say. There’s something special about Jesus – they are pleased to do what he asks. Do we know something of this too? Are we keen to do what Jesus asks?

This shows Jesus is in control of the whole situation from beginning to end, but it also shows that his disciples accept he is who he says he is – the **Lord**: “*tell him, ‘the Lord needs it’..*” (verse 3). They follow him into the city, no doubt joining in with the joyful shouting, looking around at the spectacle, **amazed** at the excitement and happiness being expressed by the huge crowds because of this one man, the one they know as ‘the Lord’. They haven’t seen anything like it before – their friend, their Lord, the King of the coming kingdom of their ancestor David.

This truly was a memorable event, a public event, an event that the whole world will hear about and will celebrate forever. The most wonderful event in history was about to happen, God’s eternal kingdom is about to be established, reason for the greatest celebration of all. Something to rejoice about forever – and if man stops rejoicing, creation itself will continue to rejoice – “*the stones will cry out!*” Even the Pharisees say, “*Look how the whole world has gone after him!*” John 12:19.

Jesus is King – he is in control. The crowd proclaim him as king. The disciples always knew there was something special about him.

[Song - “Make way! Make way! For the King of Kings!”]

## PART 2:

So what happened? What went wrong? Within 5 days we see another crowd just as vocal, shouting “Crucify him! Crucify him!” On Sunday the king of the coming kingdom of our father David, on Friday a wretched figure suffering on the cross, the most cruel and barbaric way of death. What went wrong? What did Jesus get **so wrong?**

The short answer is ‘Nothing’, but let’s explain.

As events unfold during the days that follow, we see that although the crowd rightfully recognise Jesus as king, they **misunderstand** what that **means**. They think that he has come to be a political king, a warring king, a king who would liberate Israel by force.

They're shouting the right things, but the coming kingdom they are announcing, is not the one they are expecting. Jesus will bring a **spiritual** kingdom. The crowd has latched onto Jesus' teaching that his kingdom will never end, but they have misunderstood its **nature** – they have only accepted half of the truth.

In today's society we have never had such access to so much information, with the media people in every town and country to report news, and the Internet a source of articles on every subject possible. But having access to information isn't the same as knowing the **true** information. We have to look for the **truth**, not half-truths, or falsehood disguised as truth. We need God's help with this – let's make sure we find the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

The crowd didn't understand what it was all about. But what about the disciples – did they misunderstand too? Surely **they** should have known what was coming?

John tells us in his gospel, *“At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.”* (John 12:16)

So, no, they didn't understand **either** what had to happen for Jesus' kingdom to come in. That's why they **deserted** Jesus when he was arrested. They didn't understand – who would? This was a **once in history** event – never to be repeated. God providing salvation and bringing in his eternal kingdom – would your finite mind have understood it, if you'd been there? I know mine wouldn't have.

Oh, Jesus **himself** was very clear about what was going to happen – **he** knew. Three times Mark records Jesus talking to his disciples about what is going to happen when he gets to Jerusalem:

Mark 8:31, *“He [Jesus] then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after 3 days rise again.”*

Mark 9:31, *“He said to them ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after 3 days he will rise.’”*

And most explicitly in Mark 10:33-4, *“‘We are going up to Jerusalem’ he said ‘and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.’”*

Jesus knew what had to happen – he told his disciples so. Could he have been any clearer? It was inevitable – he **must** be killed, they **will** kill him, they **will** mock him, flog him and kill him.

Each time he predicts his death is when his disciples are discussing greatness and leadership – you can look at those three chapters and their contexts later, if you want. But the disciples have an idea of greatness, which does not fit in with the kingdom of God. In God’s kingdom the first become last, the greatest become least, the rich become poor, and verse 45 of chapter 10 gives us one of the most important verses of Mark’s gospel.

There we read the following: *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Jesus did not come as a conquering warrior king as the Jews expected – he came as a **servant** king; he came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus’ greatness comes through service. In Philippians 2 we read that Jesus *“made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”* He was God, yet *“he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross.”*

Why did he die? As a ransom for many. He paid the price for our sins. He redeemed us, setting us free to know God.

We’re reminded of the passage in Isaiah chapter 53, where he writes of the ‘suffering servant’, and as we read its verses we must surely see that it refers to Jesus and what he went through on that first Good Friday.

Let’s read from chapter 53 of Isaiah, verses 2–6. [Read] *“He bore the sin of many”*. The servant suffers to bear the sins of others and bring peace and healing. **This** is what Jesus had to go through for his kingdom to come. He wasn’t going to fight any bloody battles with sword and armies – he was going to shed his own blood, die on the cross, but rise again on the third day – just as he predicted – so that his **spiritual** kingdom would be brought in.

**We** couldn’t and can’t pay the price for freedom – those in slavery don’t have the means and resources to free **themselves** – they have to rely upon an outsider to intervene. **This** is what Jesus did – he was the only one who could – the perfect, sinless Son of God become man – he intervened, and brought us freedom.

As he hung on that cross, some watchers mocked him, saying, *“He saved others, but he can’t save himself.”* They missed the point – he didn’t save himself so that he **could** save others.

[“From heaven you came, helpless Babe” – This is your God, the Servant King]