

Introduction

We come this morning to the account in Matthew 21.1-11 called “The Triumphal Entry.” It might help us learn from this account if we put it into the big picture of the Gospel and ask the pertinent (if not impertinent) question, “Why do we call this “The Triumphal Entry”?” Here are some basic facts. 1) On this occasion, Jesus enters the city on a small donkey and not on a white horse. There is no sword of conquest in His hand; there is no “sword going forth out of His mouth.” Why, then, do we speak of triumph? 2) Although we have come to the final week of His life (Passion Week), this is not His last entry into the city. Actually, he lodges outside the city and re-enters the city a number of times (Mat. 21.17 informs us that He lodged at Bethany). Why is this entry *the* entry of triumph? 3) We are in the last section of Matthew’s narrative (chapters 19-25) that the writer hangs on the hook of the great speeches of Christ (26.1 points us back to 19-25 as 19.1 points us back to 14-18, and so forth per 13.53, 11.1, and 7.28). Notably, during the entry itself, Jesus gives no speech, not even a whisper. Matthew only records what Jesus said about finding a donkey for His ride into the city (21.2-3), but during this entry into Jerusalem, we have no words, only silence (Luke does record a few words and the tears over the city, Lk. 19.40-44). With no great speech, how can this be a great entry? We find our answers to these questions by considering two main points: a) the miraculous prelude to the triumphal entry, and b) the narrator’s interpretation of the triumphal entry.

1A. The miraculous prelude to the Triumphal Entry

Matthew does not explain what led the crowds to spread their cloaks on the road (21.8) and to give the ovation, **Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!** (21.9). Luke tells us that they said these things because of “**all the mighty works that they had seen**” (Lk. 19.38). Therefore, to understand the remarkable entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, we need to view it in light of the miracle that Matthew connects directly to it. It is as if the mighty work of healing the two blind men triggered their thoughts about all His mighty works.

So let us back up to the preceding context of Matthew 20.29-34.

1) First, there is direction

The text moves toward Jerusalem (20.17) by the “passing” reference to Jericho. It is good that we read 20.29a in conjunction with 20.17:

¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside (20.17)

²⁹ And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. ³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men (20.29-30)

The narrator does not tell us what happened when they arrived at Jericho, how long they stayed, or what transpired there. However, he does mention the city by name because it is on the route to Jerusalem. Thus, he informs us that the event of healing two blind men took place in a location close in proximity to Jerusalem; he mentions the city with a glance, so to speak, in the rear view mirror to remind us that arrival at Jerusalem is near at hand.

2) Second, there is a sense of urgency

At first, the crowds tried to quiet the blind petitioners, but they could not suppress them. The blind men persisted relentlessly. They cried out for mercy from the Lord Jesus and when the crowd “rebuked” them “telling them to be silent,” **they cried out all the more** (20.31).

3) Third, there are words of honor

What they said in their petitions is even more striking than how they make them because they called Him Lord and Son of David. These titles of honor give messianic honor to Jesus. Distinctively, Jesus does not seek to quiet them. Formerly, He promoted secrecy regarding His

person and mission, by commanding those He healed to “tell no one” (i.e. Mat. 9.30). There were many reasons for the former secrecy such as potential misunderstanding that would lead to premature kingship or premature death. Now there is a clear and marked change. Now, the open proclamation of His status as Messiah emerges. In the circumstance where the crowds try to quiet the blind men as they beg mercy from none other than the Messiah, Jesus allows them to proclaim His identity as the Messiah. They do so in bold terms that grow bolder still by the efforts of the crowd to suppress them. Thus, even more attention focused on the proclamation that Jesus is the Lord, the Son of David.

4) Fourth, there is acceleration

Raising the volume a notch higher still, Jesus not only allowed the blind men to make this proclamation louder and louder, but He sealed the truth of their claims with emphasis in this very context by stopping, calling them to Him, asking what they wanted, and giving them what they requested. **And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?"** ³³ **They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened."** ³⁴ **And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.** (20.32-33). Clearly, the touch of pity that gave sight to formerly blind eyes, also accented the miracle. Jesus did not simply speak a word of healing. He touched them with a directly personal touch. The miracle, in turn, emphasized His direct and personal approval of their announcement that He is the Messiah entitled to the throne of David.

5) Fifth, there is omission

Other things are happening at this time, as Luke indicates, such as the incident with Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree and the telling of the parable of the ten servants (Lk. 19. 1-27). Matthew skips over these things. Furthermore, he records nothing about the men, as does Luke (naming one of them, stating the fact of their faith and its relation to the healing). It is also significant that Matthew omits the fact that the miracle led the people to praise God (Lk. 18.43).

Purposefully, no doubt, Matthew omits these things while he directs our attention to who Jesus is by how he records the bold and insistent acknowledgement of the blind men. They see the great light that comes to the needy in darkness. Thus, they cry out **all the more** for mercy from David's Son that is David's Lord. Thus, by the omissions, Matthew places the healing of the blind men in direct connection with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mat. 21.1-11).

Notice further, that once healed, the formerly blind men follow the Lord to the edge of the sacred city *and into it* in a processional of triumph, *all as if the healing and the entry were a single event*: **immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth-phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me..." ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting...** (20.33-21.9).

6) Finally, there is repetition

Matthew repeats their words:

²⁹ **And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him.** ³⁰ **And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"** ³¹ **The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"** (20. 29-31)

Matthew simply merges the double acknowledgement of Jesus and the accent on His identity that comes from the fruitless attempts of the people to quiet the blind men. The author distinctively records how Jesus elevated the already accented double acknowledgement of His identity. He shows us that by both word and deed, Jesus announced that He is David's Son and David's Lord; He is the long expected prophet (Mat. 21.11).

Therefore, the healing is a prelude to the famous entry into Jerusalem, which Matthew records next without a break in thought. Jesus is the Son of David; He now enters the city of David to take possession of it in accord with the promises to David and before him, to Abraham and to Adam. Let us now turn to the entry that begins the final week that leads to the cross.

2A. The narrator's interpretation of the Triumphal Entry

As we move from the healing miracle to the special entry into Jerusalem, we now have a sense that at the core of the Triumphal Entry is the reality that Jesus is the Christ, that He in fact is the Messiah promised in the OT and anticipated by the people of Israel.

1B. Summary of the event

It all begins with the command to two disciples to go into a village and obtain a donkey and her colt. A tone of authority and compliance dominates this action. It appears that the disciples, per the authority of Christ, simply go and take these animals without even asking for them, let alone buying them. If someone inquires as to what is happening, they are to tell him that the Lord needs the animals, and he will comply:

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth-phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once"...⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them (21.1-6).

Then, the disciples put their cloaks on the animals; Jesus sat on the donkey, and made His way on the lowly animal into Jerusalem amid shouts of praise to Him as the Son of David.

⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "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 entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee" (21.7-11).

The entry was quite festive; it stirred up the whole city with the pointed question, "Who is this?" In response, the crowds identified Him as the prophet Jesus.

2B. Misunderstanding the event

In a basic sense, this is not a triumphal entry! Two points support this claim.

1) The crowds misread Psalm 118

Within the Psalm they quote with their hosannas, the crowds hear the Psalmist's words of God as helper giving freedom and triumph (118.5-7). They like the idea that the coming one will save and give success so the people of Israel can rejoice and be glad (118.23-24).

What they miss is the fact that the Psalm speaks of the builders in Israel that reject the capstone in God's building, they reject the one that comes in the name of the Lord (118.22, **The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone**). When the view of the leaders, the builders, becomes evident, the crowds adopt it and reject the rejected stone. As we know, in just a few days, most of these same people will cry out for the death of Christ. With this entry into the city, the final week of our Lord's ministry began; at the end of this very week, the people will seek His crucifixion while calling down curses on the heads of their children (Mat. 27.25).

2) The crowds misread the coming of the kingdom

The proclamation is true, but what the crowds mean by it is less than true. What they say is true in the form of the words. The one causing the stir is the prophet Jesus. They correctly acknowledge that He is the Son of David. There is agreement with the healed blind men that Jesus is the Christ; He is Jesus-Messiah.

⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "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 entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

The crowds follow the miracles and anticipate an earthly kingdom (cf. Lk. 19.37). How else can we explain the fickleness of the people who in a few days will turn their hosannas into curses? They speak the truth in their words, but they do not understand what they say in its reality. The triumph of this entry is but a passing sensation.

3B. Perspective on the event

The narrator bases his perspective and interpretation on the action of Jesus in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah.

"Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden'" (Mat. 21.1-5).

Choosing to ride into the city on the donkey of humiliation, Jesus revealed the true nature of His kingship. He is the righteous and humble king that Zechariah promised would come.

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zech. 9.9-10).

Jesus fulfills the Scriptures and proclaims the presence of His kingdom. By His righteousness and with humility (Zech. 9.9), He will bring salvation to Jerusalem. There is a ring of triumph in the prophecy. The triumph is such that peace will come to Jerusalem. Peace will also come to the nations because **his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth**. He will triumph by an unspeakable depth of humiliation before the coming glory. The glory is not now; it is not yet; it is yet to come. When it comes, then the sons of God will inherit the earth. Therefore, the Triumphal Entry to take possession of Jerusalem and to inherit the promises to Abraham involves the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth now for the formation of the new human family in the eternal not yet.

Conclusion

We asked earlier how this could be a great entry without a great speech. Now, we can affirm that it is a great speech; it is the gospel proclaimed not in word but in deed (cf. Schilder, *Christ in His Suffering*, 130, Jesus accepted the acclaim but reinterpreted it as a sign of God's presence in Him).

The Triumphal entry is a proclamation that Jesus gave by action, not in word but deed. It proclaims the coming of the kingdom, definitely, in a way unexpected. This event is a gigantic contrast between the teaching of Jesus and the thinking of the people of Israel. They are blinder than the two blind men; they remain in darkness.

1) By this entry, Jesus proclaims that His rule as king is spiritual

He is a king without a white horse, but a king who rides a donkey to tell us that He is the king promised in Zechariah. That king is righteous and He brings righteousness to flow like a flood in His kingdom. For that to happen, He must be humble, *so humble, that He as king takes the last place*. He takes the place of an obedient slave. He obeys the will of the Father unto death, even the humiliating death as a curse hanging on a tree. Jesus proclaims that His rule as king brings *triumph by humiliation*. Then, through the exaltation that God gives Him by raising Him from the dead, He is the cornerstone that the builders rejected per Psalm 118.

2) By this entry, Jesus proclaims the coming kingdom and the eternal Sabbath

By fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9, Jesus refuted the crowd's interpretation of Psalm 118. What they sought were the benefits of the rule of God now in their conflict with Rome. Therefore, the entry into Jerusalem, this very entry, is good news as a proclamation of the coming triumph when restored image bearers of God attain the eternal Sabbath rest that God promised from the very beginning of the world. As the humble king who gives Himself for the salvation of a new family, a new human race, and a new world, God raised Him from the dead. That day, resurrection day is the day the Lord has made by His resurrection; it is a day of special rejoicing because it celebrates His triumph over sin and death and it promises with certainty the final triumph that will come in the final day of special rejoicing. Thus, part of the triumphal speech that arises from the actions of Christ in the Triumphal Entry is the proclamation of our

Lord regarding weekly Sabbath keeping with expectation and anticipation of eternal Sabbath keeping in glory.

Pointed Applications

- 1) Give praise to Jesus as Lord and Son of David
- 2) Do so with understanding that His ways are unexpected; they are not our ways
- 3) Understand worship by giving special honor to the day He made by the resurrection
- 4) Honor the Lord by following Him in lowly service to others in visible lowliness
- 5) Return from serving to give double acknowledgement to Jesus-Messiah

May we fall down before the majesty of our Lord Jesus, the Son of David and Son of God. May we acknowledge Him as our prophet, priest, and king; May the Holy Spirit drive the truth home to our hearts that Jesus entered Jerusalem as the prophet from Nazareth, as a priest in lowly service, and as the king taking possession of the city of David. May the Spirit teach us to acknowledge our sins and to rejoice in the inheritance of the earth and all things that we receive in Christ Jesus our risen Lord. To Him be all blessing, honor, glory, and hosannas to the highest, now and forevermore, amen.