

Jesus' Arrival in Jerusalem

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon on Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem explores the significance of the Triumphal Entry and its implications for faith and authority.

Scripture: Matthew 21:43-44, Mark 11:15, Luke 19:41, John 12:12

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Temple Cleansing"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, highlighting the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah King, and the partial understanding of the crowd. He also discusses Jesus' cleansing of the temple, emphasizing the significance of prayer and faith. Furthermore, he delves into the authority of Jesus being challenged by the Jewish leaders and the parables Jesus used to expose their unbelief and rejection of Him as the Son of God.

Transcript

Triumphal Entry, 21:1-11

The final hours of Jesus' life on earth drew near, and, in Matthew 21, the cross was less than a week away. In sharp contrast to the shame of the cross is the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, described by all four gospels (cf. Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:29-38; Jn 12:12-19). As Tasker expresses it, "Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time in a manner which showed that He was none other than the Messiah, the Son of David, who was coming to Sion to claim the city as His own."¹⁰⁴

The four accounts of the triumphal entry differ in some respects but are not in contradiction. John's gospel, written sixty years after the event, gives some of the most interesting details, including the fact that the night before the triumphal entry, Jesus had an intimate supper in the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, as recorded in John 12:1-11.

Matthew mentions Bethphage, a village no longer in existence, which apparently was close to Bethany on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, just a few miles from Jerusalem. Anticipating His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of the disciples, not named in any of the gospel accounts, into the village of Bethphage, to secure an ass and her colt to serve as His transportation as He entered Jerusalem. He told them they would find both animals tied; they were to untie them and bring them to Him. If anyone asked why they were doing this, they were to reply, "The Lord hath need of them" (21: 3). Mark 11:5 and Luke 19:31 indicate that the question was asked, but the disciples were not stopped from borrowing the beasts.

Matthew does not record the question, but only Matthew records that there were two animals and that Jesus sat on the colt.

Matthew calls attention to the precise fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy which he quotes. Without following the exact words of the Old Testament, Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9, prefaced by the phrase from Isaiah 62:11, "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." He omits from Zechariah 9:9 the phrase, "O daughter of Jerusalem." The reference to Zion is a specific reference to a hill in Jerusalem, the exact location of which is disputed today, but Zion is often used as a title for Jerusalem itself. There is no need to spiritualize Zion and make it represent the church, as it is a geographic designation especially related to the King and the kingdom.

The main point is contained in the quotation from Zechariah 9:9, which prophesies that the Messiah King of Israel, unlike earthly kings, would come in a lowly or meek manner sitting upon an ass and a colt, the foal of an ass. No king had ever come to Israel in this manner, as kings usually came on horses (cf. Rev 6:2; 19:11).

Matthew, intent on establishing the triumphal entry as a fulfillment of prophecy of the coming of Jesus as King to Jerusalem, ignores some of the details and simply records that the disciples brought the ass and the colt and put their garments on both of them. Jesus probably sat only on the colt, as mentioned in the other gospels, which had never been ridden before (Mk 11:2; Lk 19:30). To form a saddle, they threw their outer garments on both beasts, even though Jesus used only the colt.

As they proceeded to Jerusalem, they were accompanied by a crowd familiar with Christ's miracle of raising Lazarus (Jn 12:17-18), and were met by another multitude coming out of the city of Jerusalem, which went before Him (Mt 21:9). Both groups outdid themselves in honoring Jesus, laying their garments on the ground for the beasts to travel over and cutting down branches from trees and spreading them in a festive way along the road. John alone mentions that the branches were from palm trees. Although they were treating Jesus as their King, in keeping with the meaning of the triumphal entry, it seems clear that they did so with only partial understanding. John comments, "These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him" (Jn 12:16).

In greeting Him, however, the multitudes fulfilled the prophecies of just such an entry into Jerusalem (Zec 9:9) and addressed Jesus with the words, "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Mt 21:9). Hosanna is a transliteration of a Hebrew expression meaning, "grant salvation," but is used here more as a greeting or ascription of praise. Most significant is the reference to Christ as the Son of David. They recognized that He was in the kingly line, although they do not seem to have entered fully into the concept that He was coming into Jerusalem as its King.

As they came into Jerusalem, both the multitude which accompanied Him and the multitude which met Him were confronted by still others who asked, "Who is this?" The entire city, according to Matthew, was excited by the arrival of Christ. The multitude answered the question by saying, "This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." It is possible that some of the multitude were pilgrims from Galilee, in Jerusalem at this time for the feast of Passover, and that therefore, they were claiming Jesus proudly. The form of the verb said in 21:11 indicates that they repeated the information again and again.

Matthew does not record the details which followed that day. It was probably Sunday afternoon when Christ came into Jerusalem. Mark 11:11 records that He looked into the temple and then went out to

Bethany with the twelve for the night.¹⁰⁵ The events which follow, in Matthew 21:12-17, probably occurred on Monday.

Jesus' Second Cleansing of the Temple, 21:12-17

Early on Monday morning, Jesus returned to Jerusalem, and, entering into the temple, which Matthew significantly refers to as "the temple of God," He began to cast out those who sold and bought in the temple and overthrew the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold the doves for the sacrifice (cf. Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-47). There is no excuse for trying to harmonize this with a much earlier incident, recorded in John 2:13-16, which was at a previous Passover. There is obvious resemblance between the two cleansings, but the point, of course, is that the first cleansing was ineffective in bringing about any permanent cure.

Jesus rebuked them with the words, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mt 21:13). The custom was to require the people to exchange Roman money for temple money at an arbitrary rate and also to force them to buy the animals or doves for sacrifice at a high price exacted in the temple. As Lenski expresses it, they had "a grand lucrative monopoly. If one bought his animals here, had his money exchanged here, these would be accepted; otherwise he might have trouble on that score."¹⁰⁶ In doing this, the temple authorities were robbing the people and making a farce out of the whole sacrificial system. The area where the animals were kept and sold was in the great court of the temple, which never was intended to serve as a stockyard.

It is significant that on this occasion, as in the first cleansing of the temple, there was no resistance offered. There was something about the bearing of Jesus that silenced these money-loving merchants, and undoubtedly the people approved. Jesus had no illusions that His act would result in any permanent good, but it was part of His solemn judgment pronounced upon Jerusalem and His generation. Luke records that prior to going into the temple, He wept over the city (Lk 19:41-44). Matthew records a similar lamenting over Jerusalem prior to the Olivet discourse (Mt 23:37-39).

After the cleansing of the temple, Matthew alone of the four gospels records, "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them" (21:14). The result of His cleansing of the temple and the miraculous healings which took place inspired the crowd once again to repeat their acclamation of the preceding day, "Hosanna to the son of David."

The chief priests and the scribes, who apparently were silent at the indictment of Jesus on the corruption of the temple, now spoke up and expressed their displeasure that Jesus was greeted as the Son of David, recognizing as they did that this was connecting Jesus with the promise of the kingly line of David. They said to Jesus, "Hearest thou what these say?" (v. 16). However, they were helpless and were at a loss to know what to do with the enthusiasm of the crowd. The Jewish leaders were especially concerned because the young people, referred to as "the children" (v. 15), had joined in the ascription of praise to Christ. These were boys, who like Jesus, had come to the temple for the first time at the age twelve.

In answer to their question, however, Jesus replied by quoting from Psalm 8:2, "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise?" In effect, He was saying, "The youths are right, and you are wrong." If babes who barely can speak can praise the Lord, how much more these youths now twelve years of age and older? In claiming Psalm 8:2, Jesus, in effect, was also claiming to be God and, thus, worthy of praise. He left the scribes and the Pharisees stunned with no more to say.

That night, once again, Jesus probably went out to Bethany and lodged. By thus leaving Jerusalem, He placed Himself outside the area where the scribes and Pharisees could order His arrest after the crowd had left the temple.

Cursing of the Fig Tree, 21:18-22

The incident recorded here in Matthew in regard to the fig tree is presented as another significant incident in Jesus' last days. Mark 11:12-14, the only other account, makes it clear that it actually occurred on Monday morning, prior to the incident of the cleansing of the temple. It is now brought in by Matthew because of the significant comment of Jesus on the next day, which was Tuesday morning.

Matthew records that Jesus, coming into the city on Monday morning of His last week, was hungry. No explanation is given, but the assumption is that Jesus had not eaten before He left Bethany. Morgan believes Jesus spent the night "in some long lone vigil on the hillside, in a quiet and secluded place."¹⁰⁷ Seeing a fig tree with leaves on it, He came to pick its fruit. Normally, fruit grows on a fig tree before the leaves come out in spring, but it is not clear whether the figs would be left over from the previous year or whether the tree, because of being more sheltered from winter than others, had started its spring growth early. According to the parallel passage in Mark 11:13, "The time of figs was not yet." Finding the tree with only leaves and no fruit, He said, "Let no fruit grow on thee [henceforth] forever" (Mt 21:19). This, however, was not observed immediately, and refers to the experience of the disciples on Tuesday morning, approximately twenty-four hours later. Perceiving that the fig tree had withered, the disciples were amazed that this had occurred so quickly.

Many questions have been raised about this incident, including the problem that Jesus as God should have known that there was no fruit on the tree. Here, Matthew is apparently speaking from the viewpoint of human intelligence only, but the whole incident was planned as a means of conveying truth to the disciples.

In answer to their wondering, Jesus gave them a sermon on faith. Jesus informed His disciples that if they had real faith in God, they would not only be able to curse the fig tree effectively as He had done, but, He told them, "If ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (v. 21). He added the great promise, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (v. 22). In other words, they should not marvel, but believe and pray.

Many expositors see in the fig tree a type of Israel, fruitless and yet showing leaves, typical of outer religion.¹⁰⁸ This is frequently tied to Matthew 24:32, referring to "a parable of the fig tree." There is no scriptural support for this interpretation contextually. There is no ground today to support Lenski in his statement made in 1943, "Judaism stands blasted from the roots to this day."¹⁰⁹ Israel, instead, is marvelously revived today. Jesus made no application to Israel as a nation here; nor does the context of the fig tree in Matthew 24 refer to Israel. While Jeremiah 24:1-8 uses good and bad figs to represent the captives in Israel as contrasted to those remaining in the land, actually, there is no case in the Bible where a fig tree is used as a type of Israel. In view of the silence of Scripture on this point, it is preferable to leave the illustration as it is, a lesson on faith and the miraculous rather than a lesson on fruitlessness.

Authority of Jesus Challenged, 21:23-27

Upon the return of Jesus to the temple, probably on Tuesday morning of the last week, as He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders brought up the question which they were unprepared to raise the

preceding day, "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Mt 21:23).

Once again, the Jewish leaders were trying to trap Jesus in utterances which they could label blasphemy (cf. Mk 11:27-33; Lk 20:1-8). They made no attempt, however, to arrest Him or to expel Him from the temple, as they feared the people. They were no match for Jesus, however, in an interchange of questions, and Jesus replied that He would answer their question if they would answer His first: "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" (Mt 21:25).

The Pharisees were caught in a dilemma. As Allen expresses it, "If the authorities had given credence to John, they would have had no need to ask by what authority Jesus acted."¹¹⁰ If the Pharisees said the baptism of John was only of men, they would be opposed by the people who believed John was a prophet. If they said it was from heaven, then they would be obliged to believe his message affirming the deity of Jesus. Accordingly, they answered Jesus, "We cannot tell" (v. 27). Jesus replied that if they could not identify the authority of John, then He did not need to tell them by what authority He cleansed the temple. The point, of course, is that they were not seeking a real answer, as they knew that Jesus claimed the authority of God.

Parable of the Two Sons, 21:28-32

To expose the unbelief of the chief priests and the scribes, Jesus introduced three parables, the parable of the two sons (21:28-32), the parable of the householder (21:33-46), and the parable of the marriage feast (22:1-14). To start with, Jesus used a simple story of a father who asked his two sons to work in his vineyard, a parable found only in Matthew.

The first son, when instructed to work in the vineyard, replied, "I will not," but later on, thought better of it and began to work. The second son replied quickly, "I go, sir," literally, "I, sir," but he went not. Jesus then raised the question as to which one did the will of the father. They answered, "The first."

Then Jesus made the application. He said, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (21: 31-32). What had been subtly indicated before was now brought out in the open. They had rejected the ministry of John, whom even harlots and publicans had recognized as a prophet of God. They were like the son who said, "I go, sir," but who went not. By their confession, they stood condemned.

Parable of the Householder and his Rejected Son, 21:33-46

To drive the point home still further, Jesus used another parable (cf. Mk 12:1-9; Lk 20:9-19). This time, He described a man who planted a vineyard, built a wine tower, and leased it to tenants. When the time of harvest came, he sent his servants to take the fruit of it, but the tenants treated the servants harshly, beating one, killing another, and stoning another. When he sent other servants, they were treated in like manner. Finally, he sent his son, thinking that they would have respect for him. But the tenants, recognizing him, said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance (Mt 21:38). And so they caught the son and killed him.

Jesus then raised the question as to what the Lord of the vineyard would do under these circumstances. They replied, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other

husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (v. 41).

Jesus then made the application. It is probably true, as Lenski points out, that no person would send his son into a situation where servants had previously killed his other representatives but would immediately call the authorities.¹¹¹ The contrast is between what men would do and what God had done. God did send His son, even though Israel had rejected His prophets earlier and killed them and had rejected John the Baptist.

Jesus made the application with tremendous force: "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" (v. 42). Jesus was quoting from Psalm 118:22-23.

The figure of a stone is found often in Scripture, Jesus being referred to both as the foundation stone and the head of the corner (1 Co 3:11; Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pe 2:4-5). To Israel, Jesus was a stumbling stone and rock of offense (Is 8:14-15; Ro 9:32-33; 1 Co 1:23; 1 Pe 2:8). At the time of His second coming, He will be a smiting stone of destruction (Dan 2:34).

Jesus also made the further application, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Mt 21:43). Here, as Matthew does rarely, the expression "kingdom of God" is used, referring to the sphere of reality rather than a mere profession of faith. Jesus declared that the kingdom of God would be given to a nation which does bring forth proper fruit. This should not be construed as a turning away from Israel to the Gentiles but rather a turning to any people who would bring forth the fruits of real faith. The word nation is without the article in the Greek and probably does not refer to the Gentiles specifically.

Carrying further the significance of Jesus as a stone, He stated, "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (v. 44). Here Jesus was referring to Himself as the Judge of all men. The rejected stone is also the smiting stone. As Criswell expresses it so forcibly, "These parables in the latter part of Matthew are somber, terrible, fearful... They are parables of fire and fury and terrible rejection like a king taking account of unfaithful servants and visiting judgment with a drawn sword."¹¹²

The point of this parable was all too clear, and the chief priests and Pharisees realized that Jesus was talking about them. However, because of the presence of the people, they were helpless to do anything at this time. Their hatred of Jesus was only intensified by this exposure, and it gave impetus to the plot already formed to kill Jesus when they could. The shadow of the cross was lengthening over these closing events of the life of Jesus.

104 R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 197.

105 Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 811.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 813.

107 G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 255.

108 Cf. Tasker, pp. 201-2; also Lenski, pp. 825-26.

109 Lenski, p. 825.

110 W. C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, pp. 225-26.

111 Lenski, p. 835.

112 W. A. Criswell, Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 125.

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