

An Unlikely King

Mark 11:1-11

Covenant Waterfall, 7 February 2021

Read

Pray

Introduction

If we look at the state of our beautiful land, it's easy to get despondent. Government is plagued with corruption, looting, the infrastructure is falling apart, injustices – people who are in power are getting away with all sorts of crimes. Rising unemployment, economy is tanking. It's easy for us to think, in the midst of all this, that if only this government were to be kicked out of power, South Africa would become a paradise, a land of milk and honey, where all of our problems would go away. I'm sure many of us have cried out for the Lord to send us a saviour, to save us from the government! Then, we think, all would be well.

For centuries the Jews were oppressed under foreign rule. A once independent and proud nation, had been subjugated by a string of foreign powers. After they had returned from 70 years in exile in Babylon in 586 BC, they were later to be conquered by the armies of Alexander the Great, then came under the rule of the Ptolemy's, then the Seleucids, the Hasmoneans, and by the time of Christ, the Romans were ruling over them. For all this time, the Jews longed to be free in the own land once again. They held onto the messianic promises of the OT prophets that the glorious kingdom of David would be restored. In their minds, this meant of course that God would send them a mighty political deliverer, another King, like David, who would save them from political oppression, and "make Israel great again." Then all would be well!

When Jesus arrives on the scene, many people start to make the connections – that this indeed is Israel's promised Messiah – like Bar-Timaeus, who we looked at last week. Finally, a powerful king who will overthrow the Romans and save us! That's how many Jews

understood the coming of the Messiah. Yet, what we're going to see in this passage, is that they missed the point. Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, but the salvation he brings is not in form of overthrowing an unjust political system. Instead, Jesus has come to save us from a far more fundamental problem that lies at the root of everything that's wrong around us, and more importantly, everything that's wrong within us. What we'll see is that, as the Messiah who has come humble and on a donkey, Jesus has come not to dominate us in his power, but to save us from our sin.

- Mt Olives
- King on his donkey
- Save us!

A. Mt of Olives, v.1

Understand the context of this passage – last week we saw that Jesus opened the blind eyes of Bar-Timaeus. This miracle fulfilled one of the signs of what the Messiah would come and do (Isa 35:1-4). In fact, what we've seen throughout Mark's Gospel so far that Jesus has been slowly revealed to us as Israel's promised Messiah, as God himself. How so? He's driven out demons – showing his power over darkness. He's forgiven peoples' sin – something only God has the authority to do. He's healed the lame, mute and blind – things which the Messiah was prophesied to do. He's miraculously multiplied the loaves for the crowds – showing he's the promised Good Shepherd of his sheep. He's tramples the waves of the sea and stilled the storm with a word – showing that he's the Eternal Lord over all of creation.

What we see here is that Jesus' miracles are not some party tricks, nor are they meant as a standard for us to imitate. Instead, all of them reveal Jesus' true identity: he's the Messiah, God himself, fulfilling the OT prophecies about him. And what has he come to earth to do? Fix the mess that Adam and Eve started in the Garden: deal with sin, destroy Satan, reverse the curse. Sin is the reason for all the wrongs and injustices in the world. It's also the reason for our own deep tendencies for wickedness and rebellion – to go the opposite direction to God, instead of seeking him. So Jesus is the One whom Genesis 3:15 promised – the seed of

the woman who will come to crush the head of the serpent – deal with sin once and for all and reign the King of kings and Lord of lords, in the line of David, forever.

Here in chapter 11 of Mark's Gospel, we have now come to a major turning point in Jesus' earthly life – gear-shift in the Gospel. Palm Sunday. He is about to enter Jerusalem, the City of David, Zion, on what will be the last week of his life on earth, before he is to die on the cross as a substitutionary dead for the sins of his people.

Pick up in verse 1: **“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples...”**

Remember from last week, Jesus starts to make the 20km trip to Jerusalem from Jericho, where he is joined by a big crowd of pilgrims who are heading to the Holy City to celebrate Passover. After passing through the towns of Bethpage and Bethany, he arrived just outside the city limits of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is the hill opposite Jerusalem, separated by the Kidron Valley. It is here, just before entering the city, where Jesus stops. Mark includes this detail, not by accident, but very deliberately. Why?

The OT Prophet Zechariah, who recorded his prophecy some 500 BC, prophesied in chapter 14, that when the Lord himself returns, he would fight against Israel's enemies and then stand upon the Mount of Olives in victory, where he will be king over all the earth. Ever since that prophecy was made, the Jews had associated the Mount of Olives with the coming of the Messiah. Now here is Jesus, stepping upon the Mount of Olives as he enters Jerusalem. Who else can this be but the Messiah, and the Lord himself?

B. The King upon his donkey, vv.2-8

and said to them, **“Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ And**

many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields.

Upon the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two of his disciples to a nearby village where he tells them that they will find a colt (or donkey), on which no one has ridden. They are to request to use it, “for the Lord” and promise to return it to the owners.

Two things here: firstly, why is it significant that no one has ridden the donkey that Jesus has requested? According to the Law of Moses, in Numbers 19:2 and Deuteronomy 21:3, animals that were to be sacrificed to the Lord were ones that had not yet been broken in. While this donkey is not going to be sacrificed, it’s instead the rider of the donkey that will soon be sacrificed.

Secondly, we can see Jesus’ divine attribute of omniscience in action here. Because he is the sovereign Lord, who knows the end from the beginning, he foresees exactly what will happen – knowing that there will be an unbroken donkey in the next village and knowing that the owners will give his disciples permission to use it. This little glimpse of Jesus’ omniscience, reminds us that he knew exactly what he was doing. He did not go to the cross as an unknowing victim, but as Hebrews 12:2 tells us, **“for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...”** Jesus went to the cross, in full knowledge of what awaited him, intentionally laying down his life as a sacrifice for our sins, being fully obedient to the will of his Father.

Verses 7-8 continue, telling us that as Jesus sat upon the colt, starting to ride it, crowds began to spread their cloaks on the road and spread branches on the road too. What’s going on here? What’s the significance of the crowd laying down their cloaks on the road before Jesus? This had been done before, some centuries earlier when Jehu was anointed as king over Israel by the prophet Elisha. 2 Kings 9:13 recounts that, **“every man... took his garment and put it under (Jehu) on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, “Jehu is king.”** Instinctively the crowds around Jesus do the same thing, because they realise that he is indeed the Messiah, the promised King in the line of David who will reign upon his throne.

How have they come to this conclusion? The prophet Zechariah foresaw these exact events some 500 years before and recorded them in his prophecy in chapter 19:9: **“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.”

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem upon a colt that had never been ridden, was no random happening. Jesus was clearly fulfilling that ancient prophecy – he was that promised King, coming to Zion, to Jerusalem, as the only Righteous One, coming to save his people – not in great pageantry and glory – but in humility, mounted on a donkey.

This is why many in the crowd understood exactly what was unfolding, that was why they laid down their cloaks on the road – they knew that this was their promised King, coming to save them, as Zechariah had prophesied.

C. Save us! vv. 9-11

“And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

The crowd, now aware that their promised Messiah King has come in Jesus, break out in a song of praise. Not just any song, but a Psalm – Psalm 118. The verses quoted here in Mark are from Psalm 118:25-26: **“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord...”** “Hosanna” is from the Hebrew words, “hoshia na” for “save us, we pray!”

Why did the crowds sing this Psalm in particular? Psalm 118 is a very significant psalm – last psalm of what was known as the Egyptian Hallel (Pss 113-118) – the six psalms that the Jews used during the Passover feast as they remembered how the Lord had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Psalm 118 is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for his steadfast love in delivering Israel from their enemies, and a call to God to continue to save them. Verse 14 calls the Lord, **“my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”**

So why is the crowd singing this psalm as Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem on a donkey? As their promised Messiah and King, they realise that he has come to save them – that’s why

they cry out “Hosanna” (Save us). But their idea of salvation is very different from the salvation that Jesus has come to achieve.

Conclusion

The Jewish crowds cheering on Jesus on his entry into Jerusalem, had correctly connected the dots and realised that he was indeed God’s promised Messiah and their promised King in the line of David who had come to save them (v.10). Save them from what? Obvious in their eyes – Roman occupation. As God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, surely Jesus was their new Moses come to deliver them from Roman oppression?

How disappointed then were they soon to be when instead of leading an army against their oppressors and establishing a new Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem, the City of David – Jesus died a criminal’s death on the cross? What happened? Was Jesus an imposter? Were all those messianic prophecies about a new glorious, eternal, Davidic kingdom all lies? Had God failed them?

No – though many couldn’t perceive it, God’s plan was unfolding just as he had always planned – though not as many had expected. Jesus did not ride into Jerusalem in a great pageantry, bristling with messianic glory and power. No, he came meek and lowly, on a donkey. He did not come to crush Roman power by spearheading a revolution, but he came to crush the head of the serpent by dying on the cross for sins and rising to life on the third day – defeating Satan, undoing the curse and breaking sin’s power. He did not come to establish his kingdom on earth – he only gave us glimpses of that future glorious kingdom that he will one day usher in when he returns – not on a donkey, but upon the clouds of heaven in all his glory and splendour. Only then, will all earthly powers and kings and presidents be brought low and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!

Like the Jews of Jesus’ time, many of us long for a political Messiah, someone to save us from the tyranny and ineptitude of our government. We long for a this-worldly utopia free from crime, corruption and injustice. But the reality is – find ourselves in a sin-cursed world.

Like the Jews, we need to see that the point of the Messiah is not to effect regime change and set up a this-worldly kingdom, at least for now. The point of the Messiah is not to save us from political tyranny.

Instead Jesus came to do something much more fundamental than bring down a corrupt government. He came to take the penalty for our sin that we all deserved. Every single one of us has offended God by our own sin – living for ourselves instead of living for the glory of God. Self-centred lives, not even seeking for God. Result – none of us can claim to be righteous – all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) – enemies of God, separated from him, deserving of his wrath.

Because of this, because of God's great love for us, Jesus paid the price that was meant for us. 1 Peter 3:18 says, **"For Christ (Messiah) also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."**

Brothers, sisters, friends, repent and receive and put your hope in this Messiah – not in some political saviour, but Jesus, your humble Saviour who truly saves. He saves you now as you trust in him – declaring you not guilty before God, forgiving your sins and counting his righteousness to you. He is busy saving you – by conforming you to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he will save you completely on the Day when he returns – raising you to eternal life in his glorious, everlasting kingdom, where he will be our God and we will be his people.