

The Triumphal Entry: What Sort of King Are We Welcoming?

Thesis: We are a people who welcome the Lord and prepare the way for our coming King. We receive the Lord Jesus Christ on his terms, and not on our own. We pray that Christ will be what he was on Palm Sunday: the focus of attention for whole cities in days of great spiritual awakening. May the risen Jesus himself be recognized and received throughout entire communities in our day.

Text: Matthew 20:17-34; 21:1-10

Today is known in Christian church history as Palm Sunday. It is a celebration of the **Triumphal Entry of Jesus** into Jerusalem which begins his week of passion. The Gospels record the events during the last week of the ministry of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection.

The Triumphal Entry is depicted in the gospels as the arrival of the kingdom and the king to the Jews' most significant royal and religious location: Jerusalem. Jesus comes as the prophesied king of Zechariah 9:9, and it stirs up expectations about the future of the Jews, the land of Israel, and the reestablishment of David's kingdom.

The Jews of Jesus' day had expectations of what it meant for God to send his Messiah. They expected that the Messiah would come and take over, defeat the Roman empire, and vindicate and establish the nation of Israel as the supreme kingdom of the earth.

But the Gospels ask us to ponder a question: What sort of king are we welcoming?

And, there are other questions to ponder: What is the nature of his kingdom? What will his rule and his kingdom look like?

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, Matthew tells us that "the whole city was stirred." And then they asked: "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:10). The Holy Spirit prompted Matthew to ask the city back then, and the Spirit asks us to consider this question today: "Who is this?"

Let's read the story of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus beginning from Matthew 20:17-34, where we get a context that is important for the story recorded in Matthew 21:1-11.

What sort of king was the crowd welcoming?

1. **They welcomed the Son of David.**
 - a. What sort of king were they expecting?
 - b. They expected God to send a Messiah in the lineage of David who would rescue them and restore the nation of Israel to its prophetic glory.
 - c. Their expected Messiah would declare war on the evil Roman empire.
 - d. They believed that Messiah would vindicate them and defeat their enemies.
 - e. Jesus is the Son of David, but he didn't come like they expected of him.
2. **They welcomed the one who comes in the name of Lord.**
 - a. Jews had been waiting and praying for a king like David to arrive and save them from oppression.
 - b. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" is a reference to Psalm 118:26. The coming one is worthy of our honor or praise.
 - c. Those who knew their Bibles might have remembered that when one of Israel's famous kings of old was proclaimed king in defiance of the existing one, his followers spread their cloaks under his feet as a sign of loyalty (2 Kings 9:13). **They were determined to make a statement about what they thought was going on.** (NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 66–67.)
 - d. They welcomed a royal king like Judas Maccabees. He had arrived in Jerusalem 200 years before after conquering the pagan armies that had oppressed Israel. Judas Maccabees was welcomed into the city by a crowd waving palm branches (2 Maccabees 10:7). And, he was the first of a royal dynasty that lasted for over a hundred years. (NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 67.)
 - e. Yes, Jesus comes in the name of the Lord God. Yes, he comes to save.
 - i. But he doesn't come just to save us from earthly foes.
 - ii. Jesus comes to deliver us from evil, to right what was wrong in the three falls recorded in Genesis Chapters 3, 6, and 11, and to make us a part of God's forever family.
 1. Genesis 3: the fall of humanity.
 2. Genesis 6: the fall of the sons of God.
 3. Genesis 11: the Tower of Babel and the impact on the nations.
3. **They welcomed Jesus with praise.**
 - a. "Hosanna" originally meant God "save us" but by the first century was probably just a cry of praise to Yahweh. (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 313.)
 - b. But who were they welcoming with praise?

- i. According to Matthew 21:11, in answer to the question, “Who is this?”, the crowd understood Jesus to be a prophet.
 - ii. Again, what sort of king were they welcoming?
 - iii. Yes. Jesus is a prophet. Indeed, Jesus is “the prophet.” And, he is so much more.
 - iv. Scripture goes on to tell us that he is the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36).
 1. Lord: king; ruler of heaven and earth and the cosmos.
 2. Jesus: savior; our God saves.
 3. Christ: Messiah; the appointed, anointed one of God.
4. **What sort of king was the crowd welcoming?**
- a. **They declared: “Jesus is going to be the sort of king we want.”**

What sort of king were the disciples welcoming, expecting, and following?

1. **Even though Jesus told them over and over again what sort of king he was, they believed what everyone else believed.**
 - a. **Jesus told them that he was going to Jerusalem where he would be condemned to die, mocked, flogged, and crucified. And, where he would be raised to life on the third day.**
 - i. *Matthew 20:17 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 18 “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”*
 - b. **The disciples heard his words, yet what Jesus said was drowned out by what they had been taught in their culture about Messiah.**
 - i. Listen to what happened to Peter earlier in Matthew 16.
 1. *Matthew 16:21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:21-23).*

2. Peter got it right by God's revelation in Matthew 16:16. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
 3. But his understanding of what Messiah meant was not what Jesus meant.
- ii. Listen to what happened to the disciples just prior to the Triumphal Entry.
 1. *Matthew 20:20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21 "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."*
 2. Unlearning is hard.
 3. Changing our mental models is challenging.
 4. Giving up our expectations is difficult.
- c. **The disciples failed to understand that Jesus came to show us what true leadership is all about.**
- i. *Matthew 20:24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*
 - ii. Jesus didn't come to lord over people.
 - iii. Jesus didn't come as a tyrant or dictator.
 - iv. Jesus came to show us servant leadership.
 - v. Jesus came to show us that greatness is not defined by the world's definition but by laying down our lives for others.
- d. **Jesus came to bring wholeness to the least, the last, the lost, and the lonely.**
- i. *Matthew 20:29 As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. 30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 33 "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." 34*

*Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.
Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*

- ii. The crowd was anxious (controlling and conflicting) and was led by their own agenda and priorities.
 - iii. Jesus was led by compassion and paid attention to what God was doing in his spheres of influence.
2. **What sort of king were the disciples welcoming, expecting, and following?**
- a. **They believed: "Jesus is going to be the sort of king we expect."**

What about today? What sort of king are we welcoming into our lives, our cities, and our nation?

1. Listen to the comments of one scholar.
 - a. People turn to God, notoriously, when there is something they want very badly. Of course, that's like finally deciding to learn to use a phone only when you urgently need to call an ambulance; it would have been sensible to find out how to do it earlier, when it wasn't so important. But that's how people are. Church attendance goes up in leaps and bounds when a major crisis strikes—a war, [a pandemic, a destructive storm,] or an earthquake. Suddenly everyone wants to ask the big, hard questions. Suddenly everyone wants Jesus, in terms of this story, to ride into the city and become the sort of king they want him to be. Give us peace, now! Pay my bills, and hurry! Save the life of my sick child, and do it right away! Give me a job by this time tomorrow! And—perhaps the most common prayer of all—Help!
 - b. Jesus intends to answer these and all other prayers. He doesn't wait for our motives to be pure, or for us to have sorted out our lives to the point where we can look him in the face, eye to eye as it were, and do business with him.... He has come to seek and rescue the lost. It isn't the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick.
 - c. **However, at the same time he must answer in his own way.** The people wanted a prophet, but this prophet would tell them that their city was under God's imminent judgment (chapter 24). They wanted a Messiah, but this one was going to be enthroned on a pagan cross. They wanted to be rescued from evil and oppression, but Jesus was going to rescue them from evil in its full depths, not just the surface evil of Roman occupation and the exploitation by the rich. Precisely because Jesus says 'yes' to their desires at the deepest level, he will have to say 'no' or 'wait' to the desires they are conscious of, and expressed.
 - d. That's the funny thing with prayer. Once you invite Jesus to help, he will do so more thoroughly than you imagined, more deeply than perhaps

you wanted. If you invite an accountant to help you with your income tax return, you mustn't be surprised if she goes through all your other financial affairs as well, to make sure she's got everything right.

- e. The story of Jesus' grand, though surprising, entry into Jerusalem, then, is an object lesson in the mismatch between our expectations and God's answer (compare 16:23, where Jesus says something like this to Peter). The bad news is that the crowds are going to be disappointed. But the good news is that their disappointment, though cruel, is at the surface level. Deep down, Jesus' arrival at the great city is indeed the moment when salvation is dawning. The 'Hosannas' were justified, though not for the reasons they had supposed. To learn this lesson is to take a large step towards wisdom and humility, and towards genuine Christian faith.
 - f. NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 66–69.
2. **What about today? What sort of king are we welcoming into our lives, our cities, and our nation?**
- a. Do we want a king who only comes to make our life better?
 - b. Do we want a king who takes our side and helps us win?
 - c. Do we want a king who makes us great again and restores us back to the way things used to be?
 - d. Do we want a king who acts like a tyrant or dictator?
 - e. Do we want a king who only wants a relationship with us when we need him?
 - f. Or, will we surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ according to his terms and according to the revelation of God the Father and the Holy Spirit?
 - i. Unlearning is hard.
 - ii. Changing our mental models is challenging.
 - iii. Giving up our expectations is difficult.
 - iv. **But, with God helping us, we can change, learn, and grow into the people who follow Jesus for who he is, not according to what we want.**

Summary:

We are a people who welcome the Lord and prepare the way for our coming King. We receive the Lord Jesus Christ on his terms, and not on our own. We pray that Christ will be what he was on Palm Sunday: the focus of attention for whole cities in days of great spiritual awakening. May the risen Jesus himself be recognized and received throughout entire communities in our day.