

September 25, 2011

The Heavenly King in the Earthly City

Mark 11:1-11

INTRODUCTION

Historical events are tricky things. One of the most simple-minded things that history teachers do in school and which students fall for is to describe and define an event solely through the lens of one of its actors—usually (in our day) through the cynical lens of the guys who had the worst intentions. So if you ask a typical history teacher, “Why did Columbus sail the ocean?” or “Why did the Church oppose the theories of Copernicus and Galileo?” or “Why did they fight the Civil War?” you are liable to get some pretty one-dimensional answers. And that one dimension will usually divide up the teams very neatly and conveniently in way where ultimate truth is reduced to some romantic definition of progress and where ultimate action is reduced to what we all “obviously” would have done if we were there. But such a view of history is as shallow as the person who falls for it. And if this one-dimensional view won’t do for history in general, much less will it do for history’s most defining event.

- THE INTENTIONALITY OF THE GENUINE KING
- THE INTENTIONALITY OF THE PHONY CITIZENS

The Big Idea is that the Servant King will receive everlasting glory *in spite of* and *through* the fading applause of man.

DOCTRINE

I. THE INTENTIONALITY OF THE GENUINE KING

A) Making a Dramatic Entrance {1-7}

1. *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives (1a)*—In the fast-paced style of Mark’s Gospel, he does not include as much as the other Gospels of what occurs on this week. It may be helpful to point out that these two villages are mentioned: **Bethany**, which was two miles outside of Jerusalem, mentioned because it would be the lodging place of Jesus and the disciples for the week, at the home of Lazarus’ family [cf. Jn. 12:1]; **Bethpage**, which was insignificant by comparison, may have been mentioned for being the village where the donkey was found. As to the **Mount of Olives**, it is important as the last open classroom of the Teacher before the cross. Besides this teaching that would become known as the “Olivet Discourse,” the only other instruction is private to the disciples in the Upper Room and the bitter confrontations with the elders of the city.

2. *Jesus sent two of his disciples 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 (1b-2).* The intentionality of Jesus: He knows who He is and He knows from miles away where a donkey is tied to a post. But this fulfills the prophecy,

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 [Zech. 9:9-10]

If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it (3-4). Why are you doing this? That is a good question for us too. What is the significance of this? There are two answers. The first is **prophetic**. It fulfills the prophecies about the King. But the second is **theological**. It tells us what kind of a King this is. In a much older prophecy, from way back when Jacob blessed his sons, Judah is told of the King that would come from his line that, “Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes” [Gen. 49:10]. Jesus is called the vine in John 15 and here He is called a “choice vine” that binds himself in lowliness to this donkey. The prophecy draws the connection between this lowly status and the washing of the “blood of grapes” that are now attached to the vine. It is an unusual mixing of metaphors, but the

sum of it is that the Servant King comes to his power through humility, and purifying his people by his own blood.

3. There were the unsuspecting villagers just as Jesus had said, and they asked just what Jesus said they would: *And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go (5-6).* No further questions asked. Commentators think of this as some "prearranged password"—The Lord needs it! Outsiders didn't untie valuable property in a small village without a fight. Whether *kurios* here means YHWH or Jesus, clearly God had impressed upon these people (whether through a trance on the spot, or a prior revelation) that He would be borrowing their property that He was loaning out to them anyway! At any rate, they make it out without a glitch. *And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it (7).* The word **they** is still the same subject—the two disciples—so it was their cloaks that were thrown down as this makeshift saddle. Everything we see in preparation and everything of the people's response, all the way to the gates of the city, preordained in its every detail by God, including the Word made flesh. Now let's skip ahead to tie together this thread of the King's intentionality.

B) Making a Decisive Statement {11}

1. *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 (11).* After reading about how much commotion his entrance stirred and who He was and what He was doing in this city at this moment, the passage ends somewhat anticlimactically. But notice a few things: *First*, the King makes a bee-line for the center of his city, **the temple**. We separate the life of the city (*polis*) from the life of religion. And then we add to this madness by separating them both—religion and politics—from the rest of our polite society. The true King does share our insane opinion. *Second*, He **looked around at everything**, perhaps assessing the damage done by all of the imposters who defiled it day and night by their false religion. Whatever was on Jesus' mind as He looked up at the ceiling, down at the floors, and all around, it is a vivid picture that Mark paints: as if pausing in the story, remembering the exact sounds of their boots on the stone floors in the hollow absence of the crowds. *Third*, He went back **to Bethany with the twelve**, alerting the reader that more very important private teaching will accompany this all important final event. In all of this Mark sets us up, with a picturesque

introduction, to better understand the rest of his Gospel which spans six chapters on the Passion Week.

II. THE INTENTIONALITY OF THE PHONY CITIZENS

Two clues are given that these crowds are not yet true followers of Jesus. The first is a bit hazier, but consistent nevertheless. At the end of Chapter 10, the “great crowds” were still kept distinct from the twelve disciples as was Mark’s practice since the early going. But second, the crowds make up the same people as the crowds at the end of the week who demanded Jesus’ blood. Matthew’s account tells us that “when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee’” [21:10-11]. In other words, if you only read Mark and you get to the end of the evening in verse 11, you may get the impression that this entry was all very uneventful. In fact the crowds that came in were very likely intoxicated by the even bigger crowds that they ran into within the city, becoming rabid with the political possibilities.

A) Carnal Crowds Can Pay Due Honor {8}

1. *And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields (8).* Just as the two disciples were not above getting their cloaks smelly from a donkey, so the rest of these followers were not above getting their cloaks muddy on the ground. Leafy branches (*sitbatas*) are not the same things as “palms” here. That word comes from John’s Gospel [cf. 12:13], which just means that Mark didn’t see the significance of differentiating one specific plant from another.

B) Carnal Crowds Can Get Theology Right {9-10}

1. There was a deep expectation for God to be their Savior and for God to make the throne of Israel secure. We can see both in their shouts that, again, bring together the political and the religious in the character of Jewish religion. First, there is the explicitly religious: *And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (9)* What does this shout of praise mean? The language comes from Psalm 118:25-26.

Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The word **Hosanna** (*hosi a-na*) is a Hebrew word that means “save us!” or even “save us now!” Said that way, it sounds desperate, which of course makes it more accurate. Salvation is by definition a desperate thing because it assumes an imminent danger. Now if we combine the understanding of the Messiah as a conquering earthly monarch with the language of the Psalm, which seems to describe a king either going to war or returning in triumph, it is easy to understand how such a crowd can be ill motivated. The remainder of the prophecy in Zechariah tells us what they were expecting. The promised restoration formed only one category for the people and that was a restoration of the physical kingdom under one monarchy, namely, of the house of David and in the glory of Solomon.

2. And that leads to their second doctrinally accurate cry: *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!* (10) Of course the people were supposed to look forward to this as an ultimate blessing. God had promised it as an everlasting covenant. He said to David,

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever [2 Sam. 7:12-13].

Was this the coming of this kingdom of David? Absolutely! They understood much more than we often give the credit for and we often miss more than we give ourselves credit for! However, as the King would later have to begin unpacking to his subjects, “Was it not **necessary** that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” [Lk. 24:26] He came to the city that rightfully belonged to Him in order to reign through a lowly, undignified, shameful, excruciating death and rising again. It was necessary that the King should come to power *in this way*. The trouble with the crowds was not that there were not really genuine believers in them—there may have been many—nor that they did not speak accurately in these shouts of acclamation. The trouble with these crowds was that, as the time drew near and the earthly city loomed large, all their right doctrine went out the window of their hearts; and they still clung to the world’s way of power and timing and efficiency and favor. But the glory of this King is that his glory, shining through these crowds, is not dependent upon the effort or intent of these crowds. He would be honored by them and so there are many today who gather in crowds and who we can’t divide up like a pie chart into genuine and not genuine,

and in whom Christ will be honored by, one way or another. So don't be so quick to carve up the crowd, but rather make the big idea God's glory.

APPLICATION

To the Saint – Consider the otherworldly acceptance of this public honor, knowing full well it would be turned to public scorn by the end of the week. What do I mean by this 'otherworldly' perspective? First of all, even in the things Jesus uses before the shame and mockery come, they are meager. Do you realize what He must have looked like on a donkey, with, initially, only a small band of people in the procession, throwing their poor clothes and a handful of branches down as the red carpet? This isn't "the best He could do." He's God! And do you honestly think *this* (as you look around) is the best He can do today? But this *is* what He's doing! Take a closer look into history and what you will see is that it always pleases God to do great things will little means. It would seem that God is very much against building his kingdom on the applause of man.

To the Sinner – Jesus came home and took a look around in the temple; and He says nothing and does nothing, but to survey the place. Some of you are so worried about people seeing inside your home. There are particular times of the day and there are particular visitors that you wouldn't want to go together at your front door. The Bible calls our individual souls the temple of God. But some of us are much more concerned that our neighbors will see into the inside of our home than that the Lord should come and look around in the inside of the temple of our hearts. But He does anyway. And do you know what He sees? If you are a believer in Christ He sees everything that his Son is about to do in the rest of this Gospel, not your mess. He sees his own reflection and is infinitely pleased and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" all covering you and your shame and your fear of man. As far as your old temple He says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" [Jn. 2:19]. Your Servant King came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" [Rom. 8:3]—in the form of your old temple, taking on himself all the mess within it—and had the wrath of God visited upon Him instead of you. If God has done this for you, what can man do to you?