

11:1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus [1] sent two of his disciples 2 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. 9 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. ESV.

What a scene! Vast crowds of people rejoicing in the presence of Jesus. Isn't this true religion? Isn't this what it's about? When we see or hear about such scenes of religious enthusiasm on a grand scale don't we feel embarrassed by our own simple small gatherings? This is what the church must have, isn't it? Is it? Is this scene as given to us in all four gospels a description of the blessing of God, or not?

The last six chapters of Mark's gospel describe the final week in the life of Jesus. These seven days are so important that a third of this gospel is devoted to them. Why?

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem actually began nine months earlier, and Jesus and the Twelve have passed through 35 locations on the road to the city of the great King. They have travelled through Galilee, Samaria, Perea and Judea, stopping, preaching, healing, and then moving on. Soon they will be at the gates of Jerusalem. But something changes. Messianic secrecy is replaced. From this time on Jesus makes his identity as God's anointed King clear.

On this occasion Jesus did not slip into Jerusalem unnoticed as he had over the years. For much of his ministry Jesus has been telling his disciples not to disclose to the world that he is the Son of God. Even demons are silenced who cry out, "We know who you

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are!" If a leper is healed Christ says, "See that you don't tell this to anyone" (Mk.
1:44). If a little girl is raised from the dead we are told, "He gave them strict orders not
to let anyone know about this" (Mk. 5:43). When Peter on behalf of the apostles says,
"You are the Christ," then we read that "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about
him" (Mk. 8:30). The reasons for this were that there was considerable
misunderstanding as to the nature of the Messiah; the crowds thought of that figure as
a political revolutionary. Jesus needed to maintain a more low-key presence for the first
year or two of his ministry as a rabbi and as a physician while steadily pastoring and
training the Twelve. He couldn't have done that if he were constantly having to hide
from the multitudes. If Rome suspected that he was a revolutionary who claimed to be
the Messiah they'd have taken and arrested him. If Jesus had immediately thrown down
the gauntlet to the chief priests by teaching that he was the promised Messiah then he
wouldn't have survived the two or three years of ministry he had to have. So our Lord
taught the crowds in the form of parables which stuck in their minds, but whose
meaning was not clear until after Pentecost.

All that secrecy now ends. He must now manifest himself as the Messiah, the Son of
the living God. He has nothing to lose by keeping that reality hidden any longer, and
everything to gain. We now are told how He reveals himself. Of the thousand days of
the public ministry of our Lord there are 900 of which we know nothing at all. What
happened in them was not important enough for us to know. He once said, "I would
have told you," but of those many days he has chosen to tell us nothing but we have
all that is necessary for His glory to be grasped by his people.

For example, Jesus has just healed Bartimaeus in Jericho with crowds of people looking
on, and then he permits Bartimaeus to join them as they walk to Jerusalem. How
different from his response to Legion during the early weeks of his ministry when he
cast many demons out of him. Legion, the transformed man, begged to go with Jesus
but the Savior refused his request. "Go home to your family," he tells him (Mk. 5:19).

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But here the sighted Bartimaeus "followed Jesus along the road;" that is how chapter ten ends. Here is a walking miracle, walking with the others behind Jesus.

Then Jesus has made it plain his destination is Jerusalem, to the city at its most crowded at the annual celebration of the Passover feast, and no knowledge of the sufferings before him is going to keep him away; "We are going up to Jerusalem" (Mk. 10:33) he says, and so he has been on the road that leads to Jerusalem for days. There was normally a feeling of excitement at this time of the year, when crowds from the villages and farms of the nation walked to the city for the festival. Thousands of people, Jews and Gentiles, attended - they were under divine obligation to attend. They were coming to the place where the living God had chosen to put his name and manifest his presence; the place where, through the prescribed daily sacrifices, Jehovah assured his people of their forgiveness, of fellowship with himself, of hope for their future. They were coming there to celebrate one of the great events of the past, their forefathers' deliverance from bondage; redemption by the bloodshed of a substitute; the gift of freedom to live in their own land. All this was accompanied by the eating of the Passover meal, the lamb and the bitter herbs. They longed that there would be special blessing that year in Jerusalem, that God's sovereign and saving presence would be revealed in quite a new way. So as they journeyed up the hills there would be anticipation, celebration, prayer and psalm singing ascending through the Judean wilderness as they came nearer and nearer to Jerusalem. Jesus very publicly identifies himself with them by his own journey to the city to worship. This heightened the atmosphere. Friction between himself and the priests and Pharisees were well known. Rumors spread; they always do. Would Jesus dare to appear at the feast? Would he be intimidated?

But consider something else in this way our Lord makes public his person and work, see the route our Lord takes to Jerusalem. It is by a detour via Bethphage and Bethany (v.1) where he spends the Sabbath.

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He goes to the little town of Bethany, usually so quiet and peaceful, but with his presence there it became a tumult. What was significant about this village? It was in Bethany that the Lord had raised Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus from the dead, going to the graveyard where Lazarus had been entombed for three days after he'd breathed his last. There, in a quite spectacular way, Jesus raised him from death. That resurrection was not at all like the raising of Jairus' daughter, where all the bystanders were ushered out of the room, refused a sight of what our Lord did. In Bethany the resurrection was done before a crowd of people, and the result was his; "Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him" (Jn. 11:45). Jesus returns to Bethany. He could have stayed in a cottage in the country on the edges of the wilderness, or a lonely village such as one called Ephraim where he had gone on an earlier occasion to be apart from the crowd (Jn. 11:54). Christ rather goes to the place where one of his mightiest miracles was done and there he spends the Sabbath.

John tells us of the rumors filling the land, "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, 'What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?'" (Jn. 11:55&56). Jesus made no attempt to keep his whereabouts secret; he wanted people to know that he was in Bethany where he had shown his power over death itself. When that piece of news spread it created a furor. "Jesus is coming to Jerusalem from Bethany!"

Then, consider the next unusual step; once again Jesus deliberately arouses people's curiosity and draws their attention to his actions, but in what a strange way. We are told,

"Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord

There was a small settlement not far from Bethany. As two chosen disciples entered they would see a colt of a donkey tethered outside a home. They must bring that colt back to Bethany to Jesus. So old Jacob's prophecy about Judah was fulfilled:

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:10&11).

It had all been prophesied. Everything is ordered and purposed by Christ alone. There is countdown perfection about all that happened. The timing of everything is planned so that he will enter the city on the first day of the week and be crucified on the Friday when the Passover lambs were being slain.

Isn't the sending of the men to get a colt in a nearby village puzzling? No. It cannot be a Bethany donkey. We don't know why. Again, Jesus himself was quite capable of going to that community and asking the owners for the use of this animal. No. His disciples must fetch it. They are asked to do something which is bound to arouse curiosity. It is almost daylight robbery to take the colt from its owner, not asking permission first; "If anyone asks you . . ." (v.3). If? Otherwise, it seems was to be taken without explanation. Well, their activities are spotted; members of the neighborhood watch notice what the two men are up to and go across to them, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" (v.5). There was some excitement on the street; people came out of their houses to see what was going on. There was some discussion and fascination with all this. They answered the neighbors as Jesus had told them, and the people seemed totally satisfied with the reply. Did some follow the men back to Bethany to Jesus? We don't know.

Of course what is described in that incident is a miracle; nothing short of it. Here is knowledge of the future in the most detailed way, where the colt is tied, and what the owner or his friends will say, donkeys, conversations and responses are all drawn into the providence of God. The Holy Spirit is at work here. This is not coincidence, nor is it accidental. God himself is active in this event. God directs everything so that the colt is in the specified place, the predicted discussion actually takes place, in short, everything

There were good reasons why Jesus acted as he did in obtaining this mount for his entry into Jerusalem as he did. Jesus explains that this animal is special in that no one had ever sat on it before that day (v.2). An unbroken beast of burden was regarded as sacred, and so that made it appropriate for a king; no one else should ride the steed of the king. Here, again, our Lord's power over an untamed animal, to sit on its back and ride the few miles to Jerusalem, showed his kingly authority over everything in creation. Again, the commandeering of a beast of burden was the prerogative of the nation's king. The Lord Christ showed that he had the right of confiscation. The prophet Samuel once made the declaration that the newly anointed King Saul had such authority in Israel; to raise an army to defend the land; to receive taxes in money and in kind to provide for him; kings should not beg or moonlight in order to survive. Now that the greatest of all kings has come to the land, the Lord Jesus himself, the last and eternal King, he immediately makes use of this prerogative and takes a steed - before the people attempt to dethrone him. Later he will commandeer a room to hold the Passover with his disciples. So in this incident there was a manifestation of Jesus' kingly power, but there was more.

Come back with me to the beginning of the Lord's earthly ministry. Jesus returns from his baptism to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. He goes to Nazareth where he has lived for thirty years and on the Sabbath day he goes to the synagogue and he reads Isaiah 61 to them - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . ." Then he tells them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears." "But this is Joseph's son," some of them murmur, and he tells them, "no prophet is accepted in his home town," but the problem of his rejection is far more profound. The men of Nazareth are part of a nation which itself disdains its Lord. He has come unto his own and his own have received him not. It had often been thus: and so in his sermon in the synagogue Jesus tells the people of Nazareth that Elijah was not sent to any widows of rebellious Israel in that time of

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famine but to help a Gentile widow from Sidon. There were many lepers in the land at the time of Elisha, but the only leper cleansed was a Syrian, the Gentile Naaman.

The people of Nazareth heard from the local boy's lips of the sovereignty of God; his readiness to pass by a nation which rejected him, but his willingness to turn in his mercy to believing Gentile dogs. There was nothing automatically saving in being a Jew. They needed to cry mightily to the Lord for salvation and not to think that they were safe pleading, "We have Abraham as our father." Jesus' preaching was a message of love, and mercy to the repentant and to those whose hopes lay in Jehovah's grace. He knew these people intimately and desired their salvation, but Jesus' congregation was outraged at his preaching. They gathered around him and drove him out of the synagogue and onwards in front of them, pushing, prodding, right out of the village. Up a hill they drove him, on and on, until they came to a cliff top. They intended to throw Jesus off the top and dash his body on the rocks beneath, but in the twinkling of an eye he walked right through the crowd and was on his way. He disappeared from their midst and left them frustrated.

My question is this; why did Jesus permit them to go to such lengths before he made his escape? Why didn't he slip out of the synagogue before they got out of their seats? If he had the power to escape from the brutality and bloodlust of the mob at the edge of the precipice why didn't he exercise that power immediately? Why did he first permit those in Nazareth to be overwhelmed with fury, almost murdering him, and only then disappearing from among them? Why did he keep the miracle back all that time? The answer to that question will also answer the question about Christ stirring up people's curiosity about his entering Jerusalem. Here, in our text, Jesus is doing the same thing again! He is purposely and deliberately stirring up the masses. A few years earlier he had lured the people from their homes in Nazareth to hear him preach to them in the synagogue. It had been his inauguration as he began his public ministry in

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the land. On that occasion he had indelibly engraved his word on their minds and consciences. The power of the Spirit was there in that gathering and he convicted them of sin and righteousness and judgment. They could not but remember his words ever after, so that they would tell it soberly to their children and their children's children - the day Jesus preached to them in their synagogue and what he'd said. He'd told them nothing but the truth. One Gentile widow helped, and one Gentile leper helped by Jehovah's prophets while the chosen people were all passed by. How significant that would be in the year 70 A.D. and the years that would follow the destruction of Jerusalem. As Jesus preached to them in Nazareth synagogue their human natures had rebelled against his arrogant words so much so that the effect of his sermon was to stir up a lust for his blood; they'd wanted to kill the Preacher. Everything that happened that day in Nazareth was designed to exalt the truth of God and make these people feel its power and to remember.

Two or three years later in Bethany we are not presented with the Christ in his office as God's anointed prophet, but the Christ who is also God's anointed King. This day he is going to enter Jerusalem, his own city. He wants as many people as possible to gather there. There are no billboards, and no town criers. In Nazareth he went where all the town gathered on the Sabbath to hear him and he officially began his ministry encountering Israel in its unbelief. Now again he assembles the multitudes, announcing for days in advance that he was going to Jerusalem, that he would be keeping the feast of the Passover there, that he would be riding into the city on a colt on which no man had sat, which animal was not his, nor even belonging to one of his apostles, but which he had commandeered for the occasion. He would be coming from Bethany there, from the place where he had raised Lazarus from the dead. The King is coming to his own city. He excites the masses through all these things and it made the populace buzz; "Have you heard? Have you been told about his latest miracle in Jericho? Do you know what Jesus has done now?" Christ did all this that the world might never forget these last seven days, his claim to be the Lord of the universe and to be your King, and the climax of his work as our great High Priest.

In Nazareth he had lived a blameless life for thirty years; he had grown in favor with his neighbors; they spoke well of him. But when he preached the whole counsel of God publicly to them for the first time all their sweet words of praise turned to wrath; they wanted to murder him. Here again, almost three years later, Jesus invites the masses to crowd around and choke the narrow roads to Jerusalem. They initially respond with Hosannas to the one who raised the dead and gave sight to the blind. That's easy! Crowds chanting with excitement? Mob enthusiasm and shouts? It is the stuff of dictators everywhere. Now let Jerusalem sinners bow down and acknowledge him as their own King Jesus; let them cry to God for a birth from above which will bring them into his kingdom. No, within a few days, when he refuses to become what their flesh wanted him to be, they will shout, "Away with him! Crucify him! We have no king by Caesar!"