THE KING COMES!

(Jesus, King of Unmet Expectations)

September 15, 2013

Mark 11:1-19

Key Verse 11:9b “‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

In today’s passage, Jesus enters Jerusalem as the King sent by God to fulfill his promise to Save. Many people were excited and shouted, “Hosanna!” But they did not understand that Jesus was a suffering Messiah. When Jesus did not meet their expectations, they cried out, “Crucify him” four days later. When God does not meet our expectations, we often change the station in search for a new hope, one that lives up to our expectations. A young man raised in a Baptist church wrote about his disappointment with God. He wrote: “The first time I questioned the faith was when my grandmother shriveled up in front of me for 6 months due to cancer. I was 13 and my mother and father were getting a divorce. My father told me I should have been aborted. I prayed to God but he did not answer my prayers.” He abandoned his faith. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, what do you see? Do you see the suffering Messiah, or do you get caught up in the excitement with a vague hope that Jesus will solve all your problems in an instant?

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was the final stage in fulfilling God’s promise to send a Savior of the world. Jesus enters Jerusalem as King of kings and Lord of lords, not to conquer Jerusalem politically but to fulfill God’s will for world salvation. God’s will for him was to die on the cross as a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world. Jesus prepares to make the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His triumphal entry was prophesied long ago. Zechariah 9:9 says, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Though Jesus was the King of kings who was marching into Zion, he did not have even a donkey, much less a horse or a mule, for he was not a political king but the spiritual King and he is the King of peace. When he entered Jerusalem, he had to borrow someone else’s donkey.

Look at verses 1b,2. “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.’” Jesus’ mission and command to these two disciples seems awkward and even shocking to the disciples’ ears. Without even asking the owner’s permission, they are to go and take a donkey colt from a person they do not know. How could Jesus ask his disciples to do such a thing? Since he is God, couldn’t he just make a donkey colt appear at his command? Of course he could. But Jesus is always teaching his disciples something. What does he want to teach us through this event? The key words in these verses are: “the Lord needs it.” These words show who Jesus is. Jesus is Lord of all things and all creatures on the world. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” The donkey colt tied at this person’s house was not owned by that person. It was not his, but the Lord’s. The donkey colt was created by Jesus for this very purpose in history. It was put there so that he would have it to ride into Jerusalem to fulfill the Scriptures. It was waiting for Jesus to use it. It was not an accident that it had been there. We call this the Lordship of Christ. This means that Jesus is the Lord of all things. Lord means the owner. Each one of us was created by God. The Lord Jesus owns our lives. This means that he wants to use our lives. He didn’t make us for nothing. He didn’t make us and then forget about us because there are over 6 billion people in the world. Sometimes we think that our lives are ours. We also like to think everything that we have is ours. One rock singer made a song titled, “This is my life.” Some of the lyrics he wrote are: “…This is my life. Go ahead with your own life, leave me alone.” But he could not be happy, even after he married a super-model. Later they divorced. So he could not control his own life. When we try to control our lives and hold onto our material possessions for ourselves, then we become very fearful and anxious. But when we humbly acknowledge that our live are just borrowed, and when we let the Lord Jesus Christ use our lives, then we can have the peace of God with us.

What did these two disciples do when Jesus gave them this command? Look at verses 4-6. “They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, ‘What are you doing, untying that colt?’ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.” The disciples went against their own reasoning and human logic. They decided to obey Jesus. Their faith was simple and so was their obedience. They didn’t calculate or question Jesus. What happened when they obeyed? When they simply obeyed, then they had no fear of people. They were very direct, “The Lord needs it”, they said, “and will send it back here shortly.” When they spoke these words of Jesus, they believed that God would move the people’s hearts to let them borrow the donkey. As a result, God led them every step of the way and gave them a success. Verse 6 says, “They answered as Jesus told them and the people let them go.” This means that when we have Jesus’ words in our hearts and do exactly what Jesus tells us, he will give us success. This is because God always blesses our obedience. We don’t have to make up our own words to witness. Just listen to Jesus’ words and speak his words because Jesus’ words always have power.

What happened when they brought the donkey colt to Jesus? Look at verses 7-8. “When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches that they had cut in the fields.” This scene and these verses from the prophet Zechariah, show us what kind of a king Jesus will be. First of all, Jesus is gentle and humble king. No king would ever ride into a capital city like this. He would usually ride in on a white charger horse with many chariots and soldiers. His coming would inflict fear into the hearts of the people of the conquered nation and deep respect in the heart of the host nation. No one could approach this kind of king.

But Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey’s colt. This scene might look kind of comical. We can imagine Jesus riding this colt and his feet almost dragging on the ground. However, his coming in this way is very open and easy for anyone to come to. Jesus is very gentle here. This is the good picture of Jesus. Perhaps all the children laughed when they saw Jesus approaching this way and ran up to him. He was easy to come to. There were no barriers here. There was no needed security here like armed guards or undercover officers or secret service police. No armed security guards were shouting, “Make way! Stand back!!” There were no police barricades or anything like that. Because Jesus comes this way, gentle and humble, we as sinners can approach him. We don’t have to fear. He is gentle and sympathetic towards us. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us about Jesus our Great High Priest. It says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are---yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and fine grace to help us in our time of need.”

Secondly, he brings salvation and righteousness to us. This is the nature of Jesus’ kingdom. Last week we saw how Jesus had mercy on a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Ordinary kings would ignore such a useless man. Such kings would not want these kind of people in their kingdom. But Jesus had mercy on blind beggar Bartimaeus. When he cried out for Jesus’ mercy, Jesus went to him and healed him. Then he allowed Bartimaeus to follow him. In Jesus kingdom, there will be former paralytics, tax collectors, prostitutes, robbers, and beggars. There will be all kinds of sinners who have received Jesus’ saving mercy. Many who were dirty and filthy because of their sins are made right with God because of Jesus. All their sins are forgiven forever. They will all eat and drink with Jesus at a big picnic table in the kingdom of God. There will be a great celebration. In this world, many people are rejected because they are different or because they seem useless and are helpless. But Jesus doesn’t reject anyone who comes to him. To those who welcome him, Jesus comes and gives them new life. He brings salvation and he brings righteousness to men.

This is why we call his last entry into Jerusalem the “triumphal entry.” Why is it the triumphal entry? How can anyone’s sufferings and death be triumphal? It is because it was God’s victory for men over sin and death and the devil. God had promised to send the Savior of the world. Our Lord Jesus, even though he was the Son of God, came to this world and was entering Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt to die on the cross in obedience to God’s will. Until that time, the world--both man and nature--was under Satan’s rule. Satan was like a slave-driver and man was like a slave under the constant whippings of a slave master. But Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was to conquer man’s enemy, Satan, through his death on the cross. Through his death on the cross, which was the revelation of God’s love, the enemy, Satan--the incarnation of hatred--was destroyed. This is the reason his entry into Jerusalem is called the “Triumphal Entry,” even though it looked like defeat because Jesus died there.

What was the people’s reaction to Jesus’ coming into Jerusalem? Look at verses 9-10. “Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!’”

Here “Hosanna” means “save.” When the people in Jesus day saw him riding into Jerusalem that day, they knew that something exciting was happening. They knew that Jesus was riding as the Messiah would, and they thought it meant they would be free from the Romans; they thought it meant that Jesus was going to be their King. So they got caught up in the excitement of the moment and celebrated, rejoiced at the picture which was forming in their mind’s eye. A picture of a king who would save them. A picture of a nation reborn. A picture of a people who would be free to be a mighty nation again. So they celebrated, they danced down the street, they shouted Hosannas!

And then just four days later, that same crowd shouted, “crucify him, crucify him.” They learned that the picture which was developing in their mind’s eye was not the picture that Jesus was painting for himself. The dreams of that Palm Sunday were soon turned into the stark realities of the betrayal, the trial and the crucifixion. The reality of the situation was Jesus was not the kind of hero they hoped he would be. Jesus was not the kind of king to lead an earthly army. Jesus would not deliver the Jews from the Romans. In a sense he shattered the dreams of the people that day. The crowds of Good Friday turned against Jesus for one reason because he didn’t fulfill the dreams they had of him the Sunday before. Jesus had them see the reality of who he was, not an earthly king, but a heavenly king. He was not a warrior who would come to destroy the Romans. But Jesus was a warrior who would come to destroy death. He shattered the dreams of the people. He gave them a taste of reality and for that the people turned against him. Jesus was painting a picture of a suffering Messiah. A Messiah who would suffer for the sins of all people. And the people shouted “crucify him” because they could not understand that he was to be the suffering Messiah. They shouted “crucify him” because Jesus did not fulfill their expectations. They shouted “crucify him” because Jesus had let them down. They shouted “crucify him” because they wanted a warrior king who would lead them into battle. Jesus was the lamb who was to be sacrificed! The people missed the point and they were angry. What about us? Do we get the point?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross....and that is the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us....Only a suffering God can help.” The suffering Messiah gives us the power of suffering love. It is a power that forgives my sin, my fear, my anger, my resentment, my prejudice! It is a power that loosens my grip on all of my expectations and even allows me to see Christ’s face in the unlovable and most lowly on earth! It is a power that invites me to join with him in his remaining suffering. It is a power that assures me I don’t need to be afraid of suffering because it is the only way I will find my purpose, and experience true joy and peace.

May God help us to see the suffering Messiah instead of getting caught in the excitement with a vague hope that he will solve all our problems in an instant. In this way, may we truly understand God’s love for sinners and participate in his suffering.