

## Talk on Triumphant Entry

**OT passage: Zechariah 9v9: -11a.** Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion. Shout for you people of Jerusalem. Look your king is coming to you. **He comes triumphant and victorious but humble and riding on a donkey** or a colt the foal of a donkey. The Lord says ' I will remove the war chariots from Israel and take the horses from Jerusalem; the bows used in battle will be destroyed. Your king will make peace among the nations he will rule from sea to sea from the river Euphrates to the ends of the earth. **Because of my covenant with you that was sealed by the blood of sacrifices, I will set your people free'**.

A donkey and an ass aren't quite the same thing. An ass is a smaller relative of the horse, with longer ears and a shorter mane. A donkey is a domesticated ass with the Western domesticated animals looking much different to the arab donkey which is more erect, the limbs well formed and muscular, and the gait graceful. [Show photo], The upper classes, the OT judges\* and kings, (as David and Solomon,) rode upon donkeys or mules (Judges 5:10; Judges 10:4; Judges 12:14; 1 Kings 1:33). The ass by its long hollow sharp-edged hoofs, is more sure footed than the flat hoofed horse; it suffers little from thirst, and is satisfied with prickly herbs, scarcely sweats at all, and so is best suited for the arid hilly regions of western Asia.

It is lowly as compared with the horse; **it symbolizes peace, as the horse does war.** An untamed colt (i.e. an ass not broken in yet) bearing Jesus quietly marks His universal dominion over nature as well as spirit. , The colt of an ass gives the image of humility and closeness to the people he has come to serve.

\*as Jair's 30 sons, and Abdon's 40 sons and 30 nephews

**Do OT Reading and first half of NT 'mixed text' passage together.**

OT discussion: -

Two of the minor prophets were buddies. Zechariah & Haggai, both worked at getting the temple rebuilt (dates). Zechariah's books has messages which warn the wicked of judgement, but also gives the God-fearing hope for the future. They point to a coming Messiah ,a new King who will save his people. This King will come in triumph and victory, but he will be humble and not proud, he won't come on a chariot or a fine horse, but on an ass, a young awkward one not yet broke in. He will be a peace-bringer not a warrior king. Through his new covenant (agreement) and blood sacrifice, he will set his people free. Not just the Jews but peoples from sea to the sea, to the ends of the earth.

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## THE TALK

NT passages:- Mt 21 1-11, Mk 11 v1-11, Lk 19v28-40, Jn 12v12-19.

Intro: Jesus took a donkey ride on Palm Sunday, which is referred to as the Triumphant entry. But have you ever stopped to ask – What was he entering? & Why was it triumphant? In 5 days time he would be dead.

### **Part 1 – Jesus gets a donkey to fulfil a prophecy by Zechariah.**

Jesus spoke Aramaic, a language linked to the OT Hebrew, but would have been familiar with both Greek and Latin, that would have been spoken on the trade routes through the district of Galilee. His was not a written ministry, we have no indication that he ever wrote down any of his lessons. His words and actions were his message. His words used his extensive knowledge of the Old Testament and related writings, much of which he had memorised. He well knew all the prophecies of the coming messiah, and knew when to claim or live

out these prophecies, as he moved his ministry towards fulfilling the most difficult of prophecies, those from Isaiah of the Suffering Servant, one that was predicted to be beaten, injured, badly disfigured and then die to bring forgiveness to others. I was musing on Zechariah's prophecy and asked myself which is foremost, the prophecy or what Jesus did. So would he have done it anyway if it has not been prophesied, or did he look to scriptures to see what he could claim as a sign to others. I think he pro-actively selected scriptures and prophecies, and took authority over them, claiming them to show others who he was.

*As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the Mount of Olives near Bethpage and Bethany.*

Jesus was in Judea – Southern Palestine. He had been keeping a low profile with his disciples at Ephraim on the edge of the desert. Six days before Passover Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus. Martha served dinner, his sister Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. See a map, and talk through where he was and where he was going. How far was the journey, perhaps too far to ride all the way on a young donkey, so its mother might also be needed?

*There Jesus sent two of the disciples on ahead with these instructions: "Go to the village there ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey and its colt, that has never been ridden. Untie them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything, tell him, 'The Master needs them and will send them back at once'; and then he will let them go."*

Today through prayer and listening to God, we can be convinced of something that we would not humanly know. It may be a truth about some-one that will help us to share Jesus with them. Jesus' strength was in his relationship with God, where he was frequently listening to his voice. Here he learns that the young donkey he needs is waiting tied up in the next village (Bethpage or Bethany?? Find out), and send his disciples off to get them. Why both? Isn't it a bit cruel to ride a baby donkey. A colt does not necessarily mean a small donkey but just one that has not yet been broken in yet. He is ungainly, and will kick and fuss when mounted. It is likely to reduce the dignity of any rider. It's an extreme which emphasises the point, Jesus has not come in the type of wealthy majesty that a dictator or proud king would display, but the colt of a donkey gives the image of humility and closeness to the people he has come to serve.

*This happened in order to make come true what the prophet had said: "Tell the city of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you! He is humble and rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." So the disciples went and did what Jesus had told them to do. They went and found a colt out in the street, tied to the door of a house. As they were untying the colt its owners asked them, "What are you doing, untying it?" They answered just as Jesus had told them, and the crowd let them go. They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the animal, and Jesus got on and rode it, just as the scripture says, "Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Here comes your king, riding on a young donkey." His disciples did not understand this at the time; but when Jesus had been raised to glory, they remembered that the scripture said this about him and that they had done this for him.*

So the disciples did as Jesus told them, found the donkey. They drew attention to a group of by-standers, who either contained the owners or who alerted them. The disciples told the owners the Master needed it, and the owners showed no objection. If a single donkey was a shared animal, more than one owner, then it signifies these were poor people, in contrast to the wealth of the temple leaders. There could have been a pre-arrangement with a password 'The Lord has need of it', yet it's unlikely they had been warned in advance. Perhaps God had spoken to them directly about it too, and Jesus knew that it would all go smoothly. He trusted God. Jesus has been painting a picture for 3 years about who he is and what the new Kingdom of God will look like. Here he puts in one of the last pieces of the jigsaw. There was still a few key pieces left, including the last supper, the cross shape piece and the resurrection and ascension pieces, but like any jigsaw, the last pieces come together very quickly.

Zechariah's prophecy saw the Messiah as the Prince of Peace, and had waited for a confirmation to the wider public that he was indeed the Messiah claiming his kingdom. This was sign that they were waiting for. The great miracle-maker, the Jewish Messiah, going into Jerusalem to establish God's Kingdom. The fact that he was declaring himself as Prince of Peace and had no interest in this nationalistic fervour was overlooked. The people wanted a Messiah, and here he was.

*The large crowd that had come to the Passover Festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. They went out to meet him. Some spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had happened. That was why the crowd met him—because they heard that he had performed this miracle.*

Jesus was back near Bethany where he had raised Lazarus and a big crowd was out of pilgrims keen to see both Lazarus and particularly the man who had raised him from death, the one many were calling the promised Messiah. Amongst the Pilgrims travelling down would have been Pharisees from the various towns and villages .

Bethany and Bethpage would have been mostly peasant farmers. about 3km from Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. Bethpage (Place of figs) – a village near Bethany on the Mount of Olives. So if you liked figs and olives, it was a good place to live!

Jesus has been travelling down the road from Jericho to enter the city of Jerusalem and was very close to the capital now. But what was there waiting for him. What sort of reception. You often hear the question that on Palm Sunday the crowd cheered him, , a few days later they had turned against him and were cheering for the release of a murderer named Barabbas instead of Jesus – crucify Jesus. Why did the crowd turn against Jesus so quickly. But a better question is who was for him and who was against him?

Whilst the crowd outside the city had a mixture of people, a lot of them would have been swayed not just by the talk of his miracles, but actually witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus, who had been dead for days. These are the rural peasant whose hope in a new Messiah has been raised up by this Jesus of Nazareth.

*God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God!" "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise be to God!" Peace in heaven and glory to God!"*

Singing and embellishing a line from Psalm 118v26 – "May God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord"

So Jesus is entering Jerusalem on a donkey to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy of the peace-bringing Messiah, but what was waiting for him in Jerusalem? We need to understand the makeup of those people.

### **What was he entering?**

When Herod the Great, King of Jews died just after Jesus was born, the Romans split his kingdom between his three sons, ones he hadn't killed. The Northern part went to Herod Antipas, the one John the Baptist challenged. Region NE of Palestine went to Antipas' brother Philip. The area of Judea including Jerusalem went to the third son Archelus, but after only ten years the Romans got fed up with the Jewish revolts in that area, kicked out Archelus, and replaced him with a ruler, from their upper Equestrian Rank, a role they called Procurator. In AD26, this role was given to Pontius Pilate who held the position himself for 10 years. So the Jewish King Herod Antipas and the Roman Procurator, Pontius ruled over the North and the South of

Palestine respectively. But who did the rule, what made up the population of those in the Jerusalem that Jesus was entering.

**Non-Palestinian Jews:** The Jews believed they had been specially chosen by God, and some day would rule the world led by God's promised deliverer who they called the Messiah. Under King David & Solomon they were a great world power but 1000 years later it would take something supernatural to release them from the iron grip of Rome. But not all Jews would fuss about driving out the Romans, many enjoyed the extra comfort of living in a Roman society (Aqueducts, Sanitation, Irrigation, Medication, Education, Roads, and the Roman Baths). No more than 1/5 of the Jews lived in Palestine, the rest were dispersed around the Roman Empire with more Jews in the Egyptian city of Alexandria than in Jerusalem. These dispersed Jews were amongst those that had flocked to Jerusalem for the Passover festival that week. Jewish, keeping some of the customs, but not prepared to exchange their Roman style lives for a poorer and harsher life in Palestine. The latest Rabbi claiming to be Messiah probably held little interest to them. Of the 20% of Jews that lived in Palestine, this was still a very mixed bag.

**Zealots:** . When Jesus was quizzed on taxes, taking a coin with Caesar's face on, he said give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God. For a zealot, committed to the overthrow of Rome, by all means including violence, would have seen that as a sell-out. Give to Caesar what is Caesar, give him taxes. Everything in Palestine belongs to the God of the Jews. They could have no master but God, and the Romans must be driven out at any cost, not paid taxes. One of their revolutionary leaders, Barabbas had been captured and accused of murdering a Roman.

**Sadducees:** A small influential group, made up of wealthy people and the important priests, all from noble families. Very conservative and disliked any change. They might believe in a theoretical Messiah, but would have nothing to do with political protests. They did not want to upset the Romans. They only used the first 5 books of the OT (the Law), and anything Jesus or anyone said about God's future purpose, life after death, etc was all an irrelevance to them. They constantly argued with the Pharisees.

**Pharisees:** A larger group, perhaps 6000 strong, a national organisation with local groups in the various Palestinian towns. They had their own set of extensive rules on how to interpret the OT laws. They needed practical applications. Keep the Sabbath day holy – Yes but how? You could not carry a needle, and if you went for a walk it must be no more than 2/3 of a mile, the distance between God's people and the Ark of the Covenant when they first entered the Promised Land of Canaan. Many kept these rules. Belong to a Pharisee group was more important than knowing God's will. They claimed to be keeping God's law but were mainly bringing attention to their own moral achievements. So when Jesus says he came to call sinners not the righteous, it was alien to their thinking. They believed a Messiah would come to right the wrongs of evil people, and believed in life after death. Though they never took part in a revolt against Rome, some probably secretly admired those people that did.

*Then some of the Pharisees in the crowd spoke to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "command your disciples to be quiet!" Jesus answered, "I tell you that if they keep quiet, the stones themselves will start shouting." The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!"*

There were some Pharisees, probably also travelling to Jerusalem, who did not want to see the crowd proclaiming him as Messiah. They could not appeal to the crowd who would take no notice, so told Jesus to stop them. In Jesus' response indicates that you can stop the rejoicing, in effect it's far more than just these folk celebrating, the whole of creation is about to benefit from what's happening. I think there might be a

jibe at them too, it could be a play on word from the minor prophet Habakkuk who in his prophecy of doom on greedy invaders, said even the stones of the walls cry out against you, which goes on to say that the 'earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lords glory as the seas are full of water'. The jibe puts the Pharisees amongst the greedy & condemned, and outside of the Lords glory.

**The Sanhedrin:** The Jewish council of 70. Made up of Pharisees and Saducees, were given extensive powers under the procurators for making religious and political decisions,, but they only had these powers in Jerusalem & the rest of Judea. Jesus when in Galilee was free from them. They could arrest and try people and punish them, but not for crimes warranting a death sentence except for if a Gentile walked into the inner court of the temple (thus defiling it –they could kill him), otherwise they needed the agreement of the procurator which they normally got. They controlled the **Temple Guards** which was the Temples own Police Force (made up of Levites) who amongst other things kept was to keep out the forbidden gentiles!

### **The Mix**

When Jesus leaves the cheering rural peasants from the Mount of Olives, and comes against the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Who will cheer for him there, when pitted against the popular Barabbas. Not the Zealots (Jesus would have us pay taxes to Caesar). Not the Pharisees who he called 'whitewashed tombs' for their hypocrisy and lambasted for the heavy burden they placed on their followers with all their crippling rules. Not the Saducees who saw the future kingdom of God an irrelevance and wanting to keep the peace. Not the non-Palestinians who on the whole were happy with their lot in Roman Society. Not the Non-jewish foreigners living there who cared little for such matters, and certainly not the Romans, who wanted to quell all sources of uprising. That's what he was entering in Jerusalem. These were not the people cheering on Palm Sunday, but these were the people in whose hands the fate of Jesus lay.

### **Why was it triumphant?**

Exodus 12v3 says that the Jews should choose an unblemished animal ready for sacrifice on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, then kill it on the 14<sup>th</sup> (Passover), 4 days before Passover they choose the sacrifice. 4 days before Passover is the day that Jesus rides into Jerusalem. As the people cheer and shout Hosanna and herald Jesus as Lord, ushering him into the city. They are selecting and preparing an unblemished Jesus ready for sacrifice. It was inevitable. Jesus knew what he was going into. It might be easy to enact a prophecy which says he rides on an ass, but the next prophecy he enacts will be that of the suffering servant - The Sanhedrin were hostile to Jesus and had already given an instruction that anyone who knew his whereabouts should inform them so that he could be arrested. They wanted both Jesus and Lazarus killed. Jesus and his disciples would be well aware of the dangers, but courageously rolled into Jerusalem anyway with the weight of public popularity affording him some protection for the short term. He knew what he was entering and he was ready for it. His mission was nearly completed and he went into the Vipers Nest of the Pharisees and Co, not with fear and hesitation, but in praise and triumph. Humble but bold. Just like Daniel was prepared for the Lion's den, just like Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego were prepared to be thrown in the fiery furnace. None knew for sure that God would deliver them, but went with boldness and humility to do what God required.

Three years earlier, Jesus had left the Jordan Valley east of Jerusalem and starting his roving preaching ministry back in Galilee. He had been to his home village of Nazareth and set out his ministry – The Spirit of the Lord was on him, and he was going to preach the good news to the spiritually poor, bring the spiritually blind out of darkness, and releasing captives by forgiving those that asked of him. Jesus had been laying down his teaching for three years, teaching that would shape the future world for the next 2000 years and

beyond. Our Western civilisation is based on Christian values. Our freedoms to choose our own partners, careers, travel and have a right to our own personal space and our own destiny, This comes out of Christian belief that we work with God in perfecting creation by being the architects of our own lives. The Christian value of human equality is the basis for all modern doctrines of human rights. We fight for such freedoms and equality, but they are Christian values, which particularly come out of Jesus' ministry. He had laid foundations to change the world forever. The interpretation of his teachings gave birth to our freedoms. Freedom to choose partners, careers, to travel, control own destiny, war rules, human equality (basis for all human rights). That all human life had dignity and value grows out of the tradition that each person is the precious creation of God. Those that followed his teaching MADE an incredible impact on the world we live in. For centuries the monasteries were the only institutes that collected, preserved and communicated knowledge. The first medical institutes, observatories and colleges were Christian founded. Deductive reasoning and experimentation came out of interrogating nature to understand God better. Many of the great scientists were strong Christians – names familiar to all Physics students Kepler, Pascal, Joule, Kelvin, Ampere, Boyle, Ohm, Faraday, Planck – some were even Priests. His teaching changed the world and is still changing it. Was he triumphant yes. Its nearly finished, but whilst his impact was universal what he was about to do was to be of immense personal significance. He was about to save me!

3 years of teaching and he is nearly there. Like a difficult 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle when after months of effort, you have the last few pieces left. Like spending years after winning the Olympic bid, you are not only a few days from the opening ceremony. You're not quite there, but everyone can sense the great event about to happen and is excited. He's nearly there. A few more days and he would be able to hang from the Cross and say it is finished.

The first clothes thrown on the back of the young donkey made a rough saddle for Jesus, but then others were thrown in front of the donkey, like a red carpet, those who sacrificed their clothes were doing it willingly. The expected Messiah was to come from Davids line. Jesus claimed Davids line through Joseph. The Jewish peasantry had been long waiting for a Messiah, and convinced by the raising of Lazarus, were cheering in Jesus at the one had was come to save them. They cheered long and loud into the temple itself. *God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God!" "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!"*

The Pharisees did not like the noise from the Jesus' followers shouting in the temple. Though they never complained at the din from the money changing stalls in the outer courts, possibly because some had their own businesses there. They also did not like Jesus accepting the praise. Keep them Quiet! But Jesus points out that this was impossible because even creation itself would cry out his praise. Jesus had not come not just to save people but also bring a wide restoration to the physical world itself. God so loved the 'world' that he gave his only son – but the word for 'world' is 'Cosmos' which means all of creation. God loves it all, and wants to restore it. The triumph of Jesus is not just for the those that love him, but for everyone and everything. The world is a better place when those that love God protect the planet for him, from pollution and deforestation, etc.

The crowds who cheered for Jesus, some from Bethany, who may have seen Lazarus' resurrection, did not know what was about to unfold, but I would like to think that they were followers of Jesus after his resurrection, helping to spread the Gospel message. Their sense of victory was justified, the Messiah, the Saviour did come and save them, not in the way they imagined, but his death and resurrection did bring in

the new Kingdom, giving them direct access to God's Spirit, and forgiveness for their sins without the need for animal sacrifices.

## **The meaning for us.**

The people were singing Salvation is here. It has arrived. Jesus has brought it.

It's still true today. The Saviour has come, he is with us. We too can lift our head high and walk and enter anywhere he leads us, no matter how dark that place may seem. He is with us. We enter it not on a foal of a donkey, but still with humility, because we know it is not in our own strength but by the grace of God we go. We enter with boldness, because he is with us, and his Spirit gives us that courage, peace and inner strength to cope.

Some of us, have done a lifetime of loving Jesus and serving him, and are now in our final days. Like Jesus most of your ministry is behind you, but perhaps the thought of your last days worry you. Don't flinch, don't give up, finish the race in boldness and humility (grateful for what God has done in your life and though you live). One last effort, seniors, then go and claim your prize. Night time here, its morning there.

Some of us, started the Christian journey well, but have either lost our way, or been taken down. Don't dwell on the failures, remember your successes. You are chosen by God. We need to get up, refocus, and move on. Like the marathon runner that hits the wall, falls over and lies on the track, but then slightly dazed, gets up and the crowd start to roar him on as he finds his steps again. Come on you can do it.

Some of us, will have never made a commitment to follow Jesus, and still have unanswered questions and concerns of what it all means. If I follow Jesus, what sort of life will I be entering into. Now would be a good time, to set out, in humility knowing you need Jesus' forgiveness for the wrongs you've done, but a boldness to accept that forgiveness, and step out in faith into a new exciting life.

Salvation is here. Hosanna. Praise be to God. Let's make the triumphant entry into the first or next phase of our Christian lives, with boldness and humility. Amen.