

## THEY CAME NIGH TO JERUSALEM (Mk. 11:1)

Whether you enter the city of Jerusalem, coming down through Samaria from the north, or up from the desert in the south, or from the Jordan in the east, or from Tel Aviv in the West ... when you enter the city you are arriving in a place which is in the centre of God's plan. As the psalmist describes, **Ps. 87:2** *The LORD loveth the gates of Zion ...* Out of everywhere else in the world, it was to Jerusalem He sent His Son. His Word instructs us, **Ps. 122:6** *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ... with the guarantee ... they shall prosper that love thee.* Throughout their history, Scripture has recorded their spiritual infidelity, and yet such is God's unconditional love for them He promised, **Ezek. 16:60** *I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. <sup>61</sup> Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed ... <sup>62</sup> And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.*

That is the basis upon which the Lord Jesus approached this beloved city, **Mk. 11:1** *And when they came nigh to Jerusalem ...* He and His disciples had travelled all the way south from Galilee, and in just a few days' time, this stage of His journey would end at the cross. ... He came to the Mount of Olives, through the villages of Bethphage and Bethany, about two miles outside of Jerusalem, - Bethphage is where an annual Palm Sunday walk into the city begins.

Bethphage means the "house of unripe figs" ... The fig trees are a Jewish symbol of peace, for example, **I Kings 4:25** *And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. ...* However, the land of Israel was *anything but* at peace because spiritually, it was a 'house of unripe figs', - bearing none of the fruits with which their ancestors had been blessed.

Passing through Bethphage Jesus came to Bethany, where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. Bethany can mean the "House of Dates", or it can more probably mean the "House of Misery" ... and that described the state of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel at that time, under the rule of the Roman Empire.

Into this scene came Jesus, riding on a donkey and greeted by adoring crowds, **Mk. 11:9** *Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: <sup>10</sup> Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. ...* They hailed Him as a Messiah, because they *hoped* He would rout out the enemy and establish His Kingdom.

Jesus knew the kind of people these were though. They were highly-emotional, especially during this religious season. Many of them had made long journeys to be at the Passover in Jerusalem ... and they *dreamed* of the City of David being reinstated as the capital of their reborn nation. Not since Nebuchadnezzar had carried off into captivity their forefathers six hundred years earlier had they a king of their own ... and they *looked* for any potential candidate to fill that position. ... And their hopes and dreams were driven by the spirit of the Passover festivities ... But each year would ‘come and go’ without their aspirations being realised ... How true it was they had become as a “house of unripe figs” and as a “house of misery”.

Into such a religious scene as this Jesus entered, in accordance with the Divine plan. He sent two of His disciples to find the donkey upon which He would ride into the city. They were sent to the exact place where the donkey was waiting! ... When someone would ask, **Mk. 11:3** *Why do ye this?* He gave them His disciples the exact words to reply, *say ye that the Lord hath need of him ... That’s all ... ‘simply repeat what I’m telling you’ ...* This was in preparation for the arrival of God’s Son through the gates of the city, - the occasion Zechariah had prophesied five hundred years earlier, **Zech. 9:9** *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee ...* What a sight that must have been!

Another observation we make as Jesus came nigh to Jerusalem is to notice the obedience of His disciples ... **Mk. 11:1** *He sendeth forth two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. <sup>3</sup> And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. <sup>4</sup> And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him.*

... They could have responded by quizzing why He wanted a colt, a donkey. As far as we know, He had never ridden a colt before ... why would He need one now?! ... They could have questioned Him, but instead of wasting time, the two disciples were immediately obedient. ... Sometimes it’s difficult to know why the Lord is sending His people in a certain direction, but we *know* because He impresses it upon our hearts *that* is the direction we *must* take. Doors which previously would have been shut, He opens them in a way you never could have imagined ... and He gives you the quiet confidence to proceed. ... These two disciples did not know what Jesus was about to do, but nevertheless, they went in faithful obedience to His instruction.

And something else ... He could have instructed the owner to bring the donkey, or He could have gone and fetched it Himself, but He gave two of His disciples the honour of being a part of His plan to go through the narrow streets and fetch the animal upon which He would make His entrance into Jerusalem. ... What a privilege for the Lord to involve them in such an event! And they went, on His instructions, without any hesitation to fetch the animal.

One of the signs which confirms a Christian is their willingness to obey Christ. Previously, Jesus had told His disciples, **Jn. 14:15** *If ye love me, keep my commandments ...* That is one of the credentials of a Christian. ... And Jesus sent these two men with only one message, to simply bring what their Master had told them to say ... Don't veer off the message, nor change it. Neither 'embroider' or complicate it ... Just tell it as it is. ... That is all they were to do. ... That was how the prophets did it in the Old Testament, for they began their message with the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord" ... Nothing more, and nothing less ... simply, <sup>3</sup> ... *say ye ...* and when they spoke the words of the Master the owner would give them his animal. ... Out of all the donkey-owners in Jerusalem, the disciples knocked on this man's door ... and because Jesus said it, they could be confident the man would supply it.

Just one more consideration as Jesus *came nigh to Jerusalem* ... As Jesus entered Jerusalem He showed the people Who He was, **Jn. 1:11** *He came unto his own*. They were religious people, - that is why they had come from far and near to Jerusalem. They could have told you all the intricate details about the meaning of Passover ... and it is fascinating. They would have made sure to have 'read up' on all the customs and traditions of their fathers ... but why didn't they take to heart Zech. 9:9, *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee?* ... Simeon, and Anna, and others were actively waiting and believing the Messiah would come in their lifetime ... but these people were merely *hoping* it was Jesus, ... and if the Messiah didn't work out to be Him, then maybe the next one to come in might be the Messiah, or maybe the one after that! ... These people had no firm expectation Jesus was indeed the Messiah, other than *they hoped He might be*.

If they had searched the Scriptures, - instead of listening to the customs and traditions of apostate priests and religious leaders, - they would have *known* this was the Messiah. ... But how can you expect to find the truth if you are looking in the wrong places! It worked out they couldn't see this was the Messiah ... and neither could the priests and religious leaders who *ought* to have seen it!

The religious leaders were watching Him, and they saw Him only as how they wanted to see Him ... a troublemaker, but they knew they dare not confront Him, **Mk. 14:2** *Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.* ... The Pharisees knew getting Jesus at that time would have been a bad idea ... so, they decided, “we’ll ‘bide our time’ until afterwards” ... Also, Satan did not want Jesus to die on Passover, because he had heard what John the Baptist announced, - Jesus is **Jn. 1:29** *the Lamb of God.* ... That panicked Satan for he realised something ‘*big*’ was about to happen and he was powerless to do anything about it! ... Jesus was going to confirm God’s plan of salvation by being sacrificed as the substitute-Lamb.

It had all been prophesied in the Old Testament, and Satan knew he had no authority for at Calvary, it was the Father Who was in control and it was *then* He would bruise His Son and put Him to grief for His people (Is. 53:10). ... Satan would be allowed ‘to bruise the heel’ of the Saviour, but Satan Himself would be dealt a devastating blow to the head (Gen. 3:15). ... And in God’s eternal plan, Passover was *exactly* the perfect time the *Lamb* of God would *be* sacrificed for His people. ... All our sins were laid upon Him, and as the Lamb of God, He paid the full price of the punishment His Father demanded for our redemption ... and there is no longer any sin against our names to condemn us.

*When they came nigh to Jerusalem* ... Jesus knew *where* it would take Him, and *how* it would take Him. He knew the crowds would rally against Him at the cross. He *had* to go this way though, for the Gospel required it. God’s plan for our salvation *demand*ed it!

In closing, look again at v.2, *And [Jesus] saith unto them [two of His disciples], Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him.* ...

They weren’t sent into the city to find a well-bred stud horse belonging to some rich merchant. What a glorious entrance that would have been! Think of how proud they would have been walking such a beautiful animal through the streets, - they would have taken the long road round so they could show it off ... even before they handed it over to Jesus. ... No, in fact they weren’t sent into the city at all. Instead they were told to go into the village, - which village? ... Take your choice, from the “house of unripe figs” or the “house of misery” ... either way, He didn’t send them to the best stables, but instead they were sent along

some little side street. They weren't given a name nor an address, and yet they were directed to where the animal would be found.

It had never been ridden before, - if you or I had tried to get on to it, we could not have done it. It wouldn't have been used to crowds. It was young ... probably hadn't been given much exercise for it wasn't a pet, for it was intended to become a working animal. Then, one day these two disciples came and led it away. It was just an ordinary colt, but the one Jesus sat upon as He fulfilled the plan of His Father.

... Just an ordinary colt, and yet the one used by the Master. ... Wild to anyone else, and yet He instantly tamed it ... There is none of us what we are today if it had not been for the Lord Jesus. And what we shall further become is the work He will complete in us,

I know I shall see in His beauty  
The King in whose law I delight;  
*Who lovingly guardeth my footsteps ...*

He sent the Gospel with faithful messengers through the 'back streets', and that is where He found us. He knew where we would be, and they came with the simple message ... simply speaking what the Lord had sent them to say ... the words they spoke were from the Master.

Jesus [came nigh to Jerusalem](#) ... That is where He died on the cross for you and me ... and no matter where we were, He found us ...

O how sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just to trust His cleansing blood;  
Just in simple faith to plunge me,  
'Neath the healing, cleansing flood.

I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee,  
Precious Jesus, Saviour, Friend;  
And I know that Thou art with me,  
Wilt be with me to the end.

May God encourage each of us through our study of His infallible Word. Amen.