

Binding the Foal to the Vine

By Dr. Dave Neale

The entry to the city of Jerusalem, traditionally referred to as the Triumphal Entry, is something of a culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry.

It is easy to forget that once Jesus of Nazareth was a baby about whom prophecies were quietly shared among his intimate family and a few holy men from the east. It is easy to forget that he was only a boy who showed extraordinary prescience in the temple talking to the rabbis.

As he reached manhood he man forsook home and walked The Galilee, Samaria and Judea proclaiming what he called The Kingdom of God. And it's easy to forget that, for the most part, his identity was veiled in his itinerant years.

Oh, rumours flew, of course, as he healed the sick and cast out demons. Who is this? How is it that people are healed and our hearts burn within us when he teaches? Some speculated that he was the Messiah, but he did not indulge them by making it a public assertion.

In fact, the public knowledge of his identity as the Messiah was so obscure for years that the Gospel of Mark is famous for what is called the Messianic Secret. Nobody really knew for sure.

On the day of his entry to Jerusalem, Jesus travels about 2-3 km from Bethany (what is locally know today as Al-Eizariya, "place of Lazarus") to Bethphage ("house of unripe figs") where his disciples found a donkey for him to ride on. It's about 5km from there to the city.

Now, at last, at the end of a long struggle, on the dusty road from Bethany to the gate of the city - from whispered prophecy at birth, to a shining youth, to the culmination of a dynamic ministry - comes the moment of public acclamation!

The crowd shouted out ***Hosanna to the Son of David*** (the Messiah). A culmination.

There was a sense of triumph of a messianic victory in the crowd. But what did it amount to really? This version of 'we win/you lose' triumphalism is a shallow, short-lived emotion – especially when it is affixed to political or military expectations. Make no mistake, the people thought they would be delivered from Roman oppression by this new king.

As the events of the next few days would prove, this triumphalism melted into betrayal and abandonment of this man from Nazareth. All the enthusiasm amounted to less than nothing. But that's just the way people are. The 48-hour news cycle is nothing new!

Looking a bit deeper, we see that this brief report in Matthew 21:1-11, has no less than *six* significant references to Old Testament messianic themes – a very dense intertextuality. (I have an appendix to my message in the on-line manuscript that contains the six places that echo and resonate through our Matthew passage, if you would like a closer look.)

What the enthusiasm of the crowd *does* show is how close to the surface messianic desire ran in that day and how profoundly the people longed to be released from Roman domination. Even this unreliable crowd knew this was potentially a special moment in history!

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

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Hosanna in the highest heaven!" [a quote from Psalm 118]

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:9-11)

The church, in its solemn reflection of that day in the months and years that followed, saw in the entry the culmination of many indicators of the Messiah's advent presaged in the Hebrew Bible.

It appeared to them (Mark first and then to the other gospel writers who all use Mark) as though there were this rich confluence of messianic texts that were *braided together* in fulfillment in that moment.

The messianic symbolism of the day was present in the donkey, a conveyance of kings (Zechariah 9:9), the dancing procession that accompanied David into Jerusalem when he brought the ark home (2 Sam 6:5), the cloaks strewn on the ground before him accorded to kings (2 Kings 9:13), the festal branches of Psalm 118 from which the crowds shout in unison, ***Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*** The proclamation that the heir of the eternal throne of David was among them (2 Samuel 7:16).

Hosanna to the Son of David!

For our purposes this morning, let's go back briefly to where it all began. It is in an obscure OT text from the time of the patriarchs. The passage describes the history of Israel about 4000 years ago. Or 2000 years before Jesus.

Jacob (remember Esau?), the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Jacob had twelve sons. These were the lads that sold their brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt and he later saved them all in the time of the famine, having risen to high office in Egypt.

Just before Jacob died, he called his twelve sons around him and gave them what we now call the Jacob Blessing. Genesis 49. Rueben (unstable as water), Simeon, Levi (men of violence), Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, Benjamin. Each one gets a blessing, not all flattering. The twelve tribes of Israel.

Jacob says of that obscure tribe of Judah that it ***crouches down and is like a lion – who dares rouse him?*** And then it says this.

Gen 49:10-11

***The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet
until tribute comes to him;
and the obedience of the peoples is his.***

With this single reference the humble shepherding tribe of Judah shifted from obscurity to the center of political importance for the coming of the Messiah. For a few days it must have seemed like all the promises were being realized that day.

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It was the great culmination! Genesis 49 goes on to say:

***Binding his [Judah's] foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
he [Judah] washes his garments in wine
and his robe in the blood of grapes...***

Here the image is that of the foal tied up at the best vine in the vineyard. Now, if you tie your donkey to your grape vines, what is going to happen?

The donkey is going to eat all your grapes! So this is an image of the messianic kingdom which has an abundance so surpassing that even the donkeys get to eat all grapes they want! So blessed and fertile will the land be in the day of the Messiah it will produce super abundance!

This abundance is so surpassing that we can use wine instead of water for everyday purposes! Even to washing clothes. Well, usually we are trying to get the wine stain out of our clothes!

It is meaningful that Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2).

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed him. (John 2:11)

It is the fulfillment of the 2000-year-old prophecy of Jacob's blessing that Judah would bring messianic abundance to a thirsty world.

What about today? What about now? Perhaps someday, when the messianic kingdom arrives in its fullness, or we pass out of this mortal coil, we will all understand what this really means.

But until then, it means something very profound for us today. Even though the suffering to be endured by the Messiah is yet to come in only a few days, and that it was unforeseen by all teaches us that God always is above and beyond our ways. Even though suffering has its place in our lives, we are to understand by the foal bound to the vine that we, living in the time of the Messiah, dwell in a time of unparalleled spiritual fertility.

It teaches us that the table is set before us laden with hope, not despair. It is our choice whether we wallow in grievance and self-pity, or if we choose the Table of the Lord. I'm not saying it is an easy choice!

He prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...

The table is set. The choices are ours.

We live, as we said last week, in a time when the resurrection is now. We live with the gift of the Holy Spirit for which heaven so dearly paid.

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We close with video that quite a number of our talented members produced a year ago. This video is set in a vineyard, and you will see here a celebration of the Messiah's advent, and the table of the Lord set in anticipation of the great day when all will be realized. Come and thirst no more!

It is a fitting segue in to our celebration of the Lord's Table this morning. All are invited to this table with its unsurpassed abundance of love and Spirit.

Amen

Benediction

And now may the Lord of all abundance, of the vines heavy with the wine of the kingdom, quench your thirst for God this week and fill you with the Holy Spirit!

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Scripture Appendix for Palm Sunday

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Gen 49:10-11

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,

nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, (Micah 7:14, Num 21:8)

until tribute comes to him;

and the obedience of the peoples is his.

11Binding his foal to the vine

and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,

he washes his garments in wine

and his robe in the blood of grapes;

“No Judean would tie his ass to a vine, for it would be eaten up, of course. Anyone who can be so careless and who can wash his garment in wine, lives in paradisiacal abundance... - he who will come will live in a time of paradisiacal fertility.... Israel, too, associated the expectation of a paradisiacal fertility of the land with the enthronement of the king (Isai 11:1-9; Ezek 34:23=31; Amos 9:11-15; Ps 72:16” (Gehard von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 426)

2 Sam 6:5

David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

Isaiah 62:11

The Lord has proclaimed

to the end of the earth:

Say to daughter Zion,

“See, your salvation comes;

his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.”

2 King 9:13

Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, “Jehu is king.”

Psalm 118:26-27

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Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

26Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

27The Lord is God,

and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,

up to the horns of the altar.

2 Samuel 7:16

Your house [House of David] and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever!