

JESUS' REGAL APPROACH TO JERUSALEM (Luke 19.28-40)

Much of our Lord's earthly ministry recorded in the gospels was preparatory, aimed toward the climax and fulfillment of His divine mission at Jerusalem. Luke faithfully narrates the "Jerusalem journey" (9.51-19.44), and our text today signals it is nearly over. In this passage we see that

Jesus presented Himself as Israel's Messiah-King.

At first, He received a regal welcome, but this would not last long and He knew it, presenting Himself anyway.

SETTING (19.28-29a)

Luke ties this event with the preceding text: "And when He had thus spoken," i.e., "the parable for the meanwhile" in 19.11-28. Jesus told that parable because He was near to Jerusalem, and after telling it, He continued on His determined trek. "He went before (or, *on ahead*), ascending up to Jerusalem."

At this point of the narrative, the Passion Week (the week of Jesus' suffering and death) has just begun. It is Sunday, 2 April 30 A.D.¹ The gospel narratives slow down increasingly as they approach Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, literarily riveting our attention on these two most momentous events. This day in the life of Jesus has become known Palm Sunday because of the palm branches, not mentioned in Luke, spread in the way before Him (John 12.13). This story is often called "The Triumphal Entry," but Luke only tells about Jesus approaching and overlooking Jerusalem and Luke somewhat downplays the note of triumph. While His disciples are excited, some enemies grumble, and Jesus is subdued, even grieved, in their midst, a fact I had not fully appreciated before (see 19.41 ff.).

He had been staying at Bethany. While there, He raised Lazarus from the dead—perhaps His most astounding miracle to date, and a harbinger of His own resurrection (John 11). Passover was to be next Saturday. Expectations were high, but in the wrong way, as if Jesus would fulfill the Zionist's worldly fantasy (Luke 19.11). Even with the parable to correct their mistaken notions, they continued in ignorance.

Like Jesus' birth, this event occurred "when the fullness of time had come" (Gal 4.4), "the time set by the Father (Gal 4.2), 'the ends of the ages' (1 Cor 10.11), when the promises of God are realized."² A door to the new covenant age is about to open, swinging on the hinge of Christ's finished work!

The geographical note about "Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the Mount of Olives" (for the grove of olive trees grown there) vouches for historical accuracy and heightens our anticipation. The exact location of the first

town (meaning "House of Unripe Figs") is not known, but it must have been a village neighboring Bethany ("House of Ananiah") on the eastern slope (opposite from Jerusalem on the west, not far away). Today it is a Moslem village named after its most famous resident, "Lazarus."³ This text cannot be fully appreciated or prove any benefit to you unless you believe it, receiving it as literal, physical truth about what really happened almost 2,000 years ago. Christianity is a religion growing out of time/space events supported by the strongest evidence.

SECURING A REGAL MOUNT (19.29b-35)

Most of our sermon text today is given to this element of His approach—securing a regal mount. The animal was not needed for practical, but symbolic reasons.

According to Plan (19.29b-34). Jesus takes initiative fitting for a king in sending two of His disciples (19.29b) on a mission to get a "royal mount." First, this was proper for one who was about to receive a kingdom, an act of designation for kingly honors (cf. 19.12). In this way King Ahasuerus honored Mordecai (Esther 6.7-9) and David indicated his choice of Solomon as successor to the throne (1 Kgs 1.33-35).

Second, the word "colt" (19.30) could refer to any young pack-animal (e.g., horse, camel, donkey). We know Jesus was ordering a donkey (Matt 21.4-5). The particular animal is significant, first of all, as a fulfillment of the messianic prophecy of Zech 9.9, there quoted. This is the exact, literal way that God had foretold Israel's Messiah would come to her. Secondly, riding a donkey connotes a prince of peace (cf. Zech 9.10), whereas to come on a horse evokes thoughts of war (Job 39.19-25). "The entry is regal without being revolutionary or threatening."⁴ By this visible sign Jesus is teaching the Jews, once again, that He was not coming for their political or financial or mundane prosperity, but that His kingdom was spiritual—a reconciliation between God and men and among people (John 18.36; cf. Rom 14.17).

Jesus required a young donkey that had never been ridden (19.30), one suitable for this noble service (Deut 21.3; Num 19.2; 1 Sam 6.7). All by itself, this surely tipped off the disciples that Jesus was planning no ordinary ride. Their pulse must have quickened. "The time is here! Our Master is about to assume His rightful place of rule, and we who have been His faithful servants can expect to be honored with Him!" Remember the mother of Zebedee's children (Matt 20.20-28) and the disciples' own concerns (Luke 9.46).

Sending them to "loose" and "bring" such a colt (19.30), Jesus anticipates a problem and gives them a solution. If anyone questions them about this, they can just say,

¹ *The Fourfold Gospel*, McGarvey and Pendleton.

² *New Geneva Study Bible*.

³ Bock.

⁴ *IVP Commentary*.

“Because the Lord has need of it” (19.31), almost like a password, and they will gain the needed cooperation. The ensuing narrative convinces me that Jesus was not merely planning for contingencies, but rather that He knew exactly what was going to happen. Further, the biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty and Christ’s full deity reminds us that He had planned it all from eternity, so that it was bound to fall out precisely this way (Acts 15.18; 4.27-28; Prov 21.1). Indeed, all this was according to the eternal divine decree, the outworking of the covenant of redemption:

It pleased God in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Saviour of His church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified (1689 LBCF VIII.1).

Thus this gospel history is invisibly linked to and dependent on God’s purpose of grace announced before by the prophets. Now it was being accomplished through Jesus. The evangel makes no ultimate sense apart from its spiritual and theological significance. Angels which knew the gracious prophecies for centuries and had desired to look into them were now with wonder watching them unfold (1 Pet 1.10-12)!

Even conservative commentators suggest that there may have been nothing supernatural happening here, that Jesus may have known the donkey-owners and had all this prearranged. This seems unlikely because the specific details Jesus foretells as certain might not have occurred unless this was a prophecy. For example, the owners might have happened to be away from their post at the precise moment the two disciples arrived. Luke stresses the accuracy of Jesus’ prophecy as if it were miraculous: the sent ones “found it *exactly* as He had told them” (19.32 NET, emphasis mine). Besides, throughout this gospel Jesus has been foretelling events what would happen at Jerusalem (e.g., 9.22, 44; 13.33; 17.25; 18.31-33, etc.).

For the Only One Worthy (19.35). The disciples successfully bring the never-ridden donkey and, forming a makeshift saddle with some of their clothes (cloaks, ESV), “set Jesus on” it. The whole point was to draw the attention of multitudes to Him, the only One worthy, from the beginning of the world, among the mass of humanity, to present Himself this way at this time and place.

In the gospel accounts, this kind of self-presentation is unusual conduct for Jesus. Many times before this Jesus had taken deliberate measures to suppress word about Him. The “Messianic Secret” coined by scholars may overstate this, but there is something to it. We may well wonder, “Why was He being so public at this point?”

Jesus arranged for the ride. The applause and the crowds were not manipulated; they would have occurred in any case. But the ride on a colt, because it was planned, could only be an acted parable, a deliberate act of symbolic self-disclosure for those with eyes to see or, after the Resurrection, with memories by which to remember and integrate the events of the preceding weeks and years. Secrecy was being lifted.⁵

Ryle explains it simply and perceptively:

[Jesus] knew that the time had come when He was to die for sinners on the cross. His work as the great Prophet, so far as His earthly ministry was concerned, was almost finished and completed. His work as the sacrifice for sin and substitute for sinners, remained to be accomplished. Before giving Himself up as a sacrifice, He desired to draw the attention of the whole Jewish nation to Himself. The Lamb of God was about to be slain. The great sin-offering was about to be killed. It was meet that the eyes of all Israel should be fixed upon Him. This great thing was not to be done in a corner.⁶

Because of this, the outward facts of Jesus’ life here recorded cannot be credibly disputed, even by those skeptical of its spiritual significance. There are no extant counterclaim documents, and even from a purely secular view, Luke’s gospel appears historical (cf. 1.1-4).

PREPARING A REGAL WAY (19.36)

Luke refers to the participants in this verse as simply “they.” They were “a very great multitude” (Matt 21.8), including Jesus’ disciples, apparently many more so designated than the twelve, and also “much people that were come to the feast” (mostly pilgrims, not Jerusalem’s citizens) from the other direction (John 12.12). Among them there were also at least a few Pharisees steadfastly opposed to Jesus. This turned quickly into a sensational event.

All who saw Jesus on the donkey evidently recognized His suggestion that He was to be recognized a king, and with ill-informed zeal, so fickle in most of them that they would turn into a mob howling for His death, they threw their outer clothes (and palm branches mentioned elsewhere, with leaves perhaps ten feet long, and emblematic of triumph and victory⁷) onto the road before Him, an impromptu “red carpet” for His honor, like the response when Jehu announced his divine appointment to be king (2 Kgs 9.13).

At this point, public enthusiasm for King Jesus boils over; it cannot be contained.

⁵ D. A. Carson on Matt 21.1-2 in EBC.

⁶ Expository Thoughts.

⁷ Fourfold Gospel.

JUSTIFYING A REGAL ACCLAMATION (19.37-40)

Jesus had crested the Mount of Olives and was now on the downwardly sloping road of the westerly side, drawing near to Jerusalem. This may have been the most impressive vantage point for viewing the city, surrounded by a wall, but still showing clustered houses and the Temple in the midst—the pride of first-century Jews. In our culture a comparison that comes to mind is the patriotic atmosphere at a national convention stadium with countless American flags, a huge video of the blue angels flying in formation, with the Marine band playing and the next presidential hopeful in front of his well-wishers, except this lacks a comparable religious fervor.

The Disciple's Praise (19.37-38). Luke specifically attributes the joyful noise to “the whole multitude of the disciples.” “Rejoice” denotes their celebratory mood. They were praising God, no doubt for granting them what they probably thought was the beginning of the realization of their ancient hopes for the nation of Israel. The “mighty works they had seen” Jesus do sparked their belief that the end was near and Israel was about to enter her period of greatest glory, copiously described by the OT prophets. “Mighty works” is a technical term for miracles, and the stunning resurrection of Lazarus was surely fresh on their minds.

They burst out with biblical expressions to vent their intense feelings. Essentially, there are four lines.⁸

1) “Blessed is he who is coming,” quoting verse 26 from Psa 118, the last of the “Egyptian Hallel [praise] Psalms” (Psalms 113-118), sung by Jewish worshipers at the end of their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem, and especially while the Passover lambs were being slain.⁹ How fitting here, though none realized it like Jesus did! Psalm 118 is distinctly messianic, prophesying of a figurative stone refused by builders but destined to become the cornerstone by God’s doing (118.22-24), of Jesus’ humiliation and coronation.

2) “A king in the name of the Lord.” This is also mostly taken from Psa 118.26, but apparently the cheering multitude added the word “king.” They understood perfectly well the fact that Jesus was presenting Himself as their new King, but they totally misunderstood His intentions and His pathway to exaltation through the cross. “The name of the Lord” is a recognition of divine authority and accomplishment.

3) “Peace in heaven,” and 4) “glory in the highest” flow from the first two things. These last two sayings are euphemistic language omitting God’s unique name. The people are intimating that the coming messianic King would make everything right, at least in their national relationship with Yahweh, and that this great act of redemption would redound to His glory. Again, there is so much truth here, but they had no appreciation of what was really about to happen.

Providentially, mankind was here echoing the heavenly host praising God on the occasion of Jesus’ entrance into the world at His birth: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2.14 ESV). The gospel message proclaims that the one receiving Jesus by faith, truly and intelligently, also receives the gift of eternal life and a well-founded assurance that he is among God’s favorites, one of the elect, and now a regenerated son of God (John 1.11-13; 3.36; 1 John 5.11-12)! Being born again and reverent subjects of King Jesus, believers see and enter the kingdom of God (John 3.3, 5). These are the truths which very, very few Jews realized, not even a great teacher in Israel like Nicodemus (John 3.10), but now, in the wake of all that has happened, we have much less excuse to remain in spiritual ignorance!

The Pharisees' Complaint (19.39). The Pharisees, seeing few shared their disapproving sentiments, respectfully urge Jesus as “Master” to rebuke His disciples. Oh, what cowards they were, only standing for their principles when they judged it to be safe! This was the same party that Jesus excoriated on several public occasions (e.g., Matt 23), and so they were harboring deep-seated resentment against Him. It pained them to see Jesus gaining such a following, and themselves losing ground. They were experiencing a chagrin like Haman’s when he had to witness the public exaltation of Mordecai whom he loathed (Esther 6.10-12). I believe their protest was mostly on personal grounds, but they rationalized it as a principled concern for the welfare of Judaism and the people of Israel (John 7.47-49; 11.47-50).

The Savior's Retort (19.40). Jesus denies their unreasonable request. The saying here may have been a common proverb for an impossibility. Of course it is figurative language, comparable to Gen 4.10 (Abel’s blood crying out) and especially Hab 2.11 (Jerusalem’s stones crying out against Israel’s injustice and sin).

Creation is aware of Jesus, but the leadership of the nation is not. That which is lifeless knows life when it sees it, even though that which is living does not. Luke portrays their rejection as a tragic, stinging indictment of their lack of judgment.¹⁰

On this particular day of which we have read, one of the most important in all of human history, Jesus presented Himself as Israel’s Messiah-King. He judged those who would not recognize and believe in Him as spiritually dead and “dumber than rocks.” In the preaching, Jesus also presents Himself to us today. Will you give Him joyful praise as the King of kings who came into the world to save all God’s people. Will you really receive Him with all your heart? How could you possibly remain silent or complain about we who believe?

⁸ YLT, Hendriksen.

⁹ Easton’s Bible Dictionary.

¹⁰ Bock.