

THREE VALUABLE LESSONS FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

11 As they approached Jerusalem, coming to Bethphage and Bethany by the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ahead of him. 2He gave them the instructions, Go to the village that is ahead of you. When you enter it you will immediately find a colt tied there, which no man has ever ridden. Untie him and bring him here. 3If any one asks you, Why are you doing this? say to them, The Lord needs him; and immediately he will send him back here. 4So they went, and found a colt tied at the door outside in the open street; and they untied him. 5Some men who were standing there asked them, What are you doing, untying the colt? 6Then they told them just what Jesus had said; and [the men] let them go. 7They brought the colt to Jesus, and laid their garments upon him; and [Jesus] sat upon him. 8Many people spread their garments on the road; and others spread branches, which they had cut from the fields. 9They who went before them, and they who followed them, cried out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10Blessed is the kingdom that is coming, [the kingdom] of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! 11So he entered into Jerusalem and went to the temple. When he had looked around at everything, since it was already evening, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. (Mk. 11:1-11)

See the attached Appendix for the parallel passage of Matthew 21:1-11

Introduction

It was Palm Sunday, the day of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

In our mind we have a vivid picture of the events of that day: at the command of Jesus, the disciples commandeer a young donkey; they outfit the donkey with their own garments as a saddle and then Jesus mounts him for His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. As the Lord rides that donkey along the dusty road leading into the city He is accompanied by throngs of people. As they approach the outskirts of Jerusalem the roadway is lined with great crowds. Many of the people spread their own garments across the dusty road, others wave palm branches; all of them together with their children are crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

As modern day disciples of Christ, let us step back into time and picture ourselves among the circle of disciples who are accompanying Jesus into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday. We are among those disciples who were as instructed to fetch the young donkey. We were right along side of Jesus as He traveled the route of this first century "ticker tape parade." We were there as the people cried out, *"This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

What an indelible impression these events would make upon our minds! As we ponder them, especially in the light of the terrible events that would transpire on Thursday and Friday of Passion Week, what lessons would they have to teach us about Christ and our relationship to Him as one of His disciples?

As we consider the events of that first Palm Sunday, let us consider Three Valuable Lessons for Christian Living.

I. Learn to Trust in Jesus' Lordship (Mk. 11:1-6)

We may wonder why there is such a detailed account given of the incident recorded in verses 1-6; it may appear to contain so many non-essential details. But there is a reason for it. This incident, with all of its details, is graphically revealing to us and reminding us of the absolute lordship of Jesus.

The disciples are instructed to go before Jesus into the village just ahead of them. As soon as they enter, they will come upon a colt tied, a colt no one has ever ridden before. They are to unloose the colt and bring it back to Jesus. If anyone should inquire as to why two strangers are taking this colt that does not belong to them, they are simply to declare, "The Lord needs it," and permission will be granted. The disciples go as Jesus has commanded them, and all that Jesus described comes to pass in exactly the way He said it would.

To illustrate the impact that this experience must have had upon the disciples, let us seek to put it into contemporary terms: You are accompanying the president-elect into Washington D.C. You are several miles north of the capital when he instructs you to go ahead into the next town. He informs you that you will find a certain automobile (he specifies the make, the year, and the color of the vehicle) parking in front of a coffee shop, (which he identifies by name.) He tells you that you will find the keys in the ignition; you are to bring the car back to him. If anyone asks you why you are taking this particular car, which does not belong to you, you are merely to tell them the president-elect has need of it, and they will immediately allow you to take it.

This is the thing Jesus wants to impress upon His disciples; namely, the fact that He is Lord, He is in complete control of all things. No matter what is about to happen in the next week—including the trial and the crucifixion and the burial—be assured that Jesus is in charge. Indeed, it is Jesus who has been forewarning His disciples of what is about to transpire, both with regard to His death, and His subsequent resurrection:

[Jesus] then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mk. 8:31)

As Jesus informed His disciples on an earlier occasion:

... I lay down my life—[I lay it down] in order that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one takes it away from me, I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father. (Jn. 10:17b-18)

As we follow Jesus, let us learn to trust in His lordship: no matter what happens, be assured that Jesus is in control and that He is Lord over all:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... ²⁰...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18,20)

II. Learn to Imitate Jesus' Meekness (Mk. 11:7-10; Matt. 21:4-9)

If the crowd had been careful to observe the manner of Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem, they would have observed an incongruity between their view of a triumphal entry (and triumphant king) and Christ's view.

It was traditional for a conquering general to enter a city mounted atop a white charger, commanding a legion of soldiers, often times with prisoners in his train. But Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a young donkey. The significance of this is explained by the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king comes to you; he is just, and bringing salvation; humble, and riding upon a donkey, upon a colt the foal of a donkey. (Zech. 9:9)

This is the message that the Lord is graphically communicating to the crowds and to us as He chooses to enter the city riding upon a donkey instead of a war horse: Jesus, indeed, is the great Conqueror, but His conquest comes not by self-assertion and His own physical strength; on the contrary, His conquest is achieved by submitting Himself to the will of His heavenly Father. Note how this is graphically portrayed in Revelation 5:5-6a,

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne. (Rev. 5:5-6a)

The Lion who has conquered turns out to be the Lamb that was slain—Jesus' conquest is by submission to the cross in obedience to His heavenly Father's will.

Meekness is not to be confused with weakness. Our Lord Jesus Christ was strong to stand up for righteousness and strong to oppose the forces of evil and hypocrisy, as will be seen in His opposition to the merchandising carried on in the sacred temple precinct:

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves; ¹⁶and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷And as he taught

them, he said, Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers. ¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. (Mk. 11:15-18)

What exactly is meekness? Stated negatively, it is the refusal to return evil for evil; the refusal to go to great pains to justify ourselves; the refusal to take personal vengeance for the wrongs we suffer. Stated Positively, it is committing ourselves and our cause into the hands of the Lord, following the example of the Lord Jesus Himself; writing about the Lord Jesus, Peter declares, *“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”* (1 Pet. 2:23.) Furthermore, meekness is the willingness to submit ourselves to God’s holy will for the accomplishing of His righteous and saving purposes, again, in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the garden of Gethsemane just prior to His arrest and the ordeal of the cross, the Lord Jesus prayed, *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”* (Matt. 26:39.)

As we follow Jesus, let us learn to imitate His meekness, bearing in mind His gracious invitation and demand: *“Come to me, all you who labor and bear heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls”* (Matt. 11:28-29.)

We must be zealous to stand up for the cause of God, as did the apostles:

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, he said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” ²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:27-29)

But, like our Lord Jesus, we must be willing to trust God to defend our cause: *“When they hurled their insults at Christ, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”* (1 Pet. 2:23.) Note: Christ-like meekness does not mean that we may never protest against any injustice we might suffer. In Genesis 21:25 we find Abraham protesting the unjust treatment he suffered at the hands of Abimelech’s servants: *“Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech concerning the well that Abimelech’s servants had violently taken away from him.”* But Christ-like meekness does mean that we do not take matters into our own hands; rather, when we are denied justice by legitimate means, we give our cause to God, as did our Lord Himself” (1 Pet. 2:23.)

III. Learn to Heed Jesus' Word (Matt. 21:10-11)

The multitudes rightly perceived that Jesus was a prophet (Matt. 21:11;) recognizing that He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to speak the word of God.

What they failed to perceive is the fact that Jesus is **the** prophet. Jesus is the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15,16-19. Moses declared to the people of Israel,

Jehovah your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him ... ¹⁷Jehovah said to me ... ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. (Deut. 18:15, 16-19)

In the case of Jesus it is God Himself speaking the word of God, as the writer of the Book of Hebrews declares: *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son"* (Heb. 1:1-2a.)

Let us remember the command God the Father issued to the disciples on the mount of transfiguration concerning His Son: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* (Matt. 17:5.) Let us remember, too, what Jesus said about the importance of heeding His word:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man that built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt. 7:24-27)

As we follow Jesus, let us learn to heed His word—accepting it for what it is, the very word of God, and, therefore, responding to it with faith and obedience.

Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, [then] you are truly my disciples; ³²and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:31-32)

Conclusion

May the Holy Spirit enlighten us as to the lessons Jesus taught His disciples by means of the events surrounding that first Palm Sunday. As we follow Jesus as modern day disciples, may the Holy Spirit enable us and help us to 1) Trust in Jesus' Lordship; 2) Imitate Jesus' meekness; and 3) Heed Jesus' word.

Appendix: The Text of Matthew 21:1-11

21 As they approached Jerusalem, coming to Bethphage by the mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples ahead, ²instructing them, Go into the village that is ahead of you, and immediately you shall find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them, and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord needs them; and immediately he will send them. ⁴Now this happened so that the word spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, ⁵Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and riding upon a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey. ⁶So the disciples went and did just as Jesus instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their garments on them; and [Jesus] sat upon them. ⁸A great number of the crowd spread their garments along the road; [while] others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went before him, and those who followed, cried out, Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! ¹⁰When he came into Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred, asking, Who is this? ¹¹And the crowds replied, This is the prophet, Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. (Matt. 21:1-11)