

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Reading: Matthew 21:1-16

Jesus' raising of Lazarus had set off a violent reaction and his life was threatened. The days were drawing nearer when he would be taken by violent hands, but Jesus was ready for this great sacrifice. He had given his life in preparation for this great work.

The Passover was only a week away when the Lord journeyed south towards Jericho, there he healed a blind man and this miracle greatly excited the crowds and increased the interest in the Lord Jesus as he walked along the narrow streets of Jericho. So many people came to see him that he was almost lost in the crowds. It was at this time that the wealthy man who was a tax gatherer wanted to see Jesus so much that he humbled himself and climbed into a sycamore tree (a wild fig tree with spreading branches) to see Jesus. Jesus knew that he was there and he called to him and told Zacchaeus that he wanted to come into his house. Jesus knew the heart of this man and when he was given the opportunity to repent he promised to repay fourfold all he had taken deceitfully and to give half of his money to the poor. He was indeed truly repentant and made a wonderful follower of Jesus so we must never look down on anyone because God alone knows our hearts. Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus all that night. He would enter Jerusalem the following afternoon, Jesus knew that the disciples thought he was about to set up the kingdom at that time and so to prepare them he told them a parable of the Nobleman. He represented himself as a nobleman who had to go into a far country (heaven) in order to receive authority and then take up the kingdom. It was clearly teaching them that a period of time must elapse before he would return to reign on the earth from Jerusalem. Sadly the disciples never understood this until after his death.

Jesus comes to Bethany. The Lord left Jericho for the tiring journey along the road up the steep white hills of Judea to the capital city Jerusalem. It was about 19 miles and most of the way was desert filled with caves and rocks and woods, and a place easily to be attacked by robbers. It was six days before the Passover and Jesus came to the home of Martha and Mary in the little village of Bethany by the Mount of Olives. People were flocking into the city of Jerusalem from all parts. The normal excitement which accompanied the Passover was accentuated by a question that was on the lips of all.... would Jesus of Nazareth come to the feast?

We know that many of the events of the Lord Jesus were written about in the Old Testament but none so much as this final week. Remember at his baptism John the Baptist said Jesus was *the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world*. Jesus was about to play out the role of the Passover Lamb. All that was done to the lamb before it was offered as a sacrifice was done to the Lord Jesus and this we shall look at point by point.

In Zechariah 9:9 we have a verse which speaks of Israel's king coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Now Jesus was about to play out this role and all his actions were guided by the Word of God. Coming to Bethphage he directed his disciples to a farmhouse where they would find a donkey and her colt tied near her. Jesus told the disciples to loose them and bring them to him. The donkey was a symbol of kingly honour and Jesus intended to show beyond all doubt that he was the Davidic king prophesied, but this was not the time when he would lead a military revolt against Rome.

The news that Jesus was coming caused the people to flood out of Jerusalem and climb the Mt of Olives to meet him. They shouted with triumph as they spontaneously welcomed him like a conqueror, they threw their clothes and palm leaves before him and cried out “Hosanna” to the son of David, they then added *blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. If you open your Bibles to Psalm 118:26 you will see that the people were quoting this Psalm. “Hosanna” means “save now”. The people of Israel wanted a king and they looked for the Messiah who would rid them of the yoke of Rome, yet the Jewish authorities were horrified that the people should think that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised. However this great praise from the people was very short lived because in a few short days their enthusiasm was to turn to hatred for they would crucify the man they had hailed as their king. Even riding the donkey was a miracle because we are told that no man had ever ridden him before and usually these animals have to be “broken in” before they will let anyone ride them, but Jesus just sat on the donkey and began his journey.

Arriving at the temple Jesus looked round and saw that nothing had changed. The house of God was still the place of barter and merchandise; he must once more deal with this but for tonight he would go back to Bethany with his disciples.

On his way back to Jerusalem early next morning Jesus was hungry. A fig tree on the road side attracted his attention. The tree was in leaf and should therefore have produced some pre-summer figs at least. This was not the case. Although promising and showy in appearance the tree lacked fruit. So Jesus called out *let no man eat fruit from you now on for ever*. This tree was like elders of that nation. They were so outwardly showy and righteous yet they did not produce the fruits of good works which God wanted of them.

Leaving the fig tree the Lord made his way into the city to the court of the temple where he found a hive of activity, noise, impatience, greed and gain. Jesus passed through the court, turned out those that bought and sold and scattered coins by overturning the money tables. The nation had refused to repent and heed his warnings and soon they like the money would be scattered when God allowed the Roman armies to overthrow the land.

It was now four days before the Passover and just as the lamb was penned up for four days and closely looked at during that time so that no fault or blemish was found in it. So Jesus for these four days is “inspected” by the elders of the Jews questioning him.

By what authority do you do these things? Jesus however instead of giving a direct answer met their question with a question to them, promising to answer theirs when they had answered his, yet in effect his question was both an answer to theirs and it exposed their crafty motives. *The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men?* In appealing to John, Christ appealed to one whom all men accounted a prophet and the one whose whole mission was to reveal the identity of the Messiah. Here was indeed the authority for his work; Jesus challenged them to state their views of the prophet’s message. To say that John’s baptism was from heaven was to acknowledge John’s message that Jesus was the Christ. They obviously were not prepared to do this, yet to condemn the ministry of John by saying his baptism was of men was equally impossible in view of the following John had amongst the people. Their only escape was to confess their ignorance. *We cannot tell*. Jesus had caught them out and he then replied *neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things*.

Remember that the lamb had to be without spot and blemish and Jesus all through his life never, never allowed the weakness of flesh to overtake him and do anything or say anything wrong. Now at the end of his life he was tried and tested by the leaders of the Jews in every way possible and little did they realise they were fulfilling the scriptures in the examination of “the lamb”.

Try to imagine this scene of the Lord Jesus on the donkey riding into Jerusalem, in his mind would be the scriptures he was fulfilling, and in his thoughts no doubt the work before him when he must lay down his life without any resistance as a sacrifice for all. How marvellous that the scriptures were fulfilled to the very letter, for all things that were written about the Messiah did indeed come to pass.

The common people knew their Old Testament and they looked for the Messiah but they only saw him as a means of overthrowing the Roman yoke – they wanted a king there and then. They could not see the work of the Passover lamb in the Messiah and so in just a little while they were to kill the Prince of Peace.

We are greatly privileged today to be able to see these things and to understand the meaning in all the Lord Jesus did. We must always try to be thankful for the great work which has been done for us that we no longer have to take our Passover lamb as a sacrifice but this has been done once and for all for us. Let us never forget this great price paid that we might have life.

Extra work. Write out the verse in Zechariah 9 which speaks about today's lesson and find the verse it ties up with in the gospels.