

## **The Triumphant Entry, cheerfulness why?**

### **Introduction-The communication situation**

Matthew is one of the synoptic (seeing together) gospels along with Mark and Luke. There are similar in language, material and arrangement of events and sayings of Jesus, hence the term synoptic (seeing together). Mathew was the son of Alpheus (Mark 2:14, Mathew 9:9). One seemingly ordinary day as he sat at the tax collector's booth, reconciling the books for the RRA (Roman Revenue Authority) with the precision of a very learned fellow who was good with numbers but also a linguist literate in both Aramaic and Greek. The seemingly ordinary day turned extra ordinary when Jesus passed by his booth and called him to follow him. Ah! He was perhaps in the middle of a crucial tax audit report but he dropped his profession, livelihood,..and simply(there's no record of a second thought), a man whose profession was despised for its known injustices, a man who was probably on a daily charged his fellow jews more than he should have, a traitor, working for an oppressive empire...with no/minimal hesitation simply followed a carpenter.

He perhaps had heard of Jesus(the carpenter teaching with authority, Matt 7:27-28, his teaching (Matt 4:17..Repent!) and works(Mathew 4:24 healed the sick, demon possessed,, epileptics). He perhaps was weighed down by a purposeless/meaningless life of sin, guilt, injustice, purposeless motions of work and contemplated day after day if like the multitudes that were following Jesus, that he too could be among the number. The man Jesus could be the savior he, his people and all humanity was waiting for. Like many of us here, when that personal invitation was made by Jesus, he grabbed it like the lifeline it is. It is now wonder that his main target group was the Jews and he portrays Jesus as the Messiah who finally fulfills the old Testament prophecies. He emphasizes Jesus' distinct approach to the law in contrast to that of the Pharisees.[ CITATION Tho62 \l 1033 ]

### **The socio-political climate**

The Jews had been subject to centuries of civil war and rule by Babylon, Assyria, Persia, the Greeks, and finally Rome.

Heavy taxes: the grain toll, there were also taxes on produce, sales taxes, temple taxes, occupational taxes, custom taxes, transit taxes, and many others. These were mostly collected from conquered states leaving them with hardly anything to live on themselves 'the annual produce from Africa fed Rome for eight months' (Josephus, Judean war 2.383) If that was their annual produce, what were they living on. For the 'Bread and circus' event "app. 250,000 men were given a portion of grain that fed about 670,000 citizens, excluding the other 30 percent of the population that were slaves"[ CITATION Kur11 \l 1033 ]

There were some benefits; Fancy building projects of amphitheatres, public baths in and outside Rome. A form of peace that had to safeguarded with heavy Roman military presence and allegiances with local elites such as 'Herods' were made.

Emperor Cult; Like the days of Pharaoh, the emperor was a god, having authority of over life and death, peace and war. Seemingly able to save and show favour if appeased and constantly requiring more loyalty and worship with statues of him being erected near temples of traditional gods, coins with the face of a goddess on one and that Augustus on the other. Augustus formally named Octavian changed to the former that means worthy of veneration/worship Julius Caesar was deified even after his death which would make Caesar Augustus, a son of a god. In Ephesus, games, feasts, celebrations and ritual sacrifices were made in honor of the emperor. Augustus was 'son of god', 'bringer of peace to Rome, 'savior' and these announcements were regarded as 'good news'.

Israel had been through great civil unrest when the Romans took over. Julius Caesar appointed and was impressed by Herod who kept the Jews in submission to roman rule, of course with military force for those who dared to rebel. Great building campaigns of fortresses, temples were done by Herod in honor of Rome. However, all these were done with heavy taxes levied on the people of Samaria, Judea and Galilee. The greater majority already lived in abject poverty, and yet had to pay tithes and make sacrifices as required for the Jews. The Jews responded to Roman rule in various ways; submission, non-violent Subversion, non-violent rejection of roman rule and injustice, violent rebellion like the Zealots.

To add insult to injury, the Pharisees imposed their version of the law (legalistic) on their fellow Jews.

God had been silent for over 400 years and the Jews were expectant of the foretold Messiah. The expectations had veered towards a leader, a king like David who would free them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. Their expectations were of a warrior Gallant king and God's plan was of a Saviour servant King.

The passage of focus 'the triumphant entry' falls right after Jesus' teachings on the authority and forgiveness in the Church (e.g unforgiving servant Matt 18) and before portions concerning Judgment and the coming kingdom. The passage is part of the portion Matt 19-22 that narrates/exhorts concerning authority and invitations (to discipleship by Christ)

### **The Passage Matt 21:1-11**

**Before the passage:** Jesus is coming from Jericho and has just healed two blind men. A multitude that had followed him from Jericho is with him joined with the two formerly blind men, that now have their eyes opened. He had prior spoke to the disciples about servant leadership '...whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant...just like the son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.'(Matt 20;26-28)

### **The Triumphant Entry**

**21** Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."

### ***Why Jerusalem?***

Jerusalem was the city of Salem in Abraham's days, City of Zion in David's and later days. This was the home of the Temple of God, the seat of worship of Yahweh and where the Jews travelled to make their regular sacrifices especially in the season of the Passover. In the Old Testament it was required for the atonement of sin for various sacrifices to be made. At Passover in particular a lamb without blemish was offered at the altar on behalf of the people by the priests. Jesus had been to the Temple on several occasions but this time not to make sacrifices but to be the

sacrifice ‘the lamb of god who takes away the sins of the world’ (John 1:29). And where better for such a sacrifice to be made but Jerusalem. Also, it was prophesied by prophets like Zechariah (14:4, 9:9) that the Messiah, the Lord would go to Jerusalem. We therefore see Jesus again fulfilling prophecy.

<sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup>“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt,<sup>[a]</sup> the foal of a beast of burden.’”

***Hold up, so why the colt?*** There are jokes made by some that if Jesus lived in these days he would be ‘riding’ a Bentley (a posh car). Haha...Let’s demystify this seemingly harmless joke. Jesus rode a colt as predestined in the OT prophecies. One would think that a courageous liberator of the oppressed ought to arrive on a stallion or chariot but this was a courageous liberator with a different mission and state of heart, humility. As he said a chapter prior ‘...Son of Man...came to serve...’ Also, in Old times and OT, when a king came riding on a horse, it meant war and when he came riding a donkey it meant that he came in/bring peace!. I wonder if this very attitude is portrayed by the followers of Christ and those that claim to be.

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. <sup>7</sup>They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

***Hold up! Cloaks, branches of trees...again why?***

Cloaks; Let’s take a look at the dress code of the Israelites. **For men tunic, cap or “a fine wool shawl or tallith, especially during prayer. There was also a thick woollen coat or cloak to keep out the cold, called a himation in New Testament times. A poor man’s cloak was so important to him that if it was handed over to guarantee repayment of a debt, it had to be returned to him at sunset.”<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-archaeology/clothes\\_rich\\_poor/](http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-archaeology/clothes_rich_poor/)

One example of this practice in the OT is in 2 Kings 9:13 when Elisha sent word through his servant to anoint Jehu, a soldier, King. His friends and fellow soldiers on hearing this laid down their garments for him to take his steps on. This was an act of acknowledgement of the Kingship/authority/lordship of a King.

According to Lev 23:40, one of the feasts that God had instructed the Israelites to keep was the Feast of booths(it came after the Passover); at this feast the Israelites were to take "...fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees...and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days" These were symbols of celebration!

By this the multitudes were saying we acknowledge, give our utter respect to and celebrate you (and all you stand for) as King

<sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

Woah!!! Is the reaction I had on rediscovering the meaning of the word Hosanna as is also written in Psalm 118:25-26.

“Save us, we pray, O LORD!

O LORD, we pray, give us success!

<sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

Some scholars report that this song was recited during the Passover by the Israelites, what better way to welcome the Passover lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

This too is a dire plea for help on seeing one who has the power and authority to save, to keep secure, to protect from anymore harm. Have you made that plea? And we who have, do we know what we mean when we sing ‘Hosanna in the highest...’ So you can imagine, a crowd of people who have lived most of their lives in distress seeing one who represents, comes in the authority

of God coming to deliver, redeem. Give them a fresh start and fulfill all the prophecies and promises made to them

<sup>10</sup> And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"

<sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Prophets were called and appointed by God(Is 6:8), God's messengers (Is 44:26; Hag 1:13) Their primary activity was not to predict future events but to call back Israelites to covenant obedience to God. (Lesson 24, Module 3, ETS)

This is who they saw Jesus. Peter had declared him Christ(Mt 16:16), Christ had himself said so (Lk 4:18-21). So some knew him as a prophet, healer, good teacher, who do you Him to be?

This passage is one of rejoicing, one of hope, one of expectation, one of cheer and joy. As we know Jesus did not turn out to be the warrior King they expected and wanted but He was and is the savior servant King they needed, not just they but we need.

Life can hit us hard and there are seasons of consistent long suffering whether in failure, sickness, pain, poverty, sin, grief. I'll pause here and give a testimony. I grieve every other day or week for my sister that passed on six years ago. (Share the testimony of praying for your sister) She did not rise. As we can see I am yet to be healed, though the latter have greatly reduced. But I believe God heals. I have prayed for the salvation of some loved ones and friends, though they are yet to receive Christ, God answers prayer and is mighty to save. Let us take a moment to share one to another a long period of distress that God has given you joy through.

The multitudes that lay down their garments had stories; a cousin to the blind men, the centurion's servant that was healed, the former lepers and demoniacs, the sinners and tax collectors, the fishermen that bickered over who would be the greatest...they had stories. What's yours? Where would you be without God, without Christ, again, let's share one to another.

Through all the changing scenes of life, family, God can cause us to be of good cheer for He triumphs over past, present, and future circumstances all the way to eternity. Salvation is our cause to rejoice! Any day, anytime. They (the Israelites) did not see the whole picture of the triumphant entry how much more should we who know rejoice!

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