

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 11:1-11

Topic

Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem
amidst a throng of people shouting "Hosanna!"

Title

"Donkey Throng"

Introduction

It's a familiar scene that has been played out in hundreds of television programs and movies: The hero in foot pursuit sees the bad guy about to elude him by hopping into a taxi, bus, or some other type of vehicle. Desperate, he flags down the next car he sees, shouts "Police business!", pulls the driver out of his seat, and takes off after the bad guy in the commandeered automobile.

It usually doesn't end too well for the vehicle.

Must you yield your vehicle to any law enforcement officer who requests its use? Laws vary from state to state, but here in California, the answer is, basically, "Yes."

Upon first reading, it appears in our text that Jesus commandeers a donkey in order to make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

He doesn't demand the donkey, however. He has His disciples announce to the owner, "the Lord has need of it," leaving the owner free to comply or refuse.

Do you ever think of the Lord, Jesus Christ, as needy? He said it, not me; "the **Lord** has **need** of it."

If the Lord needed something from someone on that important day, *does He still have need of us?*

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Does The Lord Have Need Of You?, and #2 Does The Lord Have The Lead Of You?

#1 Does The Lord Have Need Of You?

(v1-6)

The answer is, "Yes."

God is omnipotent (all-powerful); He is omniscient (all-knowing); He is omnipresent (everywhere at once).

AND He has determined to use human beings to accomplish His eternal purposes.

It takes nothing away from the nature of God to recognize He uses us to accomplish His eternal purposes. If anything, it adds to the divine mystery of His sovereignty.

In our passage, prophecy and providence and need all intersect within the mystery of God's sovereignty.

Jesus is going to ride into Jerusalem, on the Sunday before Passover, the 10th of the month Nisan on the Jewish calendar.

He's going to ride a colt of a donkey upon which no one has ever sat. When He does, the crowds will shout, "Hosanna!"

At that unique moment in history, Jesus would be fulfilling at least three remarkable Old Testament prophecies.

The first prophecy is Zechariah 9:9, where we read,

Zec 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

Those words were written between 520-470BC.

The next prophecy is from Psalm 118:25-26, where we read,

Psa 118:25 Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.

Psa 118:26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

The words date to about 1000BC. "Save now" is, in Hebrew, "Hosanna!," the shout of the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem. The people were quoting this psalm.

In addition to His entrance on the colt of a donkey to shouts of "Hosanna!", there is a third most remarkable fulfillment of prophecy.

In the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel, written six hundred years before Jesus, the Jews were given **the exact day** in history that their Messiah would enter the city. We don't have time to go into the calculations in detail today; a few facts will suffice.

Daniel spoke of a pagan king who would make a decree allowing the Jews to restore and rebuild Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon. Daniel said,

Dan 9:25 "Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times."

The decree is a matter of history. It was given by Artaxerxes Longimanus on March 14, 445BC.

The "weeks" Daniel speaks of are sixty-nine weeks of seven years. Using the Jewish 360 day lunar calendar, that amounts to 173,880 days.

The Jews were told that exactly 173,880 days after Araxerxes issued his decree, their Messiah would enter Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey to shouts of "Hosanna!"

And that is exactly what happened.

Along the way, God acted providentially to bring it to pass. "Providence," in its simplest form, means *to provide for*. Having prophesied what would occur, God acted in history to provide for it.

I'll just give one example out of the thousands we could cite. When King Herod determined to kill the prophesied Messiah by slaughtering all the young children, God provided for Jesus to be saved by warning Joseph in a dream to take his family to Egypt.

Within the scope of prophecy and providence, God determined to use human beings to accomplish His eternal purposes. He had need of them, in a very real way.

Mar 11:1 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples;

Thus begins the last week of Jesus' ministry. It was Sunday, and He would be crucified that Friday.

Looking at all four Gospels, 40% of what is recorded in them has to do with these last seven days of Jesus' life. It's that important.

We know it was the tenth of Nisan because it was Passover week. According to Exodus chapter twelve, it was annually on the 10th of Nisan, on Sunday, that the Passover lambs were chosen - four days prior to their being sacrificed.

Jesus, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, was, in fact, the last Passover Lamb. He needed to arrive just at that time in order to fulfill the type from Exodus.

In the midst of all these fulfillments of prophecy and typology, Jesus sent two of His guys on a very tenuous mission.

Mar 11:2 and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it.

There are those who argue Jesus had made prior arrangements; but that makes no sense given His instructions. This was a Word of Knowledge given to Jesus by His Father through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

He tells them to "loose it" *before* they ask permission. In fact *they never ask for permission*. I'd go along with finding the donkey, but loosing it without asking is a bit much. It sounds like stealing.

Have you ever been prompted by God to do something a little out of the ordinary? A little out of what we like to refer to as our 'comfort zone?'

Maybe go up to a complete stranger and talk to them about Jesus?

That's similar to what these two disciples were being asked to do.

Mar 11:3 And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."

Anticipating the question the two disciples were probably going to ask - "what if someone asks us what in the world are we doing" - Jesus gives them a word to share.

Why would the owner, upon hearing those words, "immediately... send" the donkey to Jesus?

We can only speculate, but one possible scenario is that God had spoken to him in a dream or a vision. In the Book of Acts, the Roman centurion, Cornelius, has a vision in which he is told by an angel to send for Peter. Meanwhile Peter was having a vision of his own, about Cornelius calling for him.

Maybe the donkey's owner was a believer who knew the disciples by sight, and simply trusted their word.

Either way, God was at work, providentially; but the disciples had work to do in order to meet Jesus' need.

Mar 11:4 So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it.

Commentators point out that it would be unusual for an animal to be tied outside - especially during the busy Passover season. First century Israel wasn't like the Old West, where you'd tie-up at some outdoor hitching post.

It would therefore have greatly encouraged the disciples' faith to quickly find the donkey exactly as Jesus had predicted.

We often criticize the disciples for getting in the way of what Jesus was trying to do, but this time they were spot on. They did not reason with themselves that maybe it would be a good idea to ask permission. No, they went right up to the donkey, "and they loosed it."

They were not going to get away clean - not without a challenge, anyway.

Mar 11:5 But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

I wonder how many there were, and if they were thinking that they were going to put a stop to this by force, if necessary.

Mar 11:6 And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.

I see this as somewhat tense, don't you? Two guys, walking right up to the colt, loosing it, and leaving. It was a donkey-jacking in progress. A lot could have gone wrong.

I humbly suggest to you that God recommended this weird arrangement to make the point that even though prophecy must be fulfilled, and even though He provides for it to be fulfilled, human beings with free will to obey Him or disobey Him are very much needed in His equation.

Don't get me wrong: There was no danger Jesus would miss His one opportunity to fulfill these prophecies. Nevertheless people - fickle people like ourselves - were still needed, and were neither coerced or forced into obedience.

What, then, does the Lord need from **you**? If you say, "Nothing, He's God," that is not really biblical. True, we add nothing to God; but He has determined, in the universe He created, to use us in profound ways.

There's a whole list of things the Lord might need from you that come immediately to mind - things that would fit under the major headings of your *time*, or your *talents*, or your *treasures*.

One way this works is that you hear of a need - a genuine need - to minister to others. The Lord is saying, "I need your time," or "I need your talent," or "I need your treasure - your money."

Does He really need it? Yes, He does - but not as much as you need to give it, because He can and will ask others until He finds someone whose heart is aligned with His.

It's then up to you to "loose it," to let it go, for the Lord's use.

In the Old Testament, Esther is the queen of Persia just as a wicked man named Haman is about to exterminate the Jews. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, urges her to act on behalf of the Jews - even though it could cost Esther her life.

Mordecai says to his niece, "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Did you catch that? To paraphrase, Mordecai told Esther, "God needs you at this time," but if she refused, God could and would deliver His people another way.

God needed someone, and it seemed to be Esther; but if she refused, He'd provide for His plan some other way.

God needs someone; it may as well be **you**. Let loose of whatever it is the Lord needs from you.

#2 Does The Lord Have The Lead Of You?

(v7-11)

The two disciples Jesus sent were being led by Him. They went as He had commanded, did what He asked, and said the words He had given them.

The owner of the donkey, and the others on the scene in the town, were led by the Lord to comply with the loosing, and to submit to the Lord's words.

If even one of those guys, on either side, had ignored God's leading, the results may have been very different.

As it was, their faithful submission led to the triumphal entry of the King into Jerusalem just as prophesied centuries earlier.

Mar 11:7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it.

It was a donkey-whisperer moment, since no one had ever ridden this little guy before. Their "clothes" formed a makeshift saddle.

Yes, kings often rode donkeys - especially in times of peace. It should have been a sign to the Jews that their King was not coming to wage war against the oppressors from Rome, but to make peace between God and those who were His enemies by virtue of being sinners in need of salvation.

He would make peace by dying on the Cross, as our sacrifice and substitute for sin. We read in Colossians 1:20, "and by Him [God reconciled] all things to Himself... whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

Mar 11:8 And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Mar 11:9 Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

Mar 11:10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Mark doesn't mention palm branches; the other Gospels do. I guess Palm Sunday sounds better than Leafy Branch Sunday, or Spread Your Clothes Sunday.

"Hosanna!" means "Save now!" In that sense, it is not really a word expressing praise, e.g., "Hallelujah!" They were literally asking Jesus to save them by establishing the Kingdom of God that is often promised to the Jews in their Scriptures.

They were asking for "the kingdom of... David" to be restored. The Jews fully expected their Messiah to rule from David's throne in Jerusalem. They expected a literal Kingdom.

There will be a Kingdom of God on the earth; but not now. Today we are in what can be described as His spiritual kingdom, as God rules in the hearts of those submitted to Him. We live in the midst of the kingdom of the devil, and the various kingdoms of men. Our mission is to "Go!" With the Gospel, making disciples everywhere, as we enthusiastically await the return of Jesus to resurrect and rapture His church.

Throughout all His three-and-one-half-year ministry, Jesus avoided confrontation with the Jewish authorities as much as He could. Not now. Now He was forcing their hand. He was being declared King. He was receiving their accolades. The authorities must either accept Him, or reject Him. There was no middle ground.

Mar 11:11 And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

We say that something is an anti-climax, or anticlimactic, when it is a disappointing end to an exciting or impressive series of events.

On the surface, Jesus' quick survey of the Temple, followed by His withdrawal to Bethany, is anticlimactic.

It may be the most anticlimactic moment in all recorded history.

Hailed as King, riding the Zechariah-colt, entering on the exact day Daniel prophesied... *Only to turn right around to spend the night in Bethany.*

We can look back and understand the timing, the plan, because we know the events of Jesus' last week. But for His disciples, and the Passover travelers, it must have seemed very strange.

Why go to all that trouble for, seemingly, nothing?

You've undoubtedly noticed that God has His own, seemingly unusual, timing in the affairs of your life. I think He's late right now, in a few things that I'm praying for. Probably you do, too.

He's not late; He's not early. He's God, and He is accomplishing more than we can know or ask for.

There is, in this episode, a lot of what I'm calling God's leading:

- Jesus was led by God, probably by a Word of Knowledge, to send two of His guys on the mission to acquire the colt.
- His disciples were led to the colt, where they determined to obey the Lord by loosing it.
- The owner of the colt, and the townspeople in the immediate vicinity, were led to cooperate.
- You could even say the colt was being led, seeing that it had never been ridden before, but immediately submitted to Jesus.

Depending on the words you Google, if you search for God's leading, you'll see a variety of articles. Let me just summarize a few of the ways God can, and does, lead you.

We see, in the Bible, God speaks to all men through creation (see Romans 1:18–20 and Psalm 19:1–2). If you are not a believer, there is enough evidence all around you that there is a Creator. If you seek Him, you will find Him.

The apostle Paul said it best on Mars Hill:

Act 17:26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,
Act 17:27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

God has communicated in various other ways, in the Bible, including angels, His chosen spokesmen (prophets), dreams, visions, and miracles.

He even once, when dealing with the prophet Balaam, spoke through a donkey that He enabled to speak as a man speaks.

While we certainly want to be careful with things like dreams and waking visions, we must admit that God still used these well into the New Testament era:

- We mentioned the angel speaking to Cornelius, and the vision given to Peter to go to Cornelius.
- The apostle Paul received the vision of the Man from Macedonia.

I have to conclude that God can, and does, still lead using these methods.

In the Book of Hebrews we read,

Heb 1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
Heb 1:2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

The life and words of Jesus communicate to us everything we need to know about God. More to our point - Jesus said that, when He left for Heaven, He would send another Comforter of the same kind to lead us. He was speaking of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

If you are a believer, the Holy Spirit dwells within you. As you nurture your relationship with your Heavenly Father, you learn how to be attentive to His voice. As you grow in faith and mature as a believer, you will learn to hear God speak.

Of course, God speaks to us through His written Word - especially as we apply and obey it. One of our most often quoted verses is Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." It implies God has a path for us to find and follow, which He will then illuminate so we can make progress.

God can use your circumstances to lead you.

God can lead you by speaking to you through other believers; or even through nonbelievers.

The truth is, there isn't only one way, or four ways, or ten ways, that God can, and does, lead you. As you walk with Jesus, He will reveal many things to you, in many ways.

Maybe the better question is, "Are you open to being led by God?"

If we didn't have this episode in our Bible, and I were to say, "Jesus told me to go into town, and loose a colt without asking the owner's permission," I think most Christians would say, "Jesus would never tell you to do something like that."

Indeed, if you read some of the stuff on God's leading, and apply it, there's no room for anything extraordinary. The biblical logic these commentators apply cancels the extraordinary.

I'm not saying we do things recklessly and without confirmation, but I am saying God still asks us to venture into the weird now and again. Be open to it.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse looked at this passage and concluded that you and I were Jesus' donkeys. He 'rides' us, as we serve Him by bringing Him into our homes, and into our jobs, and to our schools.

There are obviously a lot of insights we can draw from this triumphal entry, but none more precious than this: God wants to use you. He wants you as His partner in spreading the Good News.

You've heard it said, "Let go and let God." It's not a great biblical philosophy.

We should say, "Let loose and let God." Rather, we ought to hear the Lord saying to us, "the Lord has need of it," then let loose of whatever "it" is.