

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

***“When he was
come into
Jerusalem, all the
city was moved,
saying, Who is
this? And the
multitude said,
This is Jesus the
prophet of
Nazareth of
Galilee.”***

—Matthew 21:10,11

THIS YEAR ON SUNDAY EVE-ning, April 17, 2011, faithful followers of our Lord Jesus from many parts of the world will once again gather in memory of his death. They will partake of the emblems that symbolize their participation with him in his death, as he instructed them. They will eat from the loaf that represents his broken body and drink from the cup which illustrates his shed blood.—Matt. 26:26-28

Jesus left no instructions for us to celebrate his birth, but he did give his disciples specific directions to commemorate his death. It was necessary that he be born into the world as a perfect man to redeem the sin-sick human family by taking the place of Adam, who had disobeyed the law of God. “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:21,22

As a perfect man, the Master taught many important lessons that have had far-reaching effects upon those who have believed and put their trust in him. His many miracles have served to illustrate the far grander work that he will accomplish under the administration of his future kingdom.

A TRIUMPHANT ARRIVAL

The last few days of Jesus' earthly ministry were hectic and tragic. Although he understood the meaning of the events as they followed one another in quick succession, his disciples were in large measure unable to comprehend their true and deeper meaning. Also, Israel as a nation was blind to the fact that the most important event in the history of the world was being fulfilled before their very eyes.

In his gospel account, Matthew provides us with a vivid recollection of Jesus' seemingly triumphant arrival at Jerusalem. It was during those dramatic days that he rode through the gates of the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, and presented himself to Israel in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy that had been written nearly five hundred years earlier. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."—Zech. 9:9

The multitudes of people, who had come to see their king, spread their garments and palm branches before him as he entered the city. This was in observance of an ancient custom of giving respect. The multitude also proclaimed, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9), which is an

acclaim of praise that closely resembles the word “Hallelujah.” Reference to the name David pointed to King David from whose lineage their long-promised Messiah was to come.

THE KING OF ISRAEL

The disciples believed that Jesus was to be a king at that time and they no doubt expected that at some appropriate time he would present himself as the King of Israel. They couldn’t even think about his dying. He was a king, and it was time the people knew it and had the opportunity to acclaim him as such. He was giving them this opportunity and they were rising to the occasion. The disciples must have thought that surely the Messianic kingdom was now at hand.

Then Jesus went to the Temple, healed the sick whom he found there, and drove out the money changers. This seemed to his followers to harmonize very well with his kingly entry into the city and their hopes were no doubt raised even higher. They manifested their enthusiasm by calling Jesus’ attention to the beautiful stones with which the Temple had been built. Perhaps they had visions of Israel’s new ruler soon taking over that magnificent edifice. However their enthusiasm was quickly dampened, and “Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”—Matt. 24:2

A FUTURE KINGDOM

The disciples began to realize that there was much they needed to learn concerning our Lord Jesus and his plans to set up his kingdom. Although

they had no clear picture of what their questions really implied, they did sense from Jesus' remarks that his kingdom was not as near as they had originally supposed. Some may have remembered other things that he had previously said, as recorded by John, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."—John 14:1-4

They wanted to know more about those things of which they realized they knew so very little, and questioned him concerning the time and evidences of his Second Presence and the establishment of his future kingdom. (Matt. 24:3) From the nature of these questions, it is apparent that the disciples began to sense that Jesus might be separated from them for a time, and would return later to establish his kingdom.

The Master's lengthy reply to their questions is a marvelous prophecy not only concerning the end of the age, but also of the intervening time beginning with the downfall of the Jewish nation. It is doubtful that the disciples understood the full impact of the Master's words, but it prepared them for the events that were immediately before them.

JESUS' CLOSING MINISTRY

Having arrived specifically for the Jewish Pass-over Feast, Jesus celebrated the supper with his disciples in the upper room which he had asked

them to prepare ahead of time. It was there that he instituted the Memorial of his death by taking the place of the sacrificial lamb. During that time, Judas bargained to betray him into the wicked hands of his enemies.

After supper, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples, where he spent his time in agonized prayer while awaiting his arrest and trial before Pilate and Herod, and his execution. During that very dark night, our dear Lord endured humiliating mocking and painful scourging, and, finally, his crucifixion between two thieves. These were but a few of the grievous events that marked the closing days of the world's Savior.

The disciples had hoped that Jesus had come to assume his place as the world's rightful king. They had high hopes, but they suffered bewilderment and, finally, bitter disappointment when they realized he was about to die. To many of the Jews, these dramatic events were only the natural consequences of the misguided efforts of a pretender. They may have thought that he was trying to usurp for himself an accepted position as the promised Messiah of Israel. Jesus alone understood his Heavenly Father's will and purpose, and, therefore, was able to bear up under the terrible strain of his trial, and to finish the momentous work that had been given him to do.

DESPISED AND REJECTED

Our Lord had never been accepted by the scribes and Pharisees—the religious leaders of Israel. Individuals among them may have been impressed with his kindly demeanor and manner of teaching

but, as a group, they had been outwardly antagonistic toward him from the very beginning of his earthly ministry. His spiteful enemies never lost an opportunity to do whatever they could to bring hardship upon him, and to prejudice the people against him. However, many of the people were not fooled by the religious leaders, and they appreciated the gracious words which the Master spoke. It was said of him, "Never man spake like this man."—John 7:46

Others were no doubt deeply impressed by the many wondrous miracles that the Master had performed. These marvelous evidences of power had been bestowed upon him by his Heavenly Father, and are reflected in the words of the blind man who had been healed. When the Pharisees challenged the man who had been born blind about how Jesus could have performed such a wonderful miracle, we read in the scriptural account, "He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."—chap. 9:25

In addition to giving sight to the blind, there were also lepers who had been cleansed, cripples who had been made to walk, the deranged who had been freed from the curse of evil spirits, and the dead who had been raised to life again. Few of those who had been blessed by our Lord on these various occasions were able to understand that what Jesus had accomplished in their lives was an illustration of what would be available to the whole world during the time of his future kingdom.

A considerable number of people in Israel were favorably disposed toward Jesus and would not be

easily influenced by the scribes and Pharisees to join in any kind of attempt to take his life. He was also overshadowed by the providential care of his Heavenly Father who prevented his enemies from accomplishing their evil designs against him until it was the “due time” for his sacrifice to be consummated.—I Tim. 2:6

THE DISCIPLES

Jesus had called his disciples to follow him and to become “fishers of men.” (Matt. 4:19) They were eyewitnesses to his wonderful miracles and listened to his gracious words that were filled with the spirit of Truth. As he went about doing good and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, his disciples became convinced that he was indeed the long-promised Messiah of Israel. However, the disciples were natural men who had not yet been begotten of the Holy Spirit. They were, therefore, unprepared for the manner in which the Lord’s ministry was to be so suddenly concluded.

Jesus had earlier made clear to his disciples the reason for his ultimate death. Matthew has recorded the occasion when Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. Peter’s answer to our Lord was evidence of the Holy Spirit of God working in his heart. “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”—Matt. 16:16-19

Further, we read, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.—vs. 21

THE SPIRIT BEGOTTEN

Peter had expressed his willingness to die for his Master, and vigorously opposed any suggestion that Jesus would put himself in harm’s way. Jesus’ reply to Peter on this occasion contained a depth of meaning which can only be grasped and appreciated by the Spirit-begotten. “Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”—vss. 22-25

When Jesus said, ‘Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it,’ he was directing these words to his disciples. During his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated that he would lose his earthly life as a sacrifice and would receive the divine nature—highest

form of all life—as a reward. His sacrifice was a voluntary one, but he must be faithful in carrying out the will of his Heavenly Father and the terms of his covenant of sacrifice. He secured his spiritual life by faithfully completing his earthly sacrifice even unto death. Later, when the Holy Spirit had come upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost, they began to grasp these deep things of God which they were unable to see before. But, even though they did not understand everything the Master told them, they continued to follow him.

By losing his life in sacrifice, Jesus also provided an opportunity of salvation for the whole sin-sick human family that was sentenced to death because of Adam's disobedience to the divine law. This is the reason that the Lord's people commemorate his death. If we are to be like him, we must also lay down our lives in sacrifice and be motivated by the same love which prompted our Lord to lose his life for others.

The Apostle Paul admonished, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

THE UPPER ROOM

The disciples were greatly unsettled as they assembled in the upper room, which had been prepared in advance for their use in partaking of the Passover Feast. There must have been a sense

of increasing anxiety, and the very air was impregnated with impending tragedy. Jesus let it be known that one of them was plotting to betray him. He knew that Judas was the traitor, yet he did not speak against him, but instead addressed him still as a friend.

There was indeed much for the disciples to learn concerning the true spirit and outlook of the Master. They viewed events from a human standpoint and largely one of self-interest. They delighted themselves with the glory which would be theirs when associated with Jesus in his kingdom. They were contentious with each other as to who would be the greatest in the kingdom. This afforded Jesus a further opportunity to exemplify his humility as well as his great passion for service. He washed their feet and explained that he who would be greatest among them would be servant of all.

There was also the strange question concerning the possession of swords. Jesus asked how many his disciples possessed. Being assured that there were two swords in the company, he explained that these were sufficient. (Luke 22:38) Perhaps this question was not so strange to Jesus' disciples at that time as it might be to us now. We know he was to die a sacrificial death and would not permit swords to be used in his defense.

THE 14TH OF NISAN

Jesus and his disciples were in the upper room to eat the Passover supper on the fourteenth day of Israel's first month, Nisan. It was a yearly memorial of that eventful night in Egypt when the blood of the first Passover lamb was sprinkled upon the

lintels and doorposts of the houses, and when the Israelites ate the Passover meal in safety, while all the firstborn of Egypt died.—Exod. 12:1-14

Each year God wanted his people to remember the great deliverance that released the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The typical Passover lamb pointed forward to the far more important sacrifice of Jesus who was the “Lamb of God” who would take away the sin of the world.—John 1:29

With his disciples, Jesus commemorated for the last time the sacrifice of the typical Passover lamb, of which he was the antitype—the true Lamb of God. It was at the conclusion of this last typical feast that he instituted a new Memorial for his followers, and asked them to partake of the loaf and the cup which represented his broken body and shed blood. They were to remember him and show forth his death each year on the 14th day of Nisan. He did not intend this observance to be a continuation of the Passover supper in a new form, but a Memorial of his own sacrifice as the real Passover lamb. Events show us that the disciples still did not realize that it was necessary for Jesus to die in order that they might have life and enjoy the privilege of reigning with him in his future kingdom. Many truths would be opened to their understanding when the Holy Spirit was poured out later.

ON THE WAY TO GETHSEMANE

The account indicates that after Jesus had instituted the Memorial of his death, they immediately left the upper room and made their way to Gethsemane. “When they had sung an hymn, they went

out into the mount of Olives.” (Matt. 26:30) The Master’s heart was very heavy and the disciples were tired, but there was some conversation as they slowly walked toward the garden. Along the way, Peter affirmed his willingness to die for his Master, and said that he would do this even though all others should forsake him.

Once they had entered the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus invited Peter, James, and John to come aside and watch with him. He thought that these three might be disposed to pray with him, but they did not. “Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” (Matt. 26:38,39) We are not to suppose that Jesus even for a moment entertained a desire to violate his covenant of sacrifice. He knew it was the Father’s will for him to die, and he was determined to carry out that will.

Perhaps Jesus did not realize fully until now that his death was to be brought about in an ignominious manner, and that he was to be charged with blasphemy and treason. For one who had done nothing but good and who had honored his Heavenly Father in his every thought, word, and deed, these were heartbreaking charges. Yet, he was glad to die as the world’s Redeemer. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”—Heb. 5:8,9

As far as human aid was concerned, Jesus had very little during the last few hours of his earthly life. This was not because his disciples were unsympathetic. Peter, James, and John were the closest to him, and Peter proved his willingness to help. But these natural-minded men became fearful and were unable to understand the trial through which their Master was passing. However, where the arm of flesh failed the Heavenly Father sustained and gave him comfort. Therefore, Jesus knew that his Father was ever near and ready to help. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"—Matt. 26:53

TRIAL AND EXECUTION

The events surrounding the last hours of Jesus' life took place under cover of darkness. At Gethsemane, Jesus and his disciples were met by the mob led by Judas, which had come out from the city to arrest him. He was then hurried away to be questioned by the religious leaders of Israel, first to Annas (John 18:12-24), and then to Caiaphas the High Priest. (Matt. 26:57-68) From there he was taken to the Council of the Sanhedrin to be examined. (Luke 22:66-71) Being unable to find fault with him, he was then sent to Pilate (chap. 23:1-7), who wanted to release him. Pilate sent him to Herod (vss. 6-12) and Herod sent him back to Pilate.

Pilate was not prejudiced against Jesus and realized that the charges brought against him had no foundation. Even if Jesus did claim to be a king, he knew it didn't constitute him as a contender to the Roman throne. However, the angry mob would not

permit him to release Jesus, so he pronounced his fate and released Barabbas, a robber.—Luke 23:13-25

“When they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head” (Matt. 27:29,30); “And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”—vs. 37

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29 ■