

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 38: Jesus as Israel's True King

Daily Reading for Week

- John 1-2, Psalm 103
- John 3-4, Psalm 104
- John 5-6, Psalm 105
- John 7-8, Psalm 106
- John 9-10, Psalm 107
- John 11-12, Psalm 108
- John 13-15, Psalm 109
- Read Scripture Video: Gospel of the Kingdom (themed video), Heaven and Earth (themed video), John 1-12

Focus of time together

To explore another Gospel story to see hints at Jesus' offensive claim to be the rightful King of Israel.

Connecting Exercise

How real and tangible to you is the idea that Jesus was and is the true King? And what do you think Jesus is the King of?

Opening Prayer

Pray the Lord's Prayer aloud together:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Then take a few minutes to pray this sort of Kingdom-come prayer in your own words, based on your own desires and experiences.

Intro to Discussion

Over the next two weeks, we will look at different aspects of the Kingship of Jesus. From His so-called “triumphal” royal entry into the Passover festival in Jerusalem to His crucifixion only days later, the Gospels show us that Jesus was being revealed as the true King of Israel.

This week, we’ll read the triumphal entry scene which depicts a kind of exaltation and inauguration of Jesus by the Jerusalem crowds. We’ll take a different approach than usual, however. So far in the Gospels, we’ve been primarily practicing “reading backwards,” that is, pausing to notice the Old Testament echoes and allusions that have been carefully woven into the Gospel stories. This week, we will look at two of the more obvious Old Testament echoes and then move on to practice another study technique: comparing stories across the Gospels. The story of Jesus’ “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem on a donkey is one of the handful of stories retold in all four Gospels. In fact, there are only 11 events in Jesus’ life which all four Gospel writers included as absolutely necessary. This indicates the narrative significance of these events.

These common passages also give us an opportunity to explore the many differences between the Gospel accounts. As modern Westerners accustomed to a very particular kind of reporting and history, these differences may first strike us as contradictions or even errors that challenge the reliability of the texts (and thereby Christianity as a whole). This is an unnecessary and confused conclusion, however. These differences do indeed serve as good reminders of the high literary nature of the Gospels, which we often forget. But they are not problems. The Gospels aren’t just dry modern news reports interested in a scientific chronicling of the facts. Rather, they are intricate masterpieces of literary communication construing multiple layers of meaning through their creative storytelling. So these differences between texts aren’t problematic contradictions or errors in history but rather clues as to the narrative focus of each author.

So, we’ll examine Jesus’ triumphal entry according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (which we are currently reading). As you read, pay attention to what is different or unique from one telling to the next. Then we’ll reflect on what these differences could indicate about what part of the story each author wanted to draw reader’s attention to and what their literary motives may have been. Read each text very slowly, giving everyone time to take notes or highlight any words or passages of interest.

Whole Group Discussion (75 minutes)

Questions for Basic Understanding (15 mins)

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

Read John 12:12-16:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;

see, your king is coming,

seated on a donkey’s colt.”

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

1. What do you think the significance of this passage is?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture (25 mins)

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

Read Zechariah 9:9-13:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;

even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

I will bend Judah as I bend my bow

and fill it with Ephraim.

I will rouse your sons, Zion,

against your sons, Greece,

and make you like a warrior’s sword.

Read Psalm 118:26-27:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

*With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.*

Now re-read John 12:12-16:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,
“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;

see, your king is coming,

seated on a donkey’s colt.”

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

1. How do the echoes of Zechariah 9 and Psalm 118 more deeply reveal what it means for Jesus to enter into Jerusalem as the long-expected King?
2. In light of these echoes, consider John the Evangelist’s authorial commentary: “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.” Why do you think John adds this commentary, that the disciples and crowds either misunderstood or couldn’t quite comprehend the truest meaning of Jesus’ Kingship until looking back retrospectively after His death and resurrection?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture (35 mins)

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

Read Mark 11:1-10:

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’” They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Read Luke 19:28-40:

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Now read Matthew 21:1-11:

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is

this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

1. What stood out to you as you read through each account? What differences did you notice?

One striking difference is in Matthew’s telling of the donkey/colt retrieval: “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a *donkey tied there, with her colt* by her. *Untie them and bring them* to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away....The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.”

Whereas Mark, Luke, and John describe the more imaginable scene of Jesus riding on one animal - either a donkey or a colt - Matthew stretches the Old Testament echo to illustrate a more farfetched scene in which Jesus is somehow to ride upon two different animals.

2. Why do you think Matthew wanted to stretch these Old Testament connections?

Questions for Self Examination

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware of who we are in the light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

1. What is it like to think about the Gospels as literary accounts which differ in some details? Do these differences make you feel uncomfortable, disoriented, intrigued, affirmed?
2. How did you experience Jesus throughout this exercise?

Closing Prayer

Pray corporately in response to this exercise, expressing your honest thoughts, emotions, and needs to God.