

Matthew 21:1-11

1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (NRSV).

The scriptural story is one that we are all familiar with, the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It is a very special occasion. Imagine you are there as a pilgrim visiting Jerusalem. At this specific time you know nothing about Jesus. You are an outsider and have not heard the news and you have not heard the buzz that is circulating around the city. You see all of the excitement and are curious about whatever is going on. The Scripture states that the whole city was in turmoil. It does not say that they were excited. Turmoil is a specific word that is used in the NRSV that indicates there was a disturbance, or some confusion, or uncertainty. The Greek word is figurative for a tremor, fear, or concern. There was anxiety, unrest, and trouble in the environment.

There was tension in the air due to three distinctively different groups. First of all, there is the Jesus group. These are the people that have followed Jesus into Jerusalem. They are made up of the disciples, women, children, and a large group of people that have been following him with more curiosity than devotion. Then there are the religious leaders. This is where the trouble comes from. There is a plot to kill Jesus and the religious leaders have unsuccessfully tried several times to trick Jesus. Now that he is in their headquarters where they have a stronghold on the population, the conflict with Jesus intensifies significantly. The overall problem is one of theology and doctrine. They are out of focus with the will of God because their doctrine has been skewed by human impression and opinions. Whereas, Jesus is in focus with pin pointed concentration on the will of God.

The third group is the general public. These are the residents of Jerusalem and the pilgrims that have traveled there. They are excited due to group dynamics. The crowd mentality is self-perpetuating. It is like a fire, the hotter it gets, the better it burns, and the better it burns, the hotter it gets. It feeds upon itself. I recently learned a lesson that was based on famous people and it compared the personality traits of two famous people. It analyzed their charisma, the activities performed, and any potential similarities. What the study brought to light is the group mentality and action of the crowd. It is the dynamics of the crowd that caused each individual of the crowd to perform in ways that they would

not otherwise perform. In crowds, human behavior is more about the group setting than it is about individual personality. The problem with the religious leaders is not that they received a rebuke from Jesus but that they have lost the crowd to Jesus.

Let your imagination take you there. You are witnessing this through the eyes of an unknowing pilgrim that has traveled to Jerusalem and have not yet heard about Jesus. You are expecting a traditional visit to Jerusalem. Everything you see and hear is new to you. Suddenly you see this tremendous excitement. People shouting and praising God. As a pilgrim you wonder what is happening and you ask “Who is this?”

From the perspective of the religious leaders, this is an antagonist, their enemy. He challenged their authority to the point that he disrupted their system of authoritarian control. From the perspective of the crowd, he is a prophet. This is a very important title with elevated religious importance. A prophet is ranked above all of the religious leaders because a prophet is in direct contact with God. However, this is an insufficient title for Jesus. From the perspective of the disciples, this is the Son of God. Those that know him best know that this is the Son of God. Now we are talking. The Son of God is special. This places him in divine status, way above any prophet or any other human being. This is above Abraham, Moses, and David. This is a divine supreme being. He has been known as the Son of God since birth when an angel visited Mary and informed her that her child will be called “Son of God.” When Jesus casts out demons they declare “You are the Son of God.” Simon Peter proclaimed “You are the Son of God.” The centurion at the cross said “Truly this was the Son of God.”

As a pilgrim, you only know the moment. You do not know the movement, the momentum, or any of the things that bring us to this moment. You only know the excitement of now. However, what is happening right now has been developing for years and the conflict with religious leaders intensifies. Jesus has pinpointed, focused concentration on his mission to go to Jerusalem and face the cross in order to save us and deliver us from evil. People see this triumphant entry like a military hero or the approach of a king with a public acclamation and celebration. They fail to see and recognize the prophetic fulfillment that Jesus is the meek messianic king that delivers us from evil.

Jesus had a pinpointed focused mission to deliver us from evil. This is something that only he could do because his status as the Son of God. The gospel writers do not assess the motives of Jesus. They refrain from any attempt of getting lost within the realm of opinions. God’s method of fighting evil is love. God’s purpose of redeeming humanity is to deliver us from evil with his own Son facing the cross and being resurrected.