

“Two Triumphal Entries”

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25 March 2018

Revelation 5:1-14

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”

3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.
[ESV]

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Today is the traditional Palm Sunday for Western Christianity. For many of the Eastern Orthodox churches, Palm Sunday is next week. For all Christians, no matter what date, it represents the beginning of Holy Week. The story of Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem is told in all four Gospels.

The disciples could not miss the fact that what was happening on this day had already been described by the ancient prophet Zechariah:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;

righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” [Zechariah 9:9 ESV]

I’m not sure that the disciples expected it, however. Their remembrance of the passage was an afterthought. It was the disciple Matthew, the former Tax Collector, who noticed it first. Later, the Apostle John recognized it, too.

“This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,
“Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” [Matthew 21:4-5; John 12:15 ESV]

As they were walking toward Jerusalem, passing through Beth Phage and Beth Ani on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, Jesus told two of His disciples —

“Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it.” [Matthew 21:2; Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30 ESV]

The two disciples probably had no clue as to what was about to happen. But they did as He told them. He had warned them —

“If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” [Matthew 21:2; Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30 ESV]

Surely enough, it happened. The owners asked. The disciples answered as instructed. And away they went with the colt.

What happened next was revolutionary. Truly! Jesus mounted the colt (who didn’t buck or rebel), and past the crest of the mountain. That’s when the revolution began. The crowds began announcing the arrival of the Son of David, the rightful king of Israel!

“And the drowds 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!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” [Matthew 21:9-11; see also Mark 11:9-10; Luke 19:38 ESV]

It is well-known from 1st century Jewish writings that the people were expecting a Messiah who would lead Israel from bondage under the fist of Rome into the glorious Messianic kingdom in which Israel would rule the world.

Rome was well aware of this also. It was well-known throughout the Mediteranean region that there were ancient prophecies which foretold such.

“...there was a firm persuasion, that in the ancient records of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judæa, were to acquire universal empire.” [Tacitus, *Histories*, V, 13, 1-2]

“A firm persuasion had long prevailed through all the East, that it was fated for the empire of the world, at that time, to devolve on some one who should go forth from Judæa.” [Suetonius, *Divus Vespasianus*, IV]

It is understandable why Rome would be suspicious of Jesus of Nazareth — He was being acclaimed as the Messiah, the King of the Jews. They feared such sentiments. Any intimation of the rise of a Messianic King from Judea would bring immediate repression from Rome.

This was why Pilate nailed the placard on Christ's cross the way he did. It said, in three languages (lest anyone misunderstand), "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Below the placard hung a helpless Jew, nailed to a cross. That's what Rome thought of Jesus the Messiah.

There is another thread weaving its way through this story of Jesus' Triumphal Entry. It has to do with Passover. Five days before the eve of Passover, the Paschal Lamb was to be selected. That just happens to coincide with the day of Jesus' Triumphal Entry. As the Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world, Jesus was coming to the temple in preparation for the salvation of mankind. Five days later, He would die for the sins of the whole world. [John 1:29, 36]

According to John, the reason the crowds acclaimed Jesus was due to the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

"The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign." [John 12:18 ESV]

The reaction of the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin was also predictable:

"So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'" [John 12:19 ESV]

Thus the stage was set for the redemption of the whole world. This triumphal entry was the prelude for the total triumph over sin and death. As Paul wrote:

"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in the cross." [Colossians 2:15 ESV]

This brings us to the other "Triumphal Entry." It is described in our text for today, Revelation 5:1-14.

First, there is the seven-sealed scroll — the title deed to the Kingdom of God described in Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14.

Second, there is the question: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?"

Third, there is the answer: "Behold, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals." All of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament meet their fulfillment in this Lion, the descendant of King David, the Son of Man who is Son of God. But as we look, what do we see?

"Between the throne and the four living creatures, and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain..." [Revelation 5:6 ESV]

The Lamb of God, who took away the sin of the world, deeply wounded, is going forward in triumph to take the Title Deed to His Kingdom.

And what do we hear? Songs of victory, triumph — the One who conquered by the cross makes His triumphal entry to the presence of His Father, accompanied by songs reverberating throughout the cosmos.

First, there are the twenty-four elders, whose presence in that celebration scene depended upon the Lamb's victory:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” [Revelation 5:9-10 ESV]

Vast myriads of glorious angelic beings throughout the universe join the refrain with a verse of their own:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” [Revelation 5:12 ESV]

The rest of all creation chimes in:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” [Revelation 5:13 ESV]

The Cherubim close it all with a rapturous “Amen!”
The Lamb of God has triumphed forever. It is finished!