

“The Die is Cast”
The Gospel According to Mark 11:1-11
August 26th, 2018

Of England’s early kings, he was perhaps the best loved. Yet history has all but forgotten him.

We know that he ruled during the third century, and that he had a daughter who was a skilled musician. And, that’s about all we’d know. Today, all that’s left of him is an earthwork amphitheater in Colchester...and something more...something that survives the reign of that king to this very day.

Two ancient writers mention our king briefly – Geoffrey of Monmouth and Robert of Gloucester. This third century king was remarkable for his era in that rulers of those days had reputations for negligence, dishonesty, thievery, and murder. But, not this king. Geoffrey and Robert described him as brave yet even-tempered; capable, yet good-humored. He was respected and popular.

If not for Geoffrey and Robert – if not for the earthwork Roman amphitheater which exists to this day – if not for a few lines of verse written about him, we’d know nothing about this king.

The author of those lines of verse is unknown. Regardless who is responsible, today we have greater insight into the temperament of an ancient king because some took the time to make up a rhyme. In this, the forgotten king has achieved a degree of immortality:

“Old King Cole
Was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe,
And he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three.”

I recited that poem as a child, *perhaps you did, too?* I thought that Old King Cole and Nat King Cole were the same person! The vast majority of kings throughout history have not been good rulers, rather they were bad kings. Just look at the kings of Israel and Judah – none of Old Testament Israel’s 19 kings were good kings. Though Judah fared better, only 25% of her kings could be labeled “good.” Scripture describes 4 of Judah’s kings as good (benevolent) rulers – Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. They and Old King Cole were cut from the same cloth.

We return today to our study of Mark’s gospel account. To this point, we’ve completed a study of 10 of its 16 chapters. Today, we begin a new chapter – **Mark 11:1-11** (Ones are wild!) The substance of the text is familiar; it’s covered by each of the 4 writers of the gospel. And, we read it every springtime at the beginning of Holy Week – the Sunday before Resurrection Sunday (Easter Sunday) – the day we call Palm Sunday. You’ve heard of Christmas in July...today, we celebrate Palm Sunday in August!

As we study this text, we’re reminded that there was – and is- a King Who is good in every way...perfect in every way. This King – Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God – is presently the only King over the heavens and the earth; He is because He made them, and everything in them! Jesus is our King, beloved, and to Him we owe all allegiance, honor, and praise!

The Gospel According to Mark 11:1-11:

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; 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*. 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.”

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

⁵ But some of those who stood there said to them, “What are you doing, loosing the colt?”

⁶ And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road. 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!’

¹⁰ Blessed *is* the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!”

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.”

In coming to Jerusalem, Jesus had reached the point of no return. There was no turning back; He had crossed the Rubicon River; the die was cast. All of His earthly ministry pointed toward Jerusalem and what had to take place there. Luke captures this in the closing verses of his gospel account (**Luke 9:51ff**) when he writes of Jesus, “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,”

Oh, such strength in purpose; such commitment by our Lord for our benefit! Oh, that we who profess to know Jesus as Lord and Savior could learn from our Lord! He never swerved from the mission He came to earth to accomplish. Yet, in comparison, how often we wander from God’s Word and the fellowship of the Church! When we make vows or promises, we must look for ways to fulfill them, not try to wiggle out of them, or discard them altogether!

When Julius Caesar landed on the shores of Britain with his Roman legions, he took a bold and decisive step to ensure the success of his military venture. Ordering his men to march to the edge of the Cliffs of Dover, Caesar commanded his men to look down at the water below.

To their amazement, they saw every ship in which they had crossed the channel engulfed in flames. Caesar had deliberately cut off any possibility of retreat. Now that his soldiers were unable to return to the continent, there was nothing left for them to do but to advance and conquer! And that is exactly what they did.

We see from today’s passage of Scripture that the crowds were excited; they rejoiced as they welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. *But, what was on Jesus’ mind as He entered the city where He would be arrested, tried, sentenced, and crucified?* Luke’s gospel account helps us with that. **Luke 19:41** reads, “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it...” It was not a joyous event for our Savior to enter the Holy City. Arriving at Jerusalem meant the time for Jesus’ death was very near; the great mission He undertook in leaving heaven and taking upon Himself our flesh was culminating in the greatest event ever in human history: The death and resurrection of the Savior of God’s elect ones!

Jesus didn't accomplish much of His ministry in the public square. As we've seen in our study of Mark, when large crowds surrounded Him, Jesus was typically in the wilderness, a remote area, or out on the water of a lake or sea. But now, in arriving at Jerusalem, "He drew the attention of rulers, and priests, and elders, and Scribes, and Greeks, and Romans to Himself. He knew that the most wonderful event that ever happened in this world was about to take place. The eternal Son of God was about to suffer in the stead of sinful men – the great sacrifice for sin was about to be offered up – the great Passover Lamb about to be slain – the great atonement for the world's sin about to be made. He therefore ordered it that His death was...a public death." (Ryle, 227)

To enter the city, Jesus chose to ride a donkey's colt. This act was symbolic of a king coming in peace. If, when a city was conquered, the victorious monarch approached riding a white warhorse, the city's inhabitants knew He was coming to judge and destroy the city. If he approached on a donkey's colt, they knew He was coming in peace. And for Jesus, He was fulfilling prophecy. First, we see this from **Genesis 49:10-11**:

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.
¹¹ Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes."

Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, wants us to see the connection here. By riding a donkey into Jerusalem, Jesus fulfilled the patriarch Jacob's prophesy to his son Judah. Several hundred years later, yet still several hundred years before the birth of the Christ Child, the prophet Zechariah wrote (**Zechariah 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."

In placing their clothes on the donkey and branches on the road, the people were carrying out the reception King Jehu received in **2 Kings 9:13**, "Then each man hastened to take his garment and put *it* under him on the top of the steps; and they blew trumpets, saying, "Jehu is king!"

The same is true of their words. This is from **Psalms 118:25 & 26** – "Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD." "Save now" is the meaning of "Hosanna"!

We also note something important about the colt the two disciples were to fetch. It was to be a colt that had not been ridden...meaning, it was reserved for sacred use. *Doesn't that make you think of Mary, Jesus' earthly mother, who was a virgin when Jesus was conceived within her womb? What about the tomb Jesus was buried in, where "no one had ever lain before"?* (Luke 23:53)

Some final thoughts on this very familiar passage of Scripture:

1 - Jesus had come to Jerusalem to take His throne – but He had committed Himself to begin His reign from a cross. He who could raise the dead...was now Himself submitting to die. When we truly begin to follow Jesus, we must submit to the death of our needs, desires, and preferences. We must die to self in order to achieve life in Jesus!

2 – It has taken Jesus some time to finally arrive in Jerusalem. Mary Slessor, the great missionary to Calabar (today's Nigeria), once wrote, "Christ never was in a hurry. There was no rushing forward, no anticipating, no fretting over what might be. Each day's duties were done as each day brought them, and the rest was left with God." So, we must not grow weary in doing good. We must continue to serve others, doing the seemingly small things in order to make our God, Jesus Christ big. Live for Jesus, dear ones, each and every day as it comes to you.

3 – Remember Who are lives are to make others think of. Jesus...not us.

The donkey awakened, his mind still savoring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life. Never before had he felt such a rush of pride. He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. "I'll show myself to them," he thought. But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind.

"Throw your garments down," he said crossly. "Don't you know who I am?" They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move.

"Miserable heathens!" he muttered to himself. "I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They will remember me." But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the market place.

"The palm branches! Where are the palm branches!" he shouted. "Yesterday, you threw palm branches!" Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother.

"Foolish child," she said gently. "Don't you realize - without Jesus, you are just an ordinary donkey?"

Just like the donkey who carried Jesus in Jerusalem, we are most fulfilled when we are in the service of Jesus Christ. Without him, all our best efforts are like "filthy rags" and amount to nothing. When we lift up Christ, however, we are no longer ordinary people, but key players in God's plan to redeem the world.