



Matthew 21:10–11

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” 11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Reflection

The most important life ever lived was the life of Jesus Christ, and the most important week of that life, was the momen-

tous week that ended it. Jesus lived thirty three years. Four biographies of his life were written down, we call them the gospels, the good news of Jesus Christ, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Luke dedicates one fifth of his gospel to Jesus' last week, Matthew a quarter, Mark a third, and John almost half. That's how important they believe this week is. That's how they want Jesus to be remembered down throughout the ages. This week is what defines Jesus. Not his miracles, or even his wisdom the likes of which the world has never seen; that was just the prelude. This week Jesus Christ dies and rises again from the dead and the course of human history is changed forever. This week has been planned since before the foundation of the world. And the eternal fate of all of humankind depends unique-

ly on each person's individual response to the events that unfold this week.

This week begins on Palm Sunday. Jesus rides the final kilometre of his journey to Jerusalem on a donkey. The king of the Jews comes in peace and is mobbed by huge expectant crowds. They're lining his way with the cloaks off their backs and fresh-cut palm branches recalling the victory parades of all conquering kings of the past.

Many of these religious pilgrims descending on Jerusalem for Passover come from Galilee in the north. They've heard stories of Jesus' preaching, stories of the Sermon on the Mount. They've heard stories of his miraculous healings and of calming storms with a word. Stories of an au-

thority and wisdom that leaves the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law red-faced and speechless. An authority that can even drive out demons. And there are rumours circulating amongst them that just last week, in Bethany, Jesus raised a man Lazarus from the dead; dead three days and then brought back to life.

This has all happened outside of the walls of Jerusalem amongst huge crowds, many of whom were either from Galilee where Jesus had spent much of his public ministry, or who had heard of Jesus along their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But in verse 10 of our passage Jesus actually enters Jerusalem. He probably entered the city through a gate that some now call St Stephen's gate, near the north entrance to the outer court of the temple. In verse 10 we read,

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The huge crowds from Galilee certainly seemed to know who Jesus was but on entering Jerusalem many of the Judean Jews, residents of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside, seem to have less of an idea. You might remember that Jesus headed north after his first year of far more private ministry in Judea when John the Baptist was arrested. He then spent his second and far more public year of ministry in Galilee in the north. So he would have been lesser known in the south.

Verse 10 says that the whole city ‘was stirred’ but this description doesn’t do

justice to the original language. The word that is used in the Greek (the language that sits underneath our English translations) is more appropriate for an earthquake. Think seismic disturbance. Think ‘wild with excitement’ or ‘was thrown into commotion’ as some of the other translations put it.

To get an appropriate feel for the temperature of these crowds a brief history lesson is in order. There were three annual pilgrimage festivals that all adult Jews, in theory, needed to make to Jerusalem: The Passover, the Festival of Weeks, and Festival of Tabernacles. They’re each listed and described in Deuteronomy 16 if you’re interested. However the Passover festival, it seems, was the one most enthusiastically observed. Perhaps the nearest mod-

ern equivalent might be the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Both ancient and modern estimations of the numbers involved vary widely but perhaps a reasonable approximation would be that if the normal population of Jerusalem was around 30,000 then the number at Passover would have been something like 180,000. That's a six-fold increase in population over Passover. People travelled from not just Judea and Galilee but from all over the Mediterranean. There were therefore many times more people than the city could properly accommodate, and so Passover groups camped all around the city. The official city limits were extended at Passover time to include the surrounding hillsides, Bethphage being the outer limit according to the Talmud (Jewish writings derived from the period).

The temple courtyard, which as we'll hear about tomorrow was huge in size, would be the natural gathering ground for this huge throng of people during the festival.

Imagine the whole city, swelled to beyond capacity with religious pilgrims, being thrown into commotion by one who arrives from the north after the fashion of a conquering king. And the question on everyone's lips was, 'Who is this man?' Verse 11,

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

Not the whole story but enough to make those in power very nervous. A prophet, a man with the authority of God behind him,

enters Jerusalem and is received like an all-conquering king, to celebrate a festival that remembers God delivering his people from pagan rule. Enough to make the Romans rest their hands uneasily on their swords. They'd arrest him in an instant only these seasoned military strategists knew how foolish it would be to antagonize crowds gripped with such religious fervour. Far better to bide your time and closely monitor the situation. So too the chief priests and Pharisees, who had kind of delegated authority beneath the Romans. They too would have arrested Jesus then and there but as we learn in verse 46 of this chapter they were also afraid of how the crowds would react. And so they lay in waiting, biding their time until the appropriate opportunity should present itself.

And so with the whole city stirring, behind the scenes the battle lines are drawn. In entering on that donkey Jesus has brought this on himself. Deliberately and decisively he has brought this on himself. And he's just beginning, as we'll see tomorrow when he enters the temple.

Think & Pray

But with what time remains today I'd like you to revisit that question from the citizens of Jerusalem. Their whole city was abuzz with news of his arrival, Romans nervously reaching for weapons, Jewish religious leaders ready to commit murder out of jealousy, a city brought to the brink of civil war at the rumour of his coming. 'Who is this man?'

How do you answer this question? Who is Jesus to you? Has he shaken up your life the way he shook up this city? When he entered your life did he turn it on its head? Is he your king? The king of kings and the lord of lords? The one who right now is holding all creation into being by his powerful word? The one who brought you from death to life? The one you owe everything to? Or is he just a casual interest on Sunday morning?

If Jesus is who he says he is, and you believe that he is who he says he is then is this reflected in the way you are living your life? Does your heart beat for him? Is your trust and confidence and identity and worth found in him? How often is he on your lips and how often is his joy found

in your heart?

What do we need to do to have our whole city abuzz with the news of Jesus? How can we shake this city with the gospel of Jesus Christ? What can you lay down for him to make his triumphant entry into our city? The cloak off your back in homage to your king? Some of the money he's given you, or some of your time, or just letting the heartfelt joy of his presence in your life be evident more often on your face. So much to think about.

When you've done so, please spending some time committing your day to Jesus. Pray that you would see him ever more clearly. That he would be the defining vision of your life. Pray for opportunities to live and speak and rejoice in his gospel

today.