

We looked at Mark's version in November 2021. All four Gospels have Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, as this was obviously a moment that the disciples remembered as something that fitted in with their desires to see Jesus as king overthrowing the Romans and establishing a new kingdom in Israel.

Let's look at the other versions

Matthew 21 1-11

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.' ⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ '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.'" ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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!' 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.'

Luke 19: 28-44

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ '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. ³¹ If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" say, "The Lord needs it.'" ³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' ³⁴ They replied, 'The Lord needs it.' ³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ 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: ³⁸ 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' ⁴⁰ 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you.'

John 12: 12-19

12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ 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!' ¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written: ¹⁵ 'Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.' ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!'

I've looked back at what I said in November 2021 (it's in the website under Resources) and am wondering what I should say that is different, or repeat what I said then, to see if any of you remember anything from a year and a half ago!

So who can remember what Hosanna means? Please save now, or please rescue now, or please help now.

Who can remember what psalm “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, blessed is the king of Israel” comes from? Psalm 118.

Psalm 118

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever. ² Let Israel say: ‘His love endures for ever.’ ³ Let the house of Aaron say: ‘His love endures for ever.’ ⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say: ‘His love endures for ever.’ ⁵ When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD; he brought me into a spacious place. ⁶ The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? ⁷ The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies. ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in men. ⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes. ¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them down. ¹¹ They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the LORD I cut them down. ¹² They swarmed around me like bees, but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them down. ¹³ I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. ¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation. ¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: ‘The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things! ¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high; the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!’ ¹⁷ I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. ¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. ¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. ²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. ²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ²³ the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes. ²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad. ²⁵ LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success! ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. ²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever.

The crowds are quoting Psalm 118, a psalm of victory for the Lord and victory for Israel. The crowds had seen what Jesus had done to blind Bartimaeus, that he had raised Lazarus from the dead, that Jesus could work miracles and do the same things as Elijah and Elisha. They had high hopes that Jesus would lead the nation back into independence, deliver the nation from Roman subjugation, and establish a new kingdom – led by a descendant of David. This was achievable in the eyes of those rejoicing and praising Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The Maccabees had achieved this 200 years earlier. The obstacles – the Romans, the religious leaders, and king Herod hadn’t appeared in any force. During the ministry of Jesus, there were crowds listening to him and following him, but they weren’t on the radar of the Romans as a threat. Nor was king Herod apparently feeling threatened because, unlike John the Baptist, Jesus hadn’t criticised him. The only people feeling uncomfortable about Jesus’ ministry were the scribes, teachers of the law, the Pharisees and Sadducees... and that was more about envy, jealousy, and being miffed that Jesus never seemed to accept their authority, their traditions and won every argument they brought against him. Moreover, they couldn’t heal the sick, cast out demons or raise the dead.

I remember that in the Alpha course Nicky Gumbel said that hardly anyone became a Christian because a Christian won an argument with him (or her). No one likes losing an argument, and the loser usually goes away feeling diminished, crushed, annoyed and disappointed rather than feeling elated that someone had got the better of him and glad that the new information or argument had changed his mind. Instead stating what we believe the truth is, and letting others think or say what they like about it, without arguing over it or telling them point blank they’re wrong, is how the Alpha course has based its success. Jesus’ teaching presents truths. Sometimes the listeners don’t understand or try to refute what he says, and like all good Jews, he often answers a question with a question himself. This time he throws a one liner at the Pharisees that they get (because of their great learning and command of the Scriptures) is a rebuke to them.

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ⁴⁰ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’ Jesus responds with a simple statement in answer the demand made by the Pharisees who didn’t like what the crowd was saying. And the Pharisees knew what he meant as they knew what the Scriptures said about stones crying out - in Habakkuk 2: 10-11 the Lord says:

You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. ¹¹ The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

That made them even more cross and annoyed with Jesus because he used Scripture, against them which they could not argue against. Today, quoting Scripture to those who claim to be Christians but who want to ignore it or alter what has been taught and accepted for thousands of years, really makes them angry as they have no answer if they claim to believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

When we last looked at this in November 2021, I put some questions to you.

Going on to some points to take home with you which are: (1) **If this story happened today, what would it look like?** (2) **What is this story saying to us today?** (3) **Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?**

(1) If this story happened today, what would it look like?

Today any celebrity, any one who does something heroic, any one who has done things to benefit mankind, any one who is famous and talented, can in a flash be torn down by a false accusation, torn down by a misquote, torn down because of something an ancestor did that was “unacceptable”. One moment the crowds may be cheering an achievement, praising what has been achieved ... and the next moment Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, broadcasters, news reporters and politicians will have cancelled a person for something which is not entirely clear, or even if it is, it will be done without a fair trial, without evidence fairly laid out and tested, and even then the truth will be ignored. Accusation equals guilt until proved innocent, and even then, many will never believe the truth. The tearing down is done by a few angry, envious, bitter, vindictive people who then whip up others into a judgmental frenzy where any who disagree with the unfairness of it all become victims of the same nastiness piled on the person being “cancelled” or “condemned”. The mob shouting “crucify him” a week later shows how people can be manipulated by a small number of others. The Sanhedrin was usually about 40 men, who could call on others to amplify their opinion so that it is almost mindlessly repeated by the mob. The high priest claimed that Jesus saying he was the son of God was blasphemy and that trigger word whipped up the small crowd of onlookers – remember this was very early in the morning. The crowd grew throughout the morning as word spread, and whatever good Jesus had done was forgotten as the blasphemy charge overrode everything. The devil is the accuser of the brethren and no one is safe from false accusation by the wicked who always seek to denigrate the good. However because Jesus was meant to die, we come to the tricky question of free will... did Judas or Caiaphas and Ananias the chief priests act in the way they did out of choice or because they were meant to do what they did so that the plan of God would be fulfilled?

As an example, think of Cliff Richard, a Christian entertainer, falsely accused and how the media treated him. The BBC had boycotted playing his records for decades simply because they hated, for no reason, his music, his faith, his lifestyle, his huge fanbase, and his lack of the usual rock star depravity. Then the BBC thought they had a “gotcha” moment, a scoop, and justified their unfairness as “public interest” even though it was all based on false accusations by a fantasist. Footage of the ransacking of his home replayed, hounding by reporters for comment on a matter he knew nothing about, much negative reporting by smug self-righteous folk who believed what they wanted to believe. No one who is perceived to be a “goody-goody” is safe from those who live in the dark and want others to be as depraved and sinful as they are.

(2) What is this story saying to us today?

As Christians, we must be courageous and willing to stand up for what we believe. We will face at some point in our lives, times when people will form opinions about us that aren't based on reality. Facts, truth and reality are often ignored when they are inconvenient to the narrative or agenda that people are trying to put forward.

In the last two thousand years the Good News of Jesus has been accepted in most of the world as Good News. Up until recently it has been accepted as entirely reasonable to believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus: the Royal family, the leaders of the country, the default position in society was acceptance of Christianity as the True Faith. Today it is not. The most vocal sections of our divided society condemn Christianity as either fairy tales or as bigoted and homophobic. From almost universal adulation and acceptance to denigration and rejection in a generation, rather than just 7 days.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:10-12: *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus says in John 15:18-25 -

¹⁸ If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: "A servant is not greater than his master". If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfil what is written in their Law: "They hated me without reason."

(3) Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?

We can be kind and generous and helpful to some who will be grateful, but others, can without warning, become ungrateful, spiteful and reject us. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us. We need God's protection and putting on the armour of God each morning is one way to start the day with the right equipment to avoid being ground down by adversity. Whatever the opposition, we must stand firm. In Ephesians 6:10-18 the apostle Paul writes:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Let's pray.