

The Entry (19:29–40)

(Matthew 21:1–9; Mark 11:1–10; John 12:12–16)

The scene opens at the Mount called Olivet, near the villages of Bethany and Bethphage, less than two miles east of the city. The Mount of Olives had strong eschatological associations (Zech. 14:4–5), but most likely Luke is not tapping that resource here; after all, he has just said that the end is not yet (v. 11). Sending two disciples ahead to make preparation recalls the beginning of the journey to Jerusalem (9:51–52). Luke would probably have us understand that the colt was owned by a disciple of Jesus and that Jesus is operating, not according to a prearranged plan, but according to divine knowledge. For sacred purposes animals were used that had not previously been employed in other service (1 Sam. 6:7).

Several features in Luke’s account of this event call for close attention. First, notice that the entry involves Jesus and his disciples ✎. Disciples secure the colt, disciples place Jesus on the colt, disciples called him the King who comes in the name of the Lord ✎ (Luke only echoes Zech. 9:9; Matthew and John both quote the prophecy). There is no ovation by the general crowds that are in the city for the festival ✎ (Matt. 21:9) or by those who had gathered because of reports about the raising of Lazarus (John 12:12); Jesus is honored and praised by his followers. This is not the group which turns cold and later calls for Jesus’ crucifixion. His disciples did not fully understand his messiahship, to be sure, but neither are they persons who sing praise and scream death the same week ✎. The portrait of such a fickle crowd must come from some account other than Luke’s. The story as Luke tells it is less crowded and more subdued, but it is an event of and for believers, and its meaning lies in Jesus and in their faith in him, meaning that is in no way related to public favor or disfavor, participation or nonparticipation ✎. This is not to say Jesus’ followers have come to clarity and maturity; the events soon to transpire will test them, and some will fail. But at this moment, descending the Mount of Olives, they are right.

Second, Luke’s account contains no mention of hosannas, of palms, or of branches cut from trees. Those belonged to parades and festivals with nationalistic overtones, and Luke apparently wants this event to carry no such implication ✎. Perhaps this is also the reason the bursts of praise contain no references to David or to the Davidic throne.

The word “King” is used (v. 38), but it seems to be without political force. In fact, the expressions of praise to the King join Ps. 118:26 and the words of the heavenly host at the birth of Jesus (2:14). “King” is placed beside “Peace”; there is nothing here to support the charge against him before Pilate (23:2).

Finally, a feature of the episode peculiar to Luke’s account is the objection by some Pharisees to the activity of the disciples (v. 39). We cannot, of course, know in what tone of voice or with what motivation the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke his disciples. Perhaps they feared that calling Jesus King would be misinterpreted and create political repercussions. If so, their reason might have been from self-interest; that is, let us not upset the Romans and lose what few benefits we now have. Or their reason might have been concern for Jesus’ safety. After all, they had warned Jesus earlier about the threat of Herod (13:31). Of course, the Pharisees could simply be registering their own disagreement or disbelief. But whatever their problem with the activity, Jesus simply responds in a vivid image to affirm the rightness and appropriateness of his disciples’ praise. “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (v. 40). In other words, some things simply must be said; the disciples are expressing what is ultimately and finally true; God will provide a witness though every mouth be stopped; opposition to Christian witness cannot succeed; and the truth will come out, it cannot long be silenced. That stones would shout is, of course, a figure of speech, but the expression does remind us that in biblical understanding, the creation is involved in events that we tend to think affect humans alone. Genesis says that the sin of Adam and Eve caused the earth to produce thorns and thistles; Isaiah sings of a reign of peace on earth when cows and bears will graze together and the lion and the lamb will lie down side by side; Matthew says a special star appeared to announce Jesus’ birth, and that the earth shuddered, cracking rocks, when he died; and all the Synoptists agree that when Jesus was put on the cross, for three hours there was an eclipse of the sun. All this dramatic language reminds us of that which we sometimes forget: all life is from God, the whole universe shares together bane and blessing, life and death, and in the final reign of God “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Of course, if we are silent, the stones will cry out.

Jesus Laments Over the City (19:41–44)

The disciples have hardly finished their song, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest, when Jesus looks up, sees the city before him, and weeps, “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!” (v. 42). The city is blind to its own need for repentance and forgiveness of sin (the substance of the gospel in Luke-Acts, 24:47) and to the fact that in Jesus God has visited the city with an offer of peace (v. 44). The offer was rejected and Israel chose to take up arms against Rome. Outbreaks of violence occurred intermittently until the open war which brought about the fall of the city and the destruction of the temple in the year 70 C.E. By the time Luke wrote, that war was history, and Luke draws upon that history in the description of how the Romans took Jerusalem (vv. 43–44). The lament also draws upon [Isa. 29:3](#) specifically and the tragic scenes in [Jeremiah 6](#) which portray the end of Jerusalem as the punishment of God. It is evident here that Luke interprets the fall of Jerusalem as directly related to its rejection of Jesus.

Verses 42–44 are called a lament, and so they are. The Bible is no stranger to laments: the psalmist laments, prophets lament, God laments. They are not so frequent in the New Testament, although the painful beauty of [Revelation 18](#) is hardly surpassed anywhere in Scripture. That Jesus laments over Jerusalem is a clear revelation of his character, for a lament is complex in its nature, and it may be that not everyone is capable of such expression. A lament is a voice of love and profound caring of vision of what could have been and of grief over its loss, of tough hope painfully releasing the object of its hope, of personal responsibility and frustration, of sorrow and anger mixed, of accepted loss but with energy enough to go on. The preacher or the teacher when dealing with this text may have to reach back of our overused “to cry” and return to the old English “to weep” in the effort to communicate the depth of passion present in Jesus.