

Luke 19:29-48: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 05 June 2020

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- [0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 19 verses 29 to 48. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you why are you untying it, you shall say this, The Lord has need of it. So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owner said to them, Why are you untying the colt? And they said, The Lord has need of it. And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. And as he was drawing near, already on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out. And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace.
- [1 : 2 0] But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation. And he entered the temple, and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers. And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him. But they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words. At the end of Luke chapter 19, we begin the third phase of Luke's gospel. The first phase runs from the start of the gospel to the turn towards Jerusalem. The second phase is the long, drawn-out journey to Jerusalem. And now, with the triumphal entry, we enter Jerusalem and the final week. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem echoes passages such as 1 Kings chapter 1 verses 33-44, where Solomon's riding on the king's mule is a demonstration that he is the true heir and successor to David.
- [2 : 3 3] This also fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9-10. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation as he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations. His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

Donkeys and mules were associated with judges and royalty in scripture. The kingdom began with a quest to find donkeys in 1 Samuel chapter 9, and it seems to me that that story is being recalled here in various ways.

The judges and Saul were associated with donkeys. Judges chapter 5 verse 10, chapter 10 verse 4, chapter 12 verse 14, and 1 Samuel chapter 9 verse 3.

The instructions given to the disciples are also similar to the sorts of signs given to Saul at the dawn of the kingdom, in 1 Samuel chapter 10. And indeed, this is the first of three signs, I believe, that present the coming of the kingdom with Christ, as parallel with the first dawn of the kingdom in the book of 1 Samuel.

[3 : 45] No one has ever sat on the animal before. It's dedicated for a special purpose, and the casting of garments is reminiscent of the welcome of Jehu to Jerusalem in 2 Kings chapter 9 verses 11 to 13, where he came to destroy the worship of Baal.

When Jehu came out to the servants of his master, they said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? And he said to them, You know the fellow and his talk. And they said, That is not true. Tell us now.

And he said, Thus and so he spoke to me, saying, Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel. Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, Jehu is king.

This might also remind us of David's removal of his outer garments in the triumphal entry of the ark into Jerusalem. The Pharisees then would be like Michael, who sought to rebuke David in 2 Samuel chapter 6, and was judged for it.

It's important to notice that Jesus moves from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and back again several times in the chapters that follow. In chapter 19 verse 37, chapter 21 verse 37, chapter 22 verse 39, chapter 23 verse 33, and chapter 24 verse 50.

[5 : 03] This geographical to and fro is significant. The reference to the stones crying out might also recall John the Baptist's claim of chapter 3 verse 8, of God creating children for Abraham from the stones.

It should also be related probably to the claim in the immediately following verses that the stones of Jerusalem would be levelled. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

Jerusalem does not know the day of its visitation. It was not aware. It was not prepared. And his weeping over Jerusalem might recall the weeping of the prophet Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations.

Jehu's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was followed by the destruction of the temple of Baal and its priests. Unsurprisingly, then, Jesus goes to the temple and drives people out.

His statement about the temple being a den of thieves needs to be read against the background of Jeremiah chapter 7, to which he alludes. Jeremiah chapter 7 verse 11 is the verse he quotes.

[6 : 02] The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah, who enter these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.

Do not trust in these deceptive words. This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered!

Only to go on doing all these abominations. Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.

The Jews of Jeremiah's day treated the temple as a sort of talisman. It protected them from God's judgment. Because God was present there, they could get away with what they wanted. They thought that it enabled them to continue in oppression and lawlessness.

[7 : 26] They could, like brigands fleeing to a den, flee to the temple and find refuge there, their worship providing them with cover for all their iniquity. Jesus is making the same point of his generation.

They have treated the temple and its worship as a way to excuse themselves from the actual service of the Lord, as a way to cover up their crimes, and not to deal with the truth of what they have done.

I don't believe that the point of driving out those buying and selling in the temple was primarily to do with an objection to the money changers, and the dove sellers in particular, or with any principled objection to the performance of such activities within the broader temple precincts.

The chief point was to put a temporary halt to the sacrifices, which couldn't proceed without these activities. Now there is an allusion, I think, to Zechariah chapter 14 verse 21, And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them, and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them.

And there shall be no longer a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day. Jesus then, having driven out all these people, makes the temple a site of his teaching.

[8 : 36] It's worth noting the language of exorcism that is used to describe the removal of those who are buying and selling in the temple in verse 45. A question to consider.

In the triumphal entry, as the people are praising God, they quote Psalm 118. Why might the quotation from this psalm at this particular juncture be significant?