

Session 12

HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST

Mark 11:1-11

Memory Verse

*Blessed is the coming kingdom
of our father David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!*

– MARK 11:10, CSB



Hosanna in the Highest

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus entered Jerusalem as Messiah, ready to pay the price for our eternal deliverance from sin.

CALL TO ACTION: We can live each trusting Jesus's saving work on our behalf.

In 2012, London was set to host the Olympics. Those watching the opening ceremonies saw the familiar London scene of Buckingham Palace as the backdrop for an epic start to this global event.

Here, famous personalities collided, both from real life and the big screen. The fictional super-spy James Bond, the famous royal corgis, and the late Queen Elizabeth II. This intro gave us not only a behind-the-scenes look at the elegance of Buckingham Palace but also culminated in one of the most daring entrances of all time.

From the palace, the Queen and Bond hopped in a helicopter that took them soaring over London, arriving at the arena where the opening ceremony would take place. From there, the Queen and James Bond jumped out of the helicopter and parachuted into the stadium with the iconic Union Jack on their parachutes!¹

Okay, it was not exactly the Queen. She was in her 80s at the time, so a stunt double dressed like her executed the jump, but it made quite the enchanting entrance.

Royals throughout history have made memorable entrances that are often both impressive and significant, but none were so important as Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. This took place during what we now call Holy Week, the week leading up to Jesus's death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection.

 What is a famous entrance that stands out in your mind? What made it memorable?

 What do you do if you want to make an entrance in a particular setting or with a certain group?

Session Summary

Today, we'll study Jesus's triumphal entry, beginning the week leading up to His death and subsequent resurrection. Mark's Gospel devotes significant attention to Holy Week, and all four Gospels record Jesus's triumphal entry, making clear this event is an important one in biblical record.

As He approached Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, Jesus had His disciples fetch an unridden colt, a mode of transportation fit for a king, and one that fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. This choice in transportation presented Jesus as a servant King.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, many spread their clothes and leafy branches before Him, an act usually reserved for royalty. The people shouted lines from Psalm 118, traditionally sung during Passover celebration. Their cries of "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (v. 10) was a call to the Lord to deliver His people. The crowd expected immediate deliverance from the oppression of Rome, but God had a further-reaching deliverance in mind that Jesus would soon fulfill.

1. The Colt (Mark 11:1-6)

 How did Jesus display trust in the Father in this passage?
How did the disciples display trust in Jesus and the Father?

 How did the response of those who questioned the disciples further affirm Jesus's identity and testimony?

The events of Holy Week make up about one-third of the entire gospel of Mark², known to be fast-moving and action-packed.

We know this event in Scripture as the “triumphal entry” (which we remember on Palm Sunday), the second event that is recorded in all four gospel accounts (the prior event being the feeding of the 5,000).³ This is recorded in Matthew 21:1-6, Luke 19:28-34, and John 12:14-15. Mark's emphasis on these events, and all four Gospel writers' inclusion of them, signifies their importance.

The landmarks mentioned in 11:1 are all nearby Jerusalem (Bethany, two miles to the east, the Mount of Olives, a large hill just to the east of Jerusalem—many Passover travelers would camp here, and Bethpage was a town on the slope of the Mount of Olives).⁴ As they neared Jerusalem, Jesus sent two disciples off to fetch a colt, a young donkey in the village ahead (probably Bethpage).

Put yourself in the disciples' shoes. They had likely grown accustomed to unusual and even miraculous happenings with Jesus by now, but this request may have still stood out as odd. Jesus gave them exact instructions. He tells them just what to say in what could have been uncomfortable moment. And they obeyed. The colt was where Jesus told them it would be, and once they repeated His words, the people let them go.

Jesus's use of the colt held significance. First, Jesus specified that no one has ever sat upon this colt. This makes it suitable to be used for a sacred purpose (fit for a King). Further, the colt fulfilled Messianic prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. Mark

did not give this detail, but Matthew (who quoted extensive Old Testament prophecy to point to Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah) spelled this out in Matthew 21:4-5.

? How does fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus serve to build our faith in Him?

2. Humble and Riding on a Donkey (Mark 11:7-8)

? How did the people respond to Jesus's arrival? What might this indicate about the crowd?

? How can we rightly respond to Jesus today?

With the requested animal procured, the disciples spread their clothes on its back and Jesus sat on it. Mark recorded that “many people” (v. 8) bore witness to this event (Matthew recorded “a very large crowd” Matthew 21:8). The crowd reacted to Jesus's entrance on the donkey by spreading their clothes and leafy branches over the road on which He rode. Clothes and leafy branches were customarily used to receive royalty.⁵

Interestingly, this was a departure from how Jesus has conducted Himself in His ministry so far. Whereas He often walked in his travels, here He “made an entrance” on the donkey. Riding on a donkey signaled Jesus as a servant leader (there is no greater example of a servant King than Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, Mark 10:45).

Jesus chose to enter the city in a way that drew attention in the city where, just days later, He would be unfairly tried and killed. In preparation, He entered as Israel's Messiah (Zechariah 9:9).

? Think about the many times Jesus said His time had not yet come. How did these events signal that His time had come? What was meant by His time?

3. Hosanna! (Mark 11:9-11)

? The people spoke the right words about Jesus but misunderstood His purpose. How might we make the same error?

? How can we be sure we are receiving Jesus as He intends and not only as we desire or expect?

In addition to laying down their clothes and branches, the people shouted praises to Jesus as He entered. Mark recounted two groups of people shouting here, first “those who went ahead” and second “those who followed” (v. 9). This could have been Jesus’s fellow pilgrims (travelers headed to Jerusalem for Passover), and people who came out of Jerusalem to meet the traveling party.⁶

The refrain that they shout comes from Psalm 118:25-26:

LORD, save us!
LORD, please grant us success!
He who comes in the name
of the LORD is blessed.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.

This is one of the psalms sung during the Passover celebration. “Hosanna” is the transliteration of a Hebrew phrase that means “save us.”⁷ Jesus was on His way to secure salvation on the cross, though not in the way anyone expected.

Each Gospel writer records the refrain in this portion of the text in a slightly different way (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13). We shouldn't take these differences as contradictions, but rather slightly different strategic perspectives to help readers grasp and come to believe in Jesus.

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD,” was part of a liturgy that was used during the Passover celebration, and a common greeting for those visiting Jerusalem for this event, but in this case, this greeting took on deeper meaning than the people knew.⁸

Only Mark's Gospel recorded the refrain in verse 10. The people's call of “Hosanna in the highest heaven” (v. 10) was a cry for the Lord to deliver His people. The deliverance most expected in that day was from the oppression of Rome, but God had eternal deliverance in mind, and Jesus was days away from securing this deliverance.



How is God's offer of salvation better than any earthly redemption we might desire?

The passage ends somewhat anti-climatically, with Jesus going into the temple and looking around, perhaps envisioning the work and ministry He would do there in the coming days. Afterward, “since it was already late” (v. 11), he headed to Bethany where He was likely lodging (Bethany was home to His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) with the twelve disciples.

Conclusion

Mark's Gospel devotes significant attention to Holy Week, and all four Gospels record Jesus's triumphal entry, the first event in this week leading up to Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. As Jesus approached Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, He sent two disciples with exact instructions to fetch a specific colt for him.

This animal, the same kind that David once ordered Solomon to ride on to secure his throne, would now become a vehicle for the King of kings. It had never been ridden, so it was ready for this sacred purpose. The colt fulfilled Messianic prophecy from Zechariah that the Messiah arriving on such an animal. Once the disciples placed their cloaks on the colt, Jesus mounted it and entered Jerusalem as Israel's Messiah. As Jesus entered the city, the gathered crowds spread their garments and leafy branches before Him (an honor customarily reserved for royalty). In the very city He would soon be unjustly condemned, Jesus entered with deliberate humility and unmistakable authority.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people quoted from Psalm 118, a psalm traditionally sung during Passover celebration. They cried "Hosanna," literally: Save us. Jesus would do just that in the coming days, just not in the way they expected. The scene concluded quietly, with Jesus briefly entering the temple and then returning to Bethany with His disciples.

 How would the events of this passage serve to support the truth of the gospel claims, even if the people couldn't see it in real time?

 What can we learn from this passage about trusting the Lord's instruction, even when the situation feels uncomfortable?

 Who can you share this account with to tell them about the saving work of Jesus?

Memorize

*Blessed is the coming kingdom
of our father David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!*
- Mark 11:10, CSB

References

¹“James Bond and The Queen London 2012 Performance.” YouTube video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AS-dCdYZbo>

²Ross H. McLaren, “Mark,” in CSB Study Bible: Notes, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1580.

³Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Mark, Sonic Light, accessed February 12, 2026, <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/mark/mark.htm#a-jesus-formal-presentation-to-israel-111-26>.

⁴McLaren, 1580.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Mark, Sonic Light, accessed February 12, 2026, <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/mark/mark.htm#a-jesus-formal-presentation-to-israel-111-26>.

⁸Ibid.