

being made in human likeness.

"He made Himself nothing" — lit. 'emptied Himself meaning, let go of status and privilege. He did not become less than God, or stop being in the form of God, but motivated by love, relinquished all privileges to be born as an ordinary Jewish baby bound for rejection and death on the Cross.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

"Even death on a cross" — crucifixion was both death by excruciating agony and a public statement of utter contempt: the complete opposite to the divine majesty of Christ in His pre-existent state.

9 Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name,

SUMMARY Sometimes a poetic style, like this, was used as a mark of special respect to describe deities or people of the highest rank. Paul explains who Jesus was, pre-existing and in very essence, God, but able to hold this lightly. His love for mankind was such that He could let those privileges go to be made in human likeness, not as a lord but as a servant. He humbled Himself to die the worst death the Romans could devise, designed to destroy a person utterly. For this extreme demonstration of love and obedience, God the Father exalted Him to the most supreme honour of sharing the same heavenly title, the Name that every creature must defer to.

APPLICATION True greatness is having nothing to prove, free to lay aside rank and privilege for a higher purpose. Jesus did not give up His divine nature but laid it aside so as to become fully man for a season – and suffer the fullest pain, slander and rejection that mankind knows.

QUESTION *We know about the events of Jesus' life and ministry. We pray prayers in His name and even remember His new covenant in sharing bread and cup. But is He Lord of our money, politics, decisions, work, marriage – and attitudes?*

PRAYER Lord Jesus, You are the gate by which the righteous may enter and the Redeemer by whom we may be counted righteous. We join with heaven in declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! You were with the Father from the beginning, came to earth to do Your Father's will, and now rule and reign in the highest honour and greatest authority. We submit our lives, our preferences and priorities, to You in reverent worship. Amen.

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"God exalted Him" — lit. 'super-exalted', a word only occurring here.

"The Name above every name" — a title which alludes to the divine name Yahweh which in the Greek OT of Paul's time was regularly translated as *Kyrios*, LORD, and used in v.11 (below).

• For further study, see *Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 1:4-5*.

10-11 that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.

"Every tongue acknowledge" — a strong word meaning 'declare in agreement'. Paul is saying that everyone — angels, obedient followers and resistant unbelievers on earth, lost souls in hell and demons—will be compelled to agree with what God has already stated, *Isaiah 45:22-24*.

The Living Word

Bible readings for Sunday, March 28, 2021, with explanatory notes

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Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for **March 28**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme for Palm Sunday: **The supreme, exalted Lordship of Jesus**

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 – Prophetic praise which anticipates Jesus

Mark 11:1-11, John 12:12-16 – Jesus comes to Jerusalem as King

Philippians 2:5-11 – Jesus who is God took the form of a servant

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 – Prophetic praise which anticipates Jesus

Words of praise which are fitting tribute to the One who has become our salvation

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.

2 Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

"He is good; His love endures" — call to worship, recalling the covenant in God's faithful, enduring love and goodness. Other psalms open this way, Ps. 105:1-2; Ps. 106:1; Ps. 107:1; Ps. 136:1

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.

"Open for Me the gates" — spiritual gates through which the righteous pass, Ps. 100:4. This draws on the words and images of Ps. 24:3-4, 7.

"The righteous" — The only One who can enter the gates of the Lord of His own accord is Jesus. He enables those who give their lives to Him, to enter.

"The gate... through which the righteous... enter" — symbolises how those who believe and trust Jesus enter into fellowship with God. Jesus declared that He was the gate, John 10:9.

21 I will give You thanks, for you answered Me; You have become my salvation.

"My salvation" — the psalmist has been delivered from defeat and death. Post-resurrection we see the context as prophetic and descriptive of Jesus the Saviour.

22-23 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

"The builders" — are the Jewish leaders. Jesus took this verse to be prophetic with His story of the vineyard owner and the son who was murdered.

• For further study on the rejection and the parable see *Isa. 53:3; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22; 17:25 and Mk. 12:1-12*.

"The cornerstone" — extra large foundation stone defining the building line, *Isaiah 28:16*, perhaps recalling the newly-built temple. A block that had been discarded has become the main foundation.

24 The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

"This very day" — a more traditional rendering is "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

25 Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!

"Lord, save us" — Hosanna or 'Save now'. A reminder of laying the temple foundation stone as an act of worship for the nation.

26 Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless You.

"Blessed is He who comes" — because He is the Cornerstone. These were words declared on special occasions. The crowd witnessing Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem a week before Passover used these words.

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.

"His light shine on us" — recalling Aaron's blessing, *Numbers 6:24-26*.

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 forever.

"Give thanks" — the people exhorted each other

SUMMARY This psalm is clearly prophetic. Originally it would have been sung by pilgrim worshippers drawing close to Jerusalem and recalling the laying of the foundation stone of the temple which stood for the spiritual life of the nation, and their covenant with God. When Jesus entered the city a week before Passover, the crowd sensed this was a special occasion, and this familiar praise was what they called out.

APPLICATION The crowd "with boughs in hand, joining in the festal procession" shared the picture popular at that time of a Messiah bringing salvation in a victorious sense. Perceiving the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah who achieved spiritual victory over sin would come later.

QUESTION *How would you explain to another how we are counted righteous?*

Mark 11:1-11, John 12:12-16 – Jesus comes to Jerusalem as King

Riding the donkey colt presented a gentle picture of a saving and serving Messiah

Mark 11:1-2 **As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.**

"A colt... which no one has ever ridden" — something chosen for a sacred purpose cannot have been previously used for an ordinary one.

• *For further study, see Numbers 19:2; Deut. 21:3; 1 Samuel 6:7*

"As they approached Jerusalem" — this introduces Mark's third and final section.

"Bethphage and Bethany" — Bethphage was on the slope of the Mount of Olives hill about two miles east of Jerusalem, near Bethany, where Lazarus was raised, and where Jesus habitually stayed.

Mark 11:3 **If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly."**

"The Lord needs it" — elsewhere "the Lord" indicates Jesus in His divine identity, Mark 1:3; 2:28; 5:19. Here it points to the temple's Lord returning to His house, Malachi 3:1.

John 12:12-13 **The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.**

at the start of the psalm, v.1, and in closing they encourage each other to pledge "You are my God!" and to praise Him.

"The next day" — v.1 tells us it was six days before the Passover or Sunday.

"The great crowd" — pilgrims from Galilee often camped out around Bethany. As Jesus followed the road to Jerusalem they cheered Him.

Mark 11:4-5 **They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?"**

Mark 11:6 **They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.**

John 12:14-15 **Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."**

"Do not be afraid" — quoting from Zechariah 9:9 - "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

"Seated on a donkey's colt" — hardly a war-like figure. He counters the nationalist expectations of the crowd and fulfils the prophecy by showing that His kingship was not that of a warrior.

Mark 11:7 **When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, He sat on it.**

Mark 11:8 **Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.**

"Others spread branches" — leaves or leafy branches. Only John mentions palms, which pilgrims would have brought from the Jericho region as they didn't grow near Jerusalem.

Mark 11:9-10 **Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!"**

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes" — from Psalm 118:26 (above), one of the praise psalms traditionally sung at Passover, and especially fitting for this occasion.

John 12:13 **They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"**

SUMMARY Combining these two gospel accounts in roughly chronological order shows us how Jesus made His entrance to the city His mission statement. He chose a time when crowds were pouring into the city to demonstrate that He was indeed the Messiah — an action likely to be misunderstood by many at the time. Even Jesus' twelve disciples had struggled to understand Jesus' very difficult call to be the Suffering Servant kind of Messiah. It was in Scripture, but most people had seized on other allusions to a successor to King David. They were expecting a grand warrior deliverer, not a humble self-sacrificing one.

APPLICATION Following the resurrection, when the Holy Spirit was given, many would understand the prophecies and how God was working. This teaches us that the pre-crucifixion perspective, and the post-resurrection perspective, are like two different windows looking in to the Good News. The challenging moral teaching of the gospels — love your enemy, forgive as you are forgiven — is made a realistic goal by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, known and experienced by the early church.

QUESTION *Why did Jesus need the donkey for His entrance to the city?*

Philippians 2:5-11 – Jesus who is God took the form of a servant

Such is His greatness He could empty Himself of privileges to become like us

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

"In your relationships" — written to people working out new life in Jesus and empowered by His Spirit. Their relationship with the Father through Jesus gave them love; their relationships with one another were to share that love.

"Blessed is the king of Israel!"

"Palm branches" — a symbol of Jewish nationalism. The crowd mistakenly saw Jesus as a political deliverer.

"Blessed is the king of Israel" — the people add to the words of Psalm 118 (above), perhaps with Zephaniah 3:14-17 in mind.

Mark 11:11 **Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.**

"The temple courts" — the 30 acre expanse around the building.

"He looked around at everything" – for signs of its true purpose, leading people to worship of God.

"He went out to Bethany" — it appears that Jesus spent each night during Passover with His friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary, Mk. 11:19; Jn. 12:1-3

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage...

"Being in very nature God" — Jesus is lit. 'existing in the form of God', in essence the very same as the Father, Hebrews 1:3. But this is not something lit. 'to be grasped' or held on to, but to give away.

7 ...rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,