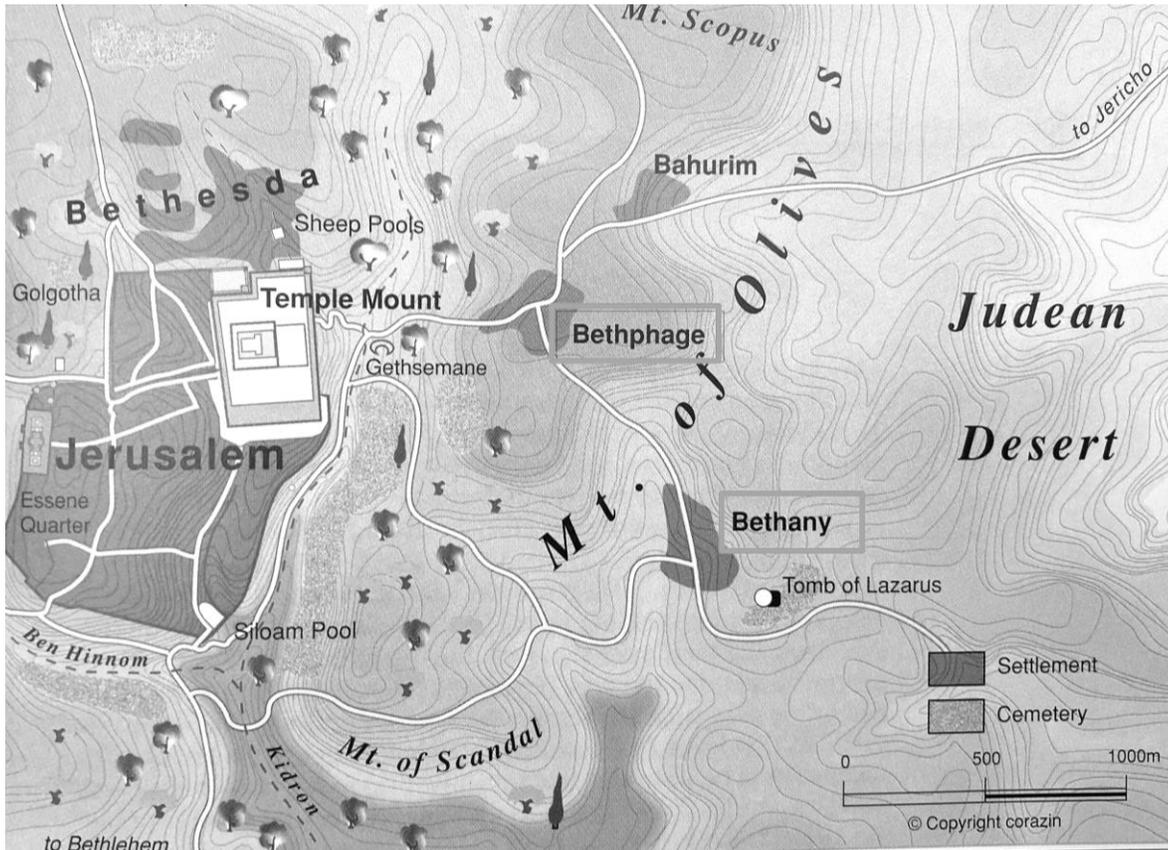


# Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

## Session Eighteen – Mark 11:1-11

**Mark 11:1-19**

***As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives,***



### ***Bethphage and Bethany***

Bethany is the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, which Jesus uses as his home base. Curiously, Lazarus, Mary and Martha are not mentioned by Mark, and feature prominently only in John's Gospel. This is a sign that the three were well known to John's community, but not to Mark's audience.

Bethany is identified by archaeologist Yigael Yadin as one of the villages close to Jerusalem where lepers of the Essene community were permitted to settle, according to the Dead Sea Scroll known as the Temple Scroll. This has led to the tradition that Lazarus suffered from leprosy.

***Mark 11:2-6 Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 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. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’” 4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.***

There are (at least) four important points to this mysterious passage. First, Jesus is apparently demonstrating some supernatural foreknowledge in predicting the existence, location, and condition of the colt.

Secondly, the fact that Jesus is using a colt – described elsewhere as “the foal of a donkey” – is unquestionably meant to bring to mind 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.”*** No longer is Jesus concealing his identity. That time is at an end.

Jesus has walked everywhere else in his ministry except when he crossed the lake in a boat. Riding a colt on this last stage of his journey becomes an unmistakable symbol that communicates forcefully and dramatically that Jesus is the king of Israel – kind of a spiritual “street theatre.”

Third, Mark twice mentions the colt being “tied” and “untied.” There must be a reason for this repetition. Scholars have pointed to Genesis 49:10-11, where the dying Jacob is blessing his sons. Of Judah, the tribe from which David and Jesus are descended, he says: ***“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch...”***

Fourth, ***‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’*** Jesus is invoking kingly authority, where the king may impress any animal for use. His authority is recognised by the owners of the animal; further kingly authority is indicated by the fact that the colt had not been ridden; a king’s mount could be used by no other.

***Mark 11:7-8 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.***

The disciples saddle the animal with their own garments, and the crowd strews the way with their garments. Another kingly sign; when Jehu was anointed King, this happened (2 Kings 9:12-13): ***‘This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king over Israel.’ They quickly took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, “Jehu is king!”***

You will remember that Jesus had gathered a crowd while ministering near Jericho, and the crowd has followed him to the Mount of Olives, and ultimately Jerusalem for Passover. They were supporters of Jesus’ ministry, and were eager to proclaim him Messiah. Again, the time for secrecy is over.

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

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, it is as though Psalm 118:19-29 is coming to life. Here is the Psalm in its entirety – match up the verses with what is going on in this Palm Sunday scene:

***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 marvelous in our eyes. 24 The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.***

***25 Lord, save us (Hosanna)! 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 forever.***

Psalm 118 is known as The Great Hallel, and is a Passover Psalm, traditionally sung at the conclusion of the Passover Meal. Not only did Jesus enter Jerusalem to the words of

this Psalm, he and the disciples “sang a hymn” at the conclusion of the Last Supper, as they made their way to Gethsemane – doubtless this very Psalm.

Jesus (in Mark’s next chapter), Peter and Paul all refer to Jesus as “the stone the builders rejected,” which becomes the cornerstone:

***Acts 4:11-12 (Peter’s speech to the Sanhedrin) “Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”***

***Ephesians 2:19-21 - Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.***

### **What is the Palm Sunday path?**

Today, pilgrims the world over follow a path from the top of the Mount of Olives, which winds steeply down past a chapel called “Dominus Flevit,” then past Gethsemane and the Church of All Nations, across the Kidron Valley, then up through St. Stephen’s Gate on the north side of the Temple Mount, then past the Pools of Bethesda, to join with the Via Dolorosa, the Stations of the Cross.

But this path is designed specifically to accommodate a Holy Week Pilgrimage, rather than to replicate the actual route. The Gospels are largely silent, other than Luke’s mention of “the road which goes down the Mount of Olives (19:37).” My own theory is that Jesus, being proclaimed as the Son of David, took the same route as David’s son Solomon for his own coronation:

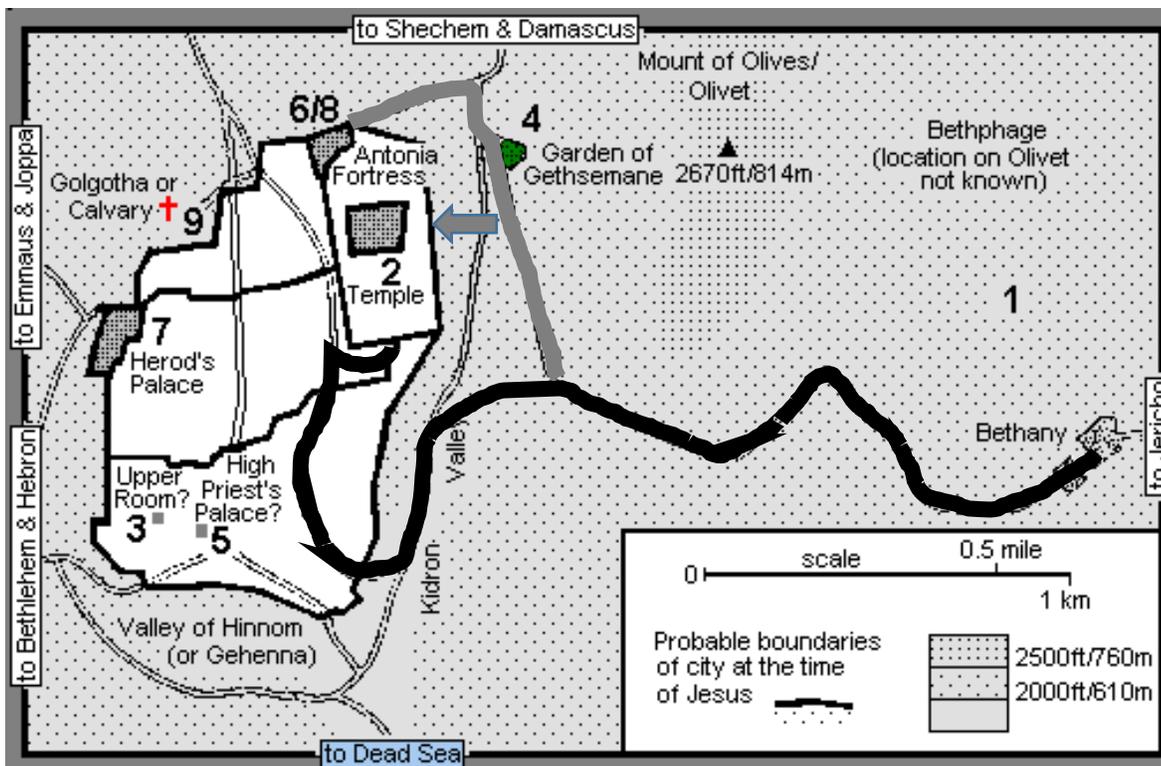
***1 Kings 1:32-37 King David said, “Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.” When they came before the king, 33 he said to them: “Take your lord’s servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon.***

***34 There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, ‘Long live King Solomon!’***

***35 Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah.”***

**36 Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, “Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so declare it. 37 As the Lord was with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!” ...40 And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound.**

Solomon goes down to the Gihon, the massive gates guarding the Gihon spring, then up to the palace (along a major road recently excavated – and financed by Pilate!) just to the south of the Temple. I believe Jesus replicated this route, which brings him to the southern end of the Temple Mount and the Temple Steps, the point of entry for the Temple courts. The symbolism would have been unmistakable.



**Mark 10:11 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.**

This may sound anticlimactic – we are expecting Jesus to enter Jerusalem, and immediately clear the temple of the moneychangers. Instead, Mark tells us, it is late, and after a look around, they head back to Bethany. Chronologically, this makes sense. It was a solid 25km walk from Jericho to Jerusalem, which would have taken the better part of a day. Jesus enters Jerusalem at day’s end, and simply runs out of time.