

# Palm Sunday

## REAL-IZED REGIME CHANGE

Luke 19:28-40 (41-44)

## Palm Sunday

## Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

28After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: 'The Lord needs it.' " 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34They said, "The Lord needs it." 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" 39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

[41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

43Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. 44They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.” ]

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## **DIAGNOSIS: A Failure of Realization**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *King, Kingdom, Arriving!*

Jesus is not just the leading actor in this drama, he is director and stage manager as well. He seems to micromanage every detail so as to guarantee that onlookers (including Luke, including us) can't help but come to the same realization: right now, right here, God is setting into motion the “cosmic regime change” foretold by the prophets. First, Jesus orchestrates for himself a ride on a donkey as the way he will enter Jerusalem—a blatant suggestion that he is enacting Zechariah's words, “your king comes to you ... humble and riding on a donkey” (Zech. 9:9). In addition, we are prompted to think of Solomon who likewise rode a mule in his royal procession on the way to being anointed king (1 Kings 1:33-35). Next, the crowds spread their cloaks on the road in front of him cheering, exactly as happened for Jehu centuries before on his way to being anointed king (2 Kings 9:13). The conclusion everyone reaches (the people, we) is that Jesus must likewise be on his way to his anointing/coronation as king.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Realizing the King?*

Yet, do the people realize what kind of king is arriving—what this regime-change is all about? More hints: Jesus stage-manages

his procession so that it begins at the Mount of Olives, reminiscent of Zechariah's words that the Mount of Olives is to be the launching-pad for the time when "the Lord will become king over all the earth (Zech. 14:9)." The multitudinous disciples hail him, again, with familiar words combining the messianic Psalm 118: 26: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!," and the angelic refrain at Jesus' birth, "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! (v. 38)." It's possible that the multitudes put the clues together, but more probably, they think the same way the Pharisees think, that any kind of regime-change with a new king would be of a political nature, probably involving a wresting of control away from the Romans. That after all, is the kind of regime they understand: a system based on laws with a pyramidal authority structure. And to tell the truth, they prefer it, especially the Pharisees who are annoyed by the cheering crowds. They snipe at Jesus because they don't want the status quo upset (v. 39). So when Jesus reaches the vantage point where he can see the entire city, he breaks down and cries. He weeps that Jerusalem has not "recognized on this day the things that make for peace" (v. 42); that it does "not recognize the time of your visitation from God" (v. 44). Sadly, these things have been "hidden from your eyes" (v. 42).

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Not Realized by God*  
It's not just Jerusalem's failure of recognition that makes Jesus weep. He weeps because he knows the consequences of their failure: Jerusalem will miss out on the denouement of God's cosmic regime change. He tells the sniping Pharisees that if he forced the disciples to cease their joyful praising, Jerusalem is doomed and nature itself would have to pick up the refrain: "If [the disciples] were silent, the stones would shout out" (v. 40). In failing to realize this new king and his kingdom, all the "blinded"—Jerusalem, Israel, the Pharisees, (us?), will end

up estranged, lost to God. Failures.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Realization of Failures**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Failures Get Realized***

But the drama continues to unfold: Jesus continues his journey. God does visit mankind and does establish his Kingdom, in a most extraordinary way: in this person, who rides a donkey, and ends up on a cross. All the hints stage-manager Jesus has given should have tipped everyone off that the new king was going to be very different, yet familiar: he will be like his ancestor David, a shepherd king (note the psalm for this day). Shepherd kings give their lives on behalf of their sheep, not vice versa. Shepherd kings are humble; they ride donkeys, not stallions. In this drama's denouement, the king will be anointed/coronated, not on a throne but on a cross. There he will give up his life as the way "to seek and to save the lost" (v. 10). Even the worse failures are "realized" (embraced) by this merciful ruler's radical salvaging effort.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Realizing the King***

Shepherd-king Jesus inaugurates the new, cosmic Kingdom anticipated by Zechariah and announced by the angels: God's new reign on earth. This is not a geographical kingdom but rather located within people's hearts. And here is where one sees the radical change in this Kingdom's modus operandi. Instead of the old Law, (debit-and-credit relationships, tit-for-tat dealing—even with God), this shepherd king loves his sheep and rules his subjects through mercy and forgiveness. Sheep who are ruled this way joyfully become his subjects, entrusting their lives and their futures to this most magnanimous ruler.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Regime Change Real-ized***

In addition, these mercy-managed subjects cannot help but adopt their beloved ruler's modus operandi as their own in their dealings with each other. Thus, as mercy and forgiveness becomes the operating principles among Jesus' subjects, God's Kingdom gets realized on earth. No wonder the crowds and all consequent subjects pick up the angels' refrain: Peace in heaven is breaking out on earth! "Thy Kingdom come" is more than wishful thinking—it's good news!