

# Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

## Contradictions in Scripture: The Triumphal Entry

When we study the events of Christ's last days of His earthly ministry before His death on the cross, things get very confusing between the four gospels, and it is difficult to determine precisely what happened when. Exact time elements are not always stated, and a word like "and" could join together two events that happened minutes or days apart. Nevertheless, if we are careful and diligent, I believe that we can figure out a "harmony" of events that leaves all four gospels being completely accurate, and yet gives us a picture of what exact events happened, and how, and in what order.

We have already examined several topics that related to these events of the Lord's last few days before His sacrifice. We considered the blind men of Jericho, and realized that there were actually four blind men healed in or near the city of Jericho that day in three distinct events. We also considered the casting of the money changers out of the temple, and concluded that the casting out in John was a different occasion from that recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which took place at the end of His ministry.

Yet there is still another mystery regarding His last days that remains to be cleared up. This is in regard to His triumphal entry. We can see the problem when we compare the entry as recorded in Matthew with its record in the other gospels. First of all, let us look at Matthew 21:1-11.

*1. Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2. saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me.*

Notice this...the Lord tells them to find two animals, a donkey and a colt tied together. They are to bring both of the animals to Him.

*3. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, "The Lord has need of them," and immediately he will send them."*

We have discussed this in our examination of Matthew, but just note here that the Lord gives this command in case anyone says anything to them about taking the animals.

*4. All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:*

*5. "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

Notice that the prophecy too speaks of the two animals upon which the Lord is to come. It is hard to picture someone riding two animals at once, at least, without some kind of double saddle. But that is the picture we get here.

*6. So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. 7. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them.*

So they do what He said, bring both animals, set their clothes on them, and set Him on them. Perhaps they formed the clothes into kind of a “hammock” between the two animals, and this made it possible for the Lord to sit on both?

*8. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!"*

*10. And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?"*

*11. So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."*

Notice that the multitudes who are praising Him here belong to the entourage that has accompanied Him from the country. They are not from the city of Jerusalem itself, for those from the city are surprised at this event, and ask Who this is Who is so coming to them with such excitement and ceremony. It is only by asking the multitude entering the city that they discover that this is Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, let us go on to consider this same story in the book of Mark chapter 11.

*1. Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; 2. and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it."*

We see that the situation is very similar. Yet, we notice one big difference. This time, the Lord only tells them to find a single animal, a colt tied, and to bring that colt. Moreover, this time the colt is said to be one “on which no one has sat.” This certainly shows forth an aspect of the Lord’s miraculous power in this event that we didn’t see in the Matthew event. Normally a colt would have to be trained, be “broken” before it would be ready to carry a person on its back. Yet this could just be a detail that wasn’t brought out in Matthew. But what happened to the donkey? Why is there only one animal mentioned here? Can it be that this is a contradiction?

Let us go on to the book of Luke and see what it has to say about this in chapter 19.

*29. And it came to pass, when He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, that He sent two of His disciples, 30. saying, "Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring it here."*

Again, we see that the colt “on which no one has ever sat” is called for. Yet again, there is no donkey in the picture! What about John 12?

*14. Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:*

*15. "Fear not, daughter of Zion;*

*Behold, your King is coming,*

*Sitting on a donkey's colt."*

John does not record the mission of the disciples to bring the colt, yet his record does coincide with Mark and Luke in that it indicates that only a colt of a donkey was involved. Notice, too, that it quotes Zechariah 9:9, the same passage that Matthew did, and yet it leaves out the part about “sitting on a donkey,” only combining the “sitting on” with the next line, “A colt, the foal of a donkey.” Why do John and the other two gospel authors so carefully leave the donkey out, when both Zechariah and Matthew are careful to bring it in? Is this indeed a contradiction?

Before we fully deal with this issue, let us continue examining the record in Mark to see if there are any further differences between it and Matthew.

3. *“And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it,’ and immediately he will send it here.”*
4. *So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it.*
5. *But some of those who stood there said to them, “What are you doing, loosing the colt?”*
6. *And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.*

The instructions are the same, although the Greek for “if anyone” indicates that it is probable, whereas in Matthew it does not. Sure enough, this time we see that they are questioned, and answer as the Lord instructed. There is no record of this in Matthew, although this in itself isn’t necessarily a contradiction because Matthew did not have to mention this detail if he didn’t want to. The record in Luke is almost exactly the same as that of Mark.

31. *And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you loosing it?’ thus you shall say to him, ‘Because the Lord has need of it.’”*
32. *So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them.* 33. *But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, “Why are you loosing the colt?”*
34. *And they said, “The Lord has need of him.”*

There is no real difference here between this record and that in Mark. If it were not for Matthew, we would say the accounts match in these details exactly.

Let us continue the story in Mark.

7. *Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it.* 8. *And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road.* 9. *Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ 10. Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

There is no real difference with Matthew here, other than a few different words in what the multitude “who went before and those who followed” said. Of course, they probably said many things, so this is no real problem. Except that there is only a colt, and no donkey! Luke again is similar.

35. *Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him.* 36. *And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road.*
37. *Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, 38. saying: “‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

Again, this is very similar to both Matthew and Mark. This time, we learn what the disciples said, not the multitude “who went before and followed.” Therefore, the difference in wording is not surprising. That completes Mark and Luke, but let us, to finish our study, consider these events as recorded in John 12.

12. *The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13. took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of Israel!”*

Notice that this carries another significant difference with Matthew. Not only does John not include the donkey, but also claims that “a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,” actually “went out to meet Him.” Yet remember that back in Matthew no one went out to meet Him, for those in the city of Jerusalem itself had no idea that the Lord Jesus was coming. The ones who praised Him were the ones who were coming to Jerusalem

with Him. The city itself was “moved,” and wondered, “Who is this?” Yet in John, they seem to both know Who He is, and be ready to meet Him. This again makes it look like these other gospels contradict with Matthew.

One final problem is worth noting, and it relates to what happened immediately after His triumphal entry. That is, His casting out of the money changers and sellers of animals from the temple courts. For in Mark 11:11, we read,

*11. And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.*

It was only the next day that He cast out the money changers, as we read in verse 15.

*15. So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves.*

Yet in Luke 19:45, right after His arrival in Jerusalem (verses 41-44,) we read,

*45. Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it,*

So, which day did He cast out the money changers and sellers? Was it on the same day as His triumphal entry, as is indicated in Matthew and Luke? Or was it the next day, as is indicated in Mark? Is this a contradiction in Scripture?

What are the answers to these questions? What is the solution to these differences? Are they just caused by a mistake on Matthew’s part? Did he fail to recall what really occurred? Yet, if inspiration failed in this event, or if God “inspired error,” then how can we place our faith in other portions of Scripture that might just as easily contain error?

I do not believe that this is a contradiction. Rather, I believe that, as is the case so often in these so-called “contradictions,” that this event of Christ’s triumphal entry happened twice! The first time, as recorded in Matthew, the Lord entered the city on a colt and a donkey. The city did not know He was coming, and so the people were amazed at the events that took place. The Lord would have returned to where He was staying in Bethany that night, as we learn He was doing every night in Mark 11:11. So it would have been necessary for Him to return to Jerusalem the next day. The next day, the people in the city knew He was coming, and so they were prepared this time. They came out to meet Him. And this time, He only commanded His disciples to bring a colt, and so He rode in on a colt only, not on both a colt and a donkey. There is no contradiction here. There are just two separate events.

Now, some might argue that it is unlikely that two such events as the triumphal entry would take place two days in a row. Yet, I would point out that this is common behavior for people to do. When a somewhat spontaneous celebration of some great thing occurs, we are all likely to want to repeat it the next opportunity we get, this time with more careful planning. I remember the first time our Minnesota Twins baseball team won the World Series. There was a tickertape parade for them the next week, and the team was overwhelmed by the response they got from the fans. When they won again four years later, there was another tickertape parade, yet this time no one was surprised, for everyone was expecting it. This time, too, there were probably even more people in attendance, for some who had missed it the first time, now that they knew what was to occur, wanted in on the action.

A very similar situation takes place here with the Lord’s entry. The first entry is a great, spontaneous (it seems to the people, though God had planned it far in advance!) event that is very exciting, and yet many miss out on it since they did not know it was to occur. Thus, when the Lord repeats His same route into Jerusalem the next day, it is the most natural thing in the world that the people would desire to repeat the same excitement that had happened the day before, and this

time more people would want in on it. In fact, the only surprising thing is that this did not happen every time He came into Jerusalem all week! In fact, maybe it did, but we just do not have a record of it.

Which brings us to the question of whether or not the casting out of the money changers was the same day or the next day after the entry. Well, we have already determined that Matthew records an early entry, taking place the day before Mark. But this, far from solving our puzzle, places the casting out of the money changers two days ahead of when Mark says it occurred. Luke seems to record the same entry as Mark, and yet it has the casting out taking place on the same day! Are all three in error?

Well, again, I see no reason why, rather than deciding this is a contradiction, we cannot conclude that these are separate events. The money changers and sellers, as we have already discussed, were cast out once before by the Lord earlier in His ministry. They obviously did not take His rebuke to heart, but rather came back to their trade, as we see them in the temple again three years later. This time, the Lord casts them out again, as we read in Matthew. Yet they are so determined to continue their ungodly trade (for they had their livelihood by it, no doubt,) that they return almost immediately once the Lord is gone, and He must cast them out again. This makes sense, and we can definitely see the money changers and sellers trying something like this.

So, that explains Matthew versus the other gospels. Matthew's first triumphal entry was followed by a first casting out, and Mark and Luke's second triumphal entry was followed by a second casting out. Yet we still have not solved the problem of Mark's next day and Luke's same day.

There are several possible explanations for this. First of all, notice that Luke does not insist that He did the casting out the same day. It only says that after His weeping over Jerusalem, "then" the situation occurred wherein "He went into the temple" and did the casting out. It could be that that "then" does not indicate the closeness in time that we might expect, but rather covers the day in between. This would not seem standard to us, but there is no rule against it. This would leave Luke's story being completely true, if not entirely clear.

Yet it is also possible that the Lord cast out the money changers on both days, is it not? Perhaps they kept stubbornly coming back, and He kept just as stubbornly driving them out. This is quite possible, and could explain the difference perfectly well.

Yet there is a final possibility. That is that Mark and Luke actually record two different triumphal entries still from Matthew's. That would make Mark's the second of a trilogy, and Luke's the third and final entry. Then, Mark's would have been a day before the second casting out, and Luke's would have been the same day as the second casting out. This could be as well, although the details in Mark and Luke are so much the same that it seems like they are describing the same occasion. That does not have to be the case, though. What we have suggested here could be the explanation as well.

So, we see that there is no reason again to assume that the differences we see between the gospel accounts of the triumphal entry are any kind of contradiction. Rather, these differences teach us that there were at least two triumphal entries that took place during the last week of the Lord's earthly ministry, and at least two casting outs of the money changers and sellers that took place afterwards. This makes sense, both in explaining the contradiction and in what we know of human nature. Thus, there is no reason beyond sheer lack of faith for assuming an error here. These accounts are complimentary, and describe the repetition of events that takes place in a very believable, human way. Praise God that we can continue to trust in the perfection of His holy Word!

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