

Date: March 5, 2023  
 Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11  
 Series: "God's Grand Story"  
 Title: "Enter the King"

In her book *The God Who Hung on the Cross*, journalist Ellen Vaughn shares the amazing story of how the Gospel came to a small village in Cambodia. Vaughn says that back in September of 1999 Pastor Tuy Seng traveled to Kampong Thom Province in northern Cambodia as a missionary. Throughout that isolated area, Seng discovered that most villagers had cast their lot with Buddhism or spiritism. Christianity was virtually unheard of, and most people were not open to him sharing the Gospel message. But much to Seng's surprise, when he arrived in one small, rural village the people warmly embraced both him and his message. When he asked the villagers to explain their openness to the Gospel, an old woman shuffled forward, bowed, and grasped Seng's hands as she said, "*We have been waiting for you for twenty years.*" And then she told him the story of the mysterious God Who had hung on the cross.

In her story, she took him back to the 1970's when the Khmer Rouge, that brutal, Communist-led regime, took over Cambodia, destroying everything in its path. When the soldiers finally descended on this rural, northern village, they immediately rounded up the villagers and forced them to start digging their own graves. After the villagers had finished digging, they prepared themselves to die. Some screamed to Buddha, others screamed to demon spirits or to their ancestors. But one of the women started to cry out for help based on a childhood memory—a story her mother told her about a God Who had hung on a cross. The woman cried out to—prayed to—that unknown God on a cross. She thought, surely, if this God had known suffering, He would have compassion on their plight. Suddenly, her solitary cry became one great wail as the entire village followed her example and started praying to the God Who had suffered and hung on a cross. As they continued facing their own graves, the wailing slowly turned to a quiet crying. There was an eerie silence in the muggy jungle air. Slowly, they dared to turn around and face their captors and when they did, they discovered that the soldiers were all gone.

As the old woman finished telling this story, she told Pastor Seng that ever since that humid day 20 years ago the villagers had been waiting---waiting for someone to come and share the rest of the story about the God Who had hung on a cross.

Of course Pastor Seng was more than happy to do exactly that and he began to tell them the rest of what is rightfully called, "*The Greatest Story Ever Told*"---or as we have been referring to it the last few weeks: GOD'S GRAND STORY.

Today we continue our study by looking at the first day of the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry---the day our Lord rode into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. Of course, the Hebrews had been waiting for this day far longer than those Cambodians---they had been waiting for the Messiah for not twenty but thousands of years.

Let's back up a bit and get the setting in our minds. In 33A.D. our Lord had just completed three years of teaching and healing. Crowds—multitudes of people—followed Him wherever He went. Six days before Passover, He arrived at a suburb of Jerusalem—the village of Bethany—which is just two miles east of the city. According to the Gospel writers, Jesus stayed there at the home of three dear friends: Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha.

This was a good choice for lodgings for two reasons. First, all of Jerusalem was packed with Jews coming to celebrate the Passover. Hundreds of thousands of them came from all over the world.

Think of it.

When Jesus first came into this world the inns of BETHLEHEM were all full, with no vacancies and ironically the same could be said about the inns in JERUSALEM that final week---so, it was wise indeed to stay in Bethany.

A second reason I think Jesus decided to stay where He did is because He knew what lay ahead.

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus had been His friends for years. The comfortable nature of old friendships like theirs was just what He needed as He drew nearer to the cross. In their home He would be able to enjoy the sustaining power of good meals shared with good friends. With all that in mind, let's read our text. Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 21. Follow along as I read the first eleven verses and if able let's all stand in respect for God's Word as it is read.

Matthew 21:1-11

- 1 - *As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,*
- 2 - *saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to Me.*
- 3 - *If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."*
- 4 - *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*
- 5 - *"Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your King comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*
- 6 - *The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.*
- 7 - *They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.*
- 8 - *A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*
- 9 - *The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*
- 10 - *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"*
- 11 - *The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

I think it's ironic that Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day on a young donkey---a colt---one that had never been ridden---never carried a burden---because on that day that animal was carrying the Man Who would bear on His body the full weight of all the sins of all mankind.

As Jesus began His entry down the two-mile road that would eventually lead up into the heart of the city the people present recognized Him. They knew of His ministry. They knew of His healing power. As Luke reports, ***"the whole city began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen."*** Others had heard of these miracles from eye-witnesses---miracles like restoring sight to the blind, healing lepers and the legs of men born unable to walk---and most recently the miracle of raising Lazarus---someone most of them knew well---raising him back to life after being dead and in the tomb four days.

When people saw Jesus on a donkey colt, they remembered the prophesy of Zechariah: ***"Look, your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious---yet He is humble, riding on a donkey—even on a donkey's colt."*** (9:9) And then like dropping a match in a pile of dry straw that realization ignited in their heads that Jesus WAS the Messiah. As we read in verse 9 of our text, they shouted: ***"Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*** The "fire" of that realization spread quickly, and the entire city turned out to welcome Jesus. His humble entry into Jerusalem turned into the first century version of a ticker tape parade. THE King had come to town! And---the way THE King came that day tells us a lot about God's Grand Story.

**(1) It tells us WHO Jesus WAS—and IS.**

As Jesus rode down that steep path and then up into the city that growing multitude of people followed Him. Now think about that for a moment---this was a first for our Lord. Nowhere else do we find him at the HEAD of the multitude:

- Not when He descended the mountain after the Sermon on the Mount
- Not as He left Capernaum
- Not as he entered the village of Nain.

Before Jesus chosen to be SURROUNDED by people rather than OUT IN FRONT—but not on that first Palm Sunday. Jesus led---because He knew the significance of this event. THE KING **HAD** come to town!

But that's not the only way that day helps us SEE and KNOW Who Jesus WAS and IS. You see, in those 33 years of His life Jesus had fulfilled much more than this "colt prophecy" of Zechariah. Our Lord's riding into Jerusalem that day is a reminder of the fact that He fulfilled EVERY SINGLE ONE of the 456 Messianic prophecies---found in the Old Testament part of God's grand story. Through His prophets God had made sure that we would be able to know exactly Who the real Messiah was and is.

If you've watched any police shows on TV---everything from *Adam-12* to *The Rookie*, you've heard the term "BOLO." And you probably know the meaning of this word. But just in case you don't it's an acronym for B.e O.n the L.ook O.out.

Let's say there's a bank robbery at the bank in Flower Hill and the thieves get away before the police arrive. Well---the police gather everyone who was there when the robbery went down and ask them for details about the suspects. They put all that information together and issue a BOLO to all police in the area to BE ON THE LOOK OUT for---well it might read like this:

*"BE ON THE LOOK OUT for two men and a woman. The woman wore jeans with holes in the knees and a blue short-sleeved shirt. She had a tattoo of Donald duck on her right arm and Mickey Mouse on the left. The men wore kaki Dockers and red golf shirts---like all Target employees. All three were wearing Joe Biden masks. The men had Irish Accents and were smoking cigarettes. The woman had a southern accent and was smoking a huge cigar. The men had on the latest white Nike high top basketball shoes. The woman walked with a limp in her right leg and wore red sequined high heels. All three had three gold stud earrings in their left ears with the carving of a tiny pickle dangling underneath. The men were tan---as if they had just come from the beach---and the woman was pale faced with dozens of red freckles---including one that was one inch in diameter on her right cheek.*

*For some reason all three showed their drivers licenses to the tellers and allowed them to copy each one. They even shouted out their names. One man said, 'My name is Sean Murphy!' The other said, 'My name is Patrick Adams!' The woman said, 'I'm Annabelle Williams!' They drove off in a 1968 aqua blue Ford Mustang with a dent just over the right rear wheel and a decal on the bumper saying, 'Vote for Jimmy Carter' heading east on Muncaster Mill Road."*

Now, once the police caught up with these three---probably before they hit Norbeck---it would be fairly easy to convict them of the bank robbery. I mean, they had a perfect description of their get-away car---they knew what clothes they were wearing---what they were smoking---where they came from, their earrings, their skin type. And---they had copies of their drivers' licenses. I mean no one else anywhere near Muncaster Mill Road would match a BOLO that detailed.

Well, in essence, through His prophets God gave us an even MORE detailed BOLO for the Messiah. And Jesus fit every single descriptive prophecy:

- Where He would be born---BETHLEHEM
- That rulers from the East would pay Him honor and give Him gifts.
- That He would live in Egypt for a time
- That He would have a forerunner to announce His coming.
- The kinds of miracles He would perform.
- How He would die---CRUCIFIXION---in fact the Messiah's crucifixion was described hundreds of years before the Romans even invented it.
- That His side would be pierced---as it was by that Roman spear.
- That He would be laid in the tomb of a rich man.
- That He would rise from the dead and ascend to Heaven.

With this 456 item Messianic BOLO---Jesus HAD to be the Messiah. The odds against it were too great. In fact, a few years back a college professor had his 12 classes of graduate students in mathematics compute the actual odds of just of 48 of these prophecies coming true---in any one individual living down through history.

Do you know what they found the odds were?

It's too high of a number for me to describe so just imagine that the entire universe with all its galaxies is filled with grains of sand. But go further than that and take a trillion, trillion universes the size of our universe and fill them all with sand. Okay—with all those grains of sand, think about just one grain of sand being colored green. Imagine that you could take a spaceship capable of traveling through all that sand—go as many light years as you want, stop one time, get in your sand-suit, leave the ship—and reach out to pick up one grain of sand from all of these trillion, trillion universes. That grain of sand would have to be the one colored green.

What are the odds that this could happen?

They are the same odds that 48 of these prophecies could come true in any man who ever has lived throughout history. And Jesus fulfilled not just 48 but all 456. So—the way Jesus came to town reminds us of fulfilled prophecy and that tells us WHO Jesus was. It—and all the other prophecies He fulfilled leave no room for doubt. Jesus was—and IS—the long-awaited Messiah.

Here's something else the events of that Palm Sunday tell us about God's grand story.

**(2) They show us WHAT Jesus was—and is—LIKE.**

I say this because, as Luke reports, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day, He did a very odd thing. He CRIED. Some scholars say a better word would be *"wailed."* Why would He cry? Why wail? I mean, He has just been proclaimed THE MESSIAH! He's just been welcomed to Jerusalem as King. Why all the emotion?

This WAS odd—plus kings don't cry in public. Do you remember how Joseph—who had been made second only to the Pharaoh—left the room so he could weep in private—not in the presence of his brothers?

Why cry then and there?

Before I answer this question, I want to remind you that one of the most prominent portraits of God throughout the Bible is that of a KING.

- Psalm 10:16 says, *"The Lord is King forever and ever."*
- Psalm 47:7 says, *"He is the King of all the earth."*
- Psalm 89:18 proclaims, *"The Holy One of Israel is our King."*

And—from the very beginning of His life, Jesus is addressed as a king. Remember?

- Referring to Jesus, the angelic messengers announced to Mary: *"The Lord shall give unto Him the THRONE of His father David: And He shall REIGN over the house of Jacob forever."* (Luke 1:32-33)
- A couple years later the wise men came to visit the Christ child with the question, *"Where is He that is born King of the Jews?"* (Matthew 2:2)
- In His very first message Jesus proclaimed, *"The KINGDOM of Heaven is near!"* (Matthew 4:17)
- Even the penitent thief on the cross realized that he hung next to royalty for he said, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."* (Luke 23:42)

So, borrowing from the wording of Revelation 19:16, we know that on that first Palm Sunday, the *"King of kings and Lord of lords"* rode into town. Well, why would the King of kings and Lord of lords weep in public? As I said kings of that day didn't do that. And that's where we find our answer. You see, Jesus is not like EARTHLY kings. So, as He rode through the crowds waving palm branches and shouting His praises, instead of smiling and giving a typical *"royal wave,"* He wept. He wept because HIS heart was broken by what He saw in the hearts of THOSE PEOPLE. He knew they had already rejected Him and the blessings He had come to bring. He knew that in just five days their cheers would turn into demands for His death.

Luke's account says: *"And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known IN THIS DAY, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you and surround you and hem you in on every side—"*

***and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*** (19:41-44)

Do you wonder what Jesus meant by the phrase, ***"IN THIS DAY?"*** Well, to answer we need to look at one of those 456 Messianic prophecies. You see, 500 years earlier an angel appeared to the prophet Daniel and told him of certain dramatic events to be marked off on the timetable of God's Grand Story---events that would affect Israel directly and the surrounding nations indirectly. They would all occur in what is now known as ***"the seventy weeks"*** or 490 years (Daniel 9:24-27).

The first week would start with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under the decree of the Persian King Artaxerxes, which was done on March 28, 445B.C. Over the next sixty-nine weeks or 483 years, Jerusalem would be restored and rebuilt until the Messiah would come. So, in Daniel's great prophecy of the 70 weeks, God had revealed the specific time---down to the EXACT DAY in which the Messiah would be presented to the nation Israel. As the Creator of time itself, Jesus knew that day had come. Jesus knew everything was right on schedule. But the people didn't---or WOULDN'T---see this. And Jesus knew that because they wouldn't---because they would reject Him---they would experience God's judgement.

This is what Jesus was talking about. He was weeping and saying, *"Even now if you would open your eyes and repent and respond---it's not too late!"* But He knew they wouldn't do that---and that because they wouldn't, in 37 years the clock would run out when---under the Roman General Titus in 70 A.D., the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. The last time Sue and I were in Jerusalem our tour guide showed us where huge stones from the temple had been thrown down by the Romans---sinking deep into the earth when they hit.

We sigh and think they should have seen. They should know! It was right there for them to read in the book of Daniel. How could they be so blind! But hey---we do the same thing. We know what God would have us do. It's right here in His book! But still we disobey Him and face the inevitable painful consequences of our sin.

And let me just pause and remind you that Jesus' reaction not only tells us what HE is like---but what God is like---because He was GOD BECOME FLESH. I mean, the best way to understand God is to understand Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 says, ***"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."*** By literally coming down to our level, Jesus gave us a window to look through and understand the heart of our Creator. Jesus showed us that God doesn't sit in Heaven and gloat over our foolishness. He doesn't think, *"Well, they deserve the pain they are experiencing! The fools!"* No---that day Jesus showed us that God weeps over our sin. Palm Sunday shows us that God is not a ruler Who is remote and insensitive like many earthly rulers. No, on that day Jesus helped us to see that God is more like a loving dad Who is crazy about His kids. Even though He has a universe to run---planets to keep balanced and presidents and kings to watch over---God still is concerned about our individual lives.

I mean, God not only knows---He also CARES that we have to deal with COVID and stock market crashes and high-priced eggs---and the threat of a third world war. He even cares about our issues with grouchy bosses and flat tires and broken dishes and late flights and toothaches. He weeps with us when we face financial crises and scary medical diagnoses. God is a King---THE King---Who is moved by our problems---even when our problems stem from our willful disobedience of His loving laws. Referring to this Isaiah 63:9 says, ***"In their distress [GOD] too was distressed."***

Let me put it this way. God not only knows your sorrows. He can taste their bitterness in His own mouth. I'm saying that on Palm Sunday, Jesus helped us to see that we matter to our Heavenly Father! We are precious to Him. He highly values EACH of us---more than anything else in all creation.

I remember the days each of my children were born---the days I got to see each of my seven grandkids for the first time. I won't tell the story of all seven grandkid births---but I will tell you about when Emma, grandkid #4 came into this world. Sue and I were waiting in a room down the hall while Sarah was in labor. We were watching the funeral of the former president George H. W. Bush. We had waited quite a while so Sue suggested I walk back to the door of Sarah's room to listen in and see if Emma had arrived. When I approached that door---I heard that first cry a child makes. The door was

partially open and when I looked in I could see that Emma had been placed on one of those warming tables just inside the door---inches from me.

I thought, *“Should I go get Sue---or capture this first cry on video?”* You can probably guess what I did. Here’s proof.

[SHOW VIDEO]

That’s Becca’s hand stroking her new niece. I should have gotten Sue---but that’s how dads and granddads are---we are crazy about our kids and grands. Well, that’s nothing compared to our Heavenly Father. Zephaniah 3:17 says God COMPOSES SONGS to reflect His joyous love for each of us. If you doubt me listen to these lyrics. ***“God will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing!”*** How does that make you feel? Think of it. God’s great love prompts Him to write songs about you and me! No wonder Jesus—God in the flesh—WEPT. He knew what the children He loved so much would face! My point is that the King Who came to town that first Psalm Sunday watches you every day of your life.

You are more important to Him than anything in the universe. God desperately loves us—and because of that love, this all-powerful, invincible King makes Himself vulnerable. He allows Himself to be moved by our lives. Job’s “friend” was wrong. Every one of our attitudes and actions affects God. When we disobey Him, we not only break a rule—we break His heart. When we sin, we don’t just commit an infraction. No—we shake our fists at Someone Who has extended bloody, nail-punctured hands to save us. And that of course is exactly what happened. Our King Jesus hung in agony on the cross out of love for you and for me---because God is a king Who would rather die than live without His subjects.

This leads us to something else we can see about God’s Grand Story as we look at what happened on that first Palm Sunday.

### (3) **It shows us what JESUS came to DO.**

As you can see in this pic, in Jesus’ day the Romans had built a huge fourteen floor fortress right next to the temple. It was named after Marc Anthony and was called the *“Antonia Fortress.”* Six hundred Roman soldiers were on duty there all the time—many more during the Passover—looking down on the Temple from those high walls. And—I’m sure the crowds welcoming Jesus—expected Him to march up to the gates and with His miraculous power turn them into splinters. Then He’d go inside and destroy the Roman force with a word.

But that’s not what happened.

Instead, Jesus rode into the temple and He didn’t go there to formally declare Himself to be the Messiah. No, for the second time in His ministry Jesus went in there and cleansed the temple. He drove out the moneychangers and the sellers of sacrificial animals. He turned over tables. Coins scattered across the pavement. Livestock ran free.

Now—let me stop and remind you why all those money changers and animal sellers were there.

The Law of Moses commanded that every male of Israel must redeem his soul by giving half a shekel as a temple tax. The Jews couldn’t bring their Roman or Greek coins into the temple, because such coins had pagan images on them that are blasphemous. Those coins didn’t belong in the Temple. So, there was a currency exchange—a moneychanger. This service wasn’t free—there was an exchange fee that went into the temple coffers—except for a percentage that went directly into the pockets of the high priest’s family. The Law of Moses also required the people of God to offer animal sacrifices. If they had traveled a long way to come for Passover, they weren’t going to bring their animals with them. If they did—it would never be judged as good enough. So—they would just bring some money and buy an approved animal for their offering after they got to Jerusalem. Prices were a little high, but they could get a bull or lamb or a pair of birds in a wicker basket—whatever was needed. Again—much of the profits from this business went to the High Priest.

Now, these money changers and animal sellers used to be outside the temple—out in the Kidron Valley. But when Caiaphas became high priest, he let them move into the temple courtyard. It was much more convenient for him—I mean the people—that way.

Well, as the Jewish people had prayed for years, the Messiah did come at Passover to judge the ungodly. But to their shock, He confronted Jewish ungodliness and sin instead of that of the Romans. With His actions Jesus was in essence asking, *“Who’s violating the temple more—the Roman soldiers who stand looking down from the ramparts—or the high priest and the temple bankers who are making money off of every poor person who comes to pray? And speaking of praying—who can talk to God with all that noise?!”* By using the temple courts in this way these religious Jews are undercutting the very reason the temple exists. They are keeping poor people from worshiping.

By the way, Jesus’ surprising actions fulfilled another Messianic Prophecy. I’m referring to Amos who said, ***“Why do you people long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”***

The point here is that Jesus came to deal with SIN—and sin is found in every heart. Sin is not just found in the speck in your neighbor’s eye—it’s found in that log that is in your own. Jesus came not to be a Lion of War—He came as the Lamb of God. He came not to sit on the throne in Jerusalem or Rome—but on the throne of Your heart—my heart. He came not to live—but to die—to die in our place. Jesus rode down that steep hillside and then up into Jerusalem knowing the cross was on the other side—the cross where He would take our sin on Himself.

St. Jerome was one of the early Church Fathers. He is best known for his translation of the Bible from Greek into Latin. In fact, Jerome’s translation, known as the Vulgate, served as the official Bible of the church for about a thousand years. Tradition says he did his translation in the same cave/stable where Jesus’ was born. It is said that near the end of his life, Jerome had a dream. In the dream, Jesus appeared to him. Jerome was so overwhelmed by the appearance of Jesus that he felt he just had to give Him something—so he got some money and offered it, saying *“Here! This is Yours.”* Jesus said, *“I don’t want it.”* Jerome brought some more possessions. But Jesus said, *“I don’t want them either.”* And Jerome said, *“If there is anything in the world that I can give You, tell me what it is. Tell me! What do You want? What do You want me to give You?”* He said he dreamed that Jesus looked at him and said this: *“Give me your sin. That’s what I came for.”*

Jerome’s dream wasn’t just a dream. It was real—because that’s why Jesus came into Jerusalem that day. He came to take away our sin.

LET US PRAY