

## **“The King Is Coming”**

Matthew 21:1-11

Let's turn in our Bibles this morning to Matthew 21, where in a moment we will look at a familiar passage of Scripture. In 2006, Apple Inc., the maker of the iPhone, was involved in a legal battle with Apple Corps, a record label owned by the Beatles. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) decided to air a special on the lawsuit, so they invited Guy Kewney, a technology writer and Internet expert, for a live on-air interview. The day that Guy Kewney arrived at the BBC London studio for the interview happened to be the same day that another man, Guy Goma, arrived at the same London office for a job interview. BBC staff mistook Guy Goma for Guy Kewney and began wiring him with a microphone in preparation for the live interview. Guy Goma thought he was being prepared for his job interview and only realized what was happening when the supposed “interview” began. Needless to say, the look on his face when the camera began to roll was priceless. And yet he managed to maintain his composure even though his replies were incoherent. When asked whether he was surprised about the verdict of the legal battle, he replied, “I'm very surprised to see this verdict come on me. I was not expecting this!” It was a case of mistaken identity.

I came across a troubling news story just this week about how scammers are now using artificial intelligence to mimic your voice and call people in your contacts to try and scam them out of money. Pretending to be you, they now have technology to sound like you to unsuspecting loved ones. The article said that to safeguard against this kind of thing, we should come up with a code word for our family in the event that it becomes necessary. And so that brings up a good question—how exactly is a person identified? If you have ever traveled internationally, you know the importance of security protocols and TSA screening

where you have to present your passport and boarding pass before you can get on a plane. When we were born, our tiny fingers and footprints were inked. People are identified through DNA, dental records, or facial recognition technology that serves as a passcode to open your smartphone.

Being able to identify someone is an important thing. Well, how exactly would the nation of Israel be able to identify the Messiah once He arrived on the scene? There would be certain criteria that had to be met, like the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. That's what Palm Sunday is all about, for it shows us how the Messiah was presented to the nation of Israel. That's what we will find in our text this morning from Matthew 21, the presentation of Jesus Christ to the nation of Israel as the Messiah. (Read)

This passage records what is referred to as the 'triumphal entry' of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, one week before the events of Easter Sunday. This event kicked off the series of events that Christians have referred to as Passion Week. The four gospels devote nearly one third of their length to the final few days of Jesus' life and ministry. Only two of them mention the events surrounding the Lord's birth. All four mention His resurrection. Yet when it comes to the events that lead up to His suffering and crucifixion, the gospels are filled with detail. And this event is recorded in all four gospels—Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12. He was welcomed by the crowds in such a way that the people lay down palm branches on the road, recognizing Him as the Son of David and the rightful King of Israel. Yet within a week, the shouts of praise from the crowd will give way to shouts of "Crucify Him." And it sort of makes us wonder just what was it that happened between Palm Sunday and Good Friday to bring about such a change of events? Well, the short answer is that it had a lot to do with expectations. Jesus is indeed the coming King, but the way in

which He bring His kingdom about differed from Jewish expectations. Before the crown, there comes the cross. And so Jesus is setting into motion the events which would lead to His arrest and crucifixion. The reason He came was to suffer and die for sins, to be our sin bearer, and it was all part of the Father's plan. The event known as the 'triumphal entry' is significant for three important reasons. First, it:

### **1—Fulfills a specific PROPHECY (21:1-5)**

*"Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once.' This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"*

Each of the four gospels record this event, and the details may vary sort of in the same way that a news story can be covered by four different news agencies. The main point of emphasis is the same, but little points may shed some light that the others did not. The timeline leading up to this is important. Jesus and His disciples have been in Jericho. He's been making His way to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. And He has been preparing the disciples for what was about to happen. In the previous chapter, we are told in verse 17, "And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way He said to them, 'See, we are going to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and

crucified, and He will be raised on the third day.” The disciples don’t understand what He is talking about. Because at this point, Jesus is at the height of His popularity. Word about Him has spread far and wide in the wake of His miracles, such as opening the eyes of two blind men in Jericho. And even sometime before this, He had visited Mary and Martha in Bethany and raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. John’s account places that miracle immediately before the triumphal entry, and says that the crowd that accompanies Jesus into the city had heard about how He had called forth Lazarus from the tomb.

**John 12:17-18—“The crowd that had been with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet Him was that they heard He had done this sign.”**

And so the crowds in Jerusalem are surging to meet Him when they hear He’s coming, and you have a crowd that is already gathered in Bethany, which was only two miles away from Jerusalem. When you piece together all four of the gospel accounts, Jesus left Bethany early that morning. More than likely He stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in their home because they were close friends. Soon after leaving Bethany, He approaches the Mount of Olives and a tiny spot known as Bethphage which means house of figs.

#### The details of this passage

Verse 1 says that as Jesus begins His journey into the city, He asks two of His disciples to do something. He sends them to a nearby village, and says, “Go to this place where you will find a donkey and her colt tied. I want you to bring them to Me.” Matthew is unique in his account that there’s both a donkey and a colt. When the disciples reach the village, they find exactly what Jesus said, these two

animals tied to a post. Mark and Luke add the detail that it was a colt on which no one had ever sat. Which is to say the animal had never been ridden. In other words, they were not to go down to the local colt dealership and get a 'previously owned' one. That's a significant detail because to ride an animal which had never before been ridden was an act of honor. Such animals were used for divine tasks. For example, when atonement was made for an unsolved murder, it required an animal that had never worn a yoke:

**Deuteronomy 21:3—“And the elders of the city that is nearest to the slain man shall take a heifer that has never been worked and that has not pulled in a yoke.”**

When the Philistines returned the ark of the covenant, they prepared a cart pulled by two animals that have never worn a yoke:

**1 Samuel 6:7—“Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke.”**

And so the fact that this colt has never been ridden sets it apart. It hadn't been broken. It had never carried a rider. Verse 6 says the disciples went and did as Jesus directed them. Because that's what disciples do. They obey Jesus. Disciples do what Jesus says. And we have no business calling ourselves His disciples if we aren't interested in doing what He tells us to do! As they untie the animals, Mark 11 adds the detail of the owner who says, "What are you doing? Why are you taking these animals?" Notice the answer they were to give, "The Lord needs them." And upon hearing this word, their owner immediately allows the disciples to have them.

That should indicate to you that whoever was the owner of that house and those animals knew the Lord. Disciples of Jesus have no issue with giving what they

have to Him for His use. That should be an important reminder for you and me, friend. All of us should ask ourselves, “How might we use those things we have in our possession to advance the purpose of the Lord?”

### The meaning of this prophecy

Nowhere else in the gospels do you and I ever read where Jesus rides on anything. Instead, He walks everywhere He goes with His disciples. He crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat, but He walked everywhere else. And furthermore, at this point He is only two miles away from Jerusalem. He is not going to ride into town on a donkey because He is tired of walking. No, there is something else going on here. It is not incidental, but very purposeful and intentional. Jesus is fulfilling a specific prophecy from the Old Testament.

**Zechariah 9:9—“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”**

Four important statements are made about the Messiah:

- He is coming
- He is righteous
- He has salvation
- He is humble

How will Israel be able to identify Him? He will come to them mounted on a donkey, specifically a colt belonging to its mother. Why is that significant? Well, because it is a symbol of what He is coming to do. He is the King who is coming

to save His people, but not in the way that they expect. In ancient times, when the king rode on a donkey, it was a symbol of peace. 1 Kings 1:38 says that Solomon rode on David's mule when He was crowned King in his father's place. A conquering king would ride into the city on a war horse, which was a white stallion, but a king who came in peace rode on a donkey. And so there's a statement being made here. Jesus isn't coming into Jerusalem to conquer or overthrow Rome. No, He is coming to make peace. He is coming to conquer sin. Something else to point out is that a donkey is a beast of burden, while a horse is associated with glory. In fact, that emphasis is made in verse 5. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem on a beast of burden. As our Savior, Jesus is coming to carry the burden and weight of our sin on His own shoulders. So He is being presented as the Messiah, but not according to their expectations. They wanted the conquering Hero, not expecting the Suffering Servant.

## **2—Provokes a special PRAISE (21:6-9)**

*“The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and He sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before Him and that followed Him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’”*

Not only does the triumphal entry of Jesus fulfill a specific prophecy. But I want you to also see how it provokes a special praise. The crowds that are accompanying Jesus into the city are hailing Him as King. It is recognition of the fact that He is the Son of David who has come to reign. He is the Messiah and the rightful heir to David's throne.

## What the crowds do

As He approached the city and the crowd began to gather around Him, people spread their garments in front of Him, like throwing down the red carpet. They throw their cloaks on the path so that the little donkey could walk along their garments. It is an acknowledgement of royalty. Kings and dignitaries were given this type of treatment in antiquity. When the Messiah came, the prophets had foretold of His reign:

**Isaiah 29:18—“In that day the deaf shall hear...the eyes of the blind shall see.”**

**Isaiah 32:1—“Behold, [the time is coming when] a king will reign in righteousness.”**

**Isaiah 35:5-6—“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”**

Jesus had done all of these things and more! So along the way, they cut down palm branches, which were common in that time. They throw the palm branches down in front also to make a highway, make a pathway for their coming King. Palm branches are always associated in the Old Testament with celebrations and expressions of joy. Palm branches are symbols of both strength and beauty; strength because they flourish in a desert climate, and beauty because they are evergreen. They are symbols of lasting joy and eternal salvation. In fact, in Revelation 7, the apostle John sees a scene that is depicted using palm branches. He describes a multitude in heaven that can't be counted. People from every nation, tribe, and tongue are before the throne. They are clothed in white robes, a symbol of righteousness, and palm branches are in their hands.

And they cry out with a loud voice saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.”

And so as the King is coming, this is the most extraordinary moment in the life of Israel. They are welcoming Him as a conquering Hero. There had been times before when the crowds wanted to crown Jesus as King, but He didn't allow it to happen. In John 6, after He had performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the Bible says, “Jesus perceived that they intended to come take Him by force to make Him King, so He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.” The crowd wanted to make Him a King, but He didn't allow it to happen. Sometimes He removed Himself. Sometimes they were restrained. They were restrained because it was not His hour. But in John's account of this triumphal entry, Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Now it is His hour.

#### What the crowds declare

Look at what they say in verse 9, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Hosanna in the highest!” The word ‘Hosanna’ that is used here comes from two Hebrew words which mean, “Save us now!” It comes from Psalm 118:25 which says, “Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!” It was known as the conqueror's Psalm and was always recited at Passover. It is the last of the psalms in the ‘Hallel’ which is Hebrew for ‘praise’ psalms. So here the crowds are at the Passover celebrating God's salvation and they're crying out, “Save now, save us!” They are hailing Jesus as their Savior and Messiah.

Notice they also call Him the ‘Son of David’ who is the heir to an everlasting kingdom. Then they say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” which is again from Psalm 118. That is a Messianic expectation. And what is

interesting is that Psalm 118 will be quoted by Jesus soon after this down in verse 42, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” They’re welcoming Him as their Messiah and Conqueror, but He’s not coming to conquer the way they think He is coming. Yes, He is a Deliverer, and He is the Savior—but He’s not coming to provide some political deliverance or a political salvation. And because He does not fit their expectations, within a few days, the crowd will cry out, “Crucify Him!” He will be rejected by the priests and religious leaders. But you see, this was the plan of God all along. Before the Messiah will reign with His people, He first had to come and redeem His people. In Judaism, the word ‘Hosanna’ is a cry for divine help. In Christianity, it is a cry of praise. For what the Old Testament cries out for, the New Testament answers!

### **3—Reveals a saving PURPOSE (21:10-11)**

*“And when He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.’”*

The events of Palm Sunday fulfill a specific prophecy, and they provoke a special praise. But I want you to notice how all of this reveals the saving purpose of God. Nothing that Jesus did was coincidental or incidental, but it was all part of the Father’s plan. The Lamb of God is being presented to those He has come to save.

#### An important question

Notice in verse 10 that at the very core of this event is the question of His identity. The whole city is stirred up, and they’re asking the question, “Who is this?” My friend, that’s the most important question in life. Who is this? Who is Jesus? What am I to do with Jesus? That question is far more important than

what the stock market is doing right now. It is far more pressing than anything else you might be worried about right now in your life. The question upon which your eternity is hinged is this question, “Who is this?” Who is Jesus Christ? You remember from earlier in the gospel accounts how Jesus had asked this question of His disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” They say, “Well, some say you are John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others say You are a prophet.” Then He asks, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” That’s the most important question of life, friends. It is a question that you must answer for yourself. Your husband or wife cannot answer it for you. Your parents cannot answer that question for you. It doesn’t matter that your grandparents knew the answer. No, you and I are personally confronted with the question, “Who do you say this Man who is riding on the back of the donkey truly is?” That is the question.

### An incomplete answer

The question is asked, “Who is this?” Verse 11 says, “And the cross said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.’” It is only a partial answer, even an incomplete answer. A lot of people stop short of the full answer, don’t they? Men and women have no problem acknowledging that Jesus was a prophet or a great teacher. He is someone they look to for some inspiration, but they are not really prepared to have Him as the King who is ruling their heart.

### **Luke 6:46—“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but do not do what I say?”**

Jesus is more than a Prophet. He is also a King and a Priest. He is the Son of God who has come to save the world. It is interesting to me that the crowds recognize Jesus as King and Prophet, but notice they don’t recognize Him as their Priest. In His priestly work, He will offer to God the Father the sacrifice of

Himself as the Lamb who takes away our sin. Before He wears the crown of jewels, He has to wear a crown of thorns. Before there is a royal throne, there will be a redemptive cross. Before the glory of the kingdom will come the agony of the garden, the shame of the cross, and the darkness of the tomb. The wages of sin is death, the justice of God must be satisfied, and the Innocent takes the place of the guilty. Maybe you remember the song:

*Atonement day, a shepherd cries  
Another spotless lamb must die  
Oh how could just one sacrifice  
Our God, Jehovah, satisfy?*

*Year after year the blood would flow  
But none could wash me white as snow  
Salvation's day fulfilled the plan,  
The promise came one holy Lamb*

*One holy Lamb washed my sin away  
One sacrifice paid the price I could not pay  
One holy Lamb, one great I AM  
One Seed of Abraham  
One holy Lamb washed my sin away!*

The Old Testament scriptures foretold that God would raise up a Savior who would be Prophet, Priest, and King. We need a King to rule over us, a Prophet to reveal truth to us, and we need a Priest to redeem us. Jesus uniquely fulfills all three of these offices!

**Deuteronomy 18:15—“The Lord your God will raise up for you prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”**

**1 Samuel 2:35—“And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to that is in My heart and in My mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before My anointed forever.”**

**2 Samuel 7:12-13—“I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever.”**

He is not a typical conqueror. He’s not riding on a white horse. John sees Him doing that the next time He comes. And on that day, there will be no mistaking who He is—King of Kings and Lord of Lords! But this time, He comes humbly. He comes peacefully. He comes to die as our Lamb. Friend, you can’t have Him as your King until you first have Him as your Lamb. The only ground of assurance is the blood of our Passover Lamb! I need no other argument, I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me. You have to have Him as your Savior before you can have Him as your King.

Have you personally received Him as your Savior?