

PALM SUNDAY | THE CROWNED LAMB

Isaiah 62, Matthew 21:1-11, Zechariah 9:9

BIG IDEA: Jesus enters Jerusalem not to seize a throne — but to surrender His life.

INTRODUCTION STORY

Silence can be a gift, but it can also be incredibly painful. Think, for example, of the last time a loved one gave you the silent treatment and you had to live with them. Every minute of silence feels like an eternity. And before long the silence has become a wall neither of you knows how to climb over. *Some of you know exactly what I'm describing. You're living in that silence right now.*

It turns out that science agrees with me. Researchers have discovered that being on the receiving end of silence actually activates the same part of the brain that processes physical pain. Being ignored literally hurts.

God had spoken to Israel through prophets for centuries — and then, nothing. No word. No vision. No prophet. Just the promises of Isaiah ringing in their ears and silence for 400 years. The rabbis had a specific phrase for what Israel was living through. They write in a famous commentary that— "When Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died — the last prophets— *the Holy Spirit has departed from Israel.*" They weren't just waiting. They were wondering if they'd been forgotten.

This Palm Sunday God breaks the silence in Isaiah 62 & the gospels. **Let's read them.**

Isaiah 62:10-12

1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

[...]

10 Pass through, pass through the gates!
Prepare the way for the people.
Build up, build up the highway!
Remove the stones.

Raise a banner for the nations.

11 The Lord has made proclamation
to the ends of the earth:

*"Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your Savior comes!*

*See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.”*

12 They will be called the Holy People,
the Redeemed of the Lord;
and you will be called Sought After,
the City No Longer Deserted.

Let’s now read Matthew’s account of Palm Sunday.

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.”

THE GOD WHO WON'T STAY SILENT | (Isaiah 62:1, 10, Matthew 21:9)

A couple of things before we dig in.

First — This year we're seeing Palm Sunday through Isaiah 62, an unusual but revelatory approach.

Second — as we move through this sermon, it would be easy to shake our heads at the crowd. They misread Jesus. They expected the wrong kingdom. They celebrated a king they didn't fully understand. But before we judge them, John 12:16 stops us cold. John tells us plainly that even the disciples didn't understand what was happening that day. Not in the moment. The full picture only came into focus on the other side of an empty tomb. They had the right scriptures. They had the wrong expectations. And the meaning only arrived after the resurrection.

So when we say the crowd misread Jesus — we're not talking about foolish people. We're talking about people exactly like us, doing what we do, seeing what we're able to see with the light we have. Hold that thought through the whole sermon.

There's something remarkable about who is actually speaking in Isaiah 62. Many believe — and I think they're right — that this isn't just Isaiah writing about God. This is the Messiah himself speaking. The same voice that says "I will not keep silent" in Isaiah 62 is the same person riding through the gate in the gospels. He wasn't fulfilling someone else's promise. He was keeping his own.

Think about the passionate language for a minute. God, who pictures himself as a groom to his bride, has been deeply wounded by her due to centuries of sin and rebellion. The Bible even calls what Israel did to God prostitution, unfaithfulness, and cheating. That's not my language — that's God's. Which tells you how deeply this wounds him. God has every right to be angry forever and give his people the eternal silent treatment.

Yet he passionately declares — **"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet."** Church, you need to know that we serve a **God [who] refuses to stay silent when his people feel forgotten.**

So this 400-year period of silence wasn't really the silent treatment. It was a quiet preparation for the loudest and most important voice to be heard. Kind of like when you have to quiet a room before someone gives an important speech. The silence was God's long shhhhhhhhhh.

And the irony of the moment is that Jesus didn't speak a word when he entered through the gates of Jerusalem — the crowds shouted. They sensed that something prophetic was breaking through — that the silence was ending. But sensing it and understanding it were two very different things.

Had we been there, the commotion would have been incredibly loud and overwhelming. We get a hint of the magnitude from the Pharisees' reaction in John's gospel — **"Look**

how the whole world has gone after him!" Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was noisy. It caused a commotion that no one could ignore.

Do any of you have a friend who texts with exclamation marks in every message? That's this moment. Listen to what the crowd is shouting:

"Hosanna!" — Save us now. A cry that's been building for 400 years has finally broken the silence.

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" — That's Psalm 118. The Scripture they sang at Passover.

And now they're shouting it because they think the One it pointed to is finally here.

"Blessed is the king of Israel!" —The groom has come for his bride. The silence is over.

But don't get too comfortable with the noise. Because the one who broke 400 years of silence with a triumphal entry will, before this week is over, choose to go completely silent before his accusers. Not because he has nothing to say. But because the lamb doesn't argue at the altar.

THE WRONG KINGDOM, THE RIGHT KING | (Zech. 9:9 / Matt. 21:4–8)

When Matthew interprets Jesus' Triumphal Entry, he does something interesting. He blends two prophecies but calls it one. He brings together Isaiah 62 with Zechariah 9:9, which explicitly tells us the Messiah, the King of Israel would come to her riding a donkey.

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 (fohl) of a donkey.

But even before Zechariah, Genesis 49:10-11 had already prophesied that an Eternal King from Judah would also ride a foal. Read that passage if you want to go deeper.

But this image must have confused them. They didn't need a king coming in peace — they needed one coming to wage war. And yet their own Scriptures mentioned a donkey.

So here comes Jesus, riding into Jerusalem — the city of God, the seat of David's throne — and he's on a borrowed donkey that has never been ridden before. And the crowd sees all this and declares him the King of David's throne.

They wave branches. They shout Hosanna!

But Jesus chose the donkey on purpose. Kings in the ancient Near East rode warhorses when they came to conquer — and donkeys when they came in peace. The animal was the announcement. And the announcement was this: the kingdom I'm bringing doesn't come by force or military conquest. It comes through me, a victorious but humble king.

And it's going to cost me everything. Here's the point: The crowd got the right king but expected the wrong kingdom.

How could they get the wrong kingdom? By the time Jesus rides into Jerusalem, they've had three years of front-row seats. They heard him say, "The kingdom of God is at hand." They watched him heal the sick, feed thousands, and walk away when they tried to crown him by force. He had been showing them the whole time what kind of king he was.

They kept the parts of Jesus that fit their expectations, and quietly set aside the parts that didn't. **And lest we judge them too quickly — John tells us that even the disciples didn't understand what was happening that day. It was only after the resurrection that it finally clicked.**

And if we're honest — on most days, so do we.

We come to Jesus with our own list. Fix this. Change that. Defeat my Romans — my circumstances, my anxiety, my enemies. Give me the kingdom I already had in mind before I got here. And when he shows up on a donkey instead of a warhorse, we don't always know what to do with that.

But here's what the donkey tells us — and what the crowd missed entirely. This king didn't come to win by force. He came to win by surrender. He didn't come to put his enemies in chains. He came to take the chains off of ours. ***But— our Savior arrives on his terms, not ours.***

Which raises a question the crowd was already asking without knowing it. When Jerusalem sees Jesus riding through the gate, the whole city stirs and asks — "Who is this?" It's the right question. And the answer has everything to do with what he came to do about the names we've been carrying.

THE NEW NAME | Isaiah 62:12 / Matthew 21:10–11

Did you have a nickname growing up? Sometimes the names given to us were endearing. As a kid, I was called Little Joel in Spanish — Joelín. But that sounded very similar to sesame seed — ajonjolí — so some people called me that. Some nicknames were warm, funny, harmless. But some nicknames became that reminded us of a deficiency, a failure, a wound. Labels that followed us out of childhood and into adulthood and somehow never quite let go.

Isaiah tells us that Israel had been given names like that. Labels worn for generations. **FORSAKEN** — the name given to Jerusalem during a time of judgment and abandonment. A woman deserted by her husband. This wasn't just political language. It was personal. Intimate. The word a wife would dread hearing. And **DESOLATE** — to be laid waste, left in ruin, devoid of life or joy or prosperity. These were the names on Israel's door. And names have a way of becoming the story we tell ourselves about who we are.

Where do names like that come from? Three places. Some come from the **Accuser** — whose very name in Hebrew means prosecutor. He takes your real failures and turns them into your permanent identity. You did that. Therefore, you are that. Forever. Some come from **circumstances** — bankruptcy, divorce, a diagnosis — that don't need words. They just point at the rubble. And some come from **people** — a parent, a spouse, a community that defined you by your worst moment and never updated the file. Three sources. One result. A name you've worn so long you've started to believe it's actually who you are.

But then Isaiah 62 does something extraordinary. God steps in and starts renaming, because **God comes to rename what shame has labeled. Forsaken becomes My Delight Is in Her. Desolate becomes Married.** Verse 12 adds two more — The Holy People. Sought After. No Longer Deserted. When God renames you, it isn't a rebrand. It's a resurrection. The old name described what happened to you. The new names declare what God has decided about you.

So when Jesus rides through the gate and the whole city stirs and asks — "Who is this?" — they were right to wonder. He's not a king riding in to bring judgment and a remembrance of your past, but one who came to give you a new name. And what it cost him to do that — we'll get to before this sermon is over.

PREPARING THE HIGHWAY | Isaiah 62:10 / Matthew 21:8

Have you ever waved palm branches at someone? *I have.* Growing up in a cult, whenever our leader walked through the crowds, volunteers had strategically placed bags of palm branches for the crowds to hold up as they shouted "Hosanna! Hosanna!" — honoring a man who was no king at all. Thank God I never picked one up. But that experience taught me something — palm branches meant something. They symbolized

Jewish nationalism, victory, and royal welcome. And when the Palm Sunday crowd laid their cloaks on the road, they were doing something even more profound — submitting to Jesus as king, making a path for him to walk through.

They may not have known it — and John tells us they didn't, not fully, not yet — but they were enacting Isaiah 62:10 in real time. Saturated with scripture, acting out prophecy, without fully grasping what they were participating in. Which is perhaps the most human moment in the entire gospel.

The verse is written as a command to ordinary people — not angels, not priests, not prophets. Just people: "Pass through the gates. Prepare the way. Build up the highway. Remove the stones." Go out. Build up. Clear the path. Raise the banner. The Palm Sunday crowd did all of this spontaneously, without a memo, without fully understanding what they were participating in.

And that's exactly the point. ***God invites his people to build the road he travels.***

The invitation is not just to Isaiah or that crowd in Jerusalem, but to us, here, today. Not to watch from a distance. Just to lay something down and clear the path.

The ancient Targum — an early Jewish commentary — interpreted the stones of Isaiah 62:10 as "*the thought of the evil imagination, a stone of stumbling.*" Clearing the road isn't just construction. It's removing whatever in us keeps people from seeing Jesus clearly.

The crowd who welcomed Jesus didn't see the full picture — and yet they built the road anyway. We are in a far more privileged position. We know what kind of king he is. We know why he came on a donkey and not a warhorse. We know where the road leads to on Friday.

So the question Isaiah leaves us with isn't complicated. It's just costly. What needs to be laid down so that the people around you can see the king passing through?

HIS REWARD IS WITH HIM | Isaiah 62:11 / Matthew 21 / John 12:17–18

Isaiah 62:11 says something that should stop us cold. The Savior who comes — the one who refused to stay silent, who rode in on a donkey, who came to rename the forsaken and build a road through the gates — he doesn't arrive empty handed. He comes carrying something. "His reward is with him."

What is he carrying?

John's gospel gives us the answer. The reason the crowd is following Jesus into Jerusalem that day — the reason the Pharisees panic and say the whole world has gone after him — is Lazarus. John 12:17–18 tells us the crowd had witnessed Jesus

call a dead man out of a tomb. And now they're following the man who did it, right into the holy city. Jesus is riding through that gate with the evidence of restored life trailing behind him. His reward — resurrected life — is already on display.

Jesus enters Jerusalem carrying life —and riding toward death.

Let that land for a moment. The miracle that drew the crowd is the same miracle that sealed his death warrant. John 11:53 tells us it was the raising of Lazarus that pushed the chief priests and Pharisees to finalize their plan to kill him. Jesus knew this. He rode into Jerusalem anyway. He carried life in his hands and rode straight toward the people who would nail those hands to a cross.

He didn't come to take a throne. He came to pay a bill — the bill for every name shame ever gave you, for every kingdom you tried to build without him, for every stone you left in the road. He came to pay it in full.

This is the Crowned Lamb. Crowned — because he is king of everything. Lamb — because he will not defend himself when they come for him. The one who broke 400 years of silence with a triumphal entry will, before this week is over, go completely silent before his accusers. Not because he has nothing to say. But because the lamb doesn't argue at the altar.

And he did it for you.

So here we stand — on the threshold of Holy Week. The parade is ending. The crowd is thinning. The road ahead goes through a temple court, an upper room, a garden, into a courtroom, up a hill, and into a tomb. And the question Palm Sunday always leaves us with isn't theological. It's personal.

Will you stay with him?

Not just today, with the palm branches and the children's choir and the Hosannas still ringing. But Thursday, when it gets quiet. Friday, when it gets dark. Saturday, when it feels finished.

The king didn't stop at the parade. He kept riding — all the way to the cross, all the way to death, all the way to the other side of an empty tomb — so that his reward could reach you.

Don't stop at the parade.

BENEDICTION

May the God who refused to stay silent speak his word over your life this week.

May you know the new name he has given you — not Forsaken, not Desolate — but Sought After. Redeemed. My Delight Is in Her.

And may you follow him all the way — through the garden, through the darkness, through Saturday's silence — trusting that the Crowned Lamb who rode toward death is the same king who walked out of a tomb.

He didn't stop at the parade. Neither should you.

Go in peace.