

Palm Sunday



Behold, Your King Is Coming to You!

Matthew 21:1-11 (ESV)

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 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. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 “Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 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!” 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” 11 And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Jerusalem is about 8,000 miles east from here—across the Atlantic ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. I’ve never been to Jerusalem. I sincerely hope that one day I will be able to see that city. Yet something happened in that city long ago that has forever changed humanity.

The events described in these eleven verses took place just over two thousand years ago. It is probably difficult for the modern person to grasp what significance, if any, these events have for us who are here today. And yet they do have significance in ways we may not fully understand. For example, why is this the year 2011? Why did we start counting our years 2011 years ago? What happened 2011 years ago? Something tragically glorious happened.

Answer: Jesus did. Jesus happened.

Two thousand and eleven years ago Jesus entered our world. These verses (that were just read) mark the beginning of the final week of Jesus’ life. Followers of Jesus ever since have cherished the memory of these final days. They are cherished for what Jesus actually accomplished in them. He accomplished salvation for all who believe in Him. These events are so significant that we are going to be following His steps throughout the coming week with special gatherings on both Thursday and Friday evenings at 7:00 p.m.

Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week and by the end of the week He was rejected. At the beginning of the week they praised Him as King and at the end of the week He was condemned as a blaspheming criminal, then crucified just outside the walls of Jerusalem. But the story does not end with His crucifixion. Jesus is not a person you can easily ignore. His words and His deeds cannot be embraced with neutrality. He is to be either embraced or expelled; kissed or condemned; commended as King or condemned as criminal.

“Who Is This?”

The question found in verse ten expresses the question for which each of us must one day give an answer— “Who is this?” This is THE most important question any human being will ever ask. This is a question we should let Jesus Himself answer. As we study the text this morning, we will learn that Jesus proclaimed Himself the Messiah-King of Israel on that day as He entered Jerusalem. We will see this in two ways. We will see this by what He did and did not do. First, we will see this by what He chose to do as He entered the city. The way in which He chose to enter the city tells us who He thinks He is. Second, we will see His claim to be king by what He did *not* do in response to the people’s praise. In summary, we will see that Jesus proclaims Himself King of the Jews on that day but what He did and did not do.

Matthew 21:1-11 (ESV)

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives,

Verse one tells us that Jesus was approaching Jerusalem and He stopped at the little village of Bethphage. Not much is known about this little village, but it “apparently lay on the eastern slope of Olivet [Mount of Olives] or at the foot of the mountain, a little further from Jerusalem than Bethany.”¹ You will recall that Bethany was the town where Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived and was about two miles from Jerusalem.

Jesus was traveling up to Jerusalem from Jericho. It was while in Jericho that Jesus had healed blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46) and had his introduction to Zacchaeus who was watching for Jesus from a Sycamore tree (Lk 19:1-10). The city still boasts today that it knows which tree it was that Zacchaeus climbed and you can visit this tree.

Jericho is about 17 miles northwest of Jerusalem and the road up from Jericho rises three thousand feet in elevation. This is why it is always said, “Let us go up to Jerusalem.” To go to Jerusalem was always to go up. Jesus stopped at this little village at the base of the Mount of Olives and paused for just a little while.

The Mount of Olives was one of Jesus favorite places. The Garden of Gethsemane is at the base of the Mount of Olives. Jesus prayed often in this garden. Jesus used the Garden as a place to teach His disciples and it may be that He occasionally slept there (Lk 21:37).

Perhaps one of the reasons He was so drawn to the Mount of Olives was because of the spectacular view of Jerusalem that it afforded. Mount of Olives is about 200 feet higher than Jerusalem so it serves as a wonderful over look.

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Mt 21:1.

The gospel of John (12:1-8) tells us that Jesus spent some time in Bethany with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. While He was there, they gave Him a dinner. Martha, of course, was serving while Mary was anointing Jesus with expensive perfume. Judas complained that it was a waste of money, but Jesus noted that what she had done was in preparation for His burial (Jn 12:7). Jesus knew His time had come. He knew He was about to die. Jesus had three times warned His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to die (Mt 16:21; 17:22; 20:17-19). His time was drawing to a close and He chose to spend one of His final days with his closest friends.

If you knew you were entering the final six days of your life, who would you spend time with?

The following day (after His meal with His friends) Jesus prepared to enter Jerusalem (Jn 12:12). Jesus was not alone in His journey to Jerusalem. There were hundreds of thousands of people going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Scholars estimate that there were about 2 million people gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover feast.² There were people everywhere. The crowds knew the miracles that Jesus had performed. Word of Lazarus being raised from the dead had circulated throughout the area. Their eyes were fixed upon Jesus.

A Unique Mission

Jesus then did something very unusual. He sent two disciples on a unique mission.

Matthew 21:1b-11 (ESV)

...then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 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. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.”

What is Jesus doing? Why is He ordering a colt on which to ride? This is the only time in all of Scripture that He rides on an animal. Is He tired and need a lift? Is this the ancient equivalent of calling a cab?

No. This is deliberate. Jesus is very intentional. Jesus is doing nothing blindly. Every step He takes has meaning and purpose. The disciples did not fully understand all that was happening in the moment, but later they came to fully understand (Jn 12:16). However, Jesus knew exactly what He is doing and Matthew tells us why Jesus was doing what He was doing. Jesus chose to do this in order to fulfill prophecy.

Matthew 21:4-5 (ESV)

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

*5 “Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”*

Matthew is quoting **Zechariah 9:9** which the Jews understood to be referring to the Messiah. “Behold, daughter of Zion, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on the foal of a donkey.” Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah-King. For those who had eyes to see, Jesus was in the very

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), Mt 21:1.

process of living out the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies describing Messiah. **Jesus was revealing Himself as Messiah and king!** And we will see that the crowds knew exactly what He was doing.

The Disciples Obeyed Their Master and 'Lord'

His disciples obeyed His request. They went into the village to carry out Jesus' command. The gospels of Mark and Luke fill in more of the details and tell us that the disciples found everything exactly as Jesus told them (Mk 11:1-11). They found the colt tied up. They untied it. The owners were indeed standing nearby and questioned them as to why they were untying the colt. They answered just as Jesus had told them. They said, "The Lord has need of it" (Lk 19:34). The owners were content with the answer and off they went.

How did Jesus know all these things? How did He know the colt would be there? How did He know the owners would be standing nearby? How did He know that saying, "The Lord has need of them" would satisfy the owners that they were not being stolen?

Jesus knows these things because He is Lord. Jesus clearly applies the word 'Lord' to Himself, meaning that He is Master and Ruler. "The Lord has need" of the donkey, means Jesus has need of the donkey. Jesus referred to Himself as Lord, and so have his followers ever since.

Matthew 21:6-7 (ESV)

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them.

Matthew alone mentions that there was both a donkey along with its colt. Many have stumbled over this fact since all three of the other synoptic writers only mention the colt. There is no need to stumble here. We learn from Luke that the colt or the foal had never before been ridden. The crowds were immense and no doubt very loud. It seems reasonable that the disciples brought along the mother donkey in order to keep the colt calm.

It is noteworthy that Jesus rode this little colt for the first time and the little guy went along with it just fine. Jesus actually made it the full two miles into Jerusalem. He is not only King over all mankind but He is King over all creation and King over all animals.

Some have also stumbled over verse 7. Some people have read the verse to mean that Jesus actually pushed up both the donkey and the colt side by side and sat on both the animals at the same time because it says, "...he sat on them." However, in the Greek the pronoun modifies the nearest antecedent, which means that "them" refers to the cloaks and not the donkeys. The disciples may have put their cloaks on both animals not knowing which Jesus would choose to sit upon, but all three of the other gospels tell us that Jesus chose to sit upon the colt and not the mother donkey.³

Matthew 21:8 (ESV)

8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

³ See Mk 11:7; Lk 19:35; Jn 12:14.

As Jesus mounts the little donkey and starts toward Jerusalem, the crowd is evidently aware of what Jesus is doing. They began spreading their cloaks on the ground in front of Him. This was a continuous action, so that as He passed over the cloaks, those behind Him would pick them up and then run in front of him and lay them down again.

This is a kind of rustic, first-century “rolling out the red carpet.” The practice has its roots in another Israelite king, Jehu (2 Kgs 9:13) who was welcomed as king in the same way. It is a symbol of complete submission to Jesus and a welcoming Him as King. This is not the first occasion in which they crowds wanted to make him king.⁴ However, this time Jesus does not hide Himself as He did previously. This time He reveals Himself. As Jesus moves closer to Jerusalem, the excitement builds and the moment intensifies.

Matthew 21:9 (ESV)

9 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!”



Jesus was surrounded by the crowds of people going with Him as He made His way to the great city Jerusalem. They were shouting and making a tremendous noise.

Palm Branches

Many artists have tried to capture the wonder of this moment. There were thousands of people walking along side Jesus, shouting His praise, laying down their cloaks, and waving palm branches. The palm branches were symbolic of victory, liberty, and joy.⁵

Hosannas

The word “Hosanna” is taken from **Psalms 118:25-26** and is the transliteration of a Hebrew expression *hôšî‘âh nā’* that originally was a cry for help and meant, “O Save us, we pray!”⁶ As the word developed, it came to be an invocation of blessing and then even a acclamation of praise.⁷

The crowds also considered Jesus to be “**Son of David.**” We know that Jesus was genealogically descended from David, but the phrase carries messianic hope as well. The term is grounded in the hope God promised in David (2 Samuel 7) that one of his sons would have a kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam 7:11-16). The Jews understood that Messiah would be a “Son of David.”

⁴ See Jn 6:15.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Mt 21:1–11.

⁶ See 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26.

⁷ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), Mt 21:9.

“Son of David,” wrote one commentator, is “unavoidably messianic,”⁸ as is the phrase, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Ps 118:26). “Hosanna in the highest” echos the angelic chorus announced at Jesus’ birth, “Glory to God in the highest” (Lk 2:14). This entire scene pointed to Jesus as the long awaited Messiah, the King of Israel. All that Jesus did up to this pointed to His public presentation of Himself as the Messianic King of Israel.

1) He came riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. 2) The crowds paid Him the highest honor and deepest submission as they laid their cloaks on the ground. 3) The waving of the palm fronds pointed to victory and triumph. 4) The crowds praised Him as the Son of David. 5) And they used words from the Psalms that were distinctively Messianic in tone. These crowds were welcoming Jesus as their king! Everything that Jesus did, pointed to Him presenting Himself as Israel's Messiah-King.

What Jesus Did Not Do

We also see that He is presenting Himself as King because of what He did **not** do. When the people were shouting their praises to Jesus, there is no doubt whatsoever as to what is being communicated. *They were proclaiming Him their king.* And when the chief priests and the scribes heard this they came unglued, especially when the children were saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (21:15-16). They were completely aware of what was being claimed and so they said to Jesus, “Do you hear what these are saying?” This is an interesting question since they were shouting these things. What they were really asking was, “Jesus aren’t you going to stop them from praising you like this because they are calling you Messiah-King and you are not Messiah-King so it would be wrong to continue to allow them to sing something that is not true, so stop them!”

And Jesus simply says, “I hear them and I will not stop them because what they are saying is true. Haven’t you ever read your Bible? Do you remember Psalm 8, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?’” Jesus did not stop them from praising Him. He allowed them to continue to praise Him. If Jesus was not Messiah-King then it would have been wrong to allow them to continue. However, Jesus did not stop them. He allowed them to praise Him. It was right for them to do this, because Jesus actually **is** Messiah-King!! In fact, Luke tells us that Jesus said, “If these children were not signing, the stones would cry out!” (Lk 19:40). Jesus had previously tried to keep somewhat quiet about who He really was, but not any more. All that changed on this day.

A Few Concluding Comments

However, there are a few things to note about this scene. Why a ride in on a donkey? We know it was a fulfillment of prophecy, but there is more. Matthew’s point in quoting **Zechariah 9:9** seems to be to emphasize the humility of Messiah. We know that during the early history of Israel donkey’s were the animals of royalty. Jair the Gileadite, one of the first judges of Israel had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys (Jud 10:4). Abdon, son of Hillel, another judge of Israel, had 30 sons and 40 grandsons who rode on 70 donkeys. David made Solomon ride on his own donkey on the day of his coronation. When Solomon became King, he began importing horses from Egypt. The horse then replaced the donkey as the animal of choice among soldiers. The horse then became synonymous with war.

Jesus came riding on a donkey as a symbol of peace. He came to Jerusalem that day bringing them peace. He did not come riding on a horse. A horse is what you rode into battle, not a donkey (Prov 21:31). The horse was made for war and a mighty warrior rode on a horse, not a silly donkey! Yet

⁸ Frank E. Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter W. Wessel and Walter L. Liefeld, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 439.

Jesus did come riding on a donkey. He was proclaiming Himself King, yes, but a humble king, not a fighting warrior king!

Lets return to Zechariah 9:9 again, and this time, lets read verse 10 also.

Zechariah 9:9-10 (ESV)

*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.
¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Notice that the king of Israel comes mounted on a donkey and He will cut off the war horse. The Messiah-King of Israel will come humbly, riding on a lowly donkey. Furthermore, he will come “and speak peace to the nations.” The Messiah-King comes “speaking peace,” like a mighty “Prince of peace” (Is 9:6).

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Jesus entered Jerusalem that day “speaking peace” as a “Prince of peace.” He came humbly, riding a little donkey. And He is more than just the King of the Jews. The Zachariah passage says, “*He will speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*”

His peace will spread “**to the nations**,” which refers to the Gentiles. His reign will not be limited to Jerusalem. It will encompass all lands from “**sea to sea!**” His reign will be “**to the ends of the earth!**” This king will not be a tribal king. He will be a global king. He will not simply be king of the Jews, but He will be the King of all the earth. Jesus was most assuredly presenting Himself as King of the Jews that day, but there were far greater implications than just for Israel alone.

Sacrificial Lamb

Another point to mention is the day that Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem in this way. He was presenting Himself as King, but He was also presenting Himself as sacrificial lamb. The crowds understood He was coming as King for they welcomed as Him and shouted for Him to save them, but they were wanting deliverance from the rule of Rome and not deliverance from sin.

Passover was on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Passover lambs were chosen on the tenth day of the month. If Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, the tenth day of the month, then Passover would have begun at sundown Thursday evening and last through sundown Friday evening. This means that Jesus would have not only been declaring Himself King according to the prophecy, but also as Messiah in presenting Himself as the chosen sacrificial, Passover lamb. Jesus entered Jerusalem on the very day that the crowds were bringing their lambs to present them to the priests to be sacrificed at Passover.

If the estimates are correct and 2 million people came to Jerusalem for Passover, then that meant that the crowds were bringing in about 200,000 lambs, since one lamb was sacrificed for every 10 people.

The timing of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on that day was not accidental. His plan was deliberate and intentional and it achieved the results He desired. With His entrance into Jerusalem on a little donkey, Jesus set in motion all the necessary events that would bring about His crucifixion on the following Friday. The Pharisees, scribes, and chief priests could tolerate Him no more and began to actively plan how to kill Him (Jn 11:43-53).

Matthew 21:10-11 (ESV)

10 *And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"* 11 *And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. Literally it means the city was shaken. What Jesus did on that day, shook not just the city of Jerusalem, but the entire world. He declared Himself the Messiah-King of the Jews and King of all Kings on earth. Jesus' actions "stirred up" everything.

And since that day, followers of Jesus have been remembering that day every year. Believers still walk that same road that Jesus walked. They still enter Jerusalem by the same gate that Jesus entered by, which is St. Stephen's Gate also called the Lion's Gate.

We may be tempted to think that this little event had little significance since the crowds changed their minds about Jesus completely within about four days. However, Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He is the one true God of all the earth. Did the reign of Jesus have any lasting effect?

Consider this. Our godless government marks time by two events - the reign of King Jesus and our independence from England. On April 15 President Obama issued a proclamation designating this coming week national park week. The final line of that proclamation says the following:

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fifteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand eleven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fifth."

BARACK OBAMA⁹

⁹ Source <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/15/presidential-proclamation-national-park-week> accessed 16 April 2011.

Our nation is far from being a Christian nation, but is it not interesting that every single presidential proclamation gives witness to the fact that Jesus is Lord? Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords whether we delight in His reign or not. But the blessing of the day is that we have an opportunity to choose to welcome Him as the humble, donkey-riding King who comes with salvation in His arms giving freely to all who will receive Him. Today is the day of grace and salvation.

However, a different day is coming. He will not always come humbly, and riding on a donkey. There will one day be a day when He comes as a conquering King riding on a war horse. He will come on that day, not to give grace, but to bring judgment.

Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV)

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Today we have a choice. We can joyfully embrace Him as loving, gracious, Messiah-King, or we can resist Him and face Him another day as the one who judges the nations in righteousness.

All of Jerusalem was shaken when Jesus entered the city that day. And everyone was asking one question, “Who is this?” How would you answer the question? Who is Jesus?

Is He just some prophet of the Jews? Or is He your Savior, King of kings, and Lord of lords?

Is this year merely “the year 2011?” Or is this “the year of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, 2011?”