

The King of Christians (Palm Sunday)

Matthew 21:1-11 on March 28, 2021

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Please read Matthew 21:1-11 before going further in this transcript.

Before we dive into Palm Sunday today, let's do a quick overview of the week leading up to Easter, what some people call "Passion Week." Altogether, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John allocate approximately 1/3 of their total content, just to this one final week of Jesus' life. Clearly, this particular week is HUGELY significant to our Christian Faith. I encourage you to read through some of these passages this week and to set aside time to mull over all that's happening in the final week of Jesus' life. I'm basing this overview on a chart from my NIV Study Bible.¹ It's always good for us to keep in mind that we are so blessed to have 4 different Gospels, each one recording these events from their own particular, eyewitness viewpoint. Some writers record the events more strictly chronologically, while others write more topically, or even geographically.² Therefore, sometimes it can be difficult for us to pin down the exact dates/times the way we'd like to. However, for our purposes this morning, this is a good/helpful overview.

Let's begin by going back to the Friday, a week before Good Friday. Jesus arrived in Bethany and spent some time with His good friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Apparently, over the next week, Jesus travels back and forth between Jerusalem and Bethany, where He was staying. Bethany is only about a mile and a half from Jerusalem, so it's a fairly easy walk, even though it's a bit hilly.³ The next day, Saturday, was the Sabbath. Although we aren't told much about this particular day, Jesus and His disciples would have honored the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. This puts us at Sunday, what we call Palm Sunday. This is the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. We'll come back to this as our primary focus for today's sermon. The Monday of Easter week is the day that Jesus cleared the temple. He drove out the money changers, turned over tables and reminded them that the temple ought to be a house of prayer, NOT a den of robbers! On Tuesday, Jesus teaches all kinds of parables and predicts several future events, including the destruction of the temple and His own 2nd coming. This included the famous Olivet Discourse from Matthew 24-25, which we learned about around this time last year. We aren't told much about what went on the Wednesday of Easter week. We just know it was there right before things got really interesting.

Thursday is the day that Jesus celebrated the Passover Meal with his disciples in the Upper Room. This is when Jesus gave the Passover Meal its fuller meaning. Jesus taught them that the bread/juice would now symbolize His body and His blood. This is also the night that Jesus washed His disciples' feet and when He was betrayed by Judas. Friday was the day of Jesus' crucifixion. But before His crucifixion, Jesus endured arrest, desertion, denial, phony trials, beatings, and mockery. We'll walk through many of these events at our Good Friday Tenebrae Service. It's a Service of Shadows that walks us through the growing darkness that Jesus faced leading up to His crucifixion. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you won't want to miss our Tenebrae service and celebration of communion. On Saturday, Jesus' body remained in the tomb, where it had been placed on Friday, and where it remained until Sunday morning. Sunday was Resurrection Day! And I hope that all of us can be here together next Sunday to celebrate Easter. So that's just a quick overview of Easter week.

¹ See map and brief overview of Passion Week on pp. 1686-1687 of *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

² See this helpful article from the *HCSB Study Bible* by Robert H. Stein to learn more:

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/march/differences-in-gospels-closer-look.html>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethany>

Please turn or click in your Bible to Matthew 21. In light of the general outline of events we just looked at, let's back up all the way to the very beginning of Easter Week, Palm Sunday. Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday officially kicks off one of the most important weeks in all of human history. Matthew 21:1-3 begins, "As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." First, some geography. I couldn't find us a good map, so we'll just have to use our imaginations. Bethphage is "a small village close to Bethany on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, east...of Jerusalem by perhaps less than a mile."⁴ Jerusalem, of course, was an incredibly important place for the Jewish people. And, it is central to the events of Easter week.

This reference to the Mount of Olives may be entirely geographical. It was TALL and hard to miss! Jesus and many other travelers would pass by here on their way to Jerusalem. Since Jesus was coming from Bethany, just a little ways east of Bethphage, He would naturally pass by the Mount of Olives, which was located right on the eastern edge of Jerusalem. However, Matthew may have also recorded this for theological reasons; to evoke within his readers' minds some of "the messianic associations of the Mount of Olives."⁵ You see, the Mount of Olives played an important role in Jewish End Times theology. Zechariah 14:4 talks about it this way: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." Zechariah 14:9 adds, "The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name."⁶ Indeed, some of the Jews who were there on that very first Palm Sunday, welcoming Jesus, were anticipating that perhaps the time of Zechariah's fulfillment was upon them! And while Zechariah 14 was NOT fulfilled during Jesus' lifetime, at least a portion of Zechariah 9 was.

In fact, this is what Mt. 21:4-5 is referring to, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: (*Zechariah 9:9*) "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."⁷ ⁸ "Daughter of Zion" is simply a way of referring to Jerusalem; so, "say to Jerusalem, See, your king comes to you." In other words, Jesus was being very intentional here "to enter Jerusalem after the fashion of Zechariah 9:9."⁹ ¹⁰ One of the most important things to notice about the first Palm Sunday, is that Jesus had a specific plan; He initiated that plan when he directed these two disciples to go get Him a donkey and her colt.¹¹ This was NOT incidental, it wasn't just because they hadn't gotten Uber service in Bethphage yet.¹² Jesus was initiating a strategic plan, which is why he'd made specific arrangements to ride a donkey into Jerusalem. You see, Jesus had entered Jerusalem MANY other times before, but NEVER this way.¹³ He does this "to show he is Messiah, Jesus deliberately fulfills the direct, predictive prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 by commandeering a donkey to ride as he enters the holy city."¹⁴ All of this being said, we can see how Messianic expectations must have been through the roof, especially among those who knew about this prophecy.

⁴ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1973 footnote on Matthew 21:1.

⁵ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 311). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ "Zechariah's prophecy was widely interpreted in rabbinic literature as messianic." Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 311). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁷ By the way, Mark 11:2 clarifies that this was "A previously unriden 'colt' [which] would not be ridden easily without its mother present." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:5

⁸ When verse 5 mentions a king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, it is quoting from Zechariah 9:9. Also "with echoes of Isaiah 62:11." Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 311). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 311). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁰ All four Gospels record that Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem illustrating that he was this king. This also reveals just how important this particular event was. See Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-38; and John 12:12-19.

¹¹ Both the Gospel of Mark and Luke clarify that Jesus rode on the colt. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1627 footnote on Matthew 21:7.

¹² Pastor Jason Fritz, "The King Has Arrived" sermon on April 5, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwqmSjd6zKw>

¹³ "Jesus arranged for the ride." D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Rev. Ed., #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 492.

¹⁴ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1973 footnote on Matthew 21:1-11.

Now, we should be careful here, to note that during much of Jesus' earthly ministry, He had asked people to keep His identity secret, or at least quiet. He did this because His time had not yet come.¹⁵ Oftentimes, after Jesus did something miraculous, He'd say something like, "don't tell anyone about this."¹⁶ Jesus hadn't wanted to "stir up the popular, but mistaken, expectations that a wonder-working Messiah would soon arise as king of the Jews and deliver them from the Roman yoke."^{17 18 19} But NOW Jesus announces His entry, and His identity, LOUD and CLEAR. The one SEATED on the donkey was the One publicly proclaiming, that He is the One who was chosen, to be SEATED on David's throne.²⁰ NOW, on Palm Sunday, Jesus is letting the whole world know: HE is the gentle king who comes to them riding on a donkey; HE is the promised Messiah they've been waiting for! However, this doesn't necessarily mean, that He was the king they were WANTING, nor that He was fulfilling the messianic expectations the way THEY wanted him to. Instead, He was obediently following His Father's preordained plan, for this particular time in history.

The kingdom that Jesus was ushering in, wasn't a kingdom of war horses and swords and bloodshed to overthrow Rome. This should have been fairly clear to them, from the fact that Jesus rode in perched on top of "the foal of a donkey."²¹ A "donkey was a lowly animal of peace."^{22 23} Even so, historically, before horses came into common use, mules and donkeys were the common mount for royalty.²⁴ However, by this time in history, a mighty war horse would have been much more the standard mount, for a king's "triumphal entry."²⁵ So when Jesus rode into town on a donkey, it should have given the crowd a pretty clear hint, that Jesus was entering as a GENTLE king. Verse 5 says, "See, your king comes to you, GENTLE and riding on a donkey."²⁶ Jesus was not there to overthrow the city by force.²⁷ People 2,000 year ago, knew all about bloody conflict at the point of a sword. However, at this point in God's master redemptive plan, the only blood that Jesus intended to spill, was HIS OWN. Jesus hadn't come to OVERTHROW the government; He'd come to OVERTHROW sin. Even Jesus closest disciples still hadn't grasped how this gentle King of Christians was about to bring all of this to fruition.

So, what was Jesus up to? Why was Jesus entering Jerusalem at this particular time, in this particular way? We're given a little more clarity when Matthew quotes in part from Psalm 118.²⁸ Matthew 21:9 tells us, "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

¹⁵ See John 7:1-10.

¹⁶ For example, see Matthew 8:3-4, 16:20 and Luke 4:41.

¹⁷ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1604 footnote on Matthew 8:4.

¹⁸ He did this because He wanted to avoid any "false concepts of the Jews, who looked for an exclusively national and political Messiah." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1620 footnote on Matthew 16:20.

¹⁹ We see this same caution in places like Luke 19:11, "While they were listening to this, [Jesus] went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once." In Luke's Gospel, he records this parable immediately before he records Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey. In other words, Jesus was well aware that the crowd was overly eager for Him to set up His kingship right THERE, and right THEN! So, he tells them the Parable of the Ten Minas. The parable begins with a man who entrusts His servants with his money, and then promises to return as their king, at a LATER date.

²⁰ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1743 footnote on Luke 19:30.

²¹ For those of us not as familiar with animals, "A mule is the offspring of a male donkey (jack) and a female horse (mare). Horses and donkeys are different species, with different numbers of chromosomes. ... Mules are reputed to be more patient, hardy and long-lived than horses and are described as less obstinate and more intelligent than donkeys." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mule>

²² *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1554 footnote on Zechariah 9:9.

²³ The donkey was an animal that symbolized three things at this time in history: humility, peace, and Davidic royalty. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1626 footnote on Matthew 21:2.

²⁴ See Judges 10:4, 12:14; 2 Samuel 13:29, 16:2. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1554 footnote on Zechariah 9:9.

²⁵ In its classic apocalyptic style, Revelation 19:11 and following predicts a day when Jesus will ride in victoriously on a mighty horse, "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...." "the rider is Christ returning as Warrior-Messiah-King." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2173 footnote on Revelation 19:11.

²⁶ "Those hoping for a liberator from the Romans, miss the significance of [this] humble beast of burden." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:8-11.

²⁷ Consider [Psalm 33:16-18](#), "No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unflinching love."

²⁸ "Psalm 118 was not only used at the Feast of Tabernacles but also at the other two major feasts, Dedication and Passover-at the latter as part of 'the great Hallel' (Psalms 113-118)." D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed., #9*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 496.

highest heaven!" "Son of David" is a Messianic way of stressing the kingly role of the Messiah.²⁹ The crowd was incredibly exuberant by this point. Matthew 21:8 tells us they were spreading their cloaks on the road. They were cutting down branches from the trees and spreading them on the road, paying Him homage.³⁰ For the Jews, this entire scene would remind them of other times in their history, when they welcomed "Israelite kings in earlier days."³¹ One author notes that some people in this crowd were likely pilgrims who were traveling along with Jesus on His way up to Jerusalem; and another part of this crowd may very well have been worshippers, who were coming out of Jerusalem, to greet Jesus and join in the procession of praise.³² In other words, news must have spread, and the crowds must have heard that Jesus was close, just down the road, on his way to Jerusalem from Bethany.

The word "Hosanna" has an interesting range of meanings. Many of us have probably come to think of it as a word for praise, "Hosanna, praise the Lord!" However, there's MORE to this word. Hosanna is indeed an expression of praise, but it can also be an expression of prayer.³³ Hosanna can also mean 'God save [us].'³⁴ In fact, originally "Hosanna" was "a Hebrew expression meaning 'Save!' which [only later] became an exclamation of praise."³⁵ In other words, sometimes Hosanna was a cry for help.³⁶ So as the crowd shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" they were praising Jesus, while at the same time crying out in prayer for help from heaven.³⁷ ³⁸ D.A. Carson puts it this way: "The people praise God in the highest heavens, for sending the Messiah and, if 'Hosanna' retains some of its original force, also cry to him for deliverance."³⁹

What's most important here though, is that we notice that what Jesus does NOT do. Jesus does NOT stop them. He doesn't stop them from praising Him. He doesn't stop them from welcoming Him as the Son of David. He doesn't do anything to interrupt this joyful procession that is entirely centered around paying homage to HIM. One pastor puts it simply: Jesus was "humble but not modest"⁴⁰

So here's what Jesus was up to: For those who were paying attention, for those who were interested in what the Heavenly Father was up to, Jesus made it clear: HE is the very king and Messiah whom these OT passages had predicted. HE is the king in verse 9, the Son of David, who comes in the name of the Lord.⁴¹ The One who comes because God had sent Him, and God was with Him. "For those with eyes to see," Jesus was "proclaiming his messiahship and his fulfillment of Scripture."⁴² Jesus doesn't stop them from praising Him, because NOW, His time, has finally come. The waiting is over. After keeping things relatively quiet and secret for His entire earthly life, Jesus is now riding in on this donkey as a visual object lesson, as "a deliberate act of symbolic self-disclosure... Secrecy was being lifted."⁴³ However, not everyone will get on board with this; in fact, it's quite the opposite by the time we get toward the end of Easter Week.

²⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 496.

³⁰ They "spread their cloaks on the road, acknowledging Jesus' kingship." D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 495.

³¹ See 2 Kings 9:13. "The entire scene recalls welcoming of Israelite kings in earlier days, especially with the strewing of palm branches (John 12:13). The accolades come from Psalm 118:25-26." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:8-11.

³² D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 495.

³³ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1627 footnote on Matthew 21:9.

³⁴ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:8-11.

³⁵ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1627 NIV text note on Matthew 21:9.

³⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, pp. 495-496.

³⁷ In fact, "Hosanna in the highest heaven" is an invitation "may those in heaven sing 'Hosanna.'" *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1627 footnote on Matthew 21:9.

³⁸ See [Psalm 148:1-5](#). Back when Jesus first came to earth, a whole chorus of angels appeared to the shepherds in [Luke 2:14](#) saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

³⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 496.

⁴⁰ Pastor Jason Fritz, "The King Has Arrived" sermon on April 5, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwqmsJd6zKw>

⁴¹ "who comes in the name of the Lord" = "The one who, with God's help, had defeated the enemies 'in the name of the LORD.'" *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 993 footnote on Psalm 118:26.

⁴² D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 494.

⁴³ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.*, #9, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 494.

It's pretty clear that many people in the crowd had missed the whole point of Jesus riding in on the donkey. Rather than understanding that Jesus was their Messiah and king, the crowd concludes something else... Matthew 21:10-11 says, "When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Now, it's certainly possible that they were referring to a very special prophet, predicted way back in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, even if this was the case, they still seem to be missing Jesus' ultimate identity, as someone who was MUCH MORE than just a prophet. They were "stirred" but they were not surrendered. Rather than recognizing God's Son, who was sent from heaven to rescue them from sin, they basically diminish Jesus to "some guy from Nazareth in Galilee."

The key question for the crowd gathered HERE, at E-Free Bemidji, is found in Matthew 21:10, "Who is this?" Who is Jesus? Just a prophet? Just a good teacher? Just a guy we talk about during Easter week? Or, is he our king? Is He the Son of David, God's chosen Messiah who will rule and reign for eternity? And, if he IS our king, are we surrendering to His rule/reign in our own lives? One author makes this blunt but accurate statement: "Crowd sentiments are fickle."⁴⁴ By the end of the week, another crowd in Jerusalem will be shouting "crucify Him!" But for now, they are happy to welcome Him into the city.⁴⁵ (This probably wasn't the exact same crowd, but likely had some overlap.) "Crowd sentiments are fickle." Brother or Sister in Christ, let's not be among Jesus' "fickle followers." Let's be among Jesus' faithful followers, who worship Him day after day, year after year. And when He returns in glory, when He unveils His true, glorious power and might, when He flexes His muscles with final justice and victory, let's receive Him as our returning King!

⁴⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed., #9*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 496.

⁴⁵ "Only five days later, some of these people will clamor for his crucifixion, even if the crowd then is not entirely composed of the same individuals as here." (Probably there will be more Judeans and native Jerusalemites present then than in this procession of mainly Galilean pilgrims just arriving in town for the Passover festival.) Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 311). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.