

## PALM SUNDAY

Gregory Lawhorn

Easter 2021

---

### **Matthew 21:1-11 2016 ESV**

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.’” 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!” 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.”

## BEHOLD YOUR KING

Let me set the scene for this passage. There were three major feasts that all Jewish men were commanded to attend – the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Families would usually attend as well. Originally, these feasts were held wherever the Tabernacle had been erected. Once the Temple was built, the feasts were held in Jerusalem. For those who lived in the outer areas of Israel this meant several days walking to reach Jerusalem, 100 miles for those living on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, more than 130 for those living close to Mount Hermon.

At least 250,000 people, and some say as many as one million, crowded in and around Jerusalem for the feasts. For those close to the Sea of Galilee, the quickest route took them down the Jordan River valley to the city of Jericho. Jericho was 800 feet below sea level; Jerusalem is 2,600 feet above sea level; people literally “went up” to Jerusalem and the Temple. People camped all along the road at dusk on Friday as the Sabbath began, and rested all day Saturday. [John 12](#) tells us that Jesus spent the Sabbath in the home of Lazarus, and so He was relatively close to the city on Sunday. The crowds were already on the move when He and His disciples left the house.

The final week of Jesus’ ministry – sometimes called “passion week” – take up a lot of room in the Gospels. 25% of Matthew, 33% of Mark, 20% of Luke, and 50% of John are devoted to this eight day period of time. All four Gospels begin with the triumphal entry, emphasizing the arrival of the King of the Jews to His city.

The “kingship” of Jesus Christ is a theme that runs all through the Gospels.

[Matthew 2:1-2](#); [4:8-9](#); [27:29](#); [Mark 15:32](#); [John 6:15](#); [18:33](#); [19:3](#)

- When Jesus was still a little child, Magi from the east came to worship “He who has been born **King of the Jews**” ([Matthew 2:1-2](#)).
- Satan tried to tempt Jesus to worship him in exchange for **receiving every kingdom** of the world ([Matthew 4:8-9](#)).
- Following the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus perceived that the crowd was about to **try to make Him King by force** ([John 6:15](#)).
- During His trials, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “**Are You the King of the Jews?**” ([John 18:33](#)).
- Jesus was mocked by the Romans, who said, “Hail, **King of the Jews!**” ([Matthew 27:29](#)).
- Pilate put a sign over His head, “This is Jesus, **King of the Jews.**” ([Mark 15:26](#)).

- The Pharisees mocked Him on the cross, “Let the Christ, **the King of Israel**, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” ([Mark 15:32](#)).

Here we see Jesus entering Jerusalem as a **King**, hailed by the people, celebrated by them, receiving the praise due to the Son of David. The pilgrims are captivated by the moment. He might have used them for His own victory in Jerusalem, used this crowd to drive the city into a frenzy, inciting the people to rise up against the occupying Roman army and throw them out.

But that wasn't Jesus' purpose. When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus “Are you the King of the Jews,” Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of the this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But My Kingdom is not of this world.” ([John 18:33-36](#)).

Jesus IS the King of the Jews. In fact, He is the King of all kings, and the Lord of all lords ([Revelation 19:16](#)). But His Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. His throne is not an earthly throne. This doesn't mean that His Kingdom has no earthly representation or existence. His Kingdom is here on earth, right now. What it means is that His Kingdom is ruled from heaven; it extends over all creation; it functions according to the will of God; it is empowered by the Holy Spirit; it's aims and ambitions are not territorial but universal, in the broadest sense of the term.

So then, what sort of King is Jesus Christ? (I say “is” and not “was” because Jesus was raised from the dead, and is enthroned now).

He is the King promised by Yahweh, unlike any other king who has ever sat on a throne. He was certainly unlike any King these people – or most people – could imagine. He is the King who fulfilled [Zechariah 9:9-10](#):

**Zechariah 9:9-10 2016 ESV**

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.

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.

**He came to be a Righteous King, and so He is.** Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, and yet He never sinned ([Hebrews 4:15](#)).

**He came to be a Saving King.** His saving work was completed on the cross, and the fulfillment of that salvation is being applied to His people even today.

**He came to be a Humble King.** Jesus was majestic and authoritative, but He was never proud or arrogant. Pilgrims walked to Jerusalem. Conquering kings ride into cities on war horses. But Jesus rode a donkey's colt into the city.

If we look back to First Kings, we find that another son of David, Solomon, rode a humble mule for his coronation:

**1 Kings 1:33 2016 ESV**

And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon.

The ride of Solomon, a son of David, on the mule is a prophetic picture of the ride of Jesus Christ, THE Son of David, on the donkey.

The King of [Zechariah 9:9-10](#) is clearly a **victorious** King – chariots and war horses and battle bows are destroyed – but He is not a **military** King.

- He comes on a donkey's colt, not a war horse.
- He comes in humility, not in arrogance.
- He comes in righteousness, bringing salvation.

This is the prophecy that Jesus fulfilled on that Spring day, and He fulfilled it deliberately. He didn't need the colt to ride because He was tired; He called for the colt in order to fulfill the Scriptures. The owner of that donkey and colt was part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. His loss – if he even thought about it as loss – would be infinite gain to him, IF he believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The fulfillment of prophecy in [Matthew 21:1-5](#) tells us that Jesus came not to defeat the Romans, or any other military force, but sin and death.

[First John 3:8](#); [Psalm 49:7](#); [Matthew 20:28](#); [9:13](#); [Luke 19:10](#)

Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan (First John 3:8). Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life" (Psalm 49:7), but Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). He came to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). He came to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). The battlefield was not the nation Israel or the city of Jerusalem, but the heart of the sinner. The opponent was not the Roman empire, but the sinner's own wickedness, "the works of the devil" done by the unrighteous man or woman. The weapons of His warfare were not battle bows and chariots and war horses, but His own body given, His own blood shed.

And how did the multitude respond to this?

## CELEBRATION AND CONFESSION

### **Matthew 21:8–11** 2016 ESV

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!” 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.”

Matthew describes quite a picture. The road into Jerusalem had been built by the Romans. It was between 8 and 12 feet wide; it was flat and smooth, graded so that rain water would run off to the sides. Thousands of Galileans were on the move, a river of people moving toward the holy city. They were already enthused, but the sight of Jesus, somewhat elevated on the back of the donkey, magnified their excitement. The cries began to spread out: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest! Hosanna! Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David!” (that from [Mark 1:10](#)). “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (that’s from [Luke 19:30](#)). “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (that’s from [John 12:13](#)).

They weren’t just Jews, they were **Galilean** Jews, and Jesus was their hero. Most of His teaching and healing ministry took place in Galilee. They were most familiar with Him. He lived among them, in Nazareth and Capernaum. If you wanted to see Jesus, and didn’t know where He was, you could go the Sea of Galilee, and you’d find Him somewhere, in one of the villages along the lakeshore.

## CONCEITED CELEBRATION & CONFUSED CONFESSION

**THEIR CELEBRATION WAS CONCEITED.** But their celebration was a matter of pride and conceit, not a matter of humility and brokenness. They acted like innocent victims whose have been proven right. We see none of the humility shown by Zacchaeus, the tax collector, or by Mary the sister of Lazarus when she anointed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair. We see none of the quiet, humble faithfulness of those who are saved by the grace of God.

**THEIR CONFESSION WAS CONFUSED.** What did the crowd say to the people of Jerusalem who were agitated by all the shouting? They said that Jesus is the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. They had just a small part of the truth about who Jesus is; they certainly did not understand what Jesus' disciples knew by God's revelation, that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." ([Matthew 16:15-17](#)).

Their celebration and confession were easy and convenient. They welcomed Jesus in the hope that He would deliver them out of the hands of Rome, and restore the throne to Israel. That assumption made them happy, and made them feel better about their circumstances. But when Jesus proved Himself to be a different kind of King – a Savior – pursuing a different kind of victory – resurrection from the dead – over a different kind of enemy – sin and death – they abandoned Him. They cheered His entry on Sunday; they cheered His crucifixion on Friday.

We have the benefit of seeing the entire event in the light of Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven, and the remainder of the New Testament. At this point even Jesus' disciples anticipated a political deliverer, and not a spiritual Savior. Jesus is coming again – may the Lord make it soon! – as the Sovereign King, but in His first coming it was as the Suffering Savior. He was the Davidic Messiah, the King of Israel, but His coronation took place on the cross, not on a golden throne.

## BRINGING IT HOME

Is Jesus going to go to war on behalf of God? Oh, yes, absolutely. He will do that in the future, bringing the great tribulation to a close.

### **1 Corinthians 15:22–26** 2016 ESV

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

But until Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom on earth, we continue to follow Him as the King who came in humility and peace to save sinners from the judgment of God through His righteous life, His substitutionary death, and His glorious resurrection.

Who is Jesus Christ? Who is this One who keeps agitating the world? Who is the One who is heralded by unbelievers, who seek to define Him in their own image? Who is this One who is condemned by unbelievers when He refuses to be what they demand that He be? That is the question that each person must answer.

This is what the Scriptures tell me, and what I believe.



- He is the Son of God, and God the Son.
- He is both Lord of glory and Savior of sinners.
- He is my hope and my salvation.
- He is my glory and the lifter of my head.
- He is the Lion of Judah, the Lamb of God who was slain.
- He is the King of kings, Lord of lords, and Prince of Peace.
- He is the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.
- He is the Author and Finisher of my faith.
- He is the Bridegroom of the Bride, His Church.
- He is Coming One who has come, and will come again.
- He is the Faithful and True Witness, the Firstborn among the dead.
- He is the Word of Life, the Righteous One.
- He is the Beloved of God, and my dearest friend.

I hope you can say all of this. And more, I hope that you trust Him every moment of every day, and rest the whole weight of your life on Him. The crowds had all sorts of ideas, as do people today. We should weep for their blind ignorance!

There was and is only one truth about the identity and work of Jesus Christ. Look to Jesus! Call upon Jesus! Trust Him as Savior! Obey Him as Lord!