

# Palm Sunday - Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> “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.’”

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> 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!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## Introduction

It is Palm Sunday and once again we are together while not being together. This is important y'all. We need to keep making sure that we are physically distancing while not actually socially distancing from one another. Reach out to one another. Video, call, message, chat, etc. etc.

We are entering Holy Week which is so often misunderstood as a family holiday. Palm Sunday, Maunday Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Resurrection Sunday aren't

family holidays. Yes, we may gather together as families on these days but that is secondary to what these holidays are all about. They are literally “holy days” that are focused on the events that brought about the kingdom of God on earth. Kingdoms all have their origin stories that tell about their beginnings and describe what is core to those kingdoms. In the United States we have stories that we like to tell such as Washington crossing the Delaware December 25–26, 1776. We have famous paintings of the scene that depict the hardship that was overcome by these early Americans and we use them to speak to elements that we think are important. Citizen of the U.S. are people who overcome hardship, they do the unexpected, sometimes we can be sneaky. All kingdoms seem to have these origin stories. Sometimes they are true stories that then take on characteristics of mythology and sometimes like Romulus and Remus of the Roman myth they are probably just made up.

The events of Holy Week are that foundational story for Christianity and they speak of power that is not of this world. The world reigns through might and influence. God reigns through overcome strength through weakness.

Let’s talk about some elements of the story we just read.

## Control

There is a temptation to read much of passion week as Jesus being caught up in circumstances as a hapless-victim. These events seem to be orchestrated by other powers and He is awash in their fury. But the Gospels place certain elements within their story that make sure we know that Jesus is still in control. He is crushed by the wheels of power but not as a hapless victim that lacks control, rather it is as a warrior Who has defeated the system. Our passage today is one such example. Matthew tells us the following:

Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” (Matthew 21:2-3)

Jesus is the Master orchestrator here. He gives very specific instructions concerning what the disciples need to do. He knows full well what He is heading into. He has been telling them for quite some time that:

“The Son of Man must suffer many things. He will be rejected by the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and teachers of the law. And he will be killed. But after three days he will be raised from death.” (Luke 9:22)

While the disciples may have not been able to see what was coming He did not hide it from them. After their eyes were open to the true meaning of what Jesus was saying, they understood that He had been telling them all along. He knew that He was heading to Jerusalem to be crushed by the powers that be there. The powers of political power and religious influence. The powers of self-righteousness and independence through one’s own resources. These are the same powers that lied to us and told us that if we ate from the fruit that they offered us we would be like God (Genesis 3:5), but when we ate from what was offered us we realized instead that we were without protection in a world that was suddenly full of turmoil, we were naked and afraid needing God to clothes us. There are storms all around us. Winds that are too strong. As much as we pretend to be in control we know at our best we are merely prepared for mild storms and the foundations that we have built on our own are built on sand.

But Jesus did not enter the city as a hapless victim to these powers. He knew when he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey He would be hailed as a conquering hero one week and taunted and denied the next week. He entered the city on a donkey and the people hailed Him as the conquering king.

The fact that He entered the city on a donkey is important. It symbolized a couple of things. First, it fulfilled prophecy. The prophet Zechariah spoke of how the Messiah would come.

The prophet wrote:

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 of a donkey.

Again Jesus was orchestrating the events around Him to serve His purpose and His purpose was to defeat evil through His undeserved suffering.

Secondly, he entered Jerusalem on a donkey to symbolically portray that He was entering in peace.<sup>1</sup> Tradition says that a king in Israel's history entering a city on a more common or lowly animal symbolized that the king came in peace, whereas entering on a warhorse symbolized that the monarch was there to dominate the city. Jehu, the 9th century BC king of the northern Kingdom of Israel, had a carpet of garments moment similar to that of Jesus when he was proclaimed king, but Jehu went to the city of Jezreel in his chariot with the mindset of purging the kingdom of evil by force. He killed the descendants of Ahab and Jezebel but did not cleanse Israel.

We like that type of hero. The good guy rushing in to save the day through superior strength and resources. Keanu Reeves, Clint Eastwood, Arnold Swartzneger, or any of the characters of our superhero movies bounding in to put evil in its place. To beat it back into submission. But the Gospel proves that the methods of the enemy cannot defeat the enemy. God is "Holy Other" from us and therefore we shouldn't be surprised that His methods are qualitatively different from ours.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://politicaltheology.com/the-politics-of-the-kings-donkey-luke-1928-40/>

So Jesus enters on a donkey as the Prince of Peace Who will defeat the enemy through taking the enemy's best blows and standing strong. He enters on a donkey because He knows that His strength is made perfect in weakness. God's path to victory is different than ours, in method and in the result.

## Hosanna

Now let's consider "hosanna," the word the crowd kept shouting as the King entered the city.

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"  
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

The word Hosanna fits in with the discussion we have had concerning ebenezers the past few weeks. As you may remember ebenezers, or stones of helping, are meant to be reminders of past events that shape the way we view present and future circumstances. "Thus far the Lord has helped us" means that we can trust that He will continue to help us. I believe "hosanna" is a verbal example of an ebenezzer. It literally means "Lord, save us" but by His continued response to the call it has become a word of praise and comfort. The fact that our God saves us turns our pleas of "save us" from cries of desperation to cries of praise. We cry "save us" because He has done so in the past. We cry "save us" because we know that He will do so again. Nathan & Elizabeth sent another video along with the wonderful prayer video that was shown earlier. It is a video of them on a walk with Bren. Let's watch that for a second.

I think this video of Bren relates to the crying of Hosanna in a few different ways. So let me make a few points.

1. Did you see the ears on his hood? This doesn't relate to the message at all but you young parents now have my generation beat on the cute clothes department. I was super excited about getting bucket hats for Adam and Noah when they were Bren's age, while y'all have access to outfits with cute little animal ears on them.
2. Ok this part actually relates to the message. Bren constantly says "mommy" on their walk and then Elizabeth ends (probably only briefly) his chanting of "mommy" by saying "amen". Thus turning it into a prayer. Now being married to a Speech-Language Pathologist and the father of two sons who studied communicative disorders I know that there are many things that could be going on with Bren's chatter here, for example, he is very possibly, perhaps likely, just engaging in verbal play and might as well be saying "babababa." But one day he will learn that crying out "mommy" or "daddy" is the cry of rescue. Then those words will not just be cries of rescue but also cries of comfort and praise. He will know that such words have power because the people behind those words will do everything they can to rescue him.
3. So let's think about "hosanna" within that perspective. The story of the Israelites is the story of being the Chosen people because they are the people who have been rescued again and again by Him. He constantly focused on His love for His people and the promises He has made to them. So the cry of "Lord, save us" is repeated so constantly that it slowly moves from a cry of anguish to a cry of praise, "Our God Saves" and a cry of comfort "Our God will save us." Their experience with the Triune God changes the meaning of the word in practice while it keeps its literal meaning.

So as Jesus was entering Jerusalem the crowds expected one type of Messiah and they threw down coats and palm leaves to make a path for him but what they received was a Messiah unlike anything they were expecting. One Who overcomes evil with weakness. One Who throws

Himself into the gearwork of sin and destroys it by allowing Himself to be briefly crushed within it. But for Him, death has no sting because He will be raised again from this crushing.

## Conclusion

So what do we do with this? This past week I have been trying to write a blog post concerning things you can do to feed yourself during the church's physical distancing. It is too long to get into here but I do want to discuss one part. I tried to write up a simple way of reading scripture and connecting it to your life. I came down to three questions:

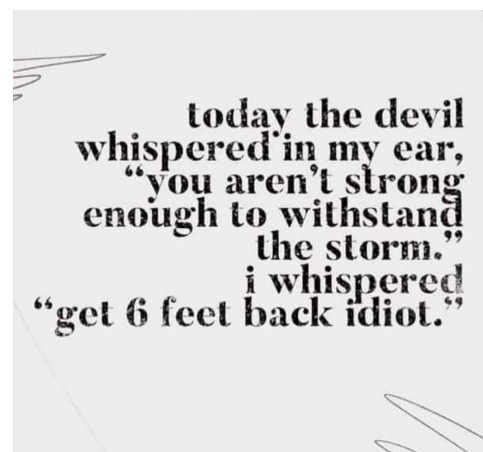
1. **What does what I just read teach me about God?** He is the subject of the Bible, every story is ultimately about Him, either in displaying Who He is or Who He isn't.
2. **What does what I just read teach me about humanity?** Sometime it will be something wonderful (like we bear the image of God), other times it may be something saddening (for we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God). Sometimes it will be about humanity at large, and sometimes it will be about us as individuals in particular.
3. **Considering what this passage has taught me concerning God and humanity how do I now live?** James tells us to not just listen to the word, but to do what it says (James 1:22)

So let's examine these. What does the passage say about Jesus? Well, it says even when it may look like He is not in control, He is still the conquering king that orchestrates His own will. He was in control of every event that was happening to Him. He chose the route in order to follow the Father's will and accomplish the Trinity's purposes. The storms subside from Him. He

is only overcome by the violence of the turmoil when He chooses to be overcome and it is He Himself that declares when “It is finished”

Secondly, I believe that this reminds us that we sinfully long for a different type of messiah than the true Messiah. We want one whose strength we recognize. We’re ok in imagining that someone is significantly stronger than us, as long as that strength is the same type as ours. We cheer for that. We still fall for the serpent’s words “that we will be like God” so we long for gods whose strength and power we recognize. We lay down our garments and palms leaves in front of that type of imagined strength and power. To our own failing, we choose god’s who are quantitatively different from us when what we need is a God Who is qualitatively different from us. Who is “holy other” Yet when we see Jesus’s power through weakness we, like those in Jerusalem, are tempted to turn our back on it and wish it away to a lonely place. It is too other for us.

Finally, I believe that it teaches us a way to live also. During this crisis, I find that I’ve spent significantly more time on social media than I normally do. I have mixed feelings about this because some of it has not been helpful, but other parts have brought me great joy. Friends posting things to help other friends, seeing the ways people I love are handling this period of physically distancing, and lots and lots of slow-motion videos of basset hounds running. One of the things I have seen on social media is this image.<sup>2</sup> First, it



made me laugh. Secondly, it reminds me of so many inspirational posters. If this was an inspirational poster it would probably end with us shouting back into the storm something like

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/joy.g.johnson/posts/10158011478832412>



“just watch!” But the Christian message isn’t one of us shouting into the storm “Yes I am strong enough to withstand this!” No, we aren’t the heroes in the Gospel. What we learn in scripture and experience in life is no matter how hard we try to convince ourselves that we are the “Masters of our own destiny” the truth is we aren’t. When the critics of Christianity say that “believing in Jesus is for the weak” it turns out that they are right, it is just that as Christian we have learned, that try as we might to deny it, we are all actually weak. The message of the Gospel is us responding to the voice of the storm by admitting that the storm is right, we aren’t strong enough to withstand the storm ... but Hosanna the One Who is will withstand it for us.

So here is how I would like to end this and for some of y’all with compatriots in the room that are more rambunctious, this may be a little more difficult. I want us to spend a minute in silence simply recognizing that He is here. If you can’t do this right now that’s fine try it later today when you have a little more stillness in your life.

Friends, He is here. Hosanna!