

Palm Sunday
When the King Comes to Town
Matthew 21:1-11

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday - the day King Jesus, Israel's Messiah, rode into town. But as we read the story, we've got questions. Why did Jesus enter Jerusalem on a donkey? Why not on a horse? Why not in a chariot? And why did the crowds greet him with palm branches? In ancient Jewish times waving palm branches, much like waving our American flag, symbolized Jewish nationalism, all that was good about being a Jew, and brought memories of past Jewish victories on the fields of battle. Palms and palm trees were often depicted on their coins, on tapestries in their synagogues and important buildings. Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple. Indeed one day in the future, a great multitude of saints will stand before the throne and before Jesus the Lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands crying out, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9, 10)

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem 2000 years ago everyone was convinced that a regime change was taking place. This was the day that they had all been praying for. They had been under the boot of Rome. They had been reduced to little more than a puppet state. A giant Roman fortress named after Mark Antony had been built on the side of the temple. As the people came to celebrate the Passover, on the roof tops all around the temple there stood 600 Roman soldiers with their spear tips gleaming in the sun. The fortress had four giant columns 14 stories high so the Romans could look down on the temple area to make sure nothing got out of hand. Big brother was always watching. But despite the crippling political power of the Romans, the Jews had not given up hope and now it seems that the King has arrived. But what they will discover is that this King was, and yet was not, what they imagined him to be.

I. He Is the Rightful King (Matthew 21:5; Zechariah 9:9)

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."

Imagine what it was like the day Jesus rode into town. Look, Jesus is coming this way now, rocking slightly as he rides down the steep hill from the Mount of Olives. People are waving and shouting. Look again! He's riding on a small donkey colt, a purebred, just as the prophet Zechariah had promised. The people are filling the streets and a victory parade starts to form at the edge of the city - a two-mile parade that will go into the very heart of Jerusalem. The people remember what the prophet had said, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you... riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey!*" The Jews knew their Bibles and they concurred that this must be the rightful king. Some of them must have remembered that when Solomon became Israel's King, he was presented on the donkey of his father David. And so they shout, "*Hosanna to the son of David!*" But long before Zachariah's prophecy Jacob had pronounced this blessing on his son Judah: *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes* (Genesis 49:10, 11)." Jacob's prophecy meant that Israel's true King would come from the tribe of Judah and would in some way be associated with the colt of a donkey. It seems so clear that the Messiah has come. The King is in town

Now if Jesus is the rightful king, then all his loyal subjects must recognize his kingship. The Jews did this by calling him the Son of David and also by spreading their cloaks before him. The people threw down their garments to make a carpet for the royal procession. In effect they were saying, "We place ourselves at your feet, even for you to walk over if necessary." This morning we too recognize his sovereignty by laying our hearts before him, throwing down our wills in absolute surrender and asking Jesus to govern everything we think and say and do. In this way we praise him as our rightful king. If he is Messiah King, then he is your King - the King of all people from all tribes, all tongues, and all nations.

II He Is the Victorious King (Zachariah 9:9-10)

“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... 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”

There is coming a day when Christ will rule over every continent and every nation. He will bring peace that will eclipse any other time in history. No more war, no more beheadings, no more violating of women and children, no more bigotry and racial slurs, no more domestic violence, no more oppression of any kind. He will rule the nations with a rod of iron! And when will that day come? That day will arrive when Jesus comes again in his Second coming.

As Jesus comes into town 2000 years ago, the crowd can't wait to see what happens. They think to themselves, “Our Messiah will judge these ungodly pagan Romans and remove them from power. He will ride right up to the Roman fortress and topple those guards from the wall. Then our glorious temple will finally be free from their soldier's gaze and cleansed from the defilement of Rome.” But Jesus does not do that, Instead he will march right into the temple, their temple. He will cleanse them, be red hot in anger towards them, not the monsters from Rome.

What the crowd did not realize was that Jesus would not win his victory on Palm Sunday, but on Good Friday. The same city that welcomed him as King would call for his crucifixion. He would be brutally executed. But through his perfect life and fully satisfying death he would bring victory over sin, death, and Satan forever. The cross would finish his life giving, life freeing work, through his saving substitutionary sacrifice for sin - a day planned out even before the world began. On Easter Sunday, Resurrection Sunday, he would rise in triumph from the grave! Death and Satan would have no hold on him.

Here is where the palm branches come in. As they welcomed him waving their palm branches they were shouting, “Hosanna!” Palm branches were an ancient symbol of victory and the cry of hosanna was not so much a word of praise as it was a prayer. It comes from Psalm 118 where it is a cry for help, “O Lord, save us! O Lord, save us!” they were crying. And though they did not know or understand it, that very

week he would answer their prayer. He would save them not from the Romans, but from themselves.

Today your King is in the audience. Jesus in the person of the Holy Spirit is here right now. And he wants to save you from your sins. He wants you to admit that you are a sinner and in desperate need of a Savior. And he wants you to trust that he lived the perfect life you could never live and that he died a fully satisfying death you could never die. He did it all for you. He has won the victory for you! And now he asks you to believe that he is the promised Savior of the world, to ask him to forgive you and to surrender to him as your new boss - your Savior and Lord!

III. He Is the Gentle King (Zachariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5)

“Behold your King is coming to you... humble and mounted on a donkey.”

An old song asks, “How does a king come?” When kings rode into a city in ancient times it was usually a show of power and wealth. But Jesus does not enter Jerusalem at the head of a mighty army, bearing the spoils of war for his royal treasury. Jesus does not come like the arrogant Roman generals on their warhorses with their vanquished prisoners in chains walking in line. He comes in humility like Solomon did - riding on a mule through the very same Kidron Valley into Jerusalem. Instead of being mounted on a proud stallion, he rides on a lowly beast of burden - and a borrowed donkey at that! He comes humbly and gently.

Notice that the prophet mentions “the daughters of Jerusalem.” God’s love for his people is like the love of a good father for his own dear sons and daughters. Imagine a father going in to say good night to his little girl. In the darkness he can just make out the small shape of her body under the covers. He kisses her soft cheek and he whispers “I love you! You are my precious girl!” Out of the warmth of his heart God sent his gentle Son to be your King. In giving his only unique Son, God lavished his extravagant love upon you. In the darkness of your night he whispers and calls you by name saying, I love you my precious child. And I have proven it through giving my gentle Son at an immense cost

Jesus stepped down into the cesspool of this earth and later into the very pit of hell so that one day he could step up and be seated on the

throne of glory. This humble Savior brings peace to you this morning. When Christ proclaims peace to the nations he is not simply talking about the absence of warfare, but the presence of welfare. Shalom means a deep desire for the receiving of God's fullest blessings through intimacy with him and intimacy with others. Shalom means wholeness, healthiness of spirit, mind and body.

One day Christ will crush his enemies, but today we see an extraordinary combination of omnipotence and gentleness. We see meekness - power under control. Some kings coddle their enemies, they lack the resolve to vanquish their foes. Others are fierce and authoritarian toward their own subjects. In contrast, Jesus is mighty enough to crush his enemies, but gentle enough that he will never treat his people roughly or abusively. He brings healing and wholeness. When you are disheartened and sad Jesus sheds a sympathetic tear for you. When you are downcast, gentle Jesus wipes away your tears.

Conclusion

Today we too wave our palms and say, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus comes today to our town, and He wants to help - to deliver us. But do you recognize Him for who He is. What he wants first and foremost is not your stuff or even your praise. What he wants is your heart! That's what Palm Sunday is all about. He is your rightful King, your victorious King, and your gentle King. Will you surrender to him as king? He is the solution to your every problem. As King he has the power to protect you from your enemies. As King he provides for your every need. As King he wisely guides you and gives you life-freeing instructions to follow. As King he demands your obedience so that he may lavish you with his blessings Just open the door to your heart and let him come in. And when you do, you will be amazed at the difference the King of glory can make!