

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 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. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 “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.’”

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

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” 11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

In August of 1979, my mom was suffering from cancer. I was watching TV one day, when she and dad shuffled through the living room with a suitcase on the way to the front door, and dad said, “I’m taking mom to the hospital.” Her face was long, she was in pain, and I said something a teenager would say like, “Okay. Love you, mom.” And she was in pain, too much to look up at me, but she whispered: “I love you.” What might you say as you walk to your death?

We don’t choose the moment of our death, but our Savior did. He chose to lay his life down as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind, and he chose to do it at the hour that the lambs were being slaughtered throughout Israel in remembrance of that day more than 1400 years before when the blood of lambs was painted on doorposts as a sign of faith in God’s promises so that the plague of the angel of death would pass over those houses as it moved from house to house to house, to every house all through Egypt and firstborn sons died in every house all through Egypt except those painted with the blood of the lamb.

Jesus had time to speak, to say things. He said a lot. About one third of John’s Gospel records this triumphal entry of Palm Sunday until the death of our Savior, and five whole chapters of that Gospel record what Jesus said at the Passover Meal, the Last Supper, without ever mentioning the food.

The Lord made a demonstration of the gospel by riding into town, not on a horse as kings of his time did, but on a donkey, which the ancient kings of Israel had sometimes done but now, donkeys were the animals for ordinary folks. Nobody's scared of a donkey. He wasn't coming as a conqueror or to start a frightening new regime or to overthrow a government with bloodshed and terror. He was coming gently with grace and the gospel of forgiveness. He had even told his disciples when they were going to get him this donkey, her foal would be there, too, and they should bring it along. Perhaps this was so that it wouldn't be separated from its mother. An important Proverb in the Bible says: "The righteous man sees to the needs of his animals."¹ The Creator cares for all people and for all things.

The prophecy from Zechariah and other words from Isaiah 62 tell us that this was God's plan all along. And notice how Matthew is careful to quote the passage this way: "**Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes.'**" Say, say, say to the Daughter of the Zion. The gospel is not a secret. It is not implied. It is spoken; it is to be told and shared.

There are people who don't think the gospel it applies to them. This is tragic, this thought that says, Jesus came for his apostles, and for some Christians I see around me, but he is not for me. He blood doesn't or can't cover anything in me, they think. Jesus reaches out to those folks, not scolding them, but aching for them, yearning for them. "Say, say, say to them, 'Your king comes.'"

He invites us to join in with the people waving the palm branches. They lay down their coats on the ground, and four things happen: **(1)** The donkey has a glorious carpet to ease its way. **(2)** The path becomes hushed, almost silent as the hooves of the animal make no noise at all on the coats. We would listen to the one who rides, and not to the one who carries him. That's a lesson, perhaps, for preachers in particular: We would listen to Jesus and not the donkey who brings him. **(3)** Each person becomes involved personally in Christ's approach to Jerusalem, I can take part in this ministry, too, and **(4)** each person in that moment had a unique souvenir, my own coat with hoof marks on it, of the event to show family and friends at home. This was an historical event; our is an historical God, not a myth who maybe did this or that, but the true God-man who came to do this one thing in particular.

And we want to join in with what the people said and sang as they quoted Psalm 118: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" And the word "Hosanna," which originally meant "Please save," or "Save us, please," is also from Psalm 118, but which I think became more of a general word of praise, the way we use Hallelujah or Amen today.

¹ Proverbs 12:10

But “he whom comes in the name of the Lord” meant the one who came from defeating the enemies of the people “in the name of the Lord.” They were thinking of him the way that people had thought about Moses, and Joshua, and the Judges, and David. Those leaders were not just military leaders. They were spiritual leaders. They were men of faith, and triumph was given from God through their hands.

Christ came to overthrow the power of sin and death, to triumph even over the grave. His victory is over Satan, and we praise him for that. His victory is over the temptations and oppression of the sinful world, and we praise him for that, too. And his victory is over the temptations, and the sin, and the inherited failure of our own flesh. We acknowledge that, and we praise him for that as well.

Listen to these words that were shouted as Matthew records them: “Hosanna to the Son of David,” and later, “Hosanna in the highest heaven.” The Son of David was Jesus, and it is clear that the people meant that and even understood it. Jesus is the descendant and heir of David’s throne, and an even larger throne.

“The highest heaven” connects Jesus correctly God in heaven as the Son of God. He is here, in person, riding into the city, both God and man, coming to lay down his life for us all.

The people here in greater and lesser degrees were saying these things, believing them, and putting their faith and their trust in him. This is faith that saves. This is faith that trusts in God’s promises because, the believer says in his heart, these promises and this Son of God are for me. I am saved by Christ. You are saved through Christ.

No one should ever say that the same crowd that said “Hosanna to the Son of David” on this day was the same crowd that said “Crucify” on Friday. Do not invent sins. We each have enough sins of our own. But whatever your sins, and for all of them, all of them, Christ came to pay the price.

We don’t choose the day of our death. But even the sins you carry with you on that day were carried already by Christ on this day. He knew what the Romans, and the Chief Priests and the Pharisees would do to him. He knew that they would overstep their own laws to do it. He didn’t force them to take his life, but God works even through people’s sins to accomplish his good purpose. And this purpose was good for us all. This pilgrim entering into his family’s royal city was coming to save you. To save us all.

And the peace of God, etc.