

Your King is Coming to You

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

God of glory, today,
Your Son enters into Jerusalem to save us.
Guide us, through the wisdom of your Spirit,
that we might see what you are calling us to see,
know what you are calling us to know,
and feel what you are calling us to feel,
that we may respond to your Gospel call of grace
with joyful obedience and service. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSVue)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately."^[a] ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – "Your King is Coming to You"

Ah, Jerusalem. Jesus mentioned many times about his desire to go to Jerusalem. But he was so busy these last few years—people longing to be healed, others clamoring to hear his teachings or see miracles, and of course those who wanted to spar with him.

Yet the Man from Galilee still kept his eyes on Jerusalem.

And today was the day we were going. We'd all been a little worried about Jesus as of late. He seemed *troubled*, more serious than normal. He kept telling us strange things like, "*the Son of Man is going to be handed over to the Gentiles and he will be crucified. On the third day he will rise again.*"

Those were the days we just had no idea what he was talking about... but it makes more sense now. He was going into Jerusalem, the city that kills her prophets. It's here he'll suffer, die, and rise—willingly, knowingly entering the domain of his enemies. And it's here his conflict with them will reach its climax.

I'm sorry . . . *I should've introduced myself.* My name is Matthew, one of Rabbi Jesus' disciples. I'm a recovering tax collector—been clean for a few years now. But this is about Jesus, not me. I've a story to share with you this morning about our visit to Jerusalem over Passover. I was there—and I saw it *all*.

Our mouths were dry and our feet dusty. We'd been walking from Galilee along the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Jesus decided that we'd take a little pit stop in the Jerusalem suburb of Bethphage—right on the [Mount of Olives](#). I didn't realize then, but it was prophetic that we made our little stop there. You see Bethphage means "*the house of unripe figs.*" I think stopping there was the Master's way of saying that *the fruit of his young life too would be plucked up early.* But also the Mount of Olives was an important place for our people. It was here the prophet

Zechariah told us that at the Messiah's appearing he will stand on the Mount of Olives. Anyway, Bethphage was I'd say, oh . . . about a mile and a half from Jerusalem. We were on the final ridge of the Mount of Olives, just getting sight of Zion. People were everywhere—thousands of Galilean pilgrims coming along this route for the great celebration of Passover.

The city of Jerusalem had swelled to over 2.5 million people. Every male Jew who lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem was required by our Jewish law to be in Jerusalem for Passover. But also Jews from every corner of the world came for this great feast celebrating our freedom from bondage to Egypt. God used Moses to deliver us. Could God be now answering our prayers for a new deliverance? Would Rabbi Yeshua the Messiah (whom you call *Jesus*) finally liberate us from the occupying forces of Rome?

But Jesus wanted to do things differently... he would never quite fit the mold we wanted to put him in—no matter how hard we tried to tell him who he was. The Rabbi was a revolutionary all right, but not the kind of revolutionary we would have thought of. His plans for kingly power were so much *bigger* and *different* than we could've ever imagined.

You call today... Palm Sunday, right? I've heard you also call it "The Triumphal Entry," no? I don't like that name "Triumphal Entry." I've got to disagree with you. As I was writing my account of Jesus, I came to see this day as more of a "Humble Entry" into the Holy City, rather than a "Triumphal Entry." No trumpets, no artillery, no chariots, or prancing war steeds.

The Master told us the plan. He approached two of us disciples, Simon the Zealot and myself. We were assigned to go into the village. "You'll find a donkey and a colt tied together. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone gives you a hard time, say this, "The Lord has need of them." And he'll give them to you immediately." So, we did as the Master directed—everything went smoothly, just like he said. This was the first time our Lord had ridden an animal. Before we walked everywhere. *But not this time*. We sensed something important was about to happen. We put our cloaks on the beast of burden and Jesus mounted.



"The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem" from an Armenian gospel.

Simon the Zealot tried to hold the donkey reins and said, "Lord, you are the Messiah. This just isn't . . . *fitting* to have you on this donkey. It's too gentle, too lowly. What you need is a good steed—that'll make for more publicity. We've got to have this image of you stick in the minds of the people: strength and power—you're our conqueror. The public needs to be *convinced* that you're the man to take Rome down. Jesus just smiled at Simon the Zealot, and said, "*the donkey's enough.*" And then Jesus clicked, and we were off.

At the time I didn't know what was going on, but it soon became clear. This was a fulfillment of the Torah. The prophet Zechariah said in our Hebrew Scriptures hundreds of years earlier,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion. Your king comes to you, humble and riding on a donkey and on a colt... and he shall command peace to the nations."

Jesus never liked to show off—in fact he always was there to *serve*, rather than *be served*. He hung out with us outcasts. He spent time with the children. He listened to and befriended the poor and foreigners. He fed the hungry. Jesus was here for peace, not for war. He didn't come with arms, but with the power of love.

Jesus turned upside down our human understandings of kingliness. So there was a reason for the donkey. It was a sign, a dramatic enacting, a visual of what his kingship was about. He was the Prince of Peace. True, riding in a procession on a donkey was a sign that one was the rightful king of Israel. All the Passover pilgrims came into the city on foot, but not Jesus. He stuck out. Jesus was speaking through the donkey—sending an important message. The purpose of the donkey is to bear burdens of work that will help human beings. Jesus doesn't come to terrify, to tyrannize, but to help, to carry our burdens. Like the donkey.

Jesus was . . . well, *different*. He used his authority to help others, not further his reputation. He was compassionate and gentle, yet fiercely courageous. God is at work through donkeys, which should give us hope. We all have a way of making . . . donkeys out of ourselves, don't we? But think about our holy scriptures.

- God spoke through Balaam's donkey.
- Saul was anointed king while he was searching for his father's donkeys.
- Once Solomon was anointed king, he rode upon his father David's donkey.
- Jesus didn't give us any speeches this day. His message was the donkey.

We see both the lowliness and the authority of Jesus here. We need them both. We can't forget either. Yeshua, however, left the accolades to his entourage. The crowds shouted out,

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

God, save us in the best way—we need your best.

Do you know what the most important question is in the gospel I wrote? Any idea? The most important question is this: *Who is Jesus?*

- Who do people say the Son of Man is?
- Who do *you* say Jesus is?

In our Jewish language, the word *Hosanna* means, "Save us!!!" And Jesus' name in Hebrew, *Yeshua*, means *God saves*. Jesus, save us!

...

We didn't know it at the time, but the very palms that we held that day that symbolized victory and healing, would be fulfilled in Jesus—who liberates us from our sins and heals our brokenness. Today is an easy day to proclaim Jesus as king. Laying down your cloaks as a red carpet. Waving palm branches. Victory parades. All good. But what will you do when the thorns, crosses, and suffering come? God calls us to follow Jesus no matter what—in the good times and in the hard times. Will you stand by his side then too? Will you cheer, "Hosanna?" or will you jeer saying, "Crucify him!"

The whole city was shaken up—like an earthquake. Four times in my scroll I speak of the people being shaken up and in turmoil.

- First, on Christmas—the day Jesus was born.
- Here, upon his Humble Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.
- Then on Good Friday, when our Lord was crucified.
- Finally, on Easter upon our Messiah's resurrection.

Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and today, Palm Sunday, we were all shaken.

Today is not a minor event. A day mixed with excitement and fear. Jesus has a way of shaking things up. Demonstrating in the Jerusalem streets that he was King was one thing. But what he did next really rattled the religious leaders.

- Going into the temple? Having his temple tantrum?
- Kicking over the tables. Kicking out the money changers?

Yes, Jesus was meek, but he wasn't meek—especially when it involved his Father's honor. That's when his popularity rating took a nosedive. It looked like his amazing campaign was over. Who could come back from that? We didn't really understand Jesus—I mean *who could ever fully understand Jesus—ever?* The Torah promises us that God will raise up for us a prophet among us like Moses and he will speak God's words. Could this be Jesus?

One thing's for sure, Jesus won't let you off easy. The road to the cross will challenge you. It'll make you feel uncomfortable. He won't always tell you what you want to hear. He'll mess with your politics, with your life. Jesus doesn't want to campaign for your party or vote for your candidate. He wants you to join his revolutionary movement of love, peace, forgiveness, justice, service, and mission to the world. Jesus wants to deconstruct our images of power and authority, from a warlike stallion to humble and gentle donkey.

Pledge your allegiance to Christ above all others. Be constantly humbled by the possibility of superficial hosannas that are devoid of the cross. Don't forget the words of our Rabbi:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

You see, Jesus wants to be the king of our hearts and lives. To enter into his kingdom and reign, to follow him into the streets and to the cross, through thick and thin.

"Who is this? That mild-mannered man at the middle of it all? Who is that?" "It's Jesus, a prophet from Nazareth in Galilee!" This humble and gentle one riding on a donkey at his first coming is the one who will be riding on a white horse at his Second Coming.

Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus! Come back for us again!

Amen.

Sermon Art: *"The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem"* from an Armenian gospel, Iran. Isfahan, Museo Armeno.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible, copyright © 2021 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.