I Am Jesus - Part Two

# The Way of Suffering

## (Matthew 21:9-17)

As we gather together today, we celebrate the coming of Jesus into Jerusalem for the holy week. This week will be the culmination of over three hundred ancient prophecies that Jesus fulfilled in his birth, his sinless life, and his glorious resurrection. And it’s on this day, the Sunday before the Passover that Jesus comes out of the wilderness and approaches Jerusalem. We are continuing our series “I am Jesus” allowing him to answer the question “Who is this man?”

Last week we looked at the words of the prophet Zechariah who said to the Jewish people, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Matthew 21:5). And today we celebrate that moment in time, remembering that it happened just as God said it would happen. In fact, this was the inauguration, the coronation of our suffering King, as we prepare to celebrate the greatest event in the history of the world. And it all began, “When Jesus entered Jerusalem" with his faithful entourage (Matthew 21:10).

The disciples followed Jesus loyally, because they had been with him in every other situation and circumstance. They were with him when the woman was healed that had the issue of blood. They were with him when Lazarus was raised from the dead. They were with him when the Pharisees tried to trap him and he alluded their grasp. And they were with him when he took the two fish and five loaves of bread and fed the five thousand. And so, here comes this little parade and the Bible says,

“The whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (Matthew 21:10-11).

But the crowd of disciples only saw dimly, they knew he was prophet enough to look into another city, to a place he hasn’t arrived yet and say,

"Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her” (Matthew 21:2).

But he was so much more than a prophet, he was Immanuel, God with us, God in the flesh, and so he was prophet, priest, and king.

That day as Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey, he reinforced the expectations of the people around him that he is coming as the Son of David, that he is coming to be King. Because the prophets before him had given them glimpses of the Messiah, but they only saw the peaks of Divine revelation. They saw the mountaintops and not the valley in between.

In other words, they saw the first advent and the second advent. They saw the coming of Christ and the return of Christ. They saw the birth of Jesus, and the return of Jesus. But not much was said about the way of suffering, they said very little about the death of Jesus. And it’s not that they were silent, because Isaiah had declared that the Christ was,

“A man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53:3).

In fact, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel had prophesied,

“They have pierced my hands and my feet” (Psalms 22:16).

And Zechariah, the same prophet who announced, “Your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey,” prophesied saying,

“They will look on me, the one they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10).

But in all the volumes of Scripture, the way of suffering was hidden from view, because it was all just part of the process. In other words, if God gave us all the details about the process we probably would’ve given up on the promise. And so, the return of Jesus is the promise, he gives them a vision of the promise, and then he throws his disciples into the process.

This is the real test of discipleship, because the real test of being a disciple is to walk with him in the garden of Gethsemane. The real test of being a disciple is to hang out with him and pray with him as he is sweating great drops of blood. That is the proof of discipleship when you are willing to walk with him, singing that familiar twenty third Psalm,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalms 23:4).

And so, the disciples are thrown into the process, they are walking with Jesus, and yet the crowds are looking ahead to the promise. And the truth is that the promise is coming, but the way of suffering is the process, and so whether disciple or crowd, just because we have the same experience, it doesn’t mean that we have the same expectations.

The disciples were following along behind Jesus faithfully, knowing that he was their kinsman redeemer, and knowing that he was going to Jerusalem to die. They didn’t know how, they didn’t understand it all, but they were willing to stick with him and see how this all worked out. Meanwhile, the crowd had grandiose expectations of their conquering King, expecting Jesus to drive out the Romans, to fix their circumstances, because they were looking forward to the promise without understanding the process.

It’s interesting, as I reflected on this because you would think that we might have learned by now. With all the injustice in the world we have to understand that too much power corrupts, and when there is an imbalance of power, we soon find an abuse of it. And that is the context here, the Jews have been oppressed, treated as second-class citizens in their own land, and much of their culture has been lost. We need to learn so that it is not repeated again, and yet the Scripture says,

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

And so, will we ever learn or are we destined to walk in the way of suffering like the millions of Africans forced into slavery, the slaughter of Armenians, the massacre of the Jews in the Holocaust, the atrocities in Bosnia or the countless refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers in America today.

I could go on and on and on about the cruel tyranny of others who like ourselves were created in the image of God. And that is the context here in our text, the children of Israel have been oppressed, their culture and religion has been greatly degraded by the Greeks and then the Romans. Now this puppet king Herod, who was partly Jewish and partly Greek has so infused his purpose into their worship that he is selling offerings in the temple. And so, “Jesus answered the temple area,” verse twelve tells us, “and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves” (Matthew 21:12).

In other words, he was infuriated because he never intended for government to get into the church business. In fact, that’s what is meant by the separation of church and state, not out of concern that the church would get into the state, but that the state would get into the business of the church. That’s what happened here, the temple was supposed to be God’s house, but now they called it Herod’s Temple. And so, Jesus said to them,

"It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13).

The people were delighted because they expected the Messiah to liberate them from the oppression of Caesar that prevailed over their city. They anticipated that he would free them from the Roman dominance that had caused many of their traditions, their worship, and their religion to be diluted and compromised. And so, when Jesus comes into the temple area they are trying to hold onto their ceremonies and rituals, he is not overturning the tables because they are selling chicken dinners after church, he is flipping tables because the government is making money off of their worship. In other words, Herod is robbing the children of Israel of their identity, and sometimes you have to stand up and fight just to hold onto who you are.

The Hebrew people thought this is where we take over, we’re going to drive the Romans out of Israel, we’re going to chase them back to Rome, and so they shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9).

The people were excited, they think this is their moment, the Messiah had come to be their liberator, their Savior, and their deliverer. But they don’t understand that Jesus, the Lord of glory, the Mighty God, the Kinsman redeemer, and the Prince of peace came to Jerusalem to die. And so, he chose not to come riding into the city on a white stallion, but instead, “on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

In other words, there is going to be a time in the future when he does that, but he is saving that for the encore.

Right now, he’s not coming on a white stallion, he is not riding in a chariot, but he is riding on the back of a colt to show that he is the God of the downtrodden, the oppressed, the denied and forsaken. Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, he chose the way of suffering. He came down through the corridors of time, he came within our reach, walking among us, and he came right where you are. And so, verse fourteen tells us,

“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them” (Matthew 21:14).

Of course, the people were jubilant, praise is in the air, but this text is full of extremes, from one extreme to the other. Praising and cursing, highs and lows, resistance and submission, all of these polarities. And so, the people were full of praise,

“But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant” (Matthew 21:15).

Of course, none of us can claim not to have another side, because everybody has a side to them that contradicts the other side. Each one of us who have been born again are a body of flesh in which dwells the Spirit of God. And so, on one hand people will think you are amazing, but on the other hand they will think you need to come to Jesus and be saved. You see, it’s how you balance the two sides that determines how well you do in life, because if you live according to the sinful nature, the Scripture says,

“Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:22).

And so, the people are praising him, and the religious establishment, the chief priests and the teachers of the law are indignant. The people think that Jesus is headed to storm the palace and take his rightful place on the throne, but we know that he is headed to the cross.

In other words, Jesus is on a rescue mission and he knows that he needs to first deal with the sin of the world. He knows that the cross comes before the kingdom, that he is,

"The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

And so, Jesus knows that he is the propitiation for our sins, he is the scapegoat, and all of our sins will be laid upon him. And that is why after he was baptized in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit sent him into the wilderness, just as his baptism was a prophecy of going to the cross and dying, his going into the wilderness was a shadow of him carrying away the sins of the world.

It is this weight that he is carrying, knowing why he was sent, burdened with his responsibility in the flesh, and knowing the fickleness of men. In other words, knowing that in one moment they will praise him with their “hosannas” and the very next minute shout “crucify him.”

When the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard the children shouting in the temple area they asked Jesus,

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" (Matthew 21:16).

In other words, their request to Jesus was that he make them stop, suggesting that such influence from young minds was not in the best interest of the people. And so, they were exasperated by the shouting of the children, because the one they were praising was in fact the cornerstone that they had rejected (Psalm 118:22-23).

And so, Jesus quiets them, quoting Psalm chapter eight, the prophetic psalm relating to the Messiah. He says, the children and infants, are those that he has prepared to give praise to himself. And so, even if they will not praise him,

"The stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

In other words, he tells them it doesn’t matter what you say, you can roll your eyes, you can hate me, but I am still blessed, because you can’t curse what God has blessed.

Now, there would be many other people in the crowd who lose their blessing because their “Hosanna” turned into shouts of “Crucify him, crucify him!” But there was a remnant, there were a few people left at the cross who would declare, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15). And so, even if he dies, I am still going to put my trust in him. If they bury him and put him in the grave, I’m still going to worship him, and bring him frankincense and myrrh. As psalmist said, “for we trust in his holy name” and so there has always been a remnant that believed and trusted in Jesus (Psalms 33:21). Not because of what they have seen, not because of what they know, but because they have put their hope in him. It’s just as Jesus said to Thomas,

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

And so, now the same people who said, “Hosanna,” they see that he is not going to do what they thought he was going to do, now they’ve got no more use for him and so, “They shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" (Matthew 27:23). In other words, they were simply opportunists, and so the only reason they turned from him was because they couldn’t get what they wanted. And so, since they rejected the gospel, rejecting the Messiah, not considering themselves worthy of eternal life he would turn to the nations. In fact, the Lord said, it is too small a thing for you to restore the tribes of Israel, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

In other words, God was looking for a few people, he wanted somebody to believe, somebody who would receive him, who would believe in his name, who would believe him by faith, believing without knowing, someone who would live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). To them, “He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). In other words, trusting him when you thought he was going to do something one way and then he did is another way. Trusting him even if he breaks your heart, even if he let you down, no matter what the people say, no matter what Pilate does, because he’s fighting a bigger enemy than what we can see.

He’s going after your real enemy, and so he sent his Son on a rescue mission as Isaiah had prophesied. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). And so, Jesus didn’t come to destroy Rome, he didn’t come to destroy Pilate, but it’s personal and individual. The Holy Spirit said, it’s for this purpose that the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8, NKJV).

And so, he came to destroy the power of sin, to destroy sickness and disease, to destroy cancer, mental anguish, and suicidal tendencies. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, reviving the spirit of the humble, reviving the heart of the contrite ones (Isaiah 57:15). And today he is calling us to trust him in the way of suffering, when we don’t understand everything, when we don’t know why he is doing what he is doing. But recognizing that all of our knowledge amounts to nothing, it’s nothing more than foolishness.

Right now, he is looking for a few people that will trust him without knowing all of the details, without thinking that they need to know everything. In fact, there are some of you here in this room that are dealing with all kinds of stuff, stressed out because you don’t know how it’s going to turn out, but you can have faith if it’s based upon you knowing everything. The beauty of faith is that you can trust God without having to know everything. And so, as believers, we can walk by faith and not by sight, doing what we know how to do, doing what we can, giving what we can, praying and trusting God for everything else.

You see, some of you may think you know, but you don’t know. In fact, the Bible says, “You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). Some of you may be going through something right now, you feel like you’re climbing a mountain, but you don’t know what is on the other side. It could be that your answer is coming up the other side, but faith is not about what you know, it’s about who you know. And so, would you trust him today, would you let God be God, and say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15). Because Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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