

Water for the Way: Part Six

Matthew 21:1-11

“Who is this?”

- Omniscient One.

- Matthew 21:1-2

- King.

- Matthew 21:1-2

- God.

- Matthew 21:2-3

- Prophesied One.

- Matthew 21:4-5

- Son Of David.

- Matthew 21:6

- King.

- Matthew 21:7-8

- God.

- Matthew 21:6-8

- Savior.

- Matthew 21:9

- Sacrifice.

- Matthew 21:12-13

- Messiah.

- Matthew 21:1-11

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Water For the Way Palm Sunday (*Matthew 21:1-11*)¹

Today is the sixth and last Sunday in the season of Lent. Lent is a season instituted by the historic church to help us annually remember significant events in the life of Jesus – no different than the holidays we usually think about, like Christmas and Easter. The season of Lent reminds us of the final days of Jesus' journey to the cross – his teachings and his arrest and torture and crucifixion. This is a season calling us to repent of our sins – yours and mine – which are the very reason Christ endured what he did. To help us during this season, many of us have been sharing together in daily readings from a book called, "Water for the Way." The message I want to share with you today is the Scripture from today's reading.

Today is Palm Sunday – the historic day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt of a donkey. This is the beginning of what we call "Holy Week" which includes the event we are talking about today, and also on Thursday was when Jesus spent the Passover meal with his disciples (you heard all about that last Sunday). That night he was arrested, and on Friday he was tortured and ultimately crucified and died – what we call "Good Friday" – not because what he went through was good – in fact, it was the opposite; it was pure, literal hell. We call it Good Friday because of the good his suffering and death on the cross did for us. Then Saturday is a day of silence and reflection and repentance, even mourning and grief, because Jesus lay silent in the grave.

So here we are on Palm Sunday, the beginning of that fateful week. I'd like to read the passage for today, and I'd like to ask you to honor what Jesus did by standing with me as God's Word is read:

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

¹ Primary resources are William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Rev. and updated, vol. 2, The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), Ryken, Philip. "The Coming of the King." Preaching Today. Accessed April 06, 2017. (<http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/transcriptseries/thehopeofholyyweek/comingoftheking032006.html>), John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Matthew* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001),

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “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.’”

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

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”
(Matthew 21:1-11, niv)

This is the Word of God for the people of God! Thanks be to God! Thank you for standing; please be seated.

It was October 29, 1927, when Charles Lindbergh (the famous aviator) was given a ticker-tape parade in New York City in honor of his solo flight of the Atlantic Ocean. I suppose I should explain what a ticker tape parade is: Ticker tape was the earliest form of digital electronic communications. It was used to transmit stock price information over telegraph lines, used from 1870 to 1970. It was a paper strip about an inch wide that ran through a machine called a stock ticker. The term "ticker" came from the sound made by the machine as it printed. So ticker tape could be hundreds of feet long at a time.



Here’s an old picture of a ticker tape parade. When a parade was held for a hero of some kind through the streets of New York in between the skyscrapers, people would throw old used ticker tape out the windows onto the parade below.

During Lindbergh’s parade, 375 tons of ticker tape poured onto the streets. But the biggest ticker-tape parade of all time happened on March 1, 1962, for astronaut John Glenn after he

became the first American to orbit the earth in a spacecraft. The New York sanitation department cleaned up 3,474 tons of ticker tape, confetti, and other paper along a 7-mile route of celebration.

Everybody loves a parade. And it was no different when Jesus came to town. It’s estimated that when Jesus rode into town on that donkey, there were over 2.5 million Jewish people in Jerusalem celebrating Passover.

When Jesus rode into town it was the festival of Passover – a national religious holiday commemorating the Israelites’ deliverance from slavery in Egypt when the death angel killed every firstborn male, except for the Jewish homes that had killed a sacrificial lamb and wiped the blood of that lamb across the doorposts of their home. For those homes, the death angel “passed over” their household. So every year the Jews would celebrate

Passover. The Law required that every adult male who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was required to go to the Temple to sacrifice a lamb, but many religious pilgrims would make the annual trip from all over the Middle East.

There is record of a Roman governor who took a census and determined that over 250,000 lambs were sacrificed at the Temple during Passover. The Law required there to be one lamb sacrificed for every ten people, so it's easy to estimate that there were at least 2.5 million Jews in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

When the Palm Sunday event happened, it was very significant in the story of the life of Jesus. There would be no turning back from here; everything was set into motion that would lead to the crucifixion and death of Christ. For Matthew, whom God inspired to write this Gospel, this event brings to conclusion the things he's been writing about regarding Jesus. All of the previous twenty chapters come to their conclusive statements during this parade.

The parade itself takes place on the road between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is really more like a hill for us (not even as tall as Ahtanum Ridge), and the Bible tells us that the distance is a "Sabbath day's journey." We know how far that is, because Jewish Law required that a person could only walk about a half mile on the Sabbath. So it's a short parade, but a lot happens in this brief half mile.

The crowd has raised the key question about Jesus, that God is answering with this scene for us. If we had been reading in Matthew's Gospel up to this point, we would notice that the main question is looming larger and larger. So the crowd finally puts into words what we have been thinking all along:

"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "***Who is this?***" (Matthew 21:10, niv)

From here on in this passage, we are going to see how God answers that question and he does it emphatically in many times and in many ways.

The first glimpse of an answer to this question comes in verses one and two, and that is that Jesus is the...

Omniscient One (Matthew 21:1-2)

Do you know what that word means? It means to be "all-knowing" – Jesus knows everything there is to know and everything yet to be known. Jesus knows the end from the beginning.

Right away, right out of the gate, at the very beginning we see something interesting: remember, Jesus tells his disciples to go the next village and there they would find a donkey tied up with her colt beside her. Matthew is making it very clear that Jesus had some kind of divine foreknowledge about this donkey and her colt. Jesus had never been there, but he *knew* the colt would be there.

My friends, Jesus *knows*. He's omniscient; he just *knows*. That means He also knows you. He knows what you are doing. You might think you can hide sin from him, but he knows.

He also knows what you need – before you can even ask. He knows what is ahead for you in your life. *You* might not know what is coming or what to do, but you can ask Jesus – he *knows*.

It is clear that this was something only the divine Christ would have been able to foreknow.

We see his omniscience even more when we notice it is coupled with the next indicator, which is in verse two, and that is...

King (Matthew 21:2)

If you think about it, this part of the story looks like Jesus told his disciples to commit larceny by stealing the donkey and the colt. At least it seems that way to us. After all, he basically told his disciples to just walk up and steal the donkey and her colt. But again, there's more going on than what it appears. There is something going on that was significant in their culture that we've lost in ours.

In that culture, everyone understood that a king could requisition the property of any of his subjects whenever he might have need of it. The reason a king could do that was because all the property within the king's kingdom ultimately belonged to the king. If the king needed something that someone had, he would merely send his emissaries to acquire it. So Jesus is clearly identifying himself as a king who has the authority to use whatever he needs for his divine purposes.

Let me ask you: do you understand that everything you have belongs to the king? If Jesus needs something that you have, and he wants you to give it away to someone in need, or he wants you to donate to an organization or the church or to Here For Good, he has every right to acquire it for his purposes. Do you understand that? Or, when Jesus asks you to give, will you tell the King, "No"? Jesus is the Omniscient one, the king.

More than just any king, though, Jesus has authority because in verse three he declares that he is...

God (Matthew 21:3)

Jesus makes it clear that he is God when he gave the instructions to his disciples. Look again at what he said:

"Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the **Lord** needs them, and he will send them right away." (Matthew 21:2b-3, niv)

Now we read that, and we think that he's simply referring to himself as a lord, or a "master." But the word "Lord" that Jesus uses is much more clear in the original Greek than it is in English. The word that Jesus uses in the Greek is "kyrios," which was used for a property owner, or a manager. This would be in keeping with the previous description of Jesus as a king. But here's what's interesting: the word is also the primary name for God in the Old Testament, and Jesus clearly intended to use the word both ways – as king, like we just saw, and as God.

So if the owner of the donkey and her colt were to ask the disciples what they were doing with his animals, the disciples were instructed to tell the man, literally, that the ultimate owner and king – God himself – needed them.

Jesus himself is God. God owns everything, by right, because he created everything – including you. Do you understand that by rights, God owns you? He created you. So when you accepted Christ, you didn't give him *your* life. You confessed the sin that you arrogantly thought you belonged to yourself, and you acknowledged that you are His. Because God has graciously come to earth in the person of Christ and given his life for you, you are now able to return yourself to God's ownership. When we become Christians, we are simply returning to God what was his to begin with. You are His. He is God.

In case you needed more validation, Jesus isn't God simply because he says so, in verses four and five we learn that Jesus is the...

Prophesied One (Matthew 21:4-5)

Matthew points out that the unfolding event is about to fulfill a prophecy made by Zechariah in the Old Testament about the Messiah. When Zechariah, in chapter nine verse nine made the statements about the Messiah riding in on the colt of a donkey, it was 600 years before this event, and right here in Matthew we see that it is being fulfilled. When Matthew referred to this 600-year-old prophecy, it gave yet another reason for the disciples to say that the **Lord** needs the animals. Zechariah's prophecy spoke of Israel's king coming to the people. God is using this passage to provide yet another answer to the question that the crowd asked, and that any reader of the Gospel asks: "Who is this?" We are shown that Jesus is the omniscient king and God, the one who was prophesied about. This is no ordinary parade!

And true to God's Word, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy about being the...

Son of David (Matthew 21:6)

The crowd of Jews that were gathered in Jerusalem knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well. They all knew that the Old Testament suggests that the heir of David would ride a donkey to his coronation. Solomon, David's son rode a donkey, according to 1 Kings 1:32-40. Absalom was David's son who attempted to take over the throne of David, so he rode in on a donkey. (2 Samuel 18:9) And Mephibosheth, an adopted heir to the throne of David, rode a donkey as well. (2 Samuel 19:26) Jesus is giving us a visual example of the prophetic truth that he is a king, and that he is descended from the very line of King David.

So in Matthew's writing of this story, the symbolism was intentional and was clearly understood by the crowds in Jerusalem that day. By riding on the donkey Jesus laid claim to the title Son of David, King of Israel. God made sure, down to the smallest detail, that there would be verification of who Jesus is.

God has made it clear that the Messiah would be a descendent of King David himself (Isaiah 11:1; 2 Samuel 7:12), and this event validated that truth of Jesus.

There was another validation in verses seven and eight once again that Jesus was indeed...

King (Matthew 21:7-8)

Again, to make sure we realize this point, we are given a second opportunity to see Jesus' kingship. First, Matthew's recording of the event makes note that Jesus "sat down" on the animal. This might not mean much to us, but in that culture, "sitting" was the normal posture for kings. And there's another indicator of Jesus' kingship, which is the donkey. Today, we don't think much of donkeys. We think they are stupid, stubborn, and small. There are characterizations of them in cartoons, and they are the "butt" of many of our jokes. But believe it or not, they were considered an animal of nobility in Jesus' day.

Finally, there is a third indicator. Not only is there a large crowd gathered for the processional, but the crowd is throwing down their coats and cloaks and palm branches on the ground in front of Jesus. Again, this seems somewhat strange to us, but the action clearly made one statement, and one statement only: this act was a symbolic way to show that they were preparing the way for their king. (This was a precedent that was set in the Old Testament [2 Kings 9:13; Isaiah 40:3-4]).

So let me ask you: when you come before Jesus, do you recognize him and welcome him as your king? We make a big deal about the personal relationship we can have with Christ, and rightly so – it really is a relationship. But it is not a peer-to-peer relationship, like you would have with your buddy. In his grace he calls you his friend, but he is and always will be *the* king.

And then, yet again in verses six through eight we see that Jesus is...

God (Matthew 21:6-8)

Again, the statement that Jesus is God is made clear by his entrance into the city. We've already said that the Passover was a significant annual event that brought Jews on a religious pilgrimage from all over the Middle East. The accepted way that these pilgrims would enter the city was by walking. If they were riding on horses or camels, they would get off their mounts and walk the road into the city. But Jesus *rode* in. He was making the statement that he wasn't an ordinary pilgrim coming to worship, but that he was actually the *object* of the worship; He was God himself coming into his house.

Every Sunday that we gather, God himself comes into his house, just like he does in every Christ-believing church.

Maybe you heard the story about the little boy who was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mom. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, dad?" Dad said, "You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved Palm Branches to honor him, so we got Palm Branches today." The little boy said, "Oh man! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

Every Sunday, Jesus shows up. He is the object of our worship. He is God, and in verse nine

he is...

Savior (Matthew 21:9)

As Jesus entered the city and they put their cloaks and palm branches in front of him, they broke out into shouts of “Hosanna!” Now, we hear that word, and we think it is similar to another Hebrew word that we use in worship, which is what? Hallelujah. Hallelujah means “Praise be to God,” so we think Hosanna must be a similar variation. But it’s not. Rather than a word of praise, it is a word of prayer. They were actually quoting Scripture. Psalm 118:25-26 says:

“Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you.” (Psalm 118:25-26, niv)

That first phrase, “Lord save us,” is the word Hosanna! They were praying a prayer reserved for the Omniscient King, God, prophesied One, Savior – the one who had come to save them from their sins.

And another interesting thing: in the last line of that Psalm I just read, it says, “from the house of the Lord we bless you”? Who is the “you” referring to? God. Well, in the original Hebrew language, that word “you” is *plural*. Why is it plural and not singular? Because God is the Father, God is Jesus, and God is the Holy Spirit; God is all three, equally and fully and completely God, the three in one, the Trinity.

Hosanna is a prayer, acknowledging both that Jesus can save us from our sins and that he is the God who can do it, and the only One who can do it in your life. You can’t do it yourself, no one else can. Only Jesus can save us.

In fact, Jesus made that point in the next verses after the passage that we’ve been looking at, because in those Jesus is preparing the way by declaring that he is the only...

Sacrifice

...that we need. Right after the parade, Jesus went to the Temple and began turning over the moneychangers’ tables and turning loose all the animals that people had to buy in order to make their sacrifices for their sin. Although Jesus entering the temple isn’t part of the text we read today, it is an important component of the triumphal entry. We often view Jesus overturning tables as an angry Jesus scolding people who are doing wrong, but the text in Matthew seems to indicate something else. The sale of sacrificial animals on the temple grounds was both common and acceptable, and many out-of-town visitors would need to purchase an animal in order to make the proper sacrifices for their sins. So Jesus entering the temple and freeing sacrificial animals is a statement about how *Jesus* has come to be the ultimate sacrifice, not the animals. There is no more need for any other sacrifice, because Jesus is THE sacrifice for our sins.

So by verse nine it is clear that Jesus is...

Messiah (Matthew 21:1-14)

When the crowd quoted Psalm 118 saying “hosanna!”, they were quoting a well-known Psalm about the Messiah. It is one of at least 16 psalms that are called the “Messianic Psalms,” which predict and describe God’s one and only Messiah.

Over and over again – ten times! – in this passage God is emphasizing and culminating everything that Matthew had written about to this point, by giving us multiple answers to the question that the crowd asked – the question we all ask: “Who is this?” Jesus is the omniscient One, the One who was prophesied about, he is heir to the throne of David, he is King of all kings, he is God, he is Savior, he is our one and only Sacrifice, he is Messiah.

Amazingly, with all this going on, the crowd answered their own question by responding with an inadequate answer: “He is Jesus, the prophet from Galilee.” They still missed it – they still didn’t fully understand who Jesus was! My friends, after we’ve gone through all of this, please don’t miss it – please make sure you fully understand who he is.

So when I ask you: “Who is this?” what will your answer be? Do you say he’s simply a man, or a teacher, or a prophet? This passage that describes the historical act of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey has left you with at least eight answers (two of them twice!) that all point to the same thing: he is the omniscient one, the King (told twice), he is God (told twice), the Prophesied One, the Son of David, Savior, the one and only sacrifice for your sins; he is Messiah.

You will either reject him, or you will embrace him. Some in this crowd recognized him as savior. The others cried for him to be crucified. Which group are you in?

Prayer

Raise hand if you want to accept him as savior.

Raise hand if you have accepted him. Keep it up if you want to surrender to him more completely.

Raise hand if you know someone you’d like to introduce to him.

Let’s cry out “Hosanna” – Lord save us! – to our omniscient King, God, Savior, sacrifice, Messiah.

Benediction

As we follow Christ into this Holy Week, may we be ever aware that Jesus is the Omniscient One, King, God, the fulfillment of prophecy, the Son of David, Savior, our Sacrifice, the Messiah. Let us go prayerfully into this week, to return on Easter Sunday to celebrate his resurrection.

Be sure to remind them about Good Friday and to take touch cards and invite their friends.