



**Defining Moments in the Life of Jesus: Entering  
Matthew 21:1-11**

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**Sunday, March 28, 2021**

**Sermon Link: <https://bit.ly/3w883PK>**

Today is Palm Sunday 2021. On Palm Sunday 2020, we were four weeks into the shut-down that accompanied the spread of COVID-19 into our region of the world. We were all asking and seeking to answer the question, “What now?,” as we faced a truly unprecedented time in our lives. Never before had our generation faced the realities thrust upon us by a worldwide pandemic. People were getting sick and dying, and heroes were rising to the occasion. On other fronts, life seemed to grind to a halt, necessary supplies were disappearing from store shelves, our financial stability was plummeting, and we were scared. What was going to happen next? We were anxious for life to get back to normal, and we were holding out hope that our worldwide pandemic would come to an end soon.

In the face of so many dangers and so many uncertainties, we knew that our God was steady and sure. We believed that He was moving—even in the midst of our difficult moment—and we believed that God was calling us to do something different from what the rest of the world was doing. While everybody else was trying to get back to “normal,” we decided to do the best we could to capture this moment and find a positive new normal. We believed that, even despite the terrible difficulties of the pandemic, our situation afforded us an opportunity to evaluate our lives, decide what was truly important, and fundamentally reorient our lifestyles around those things. We decided that we would love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and we decided that we would love our neighbors as ourselves. It was time for people to see the hope we had in Jesus Christ, and we decided that we would navigate the pandemic differently so that they could see and experience that hope through us.

A year later, we can say together that we’ve had some victories and some losses in that endeavor. There have been times when we have triumphed in faith, loving God in a way that spilled over and blessed those around us. There have been times when we have prioritized what matters most, left what we could not control firmly in God’s hands, and did the very best we could do in the power of the Holy Spirit to live out the faith once for all delivered to the saints in a way that made a positive difference in the world around us. If we’re honest, there have also been times when we’ve been less faith-filled and perhaps given way to fear, or anger, or panic, or utter exasperation. Here’s the good news we know: through it all, in the highs and lows, victories and failures, our God has been faithful. He has been present and dependable, steadfast and sure, an anchor for our souls through it all. He will continue to be that way in days to come, because that’s just who He is.

On Palm Sunday 2021, we will see again that Jesus goes into hard situations and brings hope. We’ll see again that Jesus meets us in our difficulties and carries us through to the other side. When we call out, “Lord, save us!,” He hears and responds by restoring, renewing, and redeeming us completely. He is our God, and He is faithful.

## 1. Jesus goes into hard places (21:1a).

<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1a).

As it is today, Jerusalem was a vitally important city in the first century world. The city's importance comes from God, for Jerusalem was "the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there" (1 Kings 14:21). Jerusalem was the site where Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek (Genesis 14), where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac to the Lord (Genesis 22), the city David captured and made into the capital city of Israel (2 Samuel 5), the city into which David brought the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6), and the city in which Solomon built the Temple (1 Kings 6). Jerusalem was the city that King Nebuchadnezzar captured, sacked, and burned in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25), and it was the city to which Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah returned following the Babylonian Captivity (Ezra-Nehemiah). For the Jewish people, Jerusalem was the center of life and the sacred space where they worshiped and connected with God.

By this time in His ministry, Jerusalem had become a dangerous place for Jesus. He had become known for His miraculous healings—even raising people from the dead—and His boundary-pushing teachings. He had made an enemy of the religious elite, and they wanted Him dead. When Lazarus had died and Jesus told His disciples that they needed to go into Judea, the disciples protested that it would be too dangerous for Him. When Jesus insisted, Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Jerusalem was not a safe place for Jesus. Nevertheless, He went.

Luke tells us that "when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Luke's words are reminiscent of the third of Isaiah's servant songs, in which the Lord's servant (the Messiah) says, "But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame" (Isaiah 50:7). Jesus was intent on going to Jerusalem, and once inside the city, He lamented over it, saying:

**Matthew 23:37-39** - <sup>37</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>38</sup> See, your house is left to you desolate. <sup>39</sup> For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus loved Jerusalem and its inhabitants, and He grieved the pervasive hard-heartedness of its people. He knew that entering the city meant His death. Nevertheless, He went. Why? To honor and obey His Heavenly Father. To fulfill the Scriptures and the messianic prophecies. To get to you and me.

Sometimes life calls us to go into hard places. For the past year, so many people have had to set their faces like a flint and enter hard places. Places of isolation, separation, and quarantine. Places of disease, danger, and even death. People have had to work differently, play differently, live differently, and even die differently. It has been hard, and although things seem to be improving, there are still difficulties.

The good news? For those of us who trust and follow Jesus, we can know that our Lord goes first. He went before us into Jerusalem, knowing that it meant His certain death, to reach us. To die for us. To save us. To rescue us. To give us a hope that transcends this world. The same Lord Jesus who set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, goes into the hard places to which we are called, too. How do we know? He said, "behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

## 2. Jesus was sent for hard situations (21:1-6).

<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.” <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, <sup>5</sup> “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them (Matthew 21:1-6).

Behold, the King is coming! This moment is pivotal. Because of our perspective in time, we know what Jesus alone knew as it happened—He was entering the final week of His life. We call it Holy Week, and Holy Week is hard. The Apostle John tells us that Jesus was troubled as this momentous week began:

**John 12:23-28** - <sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. <sup>27</sup> “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name.”

The hour had come for Jesus to be glorified, but His glory would be found in ultimate obedience to the Father by fulfilling the purpose for which He had come—to lay down His life as the ransom for us. His death would bear much fruit, and you and I are living proof of that truth, but His very human soul was troubled at the prospect of the weight He would bear and the torture He would endure. Nevertheless, He desired to glorify the Father, and He desired to save us. For this purpose, Jesus had come to this hour, to enter the city as the Messianic King, according to the prophets:

**Zechariah 9:9** – “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, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

There was a disconnect here, though. The people expected that the Messiah would come to provide salvation from Rome, but the salvation He would bring would look different. It would not be the immediate salvation from Roman oppression for which they hoped. It would not be the immediate restoration of the glory of Israel to the people in the way they hoped. It would be a far greater salvation, initiating a far greater reign, but inaugurated in a way completely contrary to what they were hoping.

From the disciples’ perspective, there was only uncertainty. Why would Jesus send them ahead to borrow a donkey and a colt, really without asking? His only justification for the request was that He needed them. What did the disciples do? They trusted Him enough to obey Him. We learn in the next verse that “the disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them” (Matthew 21:6).

As we face continued uncertainty, what should we do? Like the disciples, we should trust Jesus enough to do what He asks us to do. We should love God with all that we are, and we should love our neighbors as Christ has loved us. We should seek to live out the faith in a way that makes the world a better place. Our Lord is doing something in and through all of this, and our call is to simply do what He asks.

### 3. Jesus brings hope (21:7-11).

<sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matthew 21:6-11).

As Jesus entered the city on a donkey—fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy—the people begin to shout: "Hosanna!" If you've had any interaction with church in your life, you've probably heard that word. If you're like I was, you might have even sang it on Palm Sunday in church without having any idea what you were saying. That's okay. It's not a bad thing to say.

The word actually comes from a song with which the people would've been very familiar. Psalm 118 was the last of a group of psalms known as the Egyptian Hallel (praise) psalms (Psalms 113-118), which were used to praise God for His goodness to His people in the past, the present, and the future. These psalms were called "Egyptian" because of their connection with the Passover celebration during the Jewish liturgical year. Psalm 118 describes a festive procession into Jerusalem after some great deliverance. In later times, it was sung at the Feast of Tabernacles as well as Passover. It was sung on Palm Sunday, and Jesus indicates that it may be sung at His Second Coming. It was the last psalm Jesus sang at the last supper with His disciples before they left for Gethsemane.

#### **Psalm 118:19-29 –**

<sup>19</sup> Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

<sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup> This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

<sup>25</sup> Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!

<sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.

<sup>27</sup> The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.

Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!

<sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.

<sup>29</sup> Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

In verse 25, the Hebrew words literally say, "Save now, Yahweh, I pray," and "Save now" is pronounced "Ho-shi-a-na." In the Greek, the Hebrew expression is transliterated as "Hosanna," and that Greek transliteration is brought into our English Bibles. They are recognizing Jesus as the Davidic King and asking Him to save them by singing the words of this favorite song.

Like the people gathered around Jesus on that first Palm Sunday, we have been calling out to the Lord for some time. We have been desperate for His intervention, and we have been looking for His salvation from so many tangible struggles in our world. We join in their chorus, praying, "Save us now, O Lord!"

## Final Challenge

There was a danger in the people's prayer of which they were not aware. The danger was their expectation. They expected Jesus—the Messianic Ruler—to overthrow Rome and re-establish the glorious reign of Israel in the world. They expected immediate deliverance from their present enemy, and they expected it to happen right away. After all, their king had arrived! As it turned out, the salvation Jesus was bringing was far greater than simply the alleviation of Roman oppression. The salvation He was bringing was the alleviation of satanic oppression. He would come into the city to liberate their souls, not their government.

Unfortunately, that's not what they wanted. They had a tremendous felt need of wanting relief from Rome. When Jesus didn't bring it, they turned on Him. Some of this crowd would join in a different chorus in just a few days—this time, shouting "crucify Him!" Others would fade into silence, inadvertently acquiescing to Jesus' sentence of death. Jesus didn't bring them the deliverance they expected, so they abandoned Him.

As we have been crying out to the Lord for deliverance over this past year, there's a danger in our prayer, too. The danger is that we would miss God's richer blessing as we seek a needed but lesser blessing. As we pray for an end to the COVID pandemic, to racial strife, to governmental gridlock, to financial instability, and to so many other ills our world is facing, Jesus is still offering to liberate our souls. His arms are open to all people, and He is saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He is willing to deliver us from our sin and from the satanic bondage in which we have been dwelling.

Will we receive His deliverance and walk in it, or will we join in a different chorus of condemning our Lord if He doesn't deliver as quickly as we'd like or in the way we'd prefer? Will we fade into silence and inadvertently acquiesce to the protests of those who have been blinded by the enemy? Only when we experience our Lord's deliverance from sin can we truly live in the freedom of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. That's what He desires for us, and that's what He is willing to give us by His grace through His cross and resurrection.

Our Lord reigns, and our Lord delivers. He has gone willingly into hard situations to bring hope to us. Will we embrace His deliverance? Will we walk in His hope?