

Sermon File # 851

Scripture Text: Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon Title: *The Coming of the King*

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The Coming of the King

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to Matthew 21:1-17. Today on Palm Sunday and again on Easter Sunday next week, we will leave our series from the Book of Exodus to focus on the events that begin and conclude our observance of Holy Week. We will look in the Gospel of Mark for the meditation this coming Good Friday evening, as we reflect on the meaning of the cross of Christ.

This morning I'm reading our Scripture text somewhat out of the usual order. In a moment we will continue with our worship music, including that led by our children's choir, which will reenact the praise given to Jesus on that Sunday when he rode a donkey into Jerusalem. What we see in this event is an enacted parable, full of symbolism that Jesus used to convey his unmistakable claim to be the Messiah. Knowing that this was his last week of life on the earth in his mortal flesh, and that the purpose of his incarnation would be fulfilled through his looming cross and resurrection, Jesus intentionally set the wheels in motion for his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Jesus knew that his entry into the city as the prophesied King of Peace would incite the zeal of his enemies to bring about his execution, his death on the cross. Up until this time, Jesus had avoided the open declaration of his messiahship, realizing that the fervor of the crowd was for a political kingdom with immediate fulfillment and that the true message of the everlasting kingdom would be lost and his cross avoided.

Follow as I read the first 17 verses of Matthew 21, which includes Jesus' cleansing of the temple. But our primary focus will be on **Matthew 21:1-11**. (Scripture reading to be followed by children's processional and song)

The Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem created no small stir, as we read in verse 10. Actually, our *NIV* translation is a bit weak. *The New Living Translation* is better: "The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar...." It would even be more accurately translated, "the entire city was shaken, as with an earthquake." Our English word "seismic," the effect of an earthquake, is based on the Greek in this verse (France, 299).

The impact of Jesus' Triumphal Entry was more significant than that of the massive demonstrations and successful and attempted revolutions that have taken place in recent weeks and months throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The world and especially the citizens of those countries anxiously await the outcome of those demonstrations and revolutionary activities, hopeful that new governments and radical reforms will result. We can only pray that as a result of these demonstrations and revolutions new freedom for all citizens and for the exercise of religion and the free proclamation of the Gospel will result.

Here at the Triumphal Entry of Christ, a large crowd was virtually assured because of the some two to three million pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Some of those who joined in this procession of Jesus into the city were sincerely giving him praise and welcoming him to the City of David as the true Messiah. Many were no doubt joining the parade merely for the excitement. Others were simply indifferent spectators. Such a demonstration was not new nor was it significant to the Roman authorities, who were interested only if it should get out of control. They would hardly have thought of Jesus' entrance as triumphal. To them, the sight of a peasant man riding on a donkey, receiving such praise would have been ludicrous, compared to the impressive entrances they had seen by their victorious generals, governors and kings.

But there were indeed those who were disturbed by Jesus' Triumphal Entry. Religious scholars understood the messianic symbolism Jesus was conveying. They couldn't help but think, as they say Jesus entering on the young donkey colt, the prophecy of Zechariah:

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (9:9).

In this Triumphal Entry, King Jesus was acting a live parable, presenting a clear picture that he indeed is the long-expected Messiah, the one who has come to save his people. And as with all parables, only those with spiritual eyes could understand the significance of his entrance. Jesus had up until this point avoided public acclaim that would have hastened his arrest and execution. But now the time had come for

his death on the cross and so he sets in motion with this entrance the wheels that would crush him (Carson, 437).

In this living parable, let's note what the coming of the King means for us and what it demands of us. First, the coming of the King...

Demands recognition

Public demonstrations, such as the ones that have happened throughout the world in recent weeks, have as their stated purpose the calling of attention to a particular cause, perhaps to stir public sentiment in favor of a cause or to gain the attention of leaders to a cause or a grievance. In some cases, they are calling for a complete revolution, the overthrow of reigning dictators. In his Triumphal Entry into the City of David, the city of kings, Jesus is giving to the city and to the world...

Widespread information

No longer is Jesus' identity to be kept to a select few, but now it is time for the world to know that he is King of kings and Lord of lords and that he has come to bring salvation to all who will believe. Many in the crowd already knew that Jesus was a prophet from God, who had power to heal, feed the multitudes and even to raise the dead. As we read in John's Gospel, many in the crowd at this Triumphal Entry were present when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (12:17ff). All of Jesus' miracles were given as signs to point others to his divine significance as the Son of God, and John particularly shows how Jesus' miracles punctuated his "I Am" sayings, such as his declaration "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Jesus identified himself to the religious leaders as the eternal "I Am," the one who made himself known to Moses at the burning bush (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14). As one has said, "The Galilean crowds acclaim him as the local prophet, but the whole symbolism of the occasion marks him out as Messiah...." (Nixon, 842).

In sending his disciples for the young donkey, accompanied by the female mother donkey, and then entering the city from the Mount of Olives, Jesus announced to the world his kingship; and receiving the praise of the worshipers along the route into the city and to the temple, Jesus shows the world that he is worthy of all worship and honor as the Son of God (Zechariah 9:9). Entering the city as did King David, following victory over Absalom's rebellion, Jesus reveals himself to be the King of Peace (2 Samuel 19. France, 297), who through his reign overcomes the power of our sin and rebellion. Jesus offers himself and his kingdom reign for all who will repent and believe in him (4:17). By faith in Jesus and by following him as Lord we enter the realm of his everlasting kingdom, receiving the free gift of eternal life.

And to this day Jesus continues to make himself known, as he commissioned his church to carry the message into all of the world and into all of our separate worlds (Matthew 28:19f). As Jesus said, "Many are invited, but few are chosen" (22:14), which was illustrated in this acted parable. In his Triumphal Entry, Jesus is enacting the Parable of the Wedding Banquet by going into "the street corners" to invite whoever will to come to his saving grace (22:9f). The wedding hall was filled with

guests, just as the streets of Jerusalem were filled with those singing Jesus' praises. But not all of them praised Jesus with...

Kingdom insight

Many were invited but only a relative few were chosen to partake of saving grace. Many failed to understand the meaning of this Triumphal Procession because they didn't understand who Jesus was. They knew he was some kind of a prophet and miracle worker, but they had no spiritual insight. So the whole city, which was astir and even shaken by this demonstration, was asking, "Who is this?" (10). The crowd knew his name was Jesus and he was a prophet from Nazareth and that he had a group of followers and had done some amazing things, but that's about all they knew. They had no kingdom insight, no spiritual understanding or perception from above.

The gospel writers Matthew and Mark precede the Triumphal Entry with Jesus' healing of the blind men (Mark 10:46-52; Matthew 20:29-34), perhaps to show the fulfillment of the prophet who looks forward to the day when "the eyes of the blind" in David's City will see (Isaiah 29:18, Lane, 392f). And after Jesus cleanses the temple following his Entry, he heals the blind in the temple (14).

What's amazing is the transition from this adulation and praise of Jesus on what is now known as Palm Sunday (Only John's Gospel mentions that some of the branches strewn before Jesus were palm branches, in 12:13) to the crucifixion of Jesus on that very Friday. No doubt there were some who in the crowd shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David!" which means "Save now!" and had become an expression of worshipful praise, who later cried "Crucify him!" (27:22f). All that these superficial worshipers could think of was how Jesus could benefit their material lives and immediate wellbeing. They failed to see that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

We all know that public opinion changes quickly, particularly when our expectations aren't being met. All of the countries that are in turmoil and political upheaval are seeking some kind of change for the better in their governments, and we can only hope for the best results in these countries. But sooner or later, even after some improvements are made and hopes are restored, disillusionment is certain to set in. Human leaders and their governments, even at their very best, are limited in their ability to satisfy the desires and meet the needs of all of the people all of the time. No doubt there were those in the crowd on this first Palm Sunday who had hopes that this Messiah named Jesus might be the one to reverse their fortunes and meet their expectations.

There are plenty of "consumer Christians" who will worship and praise Jesus when they think it's to their advantage to do so, but their opinions and loyalties are liable to change quickly when their expectations aren't being satisfied. In my home country of the USA we have a lot of "consumer Christians" who demand immediate customer satisfaction. If their church "investment" doesn't pay immediate benefits, they soon "want their money back" and will go elsewhere. These people have a superficial view of Jesus and have no insight into following Jesus in the way of the cross.

The Romans thought this whole demonstration of a so-called king riding a donkey was ludicrous. To them a real king and hero would ride a white horse and enter with his powerful army behind him. And there are so-called Christians who want ‘power evangelism,’ *salvation* which comes riding on a white horse to chase all our troubles away. They want to hear a “gospel” which promotes health and wealth, and they expect a religion that delivers on its promises to make life better.

We can hope that during this time of widespread political unrest and revolution, many more will have the opportunity to enjoy greater freedom and prosperity. We should also pray that the message of Christ will go forward with new freedom and great power. We can hope and pray that many will turn to Christ as the real source of life’s meaning, joy and personal freedom. But saving faith will not come because economic and political circumstances are improved. If unbelievers come to faith, it will be because the grace of God has given them insight into who Jesus is and the kind of kingdom he heads. It’s a kingdom within our hearts, and he rules through our lives of humble obedience and servant-hood. But we can also expect that those who do not have the grace of God for true insight into Jesus and his kingdom of a cross of self-denial will turn away from their superficial “worship” and will be totally disillusioned by a religion of the cross that doesn’t make life more successful and comfortable for them.

On this Palm Sunday, I pray we will have grace to praise and bless the Lord Jesus, who has given us insight into who he is and we thus worship and love him with all of our hearts, even though we haven’t seen him with our physical eyes (1 Peter 1:8f). Maybe this grace for faith is given widely to children, who in this narrative continued to shout Jesus’ praises in the temple, much to the chagrin of the religious authorities (15f). Perhaps these children could see something of Jesus’ real significance that the religious scholars failed to see. The religious leaders had become blind by their pride and refusal to be open to Jesus’ self-revelation. Their willful blindness condemned them to never being able to have spiritual understanding (John 9:35-41).

The coming of the King demands recognition but also his coming...

Demands response

The children in the crowd also were among those who responded positively to him, just as they had responded earlier in his ministry. And Jesus noted that childlike openness and receptivity to him was essential for anyone’s entrance into his kingdom (Mark 10:13-16).

The Triumphal Entry is a fulfillment of the verses in The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel:

“He (Christ, the Word) was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:10-13).

Our text says that the whole city was stirred with seismic excitement, and asked, “Who is this?” (10) As one noted, most of the people knew about Jesus, the miracle-working prophet from Nazareth. But this question was more like, “Just who is this man who commands such excitement?” His presence in the city was disturbing and unsettling (Nolland, 840). And as Jesus enters Jerusalem, the response to him is either reception or rejection.

Either reception

Many did welcome Jesus, and expressed their praise and, in quoting from the psalm, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (9 & Psalm 118:26). Some in the crowd of worshipers had received Jesus as Lord, even though most of them failed to understand the nature of his kingdom and rule.

They, as we must do, acknowledged the authority of Jesus as King, even though he had none of the earthly trappings of kingship. Yet they accepted his kingship and submitted to his authority. Jesus’ authority was demonstrated even in the way he sent his disciples for the donkey on which he would ride. If the owner of the donkeys questioned their right to borrow them, they were to say simply, “the Lord needs them, and he (the owner) will send them right away” (3).

Jesus showed his authority also by the way he received the praise and worship of those who acknowledged him as the Messiah and the Lord who saves his people. Also, his authority over the temple, the center of Jewish worship, was dramatically displayed when Jesus drove out those who had corrupted the temple with their crass commercial practices that exploited the poor. And Jesus demonstrated breathtaking authority when he called the temple “my house,” which he said, in quoting Isaiah (56:7), was to be a house of prayer which they had subsequently corrupted into a den of robbers (13).

These who received Jesus as their Lord accepted him as a humble servant King, whose destiny was the cross. And although most didn’t understand the necessity of the cross until after his death and resurrection, these believers were willing to receive him on his terms and were willing to submit to his authority as King.

And this is the only way to respond to Jesus when he comes to us—to receive him on his terms. This means that we too must accept what we cannot understand and be willing for him to be our Lord and Savior, submitting to his will for us. And we know his will is that we come after him and take up our cross and follow him (10:38; 16:24). To receive him means we must follow and confess him before others, whatever the cost to us (10:32).

When Jesus comes, just as he did into Jerusalem, we must decide to receive him as Lord or we will necessarily give the response of rejection.

Or rejection

No doubt there were some in this crowd of worshipers who later, in the courtroom of Governor Pilate, would cry, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” (27:22f). In the environment of worship, with the popular support of the crowd, they were comfortable in joining with

their lips the words and songs of praise. But Jesus noted that such “worshippers” are in fact hypocrites. He quoted Isaiah, who noted that such people “honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:7f & Isaiah 29:13).

Those who rejected Jesus were not all regarded as his enemies. Most of the people probably simply ignored him. Although the city was stirred with excitement, curiosity or even with momentary concern, most of the people probably dismissed him as just another zealous leader of an illegal movement. Yet because Jesus came into the city as King, he could not be ignored, and everyone had to make the choice of either acknowledging him for who he claimed to be or of rejecting his claims.

And the fact that Jesus came into the world brings a great, unavoidable divide between those who receive him and those who reject him, either willfully or by neglect. It’s all rejection, just the same. Jesus brings his judgment simply by his presence. Even churches have to decide whether to receive Jesus as Lord of our worship, service and fellowship or we will relegate him to being a relic from the past while we go on with church business as though it were our business and not God’s.

But our response to Jesus’ coming is...

With everlasting results

Jesus knows every heart, whether we are sincere or not, as he also knows eternal destiny of everyone. In Luke’s account of this Triumphal Entry of Christ, he gives a closer look into the heart of Jesus. Jesus looked down upon the city with a magnificent vista from the top of the Mount of Olives. And Luke says,

“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes’” (Luke 19:41f). Jesus entered the city as the Prince of Peace, the King of the Kingdom of Peace through God’s salvation. Jesus spoke then of the devastation that was coming upon the City of Jerusalem. In AD 70, the Roman army would overrun the city and bring death and destruction to many of its inhabitants. William Barclay notes that in AD 70 “the city was so devastated that a plough was drawn across the midst of it” (251). Jesus’ heart was broken as he saw those who rejected him as facing an immediate and everlasting judgment.

Jesus still comes to us, “gentle and riding on a donkey” (5). He comes to seek and to save the lost and this is still a day of opportunity to receive him. As Paul says, this is the day of his favor:

“I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

He continues to come to us gently. But Jesus wept because he knew his Second Coming would be far different from his first one. The first coming introduced a period of amnesty and grace, during which the lost may come to faith and receive and follow the gentle Savior of the cross. Throughout his preaching and teaching ministry, Jesus contrasted the power, judgment and glory of his Second Coming to the humility and saving graciousness of his first one (7:21-23; 13:41-43; 16:27;

19:28; 21:41-46; 24:29-31; 25:31-46; 26:64; 28:20. See Turner, 497). As John Piper reminds us, Jesus still gently rides the donkey, but as we read in Revelation, he will return to earth riding a white war horse and wielding a sword and an iron scepter (Revelation 19:11-16). This won't be the hero many expect to come riding to their rescue on a "white horse." This is a fearful picture of the Second Coming of Jesus in unmistakable authority, power and universal judgment upon everyone who has ever lived on this earth. How we respond to the first coming of the King will determine how he responds to us in his Second Coming (Piper, 7).

Conclusion:

Today we have sensed something of the joy and glory of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The degree of the joy we sensed from the children and from our worship and from the preaching of the Word is determined by our readiness for his second Triumphal Coming. In fact, the first entry of Jesus was in some ways not triumphant but rather tragic (a point brought out by Craig Blomberg, 311). He would be turned upon by many in this crowd of worshipers and the religious leaders would conspire for his arrest, trial and crucifixion later that same week.

But God turned what appeared to be a tragedy into his great triumph, the triumph of the cross and the resurrection. And Jesus comes to us in his lowliness and as our Servant King, bringing us his great salvation. And this is our opportunity to join the procession of praise to him as we surrender to Jesus and follow him as our Lord and King.

I hope and pray that everyone here today will be stirred to ask this all-important question asked by the crowd upon his Triumphal Entry into the city: "Who is this?" (10) Who is Jesus to you? If you have received him as your Lord and King of your life, then your praise will have meaning and joy, and you have reason to celebrate on this Palm Sunday. You have received him in his first coming and now you are looking forward to his glorious Second Coming.

What a celebration it will be, which is prefigured here in the very multinational fellowship at IBC! In the apocalyptic vision given to John we read about the "great multitude that on one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and *were holding palm branches* (my italics) in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9f).

I pray that everyone here today will be in that great "Palm Sunday" processional of the consummated Kingdom. All of us who now receive Jesus as Savior and seek to follow and honor him as Lord will be there on that great day, sharing in the everlasting joy that will only have just begun.

I love the way the Psalmist expresses the joyful and enthusiastic reception of the King of glory:

Lift up your heads, O you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

.....
Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory” (Psalm 24:7, 10).

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What do you think the average person might have thought upon seeing Jesus in his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem?
2. What might have been some of the attitudes and understanding of some who worshiped and shouted praises to Jesus?
3. Do you see any comparison with these attitudes to that of people in worship services in typical churches today?
4. In your worship of the Lord Jesus, what are your thoughts about him? What is your desire and objective in worshipping him?
5. Take some time to ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you might be expecting Jesus to meet your personal expectations and needs instead of being the King and authority of your life.
6. Perhaps you know a number of people who have not yet made a life commitment to Jesus as Lord and King. Pray for them, that they might accept Jesus in his first coming before they have to face him and his judgment in his Second Coming.
7. What are some opportunities you have during this Holy Week to worship Jesus as your King?

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