

Early in the Vietnam war, a section of jungle called “War Zone D” was one tough stretch of enemy-infested ground. It was a secret zone about which allied intelligence knew almost nothing—except to stay away. Conventional allied infantry units never went near it, until eventually, allied intelligence decided it was time to invade the enemy’s sanctuary – it was “crunch time”.

Of course, no ordinary unit would do. This operation required another level of intensity and experience. This was a mission which would demand the very best. Chosen were thirteen handpicked American Green Berets and a company-sized element of their highly trained and trusted Cambodian guerilla fighters.

Through several weeks and dozens of firefights without artillery support or any chance of reinforcements, these soldiers fought fifty-one combat engagements, directed tactical air strikes on twenty-seven critical targets, and raided numerous base camps of much larger enemy units. They focused on their mission and stayed at it until it was accomplished.

When the mission faces its most critical moments, it’s time to step up the intensity, and for Jesus as He enters into the last week of His earthly ministry, He does just that. This morning we are beginning a brand-new, six-week series called “*The Last Week*” where from the Gospel of Matthew, we will look at the last week of the Lord’s earthy ministry to include His crucifixion and resurrection, and this might come as a surprise to you, but a third of the gospels is devoted to the last week of Christ.

Since we are going to be in Matthew for several weeks, I thought I would begin by telling you a little bit about the man who wrote what would become the first book in the arrangement of the New Testament.

Matthew, who was also called Levi, was a Jew, who was hated by his own people, considered the scum of the earth on the level of a leper because he had collected taxes for the Romans and presumably took a little extra for himself. Matthew was a traitor as far as the Jews were concerned, but one day he met Jesus, he rose up from his tax booth, and he left everything behind to follow Him.

For Matthew, everything had changed, and now later as an apostle – one of the original twelve surprisingly chosen by Jesus – a man who once took from his own people, he now wants to give back to the Jews by sharing the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ – their long-awaited Messiah who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Matthew wrote his gospel for a Jewish audience, revealing that Jesus is,

in fact, their King – not a king who would come to defeat the Romans right then and there as the Jews had hoped, but a king who had come to defeat a much greater enemy – Satan, sin, and spiritual death.

Now for the setting. The last week of the Lord’s ministry actually begins with His triumphal entry into the capitol city of Jerusalem – and it just so happens to be the time for the annual Passover celebration where some two million people, maybe more, from all over, are jammed into the city to commemorate the great deliverance of Israel from Egypt when the Passover lambs were sacrificed to save the first-born of Israel. If you recall, this was the final plague from God that broke Pharaoh’s hardened heart, paving the way for the Israelites to leave Egypt for the Promised Land.

That’s the setting, so if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 21** and we will begin with **verse 1**. Matthew tells us,

¹When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”

Jesus and His disciples are making their way to Jerusalem from the east, from Jericho, and they come to a small village about two miles from Jerusalem called **Bethphage** which means the “*house of unripe figs*”, and as you can see from the map, this village is situated on the southeast side of the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives. If you remember, the Mount of Olives is a very prominent place in the history and in the future of Israel and of God’s people. For example, the Garden of Gethsemane is situated at the foot of the mount. It’s a place Jesus often went with His disciples – and it’s the place where He would be arrested. The mount is the place from where Jesus ascends into heaven after His resurrection, and it will also be mount where He returns at His second coming.

In this passage, it’s the place where Jesus is about to do something He had never done before publicly, something He had repeatedly cautioned others not to do for Him: He was going to publicly reveal Himself as the Messiah and King they have been waiting for.

On that day, Jesus sends two of His disciples on ahead to find a donkey and her young unriden colt. They were to untie them and bring them to Jesus, and if anyone asked what they were doing, they were to say **“the Lord has need of them, and immediately He will send them.”** You see, Jesus knew where the animals were supposed to be and He knew they would be given to Him, maybe as a subtle reminder to everyone else that He was in complete control – even during the darkest times of this last week, and as we know from Luke, it happened just as the Lord said it would – the owner asked the two disciples what they were doing with his donkeys, and they answered exactly as Jesus told them, and they were allowed to take them.

Now as you know, Jesus has been walking or sailing everywhere during His ministry, **so why does He need a donkey now when He is only two miles from Jerusalem?** There are two things I want to point out about the need for the donkey:

First, most people today think of a donkey as being nothing but a humble beast of burden, a pack animal, but in Jewish history, a donkey was looked upon as an animal fit for a king. In the ancient Middle Eastern world, it was common practice that kings rode horses if they went to war or wanted to portray themselves as mighty conquerors, but they rode donkeys if they came in peace, and Jesus is coming to bring peace.

Secondly, Jesus needed the donkey so that He might fulfill Old Testament prophecy given by **Zechariah** some 500 years earlier, and instead of reading from Matthew, for the sake of context, I want to take you to **Zechariah 9**, and I am going to read **verses 9 and 10** from the New Living Translation. We read,

⁹ Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt.

That’s pretty much what Matthew quoted, but let’s continue with the very next verse in this prophecy.

¹⁰ I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

So, we are told that the King will come on a donkey's colt to Jerusalem, He's bringing peace with Him, but as we can also see in this prophecy that peace comes on the heels of war – the war to end all wars is coming, meaning this prophecy of Zechariah is a dual prophecy. Yes, the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a fulfillment at His first coming, but the other part will be fulfilled at His second coming when He returns in power and glory to reign over the earth.

Now before we move away from the subject of prophecy, I want to share another prophecy from the book of **Daniel**, because there is something in that book which is very pertinent to the timing of this last week of Christ.

In **Daniel 9**, Daniel was praying for his people the Jews for they were in captivity in Babylon, and while praying, God sends His angel Gabriel to give Daniel some comforting words, and in these words, he is told that there will come a time when the Jews finally repent and turn to their Messiah for the forgiveness of sin, and their Messiah will establish His earthly kingdom and bring everlasting righteousness – everything will then be made right. For us, that is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

The angel Gabriel tells Daniel that all of this will occur in 70 weeks – **weeks** is a word for seven like dozen is a word for twelve, and when taken together, we are looking at 70 seven-year periods which equates to 490 years. Then beginning in **Daniel 9:25**, we are told when this 490-year calendar starts:

²⁵So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

²⁶Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing,

Here, Gabriel reveals two out of the three segments of this 490-year period. The first segment, is **seven weeks**, or we could say “*seven sevens*” which equates to 49 years and it begins with the **decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem**. This decree was made in March of 445 B.C. when King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission, safe passage, and the necessary supplies to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

The second segment given by Gabriel is **sixty-two weeks** or “*sixty-two sevens*” or 434 years. It begins after the first segment and it takes us right up to the last week of Christ beginning with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem – to the day. Only the

true Messiah could present Himself like this with perfect timing, and that's exactly what Jesus is doing.

And for those poor souls whose brains are working overtime with the math, when you add these two segments together, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the Lord's triumphal entry into that same city, you come up with "sixty-nine sevens" or 483 years. We started with 490 years, and 483 years have come and gone, **so what happened to the remaining seven years?**

Well, because the Jews **cut off** their Messiah as described in **Daniel** – they rejected and crucified Him during the last week, the calendar stopped for the Jews and the church age was ushered in for us, and for those seven years which remain – the third segment – we call those seven years the Tribulation Period – a time after the church age – a time primarily intended for the Jews to repent and turn to Jesus as their true Messiah and King before He returns to set up His earthly kingdom.

Now, just to let you know, this summer we are going to tackle the book of **Daniel** and we will look at this in more detail. Anyway, let's get back to **Matthew**.

So, Jesus is revealing Himself publicly as the Messiah and King to fulfill prophecy, but there is another reason He is doing this. It's *crunch time* and Jesus is dialing up the intensity with this public display to force the hand of the Jewish religious leaders to act against Him now instead of waiting until after the Passover as they would prefer. You see Jesus in the true Lamb of God – the perfect – the approved Lamb that God has sent to take away the sin of the world, and on this very Passover, it is ordained that He sacrificially offer Himself as payment for sin and to satisfy the wrath of God.

Then beginning with **verse 6** Matthew tells us,

⁶The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

We are told the disciples went and found everything just as Jesus had told them, then they brought the donkey and her young colt back to Him, they put their own coats and outer garments on them as crude saddles, and as prophesied, Jesus got on the colt and began to make His way towards the city.

People on the road were overcome with emotion at this special moment as Jesus was being treated as the King they had longed for. These were people who had followed Jesus from Galilee, who had seen Him resurrect Lazarus from the dead only a few days before, and they were pilgrims visiting the city for Passover.

Granted, they only had a partial understanding of who Jesus really was and what He was doing, but it was exciting to them, and taking their cues from the disciples, they quickly began ripping off their coats, laying them on the road into the city for their King. Others began cutting down branches from nearby palm trees and spreading them on the road – all part of giving Jesus their version of the “*red carpet treatment*”.

At this point, Jesus has not said a word about Himself – and quite frankly, He does not need to. In **verse 9** we are told,

**The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,
“Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!”**

During His earthy ministry, Jesus normally moved quietly among the people – but not this time – not now. Here we are told there were crowds going on before Him and crowds following Him – it was a snowball effect, they were welcoming and receiving Him – at least for the moment, offering shouts of praise from **Psalm 118** – a psalm that celebrated Israel’s deliverance from captivity.

In praise, they shouted **Hosanna** which literally means “*save now*”. “*Jesus, save us now – overthrow our enemies the Romans now – deliver us from captivity now – establish Your earthly kingdom now.*” That’s what the Jews expected from their Messiah and King – “*Jesus, save us now*” – and here’s the thing, that’s exactly what He had come to do, but not in the way they expected or understood. Not a single Jew, to include the Lord’s own disciples, understood that before the King could reign, He first had to redeem.

“Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.”

Yes, Jesus is the rightful heir of King David’s throne – He’s the **Son of David** which is a Messianic title, and He has the power to save. They are praising the **name of the Lord** – they just don’t realize the Lord is in their midst. Again, the

people did not fully understand who Jesus really was and what He had come to do for them. It was difficult for the people, even those who were the closest to Jesus to understand that His ride into Jerusalem as the prophesied King and Messiah was not to ascend to the throne, but rather to be lifted up on a cross. They had no idea.

Then beginning with **verse 10**, Matthew tells us this,

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” **11 And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.”**

As Jesus entered the city, the **city was stirred**. The Greek word for **stirred** is where we get our English word for *seismic*. From all the commotion, the city was quaking, it was moving with excitement, it was stirring with anticipation, and the result was that crowds who were in Jerusalem for Passover began to ask one another, **“Who in the world is this who has come into the city?”** The city was shaking because of Jesus, but they don’t know who they’re talking about. The popular opinion by most the crowds was that Jesus was the **prophet** from Nazareth, and yes, He was the prophet, but He was so much more.

Luke tells us that as Jesus approached the city this day, amongst all of the uproar going on around Him – Jesus was weeping for He knew that people really did not know who He was or what He had come to do for them – many were simply caught up in the moment. Jesus knew these people had an image of Him, and they had expectations of how He was supposed to act on their behalf. He’s supposed to act in a way they think He is to act. He’s supposed to kick out the Romans and establish His earthly kingdom right then and there. Jesus knew He would not meet their expectations for their expectations were wrong, and the people would become disillusioned and doubtful of Him, to the point that in a matter of days, they would not be shouting **“Hosanna”**, but rather **“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”** They do not know who Jesus really is and what He has come to do. We call this the Lord’s “triumphal entry” but in many ways it was a tragic one.

I want to circle back to that question being circulated in Jerusalem because it’s a question for us as well – a question I cannot answer for you. **Who is this? Who is Jesus to you?**

For some, Jesus might be this wise teacher, who shared some good stuff about living, but He has no moral claim on your life. He can be ignored if you want. To others, Jesus might be a genie out of the bottle to do what you want Him to do and

to give you whatever you want. Of course, that doesn't happen, so you are often angry with Him when things don't go your way. To some, Jesus is just a loving friend who always wants to make you happy – never offending, never confronting, never asking you to do anything difficult – **I mean how loving would that be?** On the other end of the spectrum, maybe to you Jesus is always angry – constantly judging and belittling you, pointing His finger and picking you apart piece by piece – never satisfied, never gracious. I know that one very well.

If this is what you think about Jesus, then you got the wrong Jesus. Someone once said this about Him:

He is the Bread of Life who began His ministry hungering. He is the Water of Life who ended His ministry thirsting. Jesus hungered as a man, but He fed the hungry as God. He grew weary, and yet He is our rest. He paid taxes, but He is the King. Jesus was called a devil, but He cast out demons. He prayed, and yet He hears prayers. He wept, but He dries our tears. Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver, and yet He redeems sinners. He was led as a lamb to slaughter, but He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus gave His life, and by doing so, He destroyed the penalty of death.

Jesus is the divine Son of God – God in the flesh, who came to dwell with man and then as the perfect Sacrificial Lamb, once and for all, He offered Himself as full payment for sin to satisfy God's wrath. He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the long-awaited Messiah, the Prophet, the High Priest who intercedes for His people, and the Savior who seeks and saves the lost. He sits at the right hand of the Father, and one day soon, He coming back to make things right and to establish His kingdom on the earth. And here's the most amazing thing – Jesus knows you – He knows all about you, and in spite of you, He loves you and wants you to know Him.

Source Material:

The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck

Stuart K. Weber, Matthew, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

Charles R. Swindoll, Matthew 1–15, vol. 1A, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2020).

D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

Jon Courson, Jon Courson's Application Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

Enduring Word – David Guzik

What I just shared with you this morning is a story which I suspect most of you know. You know the story of His triumphal entry, but here's the question: **Does it matter?**