

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, March 28, 2021

Matthew 21:1-11 “Jesus, the King of Love”

Intro. Our Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem is one of the comparatively few events which is recorded in all four Gospels. No Gospel writer felt his gospel was complete without this account included. The reason it receives so much attention by the gospel writers is because the event was unusual for Christ, and because it was so instrumental in bringing about His crucifixion that same week.

So the Passion Week begins here. For some time Jesus and His disciples had been traveling to Jerusalem. In chapter 20 they had reached Jericho, deep in the Jordan valley (20:29). From there Jesus led His disciples up the winding road towards Jerusalem, ascending about 3000 feet! He had warned His disciples that He was going up to Jerusalem to die, and He yet again affirmed His intent to lay down His life for us (20:28). Based on John’s Gospel it may be assumed that Bethany was reached before sunset on Friday. Then, He enjoyed a Sabbath rest with His friends in Bethany, including Simon the leper, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. On Saturday evening a supper was given in His honor, after which Mary lovingly anointed Him with fragrant oil. Then sometime Sunday morning Jesus and a group with Him started out from Bethany, which was located on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. Before they reached the crest of the Mount of Olives, He stopped and sent two disciples to get a donkey for Him to ride. Some villager gladly yielded his beast to Jesus. They spread some of their outer garments upon the donkey and then Jesus mounted the donkey to begin His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the city of the great King (Ps. 48:1-2).¹

What happened during this event is very revealing about who Jesus really is and what He came to do. In fact, the people of Jerusalem were asking in v.10, “Who is this?” Well, we will answer that question this morning. And so I will be preaching mainly about Jesus today. I want to lift up Jesus, and let you see His glory. If you really know Jesus, you will love Him, obey Him and serve Him. If you do not yet know Jesus, I pray you will see His glory today, and believe in Him. Jesus said, “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.” I want to lift up Jesus that you might be drawn to Him.

Let’s see what this passage tells us about Jesus. First of all:

I. JESUS IS INDEED A KING

What we have here was very unusual for Jesus. Up to this time, He almost always shunned publicity. For example, often He would try to keep the people He healed from giving praise and publicity about their healing. But here, He openly presents Himself to Jerusalem, the city of David, as the promised King. I want to show you from this text that He is indeed the promised Messianic King. First:

A. Because He Deliberately Fulfilled a Messianic Prophecy – The fact that Jesus deliberately chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey was very unusual.² As far as we know, He

¹ V.7 literally reads, “They brought the donkey and the colt, and laid upon them the outer garments, and he sat on them.” The closest antecedent of “them” is “outer garments,” not “the donkey and the colt.” Matthew is the only Gospel writer that mentions both the donkey & the colt, probably because the prophecy mentioned both.

² Though it was common for Jews to ride donkeys in that day in Palestine.

walked everywhere He went. But the reason for this manner of entrance into Jerusalem is found in vv.4-5a where we read, “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you....’” Jesus deliberately fulfilled a prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. With unusual consistency, the Talmud and the ancient rabbinic authorities had applied this prophecy to the Messiah, the promised King. By His action on that Sunday, Jesus said in a way more plain than words, “Behold I am your King, your Messiah.” A certain divine decorum required that at least once He should enter the city as its King. And note it is “your” (v.5) King, your very own. He is not a foreign king. He first came as the King of the Jews.

Now in order to fulfill this prophecy, He needed a donkey.³ He did not have one. The way it was obtained in vv.2-3 demonstrates the omniscience of Christ, and His providential Lordship. Sure enough, as the disciples began to take the donkeys, they were questioned, but given permission to take them, just as Jesus predicted. Imagine what would have happened if every owner they asked refused to give up their donkey? So when Jesus obtained the donkey and rode it into Jerusalem, He was deliberately fulfilling Messianic prophecy. He was affirming that He is indeed the Christ.

Another reason we may believe that His is King was:

B. Because of the Recognition of the People – Remember, this was leading up to the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover. There could have been hundreds of thousands of people in and around Jerusalem at this time. V.9 mentions a crowd in front of and a crowd behind Jesus. Probably, the people behind Him included some of His disciples and some pilgrims from Bethany and Bethphage,⁴ including Mary, Martha, and other locals who bore witness of the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 12:17).⁵ Some pilgrims would spend the night in those nearby villages because of limited accommodations in Jerusalem. The people in front of Jesus would have included those meeting Him from Jerusalem. According to John 12:1, 12, 13a, 18, the caravan of pilgrims that had arrived in Jerusalem previously had heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. And so, as Jesus was on His way toward the city, news of His coming spread quickly, especially due to the manner of His coming, and they came pouring out of the eastern gate to meet the One whom they hoped would be their Messianic King. Picture in your mind the two crowds meeting. As the crowd from Jerusalem met Him, they turned around and walked ahead of Jesus. By the time Jesus reached the city, the crowd must have been very large.

Notice how they affirmed their belief that Jesus was the promised King. First, they affirmed it by their *actions*. It was customary for a large group to go out to meet a king upon his arrival to a city and welcome him. In fact, 1 Thess. 4:17 says that when Jesus comes again, “we who are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air....” The word translated “to meet” is a technical word to describe the kind of meeting I am talking about. Indeed, the explicit reasons given for the rapture in that verse is that we will be caught up to welcome our King as He returns. Furthermore, when welcoming a king, it was customary for people to lay their outer garments on the road, like a welcome mat, but also as a sign of submission (2 Kings 9:13). They added festive branches as well, symbols of nationalism and victory.

³ When the Lord instructed them in v.3 to say, “The Lord has need of them,” the need was not for transportation but to fulfill prophecy.

⁴ Beth'phage (pronounced with soft g) means "house of [green] figs," an appropriate designation for a region that abounded in luxurious fig trees (Phillips). Today the town is called el-Azariyeh, named in honor of Lazarus.

⁵ Was Lazarus with Jesus, considering the plot to kill him? (Jn. 12:10).

Secondly, their *words* also demonstrate their recognition of Jesus as the King and Messiah. We read in v.9, “Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!’” Notice what they said. “Hosanna” means “save now,” or “save, we pray.”⁶ Essentially, it is a people’s cry for deliverance. And at the end of v.9 they repeated their Hosanna with a little variation saying, “Hosanna in the highest.” This was another plea for salvation, which they recognize as coming from God, who dwells in the highest heaven. We can imagine it all, how the fire of hope would leap from heart to heart. And the fact that they called Him “Son of David” also had Messianic overtones, for God promised that a descendant of King David would rise up to save the people of Israel. So a sizable group of people recognized Him as the promised Son of David, and the Kingdom was at hand!

The people also proclaimed in the last of v.9, “Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord.” This is a quotation from Psa. 118:26. There is one reason why they quoted from that Psalm that you may not be aware of. Jewish tradition says that Psalm 118:25-29 was chanted antiphonally as the people of Jerusalem welcomed pilgrims coming for the feast. The citizens of Jerusalem chanted the first clause of each verse and the pilgrims answered with the second clause. Psa. 118 was commonly recognized as Messianic. We can’t know for sure if the people were singing this verse because they were affirming that Jesus was the Messiah, or simply because of this Jewish custom to welcome pilgrims into Jerusalem. But either way, it is significant that they were chanting or singing a Messianic Psalm upon His arrival to Jerusalem.

According to Lk. 19:39-40, the Pharisees were beside themselves with envy when they saw the multitude and heard their Messianic words of praise. So they appealed to Jesus to stop their hopeful words of praise. Now if Jesus had not been Messiah and King, He would have refused their recognition and praise, as John the Baptist did. But He didn’t! For the first time He publicly acknowledged that He is indeed a King.

So Jesus deliberately presented Himself to Jerusalem as their King. The fact that He deliberately fulfilled a Messianic prophecy, and the fact that He accepted the Messianic praise of the people all demonstrate that Jesus believed that He was indeed the promised Son of David, the King of Israel. And we will see more evidence in this message that He is indeed the King that God promised.

So do you acknowledge Jesus as King? Is He Lord of your life? Are you living in obedience to Him? Or are you living in willful disobedience in any area of your life? If so, how can you say He is Lord? Jesus is worthy of your loyal obedience. He is King, and we are to recognize Him as such. If you run your own life you will make a mess of it. But if you allow Jesus to be Lord of your life, you will be so much better off.

Let’s see what else this story teaches us about Jesus:

II. JESUS CAME TO BE A GENTLE, LOVING KING

In this text He shows the crowd what kind of Messiah He is. He would not be the earthly Messiah of Israel’s dreams, the One who wages war against the Romans. For notice that this King does not come riding upon a white horse, or upon a mighty chariot, as many a conquering general had done. There were no marching legions in gleaming armor and weapons. And for this reason, I do not believe that Jesus caused any real concern to the Romans at this point. Instead, notice in v.5

⁶ See 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26. It may be that the word had lost some of its original meaning, and that it had become to some extent only a cry of welcome and of acclamation to a king, like “Hail!”

how Jesus came to the Jewish people: “Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey....” That word “lowly” [*praus*] perhaps should be translated “meekly.” At times a king would enter a city upon a donkey as a symbol of peace and good will (cf. 1 Kings 1:33). And in the case of Jesus, He not only rode on a donkey, but even the colt of a donkey (v.5b). It was probably just old enough to carry Jesus!⁷ So riding on a donkey demonstrates the fact that this king, true to prophecy, is meek, gentle, peaceful, and gracious. He is the Prince of Peace. His attendants are not warriors bearing spears, but peasants with palm branches. So I believe that Zechariah meant that Zion’s King should not reign at first by brute force, but loyalty to Him will be won by lowly meekness and love. It was a last appeal to Israel to open their hearts to Him.

Later that week, Jesus again demonstrated His meekness. When the crowds called for His crucifixion, the soldiers took Him away. They mocked Him, putting a robe upon Him. They put a reed in His hand, a hollow scepter. They thrust a crown upon His head, but no royal crown; it was a crown of thorns, a crown of suffering. Yet, He meekly accepted it all. He did not resist in the least.

Jesus reveals the nature of the Father. The Lord is often in the still, small voice, not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the mighty wind (1 Kings 19:11-12). Christ’s triumph would be the victory of love over hatred, truth over error, and life over death. Jesus said that the meek will inherit the earth (5:5). The kingdom that is established in meekness, and ruled by gentleness, that is the kingdom which shall be eternal and universal. The rule of Christ over the hearts of men has continued for almost 2,000 years now. Where are all the ancient kingdoms which were established through might and force and bloodshed? They have all come to an end without exception, even the mighty Roman Empire! But the reign of Christ continues into the ages! The love and goodness of God has led many to repentance (Rom. 2:4) and faith in Christ as Lord of their lives. And by the way, as instruments of the advance of the Kingdom of God on earth, we must rely upon His love and grace to win the hearts of men. We cannot win the world by becoming like the world, using force, or the power of the State. The same prophet Zechariah also said, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord” (Zech. 4:6, KJV). The meekness and love of Jesus is at odds with Islam, which seeks to expand at the edge of a sword, and through the blast of bombs.

Now this says something to you who have not yet accepted Christ as Savior. In this present age, Jesus will not force His rule over your life. If His love and grace does not win your heart over, nothing else will. So you must willingly accept Him as Savior. Someone said, “The door to the human heart can be opened only from the inside.” Jesus Himself said in Rev. 3:20, [quote with picture].

However, the book of Revelation says that Jesus *will* come again in great power and glory some day. Rev. 19:11 says, “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.” When Jesus comes again, He will not come meekly upon a donkey, but upon a white horse and force His rule upon this earth. Rev. 2:27 says, “He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels.” And when Jesus comes again, Php. 2:10-11 will come to pass. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So if you do not accept Him as Savior and Lord now, you will meet Him as Judge, warrior, and Sovereign King. How do you wish to meet Him? Ah, consider Jesus once again. See Him riding meekly upon a young donkey. Will you welcome Him into your heart today?

Well if you still are not moved, then consider one more truth we may see about Jesus in our text:

⁷ The mother donkey was probably brought along to calm the young donkey.

III. JESUS CAME TO DIE FOR OUR SINS

Even this passage shows that the purpose of the coming of Jesus was not to conquer Rome and rule Israel by force, but He came to die for our sins (cf. 20:28). He did not come the first time to be crowned with a royal diadem, but to be crowned with thorns! He came not only to be presented as Lord, but also to be our Savior. Our greatest need is not for a military deliverance, or for political reform. Our greatest need is for the forgiveness of sin. Friend, the Bible says that “the wages of sin is death,” and “the soul that sins shall die.” If your sins are not forgiven, you will die in your sin and be separated from God in outer darkness for all eternity. Oh yes indeed, your greatest need is the forgiveness of sin.

Well how can you be forgiven? Do you think you can make up for your sins with good works or religious rituals? 62% of unchurched Americans believe that (2006 Barna report). But the Bible says that you cannot be saved by works of righteousness or good works. Hebrews 9:22 tells us the one way we can be forgiven. There we read, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.” The sacrificial system of the Old Testament demonstrates the same truth.

So knowing this, Jesus came into Jerusalem, not for His coronation as King, but to die for our sins. He said just a few days before in Mt. 20:28, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” He had no grand illusions that He would soon be placed on the throne of David. I can prove this in three points:

A. By Prophecy - People were quoting from Psa. 118. But note the *context* of Psa. 118. This Psalm includes a prophecy of the builders rejecting the chief corner stone (v.22). The builders of Israel were the leaders, and God predicted that they would reject the chief corner stone, which is a reference to the Messiah. In fact, Jesus refers to this prophecy in v.42 of Mt. 20. And Isa. 53 is another Messianic prophecy which adds, “He was despised and rejected of men.” The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem made the leaders more determined to kill Him.

B. By Entering Jerusalem - Israel’s leaders had plotted His death, and Christ would have avoided Jerusalem if He did not intend to lay down His life. The Gospel of John reveals that the Sanhedrin came to a decision in recent days that Jesus must die, supposedly to keep the Roman authorities from feeling threatened by Jesus’ popularity. There were some secret disciples on the ruling council who could have told Him about that plot. However, Jesus knew about it even without their help, for He is the Son of God. Yet, in spite of this, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem, and even to do so openly.

Along the same lines, we see here His courage. Jesus knew full well that He was entering into a hostile city. Most would expect that, if He had come to Jerusalem at all, He would have slipped in under cover of night, and would have kept prudently to the back streets until He reached His shelter. But Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that deliberately set Him in the center of the stage, vulnerable to the hostile authorities. Would you have done that?

C. By Antagonizing Israel’s Leaders - Not only did He enter Jerusalem, but He openly antagonized Israel’s leaders by the triumphal entry. They were filled with envy (27:18; Lk. 19:39; Jn. 12:19) and became desperate to do something to stop Him. This was in absolute opposition to His usual action, which had been one long effort to dampen down Messianic hopes.

What is the reason for the contrast? Up to this time He avoided situations which could lead to a premature death because “His hour was not yet come” (John 7:30; 8:20). But now He knew

that His hour had come. So by the Triumphal Entry He precipitated the conflict which was to end in His death. He fully realized that the enthusiasm of the masses would enrage the hostile leaders at Jerusalem, so that they would desire more than ever to carry out their plot against Him, and do it quickly. And we can only understand this if we recognize the fixed resolve of One who knew that His mission was not only to live and to teach by word and life, but also to die, and by death to deliver the world. Any other hypothesis, it seems, cannot account for His act here. The very fact that he openly declared himself as the messianic King was used against Him at His trial (27:11-12).

So it is clear to me that Jesus was absolutely determined to die for us, and since He is Lord and King, He died on Passover, the very day that pictured the meaning of His death.⁸ He died for others, because He loves us so.

I grew up going to church, and I was familiar with the story of Jesus. By the time I was 9 years old I knew that I was a sinner and that I needed to be forgiven for my sin. But I wasn't ready. Something was holding me back. But when I was a 12 year-old boy, I saw a movie that pictured the story of Jesus dying for my sins. Somehow I knew that it was for me He died. My eyes filled with tears as I watched Jesus die for me. That night I went to my room, knelt by my bed, and asked Jesus to be Savior. I believe I was saved that night, and I began a journey of learning that Jesus should not only be my Savior, but also my Lord.

Conclusion: So this Gospel story shows that Jesus is not only Lord and King, but He was also sent to be our Savior. Have you accepted Jesus as *your* Savior and Lord? Well this morning I have shown you that He came to die for our sins. He is also the King that God promised to raise up unto Israel, and He is not only the King of Israel, but He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is to be the King of all people. After His death God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to rule as Lord over the hearts of millions around the world (Acts 2:36). But at this time He is still a gentle King, not forcing His rule by might, but winning it by His love. If you have not done so, will you yield your life to Him as Savior and Lord!

Now the first thing Jesus commands you to do is to confess Him publicly as your Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 says, "That if thou shalt confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (KJV). Have you done so? Have you obeyed His command to be baptized? If not, why not do so today!

Christian, we see clearly from this text that Jesus is King. Are you living in daily obedience to Him?

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, no date), [23C.10]; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

⁸ This point is addressed more fully in my Mt. 26:1-5, 14-16 sermon.

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