

## **Introduction**

It may seem strange to you that here it is September and we are turning to the quintessential text for Palm Sunday. But the fact of the matter is that for some time we have been in a series of sermons on the gospel according to Matthew. At this time last year, I jumped over the this section in order to arrive at the resurrection of Christ on Resurrection Day last spring. So at this point we are coming back to where we were and in the next number of months I will be preaching on Matthew 21-25. Our text this morning presents what is usually called the triumphal entry of Jesus.

[Read Text and Pray]

Jesus's normal course of transportation was his feet. He walked wherever he went. He even walked on the water in a couple of instances. But in our text this morning, Jesus took a ride. Clearly it was an intentional act God had designed to say something significant to everyone who saw and to those who are able to read the gospels. Matthew's narrative captures the message of this act. He describes how Jesus presents himself to Jerusalem as King. His royalty shines in several aspects of his entrance into the holy city. And mingled among these facets are some important practical matters for every follower of Christ to consider. So let's dig in. The divine royalty of Jesus shines first in how he obtains his transportation. So first, I want you to see . . .

### **I. The Acquisition of His Transportation.**

We can't skip over how Jesus obtained his ride. Jesus has been on a circuit across the northern reaches of the region. And having turned southward, he has arrived at the outskirts of Jerusalem. At Bethphage, he is across the Kidron valley and within sight of the city of Jerusalem, which was little more than a mile away. He sends two of his disciples into the next village to obtain his mode of transportation into the city. They were to bring from the village a donkey and her colt. Jesus instructs the pair that if anyone asks, they are to explain that the Lord needs them. Probably Jesus had made a prior arrangement with one of his followers to have this donkey and her colt available. This explanation is all that would be required; the owner would not merely allow them to be taken, he would send them at once.

Before going any further, we need to ponder this explanation and the promise of an instant response from the owner of the donkeys. All he would need to know is that the Lord required the use of them and he would be more than cooperative. He would send them on to Jesus for his use.

The unnamed owner is an illustration of a cheerful giver. He is aware of what belongs to him. He is protective of that property, seeking to preserve it. He has tied up the donkey. He wants to know what the disciples are doing who are untying the animal. But when he hears that the one who wants to obtain the pair is the Lord, he joins with the disciples as if to say, "please take them; please send them to Jesus." How much is he like or unlike you and me? When the Lord seeks the use of us and of what we call ours, how willing are we to passively let go? And more than that how willing are we not merely to let go but to gladly send it on to Christ?

That is the kind of willingness demonstrated by the new Christians in Macedonia. They were poor and experiencing severe affliction. But of them Paul said that "their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty . . . overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means . . . and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints."

What is the key to letting go of what the flesh desires to hold on to? The key is truly owning Jesus as your Lord! That is the key. You and I give willingly and gladly when we realize that ultimately that giving is to Jesus. The Lord desires to use what he has entrusted to us! What a pleasure to be able to play a role in his wonderful plan!

But there is one more point to be considered here. It is the fact that Jesus refers to HIMSELF as Lord. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say to them, "THE LORD needs them." That Jesus is Lord is not a determination made purely by human reason or deduction. It has come as Christ's own instruction. Jesus is Lord. He is king over all. It is to this very place that God the Father has exalted him. He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. To come to Jesus to be his disciple cannot happen if you are unwilling to acknowledge and to submit to his Lordship. The king who now draws near to present himself to Jerusalem as her king is not just another king. He is no ordinary person in David's line of descendants. No, this king is Lord. He is THE Lord. He is Lord of lords. He must be worshiped and served as Lord. If you resist Christ Jesus, you resist the Lord. It is grievous sin.

The divine royalty of Jesus shines first in how he obtains his transportation. It shines second in his transportation of choice.

## **II. The Choice of His Transportation.**

Jesus chose to ride on a DONKEY. The two disciples did as they were directed by Jesus. They brought the donkey and her colt and laid their garments on them and Jesus took his seat on the garments on the colt and rode it into Jerusalem.

Last week Melissa and Ariail and I attended my niece's wedding in the low country of South Carolina. We flew down to Savannah, Georgia and rented a car to get around. As you know I always search for a deal. And in my search I found that the cheapest rate I could get on anything was on a Mustang convertible. And so that is what we got. We did have to put one piece of luggage in the back seat, but we had fun! I have to admit I did not mind coming to a red light because of the acceleration I enjoyed as soon as the light turned green! This mindset makes me wonder. I wonder why Jesus chose a donkey. He is Lord, and as Lord, he could have ridden ANYTHING in to the city of Jerusalem. And he chose a donkey? There has got to be something to this! And indeed there is. It is about significance. There are several points of significance each of which magnify the royalty of Jesus.

1. The first and most obvious point of significance is the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus intentionally chose a donkey because through the prophet Zechariah, God had indicated to Zion, that is Jerusalem, that her king would come to her mounted on a young donkey, a colt. By fulfilling prophecy in this way, Jesus is intentionally saying to Jerusalem, "I am your king. I am the King of the Jews." He is underscoring the very fact Matthew stated at the outset of this gospel. He set forth the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah) the son of David. Over and over Matthew has drawn attention to numerous ways in which Jesus fulfills the prophecies of the scripture concerning the son of David. Here in selecting a donkey, Jesus fulfills yet one more prophetic utterance that demonstrates him to be the king.

2. A second point of significance is that riding a donkey into town in this way was in and of itself a claim to kingship. King David had vowed that Solomon would be king after him. Before he died he ordered that Solomon ride on David's own mule to the place where he would be anointed and proclaimed king. Now here is Jesus riding into the city as the true son of David whom Solomon foreshadowed. Here is part of why God ordained and prophesied that Jesus would enter Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. It is part of proclaiming him as David's son coming into David's city.

3. But riding a donkey is not only a point of royalty; it also reflects peace. If a king was coming to a city in a time of war with the intent to conquer, he would be riding a horse. The emblem of a donkey communicates peace. Peace is tied to the prophecy from Zechariah. The daughter of Zion is told to rejoice greatly because her king is coming on a donkey, but the Lord will cut off the chariot and the war horse and the battle bow. The king will speak peace and rule over all.

4. That is not all. Here is a fourth point of connection that we should not miss. It goes all the way back to Abraham. Just as Matthew in his opening words refers to Jesus as the son of David, he also refers to him as the son of Abraham. God promised Abraham a son. Isaac was that son of promise. And after he was born, God tested Abraham saying "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." The scripture says, "So Abraham rose early in the morning, SADDLED HIS DONKEY, and took . . . his son Isaac . . . and went to the place of which God had told him." A donkey accompanied Abraham and Isaac to the place of sacrifice, which by the way is the ancient site of Jerusalem generally and the temple specifically.

Now here comes Jesus, God's only Son, the Son whom he loves, to that very same place. He is on one donkey and accompanied by another. And he enters what will be his place of sacrifice. As I hope you are aware, God spared Isaac and supplied a substitute ram. But Jesus is the son who IS THE substitute and for WHOM there is NO substitute. It is for the descendants of Abraham, people of the faith of Abraham, that he died so that the sons of Abraham by faith might be spared the wrath we deserve.

And so Jesus' choice of transportation into Jerusalem carries the message that he has come to be the consummate sacrifice. He is the king above all kings not only in power and might but in humility and service. It is as Paul says to the Philippians, "he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." In fact this was his path to being exalted so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. Here is why no one can bring any charge against God's elect!

Jesus, riding on a donkey and coming into Jerusalem, speaks to us of his royalty for sure, but it is a royalty like no other. For here is a king who stoops to serve his subjects. He dies that they might live. Why wouldn't you want to be his subject? It is a costly choice. It will cost you everything. Recorded in Luke 14:33, Jesus declares, "So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." It is a costly choice but the blessing is to live under the rule of the only king ever to die and rise again to produce subjects whose destiny is to share in his own glory and rule. He is the only king who is holy and righteous and gentle and kind but who will not abide those who refuse him.

There is another aspect here of the donkey image that corresponds to Christ's sacrifice. You may have noted the description of the colt in the prophecy to which Matthew refers. Zechariah as God's mouthpiece delivered the message to the daughter of Zion that her king was "coming ... humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a BEAST OF BURDEN." In this way the donkey epitomizes Jesus and his mission to reconcile humans with God. What he did in becoming a substitutionary sacrifice was to bear our sin BURDEN. "He himself BORE our sins in his body on the

tree," writes Peter. Isaiah states, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has LAID on HIM the iniquity of us all."

This entrance into Jerusalem is normally referred to as the triumphal entry, but I think it is more aptly described as Christ's sacrificial entry.

5. I have one more point of connection to the fact that Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem. If you think about the most prolific of donkey-riders in the Bible—the one guy that stands out among them all—who would that be? Would it not be Balaam? Remember Balaam. He is the prophet the Moabite king hired to curse the Israelites. Being summoned by the Moabite king, Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. Along the way the angel of the Lord, seen by the donkey but not seen by Balaam, stood in the way three times, and the donkey ran off the road into the field, then crushed Balaam's foot against a garden wall, and finally laid flat down because she could not pass by the angel of the Lord with his drawn sword. In each case Balaam was furious and struck the donkey. At last the Lord allowed the donkey to talk. The donkey asked Balaam why he beat her. "Because you made a fool of me," he said. The donkey replied, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said no. Then the Lord opened his eyes and he saw what the donkey had been seeing and he fell on his face. Here is the case of a compliant donkey who resisted its master and sustained a beating rather than oppose the angel of the Lord which may well have been Jesus himself in a pre-incarnate appearance.

Coming into Jerusalem on this monumental day, however, Jesus rides an unbroken colt of a donkey. Here is a donkey which had never had to comply with a rider, which had not been broken in. And yet this donkey stands in contrast to Balaam's donkey. The unbroken colt surrenders itself with complete compliance to Jesus, demonstrating that he is Lord over all creation, even over the untamed disposition of a unbroken donkey. And Jesus is demonstrated to be the one before whom everyone should fall on their face.

Do you fall on your face before Christ? He is lord and he is king and he deserves our worship. He deserves our homage. He deserves our attention. He deserves every ounce of the life he has given us.

So, the divine royalty of Jesus shines in his transportation of choice as well as in how he obtains his transportation. Finally this morning, his divine royalty shines in . . .

### **III. The Celebration of His Arrival.**

For three years, Jesus has been preaching the good news, teaching about the kingdom of heaven, and healing people afflicted with the consequences of sin. In the last few days Jesus had healed two blind men and raised up Lazarus from the dead. Crowds were stirred into a frenzy of excitement and rejoicing along the way. Geography is important here. Bethphage was located on the Mount of Olives. A deep valley lay between there and the rise upon which Jerusalem was situated. So the road down which Jesus proceeded and all its accompanying activity would have been visible from the city. Interested observers would have seen and perhaps even heard the procession and come out of the city to investigate and then would have become part of the whole celebratory procession. They were throwing their cloaks and tree branches on the road before Christ as he came. And they were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Throwing their cloaks and branches before Jesus, this crowd was visibly expressing its respect and submission to Jesus. Shouting its loud acclamations, this crowd was verbally attesting Jesus as the Messiah. "Hosanna" is a cry for salvation. It literally means "Save us." These words come from Psalm 118:28-29 and there the translation is "Save us we pray, O Lord!" This was their cry as the Son of David made his grand entrance to the city. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" is an expression of praise to Jesus but also an acknowledgment that he came with the authority of the Lord. These are powerful testimonies if people make them with authentic knowledge about what they are saying. It is clear that the crowd was applying to Jesus an acclamation that he was Messiah, but something was missing. For when the folks in the city asked who this was, they replied, "it is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth." That he was and yet so much more. That their acclamation was lacking is apparent in that by the end of the week the crowd was calling for Jesus to be crucified. You see what they had in mind for Messiah to be was at odds with what he actually is. They wanted a king to throw off Rome. He is the king who came to throw off a far greater enemy, the enemy of sin and death.

People today are no different than they were when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey. Many people get caught up in religion and churchy things who really miss the nature of Jesus's kingship. He did not come to give you and me an easier life and help us through the tough times we experience. He came to be our ruler. Yes he came to save but to save from far worse than what this world has to throw at us. He came to save us from God's righteous wrath. And he came to rescue us from the corruption of sin. And he came to save us from the destruction that is ours because we love the world and the things of the world. He came to save those who will relinquish everything to follow him. American evangelicalism is full of people who want to call Jesus Lord, who want to be able to say "I am saved!" but who really want nothing to do with Jesus being Lord of their lives. Friends, it just does not work that way. Jesus invites you to throw down your cloak before him, but not so you can deny him later in the week. Submission and honor means surrender to his will and to his way.

I recently talked to a college student at a Christian college who told me their roommate claimed to be a Christian but parties almost every night and has sex with whomever whenever. The student kindly challenged the roommate about Christ's commands to which the roommate said, "Well, I guess I'm not a Christian after all." I am afraid not a few people just like that make up much of American Christianity. It is a reflection of the cheap gospel that has been preached about a Savior that does not exist.

Oh, there is a Savior. His name is Jesus. He is Lord. He came to bear the burden of sin's penalty so that those he rescues are not merely saved in their sins but saved from their sins. The call to follow him is unmistakably clear in Luke 14 where Jesus says in verse 27, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." In verse 33 he clarifies the warning, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

I wonder this morning, "Do you call yourself a disciple of King Jesus?" More importantly, though, I wonder, "Would King Jesus call you his disciple?"

## **Conclusion**

In those days if a king came on a donkey he came in peace. If he came to town on a horse, it was a different story. Jesus came to Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago offering terms of peace. And those who take those terms, who put their faith and hope in him and who deny themselves and follow him enter into that peace. But a day is coming for those who refuse. Jesus will arrive not on a donkey

but on a horse. He will be joined by the armies that are in heaven white and clean. And they will follow. He will not be coming to bring peace. In Revelation 19, John reports:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Is Jesus your King? Is he your Lord?

### **Prayer**

#### **Benediction**

To him who sat mounted on a donkey and rode into town to become our Savior through his death and to that same one who will soon mount a white horse and come back to earth to make war—for both his mercy and grace as well as his holiness and justice—to him be glory and loud shouts of hosanna. For he is the true and majestic king of kings. May he receive glory from us his followers and his subjects as we live for him this week. May he make his face to shine upon us and give us peace.