

March 16, 2008  
Palm Sunday

*"Loud Hosannas for Jesus"*

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### **MATTHEW 21: 1-11**

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*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup> "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

When George Fredrick Handel composed his now famous "Messiah" the story is told that his assistant called out his name, but no answer came. He went to his room and found him crying, not tears of sorrow, but tears of joy. He had just finished writing the well known "Hallelujah Chorus" and confessed to his co-worker, "I have just seen the face of God." When King James 2 heard the Hallelujah Chorus for the first time, he stood in awe and respect, honoring his greater monarch. When Queen Victoria went to a presentation of the Messiah, her courtiers encouraged her not stand the way the common people did when the Hallelujah chorus was played by the orchestra and sung by the choir. She could not contain herself. She stood and bowed her head in honor of her greater monarch, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The people could not contain themselves when they saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. They burst out into a very familiar song of praise from Psalm 118, "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." When the Pharisees told Jesus to restrain his followers, Jesus told them that if his followers remained quiet, the very rocks would cry out and sing his praises.

Remember the first time you ever heard the account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, or saw the picture of him sitting on a donkey in a Bible story book? Were you not overwhelmed with joy and appreciation for how much he loved you and cared about you? Today, we don't want to be quiet, or the stones will cry out. We want our voices to shout loud hosannas because of the overwhelming peace and joy Jesus brings into our lives.

### **He fulfills the promises**

What amazes us is that Jesus wanted to ride into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. He did this

to fulfill the prophecy about him in the Old Testament book of Zechariah. Thousands of pilgrims have already come to the city for the Passover week celebration. Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead of him into the village of Bethphage with the instructions that they would find a donkey and her colt tied there. He told them to untie them and if anyone asked what was going on they should simply say, "The Lord needs them." Jesus even promised them the person would send them right away.

Notice how Jesus uses his power as God to provide the donkeys for himself that would fulfill the prophecy given in Zechariah. He knew where the donkeys were. He gave the right words that would cause the man to let the disciples have the donkey. Jesus never used his power as God to make his life easier on this earth, or even to take away some of the suffering for our sin. Here he uses his power as God, not for himself, but to fulfill a prophecy that would help the people believe in him.

Here is the prophecy again, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'See your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of donkey.'" It appears from what is told us that the disciples placed their clothes on the mother donkey and the colt, and that Jesus rode both donkeys into Jerusalem. Critics of the Bible have said there are inconsistencies in the gospel accounts. Did Jesus ride on the mother donkey, or on the foal of the donkey, or did he ride on both? One of the gospel accounts tells us that no one ever rode the colt before. How could Jesus ride that donkey without having the young donkey buck and twist to get him off his back? Has anyone ever tried to ride a horse that has never been ridden before? On the family farm we tried to ride the young heifers, but always we were bucked off. Jesus was in total control of these lowly beasts of burden to fulfill the prophecy set forth in Zechariah.

When we see how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah, we are reminded this morning of dozens of prophecies Jesus carefully fulfilled during his suffering and death for our sin. For example, in Psalm 22 the Messiah says that they would pierce his hands and feet. Jesus allowed the Roman soldiers to use a nail such as this (show spike) and nail his hands and feet to the cross to fulfill that specific prophecy. Psalm 22 predicted that Jesus would suffer such terrible thirst his tongue would stick to the roof of his mouth. Jesus fulfilled that prophecy by refusing to take the wine vinegar that was offered to him as he was hanging on the cross. Psalm 22 predicted that they would gamble for the clothes of Jesus, and that is exactly what the Roman soldiers did with the clothes of Jesus after they nailed him to the cross. Isaiah 53 predicted that Jesus would be numbered with the transgressors. That prophecy was fulfilled when they crucified Jesus with one thief on his right and the other on his left.

Let me illustrate this morning for us why these prophecies are so important for us. When you go to the gasoline station to buy fuel for your car, you notice three grades of fuel usually 87, 91, and 93 octane rating. There is also another nozzle at some stations for #2 diesel. It is usually marked with a green and designed to not fit into the neck of your fuel tank. You don't want to reach for the diesel fuel and put it into the gasoline engine or it will ruin your car.

When it comes to your eternal salvation, you want to put your hope and trust in the right place. The fulfilled prophecies of Jesus life, death and resurrection, point to him as the Christ, the one that will do the job right and save you. Jesus could have walked

into Jerusalem. He could have ridden on a mule or a horse, or even rode in a chariot. He purposely rode on a donkey, and the foal of donkey, so he would fulfill precisely this Old Testament prophecy, to let us know this morning that we are putting our trust in the right place for our hope of eternal life. If you have an emergency situation what number do you call? Do you call 123, or 456, or 892? No, every one knows, even the little children know the right number to dial is always 911. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to show us beyond a doubt this morning that we are putting our hope and trust for eternal life in the right place.

Have you ever flown over the ocean to Hawaii and been amazed at how much water is in the Pacific Ocean? What is one tiny drop compared to all the water in the ocean? So it is with eternity. In comparison to eternity, my little life on this earth is like a drop of water compared to the ocean. Yet, my life is important because it is an opportunity to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Isaiah 55 says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found." By riding into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey, Jesus is telling us we have put our trust in the right place. What we believe about Jesus in this short life on this earth, allows us to live forever in the place he has prepared for us.

### **He provides salvation**

The Old Testament prophecy that said the Messiah would come to Jerusalem on a lowly donkey also said that he would be righteous and have salvation. The people had high hopes for Jesus that he would save them. That is why they welcomed him the way they did. It says that a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. It was their way of welcoming Jesus and saying to him, "We want you to be our king!"

Notice also that they shouted out loud, as loud as they could. Three of the gospel accounts speak about these loud shouts, and another gospel account says that they sang loud praises. How did the people know what to sing? They sang what was most familiar to them, the great words of Psalm 118 that included phrases such as, "Blessed is who comes in the name of the Lord." That psalm began with the great words, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever." It includes words such as "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done." Just to illustrate how these people spontaneously sang, let me illustrate with a familiar song and see if you can respond spontaneously, "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound.. (wait for response) I once was lost... (wait for response.)"

The people were excited that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem and fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, because they had high hopes that Jesus would change their lives. They wanted him to bring glory back to the nation of Israel. They wanted him to lift them out of poverty by his mighty miracles. What are you going to do with the stimulus check you receive from your government later this year? Jesus with his power to perform miracles could give them what ever they wanted. They wanted him to help them live better lives so they could earn God's favor. They wanted him to even rid the land of the heathen Romans. What they did not want was Jesus to come and allow himself to be arrested, allow himself to be nailed to a cross, and allow himself to suffer and die for their sins. This was not the kind of Savior they had in mind for their lives.

O my dear Christians look at Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem on the lowly donkey. Look at his hands as he holds on to the neck of the donkey. Look at his legs as he balances on the back. He is the mighty God, whose hands created the world and all things. He holds on to keep from falling off. How true are the words read in our second lesson for this day from Philippians 2, "He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross."

Look at the body of Jesus riding on the lowly donkey and think of how it will be badly beaten, then dragged through the streets and then nailed to the cross. Listen as Jesus breathes his last words, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." Watch as his body slumps over in death. The Christian faith is the only religion in the world that has the mighty God become one of us and then offer his body as the source of salvation. It is the only religion of the world that teaches what we produce in our bodies on this earth can never make us acceptable to God.

The other day I was reading from Psalms in my personal devotions and I came across these words, "God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand any who seek God. Everyone has turned away they have together become corrupt." When you read words like this you realize how corrupt everything becomes in your life. There is no hope in what we produce in our bodies here on this earth. That is why we look to the body of Jesus as the pure hope of pardon for all sin. That is why we cry out with a loud voice, "Hosanna, Lord save us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Amen.