

**April 13, 2014
Palm Sunday**

"King Jesus Rides on a Donkey"

MATTHEW 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ "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.'" ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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!" ¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

I love Palm Sunday. I recall even as a child how special that Jesus did not choose to ride into Jerusalem on a mighty war horse. Instead he chose a lowly donkey to show us how much he loves and how he was willing to do everything necessary to rescue us from our sin.

You have seen the little donkeys that transport people in remote and backward places such as Afghanistan. It is almost comical, is it not, as you see these donkeys carry a full grown man up the side of the mountain with his legs almost touching the ground. The comical character in the western movie is made even more comical as he tries to ride a little burro or donkey.

Jesus is no pathetic, comical character as he rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He is the conquering hero, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is ready to go to war against the sin that has destroyed our lives and made us unacceptable to the God who created us. Look at your king this morning with your amazing eyes of faith given to you by the Holy Spirit. See him in total control. See him as your Lord and God. See him as your loving Savior.

King Jesus comes to you in total control

King Jesus is in total control the situation as he rides into Jerusalem appearing to be so meek and mild. As they approach Jerusalem, he tells his disciples, "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. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." Jesus is in control. He knows there is a mother donkey and its colt tied up in the village nearby. He knows that when his disciples are

asked why they are taking the donkeys, the owner will let them have them if they simply say, "The Lord has need of them."

Why did Jesus need this donkey to ride into Jerusalem? Was he tired from the several days of walking it had taken to get to Jerusalem? No, he needed this animal because he wanted to show us how much he is willing to give himself for us. The humble little donkey is capable of bearing large loads. But think of it. Jesus is bearing an even greater load. Don't let Jesus' humble appearance deceive you. He carries the heavy load of our sin. The prophet Isaiah said: "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." He bears the heavy load of our sin and all the punishment that goes with it. As we sing in the hymn, "I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God. He takes them all and frees us from the accursed load."

King Jesus is in total control. He needed that donkey to fulfill the words of Scripture written hundreds of years before. "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: '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.'" Critics say the Bible is not true because there is confusion over whether Jesus rode two donkeys into Jerusalem or one. The prophecy was very specific. It said that Jesus would ride the foal or colt of the mother donkey.

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament predictions with great specificity. He knew there will be times when we face critics of the Bible who challenge us with the words, "How do you know the Bible is true?" One of the reasons we believe it is true is because hundreds of specific predictions about Jesus recorded in the Old Testament over a span of a thousand years were fulfilled with careful specificity. Old Testament predictions are not like the predictions that you find in a Chinese fortune cookie, so general they apply to anything such as "You will have a nice day." Psalm 22 predicted precisely that Jesus would be so thirsty that his tongue would stick to the roof of his mouth. Jesus allowed himself to experience such thirst and finally said, "I thirst" so the Scripture would be fulfilled. King Jesus wants us to see how he fulfilled every word of the Old Testament that was written about him.

King Jesus comes to you as your Lord and God

King Jesus wants you to know that even though he is riding on a lowly donkey he is our Lord and God. "The disciples went and did as Jesus instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them." It appears here that Jesus rode the mother donkey and also the colt as well. Another gospel account tells us that this colt had never been ridden before.

How could Jesus ride a donkey that had never been ridden before? How did he know where the colt and its mother would be tied? Jesus wants us to see and believe even though he looks poor and humble, he is the very Lord and God who created this animal along with all the other animals of the world.

How amazing that the hands that created the world are now holding onto this animal so he does not fall off. Joyfully we proclaim to each other, "That's my King. That's my Lord and God." Not everyone saw Jesus that way. Some said, "This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth." Is that all Jesus is? Just a prophet? Don't you feel like running up to these

people and saying, "No, No, No, this is our Lord and God?"

Some day when Jesus returns in glory he will come on clouds of glory. He told the Jewish leaders who falsely condemned him, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." As our reading said this morning, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

When George Fredrick Handel was composing his famous *Messiah*, it is said that his assistant called out his name and no one answered. He went to his room and found him crying with tears streaming down his face, not tears of sorrow but tears of Jesus. He just had finished putting together the musical score and words for the well known "Hallelujah Chorus." He allegedly told his co-worker, "I have just seen the face of God." When King James II heard this for the first time he stood in awe and respect. When Queen Victoria went to a presentation of the *Messiah* her assistants advised her not to stand as the common people were accustomed to do when they heard the "Hallelujah Chorus." She could not contain her emotions and feelings. The great queen stood and bowed her head to honor her greater Monarch, her King of kings and Lord of lords.

We cannot contain our emotions and feelings. We have to confess as Thomas did when he saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead, "My Lord and my God."

King Jesus comes to you as your Savior

Now see the large crowd of people coming to welcome Jesus. "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road." See yourself in that large Palm Sunday crowd. "Yes, I was there. I heard someone running down the street saying, 'Jesus is coming.' I ran with the crowd through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, down into the Kidron Valley and up the road to Mount of Olives. I saw them waving palm branches and others are taking off their cloaks to lay them in front of Jesus. Someone shouted out the words from Psalm 118 when we go up the temple to worship, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Soon we were singing, everyone was singing, I'll never forget that moment.

"Hosanna. Hosanna means "Lord save us!" Here is how the words occur in Psalm 118, "O Lord, save us, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Save us from what? Government oppression? Economic recession? Bouts of depression? Within that large crowd were the many who believed Jesus could do it all. Had he not raised people from the dead? Had he not fed 5000 with only five loaves and two fish? Save us Jesus. Make us successful and prosperous. When Jesus did not fit their wants, they quickly turned on him with disgust and disdain and disappointment as he was dying on the cross.

Have you ever known someone who was disappointed with Jesus because he did not give them what they wanted? Jennifer was about ten years old when she was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She loved worship and she loved to learn about Jesus her Savior in Sunday school. Then she told the people who brought her to church

she did not want to come any more. She had prayed for a horse and Jesus did not give her a horse so she wanted nothing more to do with hearing God's Word and learning more about him.

Jesus gives you what you need in life more than anything else. He saves you from your sin. The thought came to me this week. What if the sin of idolatry is much deeper than just worshiping an idol or loving money more than I should or being too hooked on myself? What if it includes being so preoccupied with what is happening in my life that I forget about the Lord? When you come to know the truth about yourself you realize there is nothing that you can produce in this body or this life that can ever please God or pay for what I do wrong.

Look at the hands of Jesus holding on to the donkey one more time. These are the hands of God. They will be nailed to the cross for your sins and mine. Look at the body of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem one more time. That body of Jesus lived the perfect life you could never live. That body will be raised to life again. Jesus wanted to ride into Jerusalem on this lowly donkey to assure us this morning beyond any doubt that he will do everything necessary to earn our forgiveness and give us peace with God. I love Palm Sunday and I know you do also. Thank you King Jesus for riding into Jerusalem on a donkey so that we never forget how much you love us and care about us. Amen.