

Pray

Read Matthew 21:1-11

¹ When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, ² telling them, 'Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once.'

⁴ This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:

⁵ Tell Daughter Zion,
'See, your King is coming to you,
gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt,
the foal of a donkey.'

⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt; then they laid their clothes on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their clothes on the road; others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road. ⁹ Then the crowds who went ahead of him and those who followed shouted:

Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar, saying, 'Who is this?' ¹¹ The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Introduction

Imagine a man named Eliakim. Eliakim is a Pharisee. He knows His Bible. And has memorised Zechariah. He can recite the promise from memory. Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Eliakim prays that Messiah would come every morning. Every evening. For decades. He dreams of a warrior-king. A conqueror-king. A king on a white horse. A king who will sweep away the Romans. And restore the throne of David. Eliakim debates the timing of the king's coming with his friends. He watches the signs. And he is certain the time is near.

Eliakim and his family are in Jerusalem for Passover. The city is bursting with pilgrims. The streets choke with bodies. The air is thick with hope and tension. Every conversation turns to the same question. Is this the year? Is the Messiah coming?

He has heard rumours. A miracle-worker from Galilee. A prophet, they say. Who heals the sick. Who raises the dead. But is this the Messiah? Eliakim is sceptical. The Messiah will come from Bethlehem. Not Nazareth. The Messiah will ride a warhorse. Not walk the dusty roads of Galilee.

Then Eliakim hears a noise. A commotion from the Mount of Olives. A crowd. Growing louder and louder. Voices rising. His heart pounds. He pushes through the narrow streets. He longs to see a conqueror. Armour. Horses. Swords. A king ready to fight for his people.

The crowd parts. And He sees a man. On a donkey. This is what I have waited for Eliakim wonders?

Is this what I have waited for? That question divides Jerusalem. It divides the people. And it will even divide this room. The answer depends on who you believe the man on the donkey is.

Let us turn to Matthew 21 and meet the King.

1) The intentionality of the King (Matthew 21:1-5)

¹ Jesus and His disciples are approaching Jerusalem. They reach Bethphage at the Mount of Olives. They are about 1.5 kilometres from the city gates. From the summit you look out over the Temple Mount. Then Jesus stops. He sends two disciples ahead with precise instructions.

² Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once.

Jesus is not making travel plans. He is taking sovereign control. He is not reacting to His circumstance. Jesus is orchestrating circumstances. He asserts His authority before He even enters the city. Jesus will not be a victim of the week to come. He is the divine author of passion week.

Matthew pauses his narrative. He wants you to understand. ⁴ This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: ⁵ Tell Daughter Zion, 'See, your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

Matthew 21:5 fuses two Old Testament texts. Isaiah 62:11 announces salvation to Zion. Zechariah 9:9 announces the coming King. Together they prophesy that the righteous, humble King will come riding on a donkey.

The crowd understood these symbols. A king on a horse meant war. A king on a donkey meant peace. Solomon rode David's mule at his anointing. Zechariah 14 promised the Lord would stand on the Mount of Olives. Jesus is not being subtle. He is deliberate. Intentional. Unmistakable. He is announcing Himself as the Lord, the Prince of Peace.

The crowd sees the symbols. They recognise the King. But they reinterpret the donkey through their own expectations. They want peace from Rome. Political peace. Earthly peace. They want a King who will fight for them. Their praise is real. Yet their understanding is shallow. They see a conqueror. Jesus comes as a servant.

Jesus sovereignly orchestrates His entry. He fulfils prophecy. He asserts His identity as Jerusalem's humble King.

The King has set the stage. Now the crowd will respond. Some will praise. Others will linger in confusion.

2) The praise of those who recognise their King (Matthew 21:6-9)

⁶ The disciples go. They do exactly what Jesus directed them. ⁷ They bring the donkey and the colt. They lay their clothes on them. Jesus sits on them. The donkey, with the colt walking beside. A symbol peace and humility.

Then the road comes alive. ⁸ A very large crowd spreads their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. This is not a quiet procession. This is homage. They are rolling out the red carpet for their King.

Then the crowd erupts. ⁹ The crowds who went ahead of him and those who followed shout. They shout, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Hosanna means Save now! It is a plea. It is praise. It is both. They call Him the Son of David! That is covenant language. They are saying, You are the promised heir. You sit on David's throne. They know their Bibles. They remember **2 Samuel 7**.

They quote **Psalm 118**. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! A psalm sung at the great festivals. It was a messianic shout of hope. The crowd is declaring, You are the Anointed One. You are our Messiah.

Then they look up. Hosanna in the highest heaven! This is not earthbound praise. They are calling on heaven itself to join. They see Jesus as heaven's ambassador. The Saviour sent from God.

I have watched the Boks run out at Loftus Versfeld a couple of times. The roar shakes the stadium. Strangers grab each other. Voices crack. A tear of pride rolls down my cheek as 52,000 South Africans sing our national anthem. Joy without restraint. A crowd pouring out their hope.

That is what happens on this road. A very large crowd. Two crowds merge. Cloaks fall to the ground. Branches wave in the air. Voices rise. They are not passive. They are not polite. They are raucous. Undignified. Unforgettable. Joy-filled.

The crowds recognise their deliverer, erupting in raucous celebration of Him as King, Messiah, and Saviour. Their praise rests on a partial understanding. They see a King. They long for deliverance. Jesus will give them something greater.

The King has been praised. Now the city will respond.

3) The confusion of those who miss the King (Matthew 21:10-11)

¹⁰ Jesus enters Jerusalem. The procession reaches the city gates. Then the mood shifts. The whole city was in an uproar.

The word uproar means stirred. Shaken. Agitated. This is not joyful celebration. This is bewildering noise. The city that should have been waiting for her King does not even recognise Him.

The people of Jerusalem ask, Who is this?

Not, Is this the King? They do not even ask that. Their question exposes their unbelief. The priests, the scholars, the religious elite—they should know the prophecies. They had the scrolls. They taught the people. Yet when the prophesied King arrives, they do not know Him.

¹¹ The crowds on the road answer. This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.

It is not a denial. A prophet is still a messenger from God. But listen to what they no longer say. Moments ago they shouted, Son of David! They declared Him Messiah. Now, standing before the skeptical city, their confession shrinks. They fall back on safer, smaller words. The city's confusion is contagious, and even the crowd that shouted Hosanna begins to pull back. Their praise is not extinguished, but it is faltering. Diluted by the weight of Jerusalem's unbelief.

Recall Eliakim. He has waited his whole life for the Messiah. He knows Zechariah. He knows Isaiah. Now he stands in Jerusalem watching. He sees the crowd's fading praise. He hears the city's sceptical questions. His lifelong anticipation has collided with a humble man on a donkey.

He must choose. Will he join the praise? Or will he linger in confusion?

The city's agitated response exposes the division. Some recognise the King. Others miss Him entirely. Jesus arrives as the prophesied King, dividing people into praise or confusion.

The King has entered. The division is clear. The gospel now explains why.

Connect to the gospel

The King has entered. The division is clear. The crowd shouts praise. The city stirs in confusion.

But the King knows what lies ahead. He has already told His disciples. Three times in Matthew's gospel, He has spoken of His death. He knows the temple confrontation waits beyond the gate. He knows the religious leaders will reject Him. He knows His own people will turn against Him. He knows the cross is waiting for Him. This is no victory parade. This is a step-by-step procession to the cross.

The crowd saw a conqueror who would overthrow Rome. Jesus saw Calvary. The crowd wanted political liberation. Jesus came to give something greater. He came to save them from an enemy far worse than Rome. Sin. Death. And judgment to come.

Zechariah promised a humble King who brings salvation. Isaiah declared Zion's King would come. Now He rides on a donkey's colt. Fulfilled prophecy. Open identity. But salvation would not come through a sword. It would come through a cross.

Hosanna! Save now! That was their cry. They meant it for political freedom. But God meant it for something far greater. The gospel redefines Hosanna. It is not a cry for a better government. It is a cry for a new heart. It is not a plea for earthly peace. It is a desperate call for eternal salvation.

And God answered that cry. The King went to the cross. He bore the sin of the world. He took the judgment His people deserved. He died. And three days later, the tomb stood empty. Death could not hold Him. He rose. Victorious. Alive. Forever.

This is the King who entered Jerusalem on a donkey. This is the King who went to the cross. This is the King who rose from the grave and will return to reign.

His identity still divides. Some praise. Others linger in confusion. Which will you be? This is the central call of this passage, and the central call of my message to you today. Praise your King who saves.

The King has made His way to the cross. He has conquered the grave. Now He calls you to respond. Will you praise Him? Or will you remain confused? The application flows from this.

Believers

Praise your King who saves.

Do not limit your praise to a few songs on a Sunday morning. That is not the worship Jesus seeks. The King who entered Jerusalem now lives. He is not distant. He is not silent. He is present.

So praise Him with your lips. Speak of Him with your mouth. Tell your children and grandchildren why He matters. Let your family hear His name on your tongue.

Praise Him with your life. Let your work be worship. Let your decisions display His worth. Let your marriage reflect His faithfulness.

Testify to His person before your colleagues. Before your neighbours. Before those who do not yet know Him. They do not need your opinions. They need your witness.

Let your daily walk be a loud Hosanna. Not a whisper. Not a quiet nod. A life poured out in praise.

Our King is worthy. Praise Him.

Unbelievers

Praise your King who saves.

The King rode on a donkey in humility. That was His first coming. He will return on a warhorse in conquest. That is His second coming. Do not wait until then to decide.

Do not linger in doubt. Do not be like Jerusalem. Confused. Stirred. But unchanged. You have heard the truth. You have seen the evidence. Now you must choose.

Bend the knee today. Not tomorrow. Today. Let go of your expectations of who God should be and how He should work. Instead surrender to who He has revealed Himself to be in Jesus.

Shout Hosanna. Cry out to Him. Save now. He hears. He answers.

Trust in His death. He died for sinners. For you. Trust in His resurrection. He lives to save. To keep. To bring you home.

Be saved.

Do not walk out of this room unchanged. The King still divides. Choose praise.

Conclusion

Eliakim stands in the city. The noise fades. The crowd disperses. The man on the donkey moves toward the temple.

He watches the King disappear into Jerusalem. He feels the weight of the moment. His lifelong anticipation has met a humble man on a donkey. His warrior-king did not come. His conqueror did not ride.

But something stirs in him. A question he cannot ignore. Who is this?

He saw the sovereign King orchestrate His entry. He heard the crowd shout praise. He feels the city's confusion pressing in.

Will he cling to his expectations? Will he linger in doubt like Jerusalem? Or will he bend the knee to the King who saves?

What if our imaginary friend Eliakim believed?

The same question stands before you.

You have seen the King's intentionality. He is not a victim. He is the author of the cross. You have heard the crowd's praise. Their Hosanna was real, even if partial. You have felt the city's confusion. The religious elite had the scrolls and missed the King.

Now you must decide.

The King who rode on a donkey goes to the cross. He rises from the grave. He will return on a cloud to reign. He is the King of promise. The Messiah of hope. The Saviour from heaven.

Do not be like Jerusalem. Confused. Stirred. But unchanged.

Be like the crowd that recognised their deliverer. Shout Hosanna. Trust in His death. Trust in His resurrection. Let your daily walk be a loud Hosanna.

Praise your King who saves.

Amen

Close in prayer

Benediction

Philippians 2:9-11, God has highly exalted Jesus and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.