



Pastor Mike O'Neill
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Ashes to Fire, Week 6
With Jesus on the Way to Calvary
Matthew 21:1-11

“Who is this?” (21:10)

- **Omniscient** (21:1-2)

- **King** (21:2)

- **God** (21:3)

- **Prophesied One** (21:4-5)
- *Zechariah 9:9*

- **Son of David** (21:6)
- *1 Kings 1:32-40; 2 Samuel 18:9, 19:26*

- **King** (21:7-8)
- *2 Kings 9:13; Isaiah 40:3-4*

- **God** (21:6-8)

- **Savior** (21:9)
- *Psalm 118:25-26*

- **Messiah** (21:1-2)
- *Psalm 118:25-26; Matthew 27:22-25*

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West Valley Church
Michael O'Neill

A2F: With Jesus on the Way to Calvary
Ashes to Fire, Year A
(Matthew 21:1-11)¹

Video

It was October 29, 1927 when Charles Lindbergh was given a ticker-tape parade in New York City in honor of his solo flight of the Atlantic Ocean. I suppose I should explain what a ticker tape parade is: Ticker tape was the earliest form of digital electronic communications. It was used to transmit stock price information over telegraph lines, used from 1870 to 1970. It was a paper strip about an inch wide that ran through a machine called a stock ticker. The term "ticker" came from the sound made by the machine as it printed. So ticker tape could be hundreds of feet long at a time.

When a parade was held for a hero of some kind through the streets of New York in between the skyscrapers, people would throw old used ticker tape out the windows onto the parade below.

During Lindberg's parade, 750,000 lbs. (375 tons) of ticker tape poured onto the streets. But the biggest ticker-tape parade was on March 1, 1962, for astronaut John Glenn after he became the first American to orbit the earth in a spacecraft. The New York sanitation department cleaned up 3,474 tons of ticker tape, confetti and other paper along a 7-mile route of celebration.

Everybody loves a parade. And it was no different when Jesus came to town. It is estimated that there were over 2.5 million people celebrating in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' parade.

When Jesus rode into town it was the festival of Passover – a national religious holiday commemorating the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt when the death angel killed every firstborn male, except for the Jewish homes that had killed a sacrificial lamb and wiped the blood of that lamb across the doorposts of their home. For those homes, the death angel "passed over" their household. So every year the Jews would celebrate Passover. The Law required that every adult male

¹ Primary resources are William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Rev. and updated, vol. 2, The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), Ryken, Philip. "The Coming of the King." Preaching Today. Accessed April 06, 2017. (<http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/transcriptseries/thehopeofholyyweek/comingoftheking032006.html>), John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Matthew* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001),

who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was required to go to the Temple to sacrifice a lamb, but many religious pilgrims would make the annual trip from all over the Middle East.

There is record of a Roman governor who took a census and determined that over 250,000 lambs were sacrificed at the Temple during Passover. The Law required there to be one lamb sacrificed for every ten people, so it's easy to estimate that there were at least 2.5 million Jews in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

When this event happened, it was very significant in the story of the life of Jesus. There would be no turning back from here; everything was set into motion that would lead to the crucifixion and death of Christ. For the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, this event brings to conclusion the things he's been writing about regarding Jesus. All of the previous twenty come to their conclusive statements during this parade. The parade itself takes place between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is really more like a hill for us, and the Bible tells us that it is a Sabbath Day's Journey from one to the other. Jewish Law required that a person could only walk about a half mile on the Sabbath; any more walking than that would be considered work and be a violation of the Law about not working on the Sabbath. So it's a short parade, but a lot happens in this brief half mile.

Many of us have been reading together the daily Scripture passages that are listed in the "Ashes to Fire" devotional that is taking us from Ash Wednesday in February all the way to Pentecost Sunday in June. How is that coming? If you aren't reading with us, you can pick up a copy at the Welcome Center for a \$5 donation – we still have just a few copies left. But if you've been reading, you've noticed that all of our Gospel readings up until today have been from which Gospel? John. But today's reading is from Matthew. That might seem strange, but think about it this way. It's like switching camera angles. If you were watching a television program, you would get bored if the show was shot all from just one camera. That's the way shows used to be filmed. Now, there are so many camera angles that you don't even realize that they are changing cameras multiple times within one scene. Here's a bit of trivia for you: the first television series to use two cameras was the Andy Griffith Show. I know that because I'm a big Andy Griffith Show fan. I know lots of useless information about the Andy Griffith Show.

Well, the switch in today's reading is like changing from one camera – John's Gospel – to another camera – Matthew's Gospel. And this angle gives us some very revealing perspective.

The crowd has raised the key question that Matthew is answering with this scene for us. Matthew wants us to understand exactly who Jesus is; if we had been reading in Matthew up to this point, we would notice that the question is looming larger and larger. So the crowd finally puts into words what we would have been thinking all along:

"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked,
"Who is this?" (Mt. 21:10, niv)

From here on in, we are going to see how that question is answered multiple times over in this passage.

The first glimpse of an answer to this question comes in verses one and two:

Omniscient (21:1-2)

Right away, right out of the gate, at the very beginning we see something interesting: Jesus tells his disciples to go the next village and there they would find a donkey tied up with her colt beside her. Many modern scholars have read this passage and they make the assumption that this is an example of Jesus' organizational skills – that Jesus made arrangements in advance with the donkey owner so that Jesus could take this premeditated ride on the route from Mt. Olives to Jerusalem. With our obsession with organizational skills and administrative planning, we like to think that Jesus practiced the skill of scheduling his week. But I've got to tell you that you just can't get that out of this passage, and there's nothing like that in the original manuscript either. The clear implication of this passage is that Jesus had some kind of divine foreknowledge about this donkey and her colt.

My friends, Jesus *knows*. He's omniscient; he just *knows*. He knows what you are doing. You might think you can hide sin from him, but he knows. He also knows what you need before you can even ask. He knows what is ahead for you. You might not know what is coming or what to do, but you can ask him – Jesus *knows*.

Matthew wants us to know that this wasn't advanced planning on the part of the human Jesus; this was something only the divine Christ would have been able to foreknow. This is shown even more when we see it coupled with the next indicator, which is in verse two, and that is...

King (21:2)

It appears as though Jesus told his disciples to commit larceny by stealing the donkey and the colt. At least it seems that way to us; if Jesus didn't make prior arrangements with the owners, then he told his disciples to just walk up and steal the donkey and her colt. There's more than what appears is going on. There is something that was significant in their culture that we've lost in ours.

It was understood in their culture that a king could requisition the property of any of his subjects whenever he might have need of it. The thought was that all the property within the king's kingdom ultimately belonged to the king. So if the king needed something, he would merely send his emissaries to acquire it. So Jesus is clearly identifying himself as some kind of king who has the authority to use whatever he needs for his divine purposes. Do you understand that everything you have belongs to the king? If Jesus needs something that you have, and he wants you to give it away to someone in need, he has every right to acquire it for his purposes. Do you understand that? Or, when Jesus asks you to give, will you tell the King, "No.?" Jesus is the king.

More than a king, though, Jesus has authority because in verse three he declares that he is:

God (21:3)

Jesus explains it this way:

“Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the **Lord** needs them, and he will send them right away.” (Matthew 21:2b-3, niv)

Now we read that and we think that he’s simply referring to himself as Lord, or “master.” The word “Lord” that Jesus uses is much more clear in the original Greek than it is in English. The word that Jesus uses in the Greek is “kyrios,” which was used for a property owner, or a manager. This would be in keeping with the previous description of Jesus as a king. But here’s what’s interesting: the word is also the primary name for God in the Old Testament, and Jesus clearly intended to use the word both ways – as king, like we just saw, and as God.

So if the owner of the donkey and her colt were to ask the disciples what they were doing with his animals, the disciples were instructed to tell the man, literally, that the real owner and king – God himself – needed them.

Jesus himself is God. God owns everything, by right, because he created everything – including you. Do you understand that by rights, God owns you? When you accept Christ, you aren’t giving him your life. You are confessing the sin that you arrogantly thought you belonged to yourself. Because God has graciously come to earth in the person of Christ and given his life for you, you are now able to return yourself to God’s ownership. We are simply returning to God what was his to begin with. He is God.

In case you needed more validation, Jesus isn’t God simply because he says so, in verses four and five we learn that Jesus is the...

Prophesied One (21:4-5) (*Zechariah 9:9*)

Matthew points out that the unfolding event is about to fulfill a prophecy made by Zechariah in the Old Testament about the Messiah. Zechariah made these statements about the Messiah 600 years before this event, and they are about to be fulfilled. When Matthew referred to this 600 year old prophecy, it gave yet another reason for the disciples to say that the **Lord** needs the animals. Zechariah’s prophecy spoke of Israel’s king coming to the people. Matthew is using this passage to provide yet another answer the question that the crowd asked, and that any reader of the gospel asks: “Who is this?” Matthew is showing that Jesus is the one who was prophesied about.

There is a fable told of the donkey that Jesus rode on. The story says that the next day, the donkey awakened, his mind still savoring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life. Never before had he felt such a rush of pleasure and pride.

He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. "I'll show myself to them," he thought.

But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind. "Throw your garments down," he said crossly. "Don't you know who I am?"

They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move.

"Miserable heathens!" he muttered to himself. "I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They will remember me."

But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the market place.

"The palm branches! Where are the palm branches!" he shouted. "Yesterday, you threw palm branches!"

Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother.

"Foolish child," she said gently. "Don't you realize that without Jesus, you are just an ordinary donkey?"

Just like the donkey that carried Jesus in Jerusalem, we are most fulfilled when we are in the service of Jesus Christ. Without him, all our best efforts amount to nothing. When we lift up Christ, though, we are no longer ordinary people, but key players in God's plan to redeem the world.

Whenever Jesus the omniscient king and God – the one who was prophesied about – whenever Jesus gets involved, amazing things happen, and it can be true in your life, too. And true to God's Word, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy about being the...

Son of David (21:6)

The crowd of Jews gathered in Jerusalem understood the Old Testament very well. Of course, for them, it wasn't the Old Testament, it was simply the Bible; there was no New Testament yet. But they all knew that the Old Testament suggests that the heir of David would ride a donkey to his coronation. Solomon, David's son did, according to 1 Kings 1:32–40. Absalom was David's son who attempted to take over the throne of David, so he rode in on a donkey. (2 Samuel 18:9) And Mephibosheth, an adopted heir to throne of David, rode a donkey as well. (2 Samuel 19:26) Jesus did this also in the tradition of the prophets, who would often "act out" the prophecies of God for the people so that they would fully understand what God was saying. For example, our daily reading has been taking us through the prophet Jeremiah. In a chapter that we will soon read, Jeremiah reminded the kings that God owned all the creatures in the world, by putting a yoke around his own neck and shoulders and walking around with it on. Well just like that, Jesus is giving us a visual example of the prophetic truth that he is a king, descended from the very line of King David.

So in Matthew's writing of this story, the symbolism was intentional by Matthew and was understood by the crowds in Jerusalem that day. By riding on the donkey Jesus laid claim to the title Son of David, King of Israel. God made sure, down to the smallest detail, that there would be verification of whom Jesus was. You can be sure that in your life God will attend to your needs down to the smallest detail; he did so for Jesus, you can be sure he will do so for you as his child.

God had made it clear that the Messiah would be a descendent of King David himself (Isaiah 11:1; 2 Samuel 7:12), and this event validated that truth of Jesus.

There was another validation in verses seven and eight that Jesus was indeed...

King (21:7-8)

Once again, to make sure we realize this point, the event reiterates Jesus' kingship. First, Matthew's recording of the event makes note that Jesus "sat down" on the animal. This might not mean much to us, but in that culture, "sitting" was the normal posture for kings. There's a second indicator of Jesus' kingship, and that is the donkey. Today, we don't think much of donkeys. We think they are stupid, stubborn, and small. There are characterizations of them in cartoons, and they are the "butt" of many of our jokes. But believe it or not, they were considered an animal of nobility in Jesus' day. Anyone riding a donkey was either a king or nobility, or pretending to be that.

Finally, there is a third indicator. Not only is there a large crowd gathered for the processional, but the crowd is throwing down their coats and cloaks and palm branches on the ground in front of Jesus. Again, this seems somewhat strange to us, but the action made one statement, and one statement only: this act was a symbolic way to show that they were preparing the way for their king. (They knew this from precedents that were set in the Old Testament [2 Kings 9:13; Isaiah 40:3-4]).

When you come before Jesus, do you recognize him and welcome him as your king? We make much about the relationship we can have with Christ, and rightly so. It really is a relationship. But it is not a peer-to-peer relationship, like you would have with your friend. He is still, and always, will be a king and again in verses six through eight Jesus is...

God (21:6-8)

Again, the statement that Jesus is God is made clear by his entrance into the city. We've already said that the Passover was a significant annual event that brought Jews on a religious pilgrimage from all over the Middle East. The accepted way that these pilgrims would enter the city was by walking. If they were riding on horses or camels, they would get off their mounts and walk the road into the city. But Jesus *rode* in. He was making the statement that he wasn't an ordinary pilgrim coming to worship, but that he was actually the *object* of the worship; He was God himself coming into his house.

Every Sunday that we gather, God himself comes into his house, just like he does in every Christ-believing church.

Maybe you heard the story about the little boy who was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mom. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, dad?" Dad said, "You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved Palm Branches to honor him, so we got Palm Branches today." The little boy said, "Oh man! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

Every Sunday, Jesus shows up. He is the object of our worship. He is God and in verse nine he is...

Savior (21:9)

As Jesus entered the city and they put their cloaks and palm branches in front of him, they broke out into shouts of "Hosanna!" Now, we hear that word and we think it is similar to another Hebrew word that we use in worship, which is what? Hallelujah. Hallelujah means "Praise be to God," so we think Hosanna must be a similar variation. But it's not. Rather than a word of praise, it is a word of prayer. And they were actually quoting Scripture. Psalm 118:25-26 says...

"Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you." (Psalm 118:25-26, niv)

That first phrase, "Lord save us," is the word Hosanna! They were rightly praying to Jesus as King, God, prophesied One, Savior – the one who had come to save them from their sins.

And another interesting thing: see that last word – "you" – where it says, "from the house of the Lord we bless you"? Who is the "you" referring to? God. Well, in the original Hebrew language, that word "you" is *plural*. Now why would that be? Because Jesus is God, is the Holy Spirit; God is all three, equally and fully and completely God, the three in one, the Trinity.

Hosanna is a prayer, acknowledging both that Jesus can save us from our sins and that he is the God who can do it, and the only One who can do it in your life. You can't do it yourself, no one else can. Only Jesus can save us.

I hope that is a regular part of your prayers whenever you approach Jesus, because in verse nine it is clear that Jesus is...

Messiah (21:1-2)

When the crowd quotes Psalm 118, they were quoting a well-known Psalm about the Messiah. It is one of at least 16 psalms that are called the "Messianic Psalms."

Over and over again, this passage emphasizes and culminates all that Matthew had written about to this point, by answering the question that the crowd asks for us:

“Who is this?” Jesus is the omniscient One, the One who was prophesied about, he is heir to the throne of David, he is King of all kings, he is God, he is Savior, he is Messiah.

Amazingly, with all this going on, the crowd answered their own question by responding with a less than full answer: “He is Jesus, the prophet from Galilee.” They still missed it – they still didn’t fully understand who Jesus was! My friends, after we’ve gone through all of this, please don’t miss it – please make sure you fully understand who he is.

And there’s one last word I want us to see in this. We often wonder how this crowd of spiritual pilgrims could make all these claims about Jesus, and then turn around the next day and shout for him to be crucified. It simply doesn’t make sense! Well, for one thing, it certainly shows how fickle and unstable we are in our faith and how driven by emotions we can be. But there’s something else, too: the crowds in this passage who welcomed and cried out to Jesus, God and King to save them, is not entirely the same crowd who called out for his execution by crucifixion in Matthew 27:22-25.

The crowds who welcomed and cried out to Jesus in prayer as their King and Savior and Messiah, were all peasants. Many of these people followed Jesus from Galilee to the Passover celebration. They were different than the city dwellers who called out for Jesus’ crucifixion. Please don’t miss this: Jesus is the King of the marginalized, the poor, and the humble. Jesus is Messiah and Savior for those *who know they need him*. He is King for those who have nothing else to depend on Him but him. But for those who are comfortable in this life, for those who think they’ve got what they need already, for those who don’t desperately long for him to save them – for those people Jesus is a threat to their comfort and security.

Which are you more like? I can tell you that, other than the immigrants and homeless and widows and orphans among us today, almost every one of us are more like the city dwellers, not the poor, praising, prayerful, peasants. If we were to look at our socioeconomic status and the geography of where we live, we are the city dwellers. The difference between peasants who praise and city dwellers who crucify is the awareness of their need; it is their humility, it is an attitude of the heart. You may be a city dweller, but you can be a spiritual peasant if you will forsake it all, give it all to the King who owns it anyway, and depend on him daily for everything. Daily, let’s cry out “Hosanna” – Lord save us! - to our King, God, Savior, Messiah.

Pray