

See, Your King Comes to You

Matthew 21:1-22

Key Verse: 21:5

“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

In chapters 21-25 of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus enters Jerusalem as the promised Messiah, Israel’s King, and begins to exert his authority. Jesus’ kingship and authority are spiritual in nature. Jesus came to destroy invisible enemies: sin, death, and the devil. Jesus defeats these enemies completely through his death and resurrection. This victory is manifest in real ways that show Jesus’ power is supreme. Yet Jesus does not transform the visible world right away into paradise. Jesus works according to God’s time schedule. Jesus promises the complete triumph of his reign when he comes again as King of Kings. Jesus wants us to have this hope burning in our hearts. Yet, in the meantime, we live in a kind of tension. We live in a world that is in conflict with our King due to the dominions and powers that remain opposed to him. Understanding our situation, Jesus teaches us how to live as his people in this world, as we eagerly await his glorious kingdom.

In today’s passage Jesus makes his triumphal entry. Jesus declares clearly that he is the promised Messiah, the King sent by God, who comes to reign over his people. Jesus reveals the nature of his kingship and his character as king. Many people, especially in the United States, have an allergy to the word “king.” Our forefathers obtained freedom from the rule of a monarch at the cost of their blood. We guard and defend this freedom. Some people feel that if they accept a king, their lives will be miserable. But this is not so. The Bible tells us of good kings who ruled with a shepherd’s heart for their people, like David. They brought peace and justice and prosperity to their people. This is especially true of King Jesus. Jesus restores harmony and order and paradise. His people welcome his reign. As we study today, let’s learn more about Jesus, God’s King, and accept him in our hearts. Let’s learn how to acknowledge his reign in our practical lives. This brings his blessing to us, our families, our community and our nation.

In verses 1-22, Jesus does three things that teach about his kingship. Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey (1-11). Jesus drives out businessmen from the temple (12-16). And Jesus curses a fig tree (17-22).

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I. Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey (1-11)

Look at verse 1. Jesus and his disciples came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. It is likely that they would have come over a hill, and suddenly into the full sight of Jerusalem. This was Jesus' destination. With the city spread out in a panorama before him, Jesus prepared his entrance. Jesus sent two disciples into the village ahead of them with instructions to untie a donkey and colt and bring them to him. People placed their cloaks on the animals and Jesus rode into Jerusalem on them (7). Why did Jesus do this? Look at verses 4-5. **"This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to Daughter Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"** Jesus did this to declare that he had come to Israel as the Messiah, the King sent by God. Here we learn several things about Jesus' kingship.

First, Jesus is the King sent by God. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus' entry fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah. This means that Jesus is the King who came from God. As such, Jesus submitted himself to God's will and ruled according to God's word and purpose. Even though God's will for Jesus was to be crushed and to suffer greatly on the cross, Jesus obeyed the Father God. Jesus' kingship is the exact manifestation of God's reign over mankind. This makes Jesus different than other kings. In the time of Samuel, God's people asked for a king to rule over them like all the other nations had. They expected this king to defend them from enemies and bring peace and victory to their land. However, God warned them that their king would claim rights that would make their lives painfully difficult, even reducing them to slavery (1 Sa 8:10-18). This was fulfilled in King Saul, who grieved God, lost his Spirit and became a destructive dictator. Kings who rule without God are usually subject to their own self-interest. They use others for their benefit, robbing their creativity, talent and honor. But Jesus is different. Jesus was sent by God and reflects God perfectly. Jesus reflects God's love - which always builds up others, God's holiness - which is the essence of perfection and imbues everything he does with purity, God's wisdom, power, and all the attributes of God. God loves us and reigns over us for our good. There is no problem he cannot solve. There is no enemy he cannot defeat. So Jesus coming as the King sent by God is really good news for mankind.

Second, Jesus is the gentle king. Verse 5 begins, **"Say to Daughter Zion..."** Jesus approached his people like a father to his precious daughter, with tenderness, appreciation and great affection. Jesus understood their anxieties and fears and

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sorrows and he spoke assuring words, comforting words, encouraging words to them. Jesus knew that they were too weak to come to him, so he came to them. Jesus came humbly and gently, riding on a donkey's colt. It must have looked almost humorous, as Jesus' feet nearly touched the ground on each side. Jesus was accompanied by country boy disciples, not well-equipped soldiers. Because Jesus is so gentle, he is approachable by anyone. Even little children were happy to come to Jesus and join his procession. Everyone felt that they would be accepted and welcomed by Jesus. Jesus is a gentle king. However, we should not confuse Jesus' gentleness with weakness. Jesus came in the name of the Lord, the mighty God. Jesus revealed his power in dealing with God's enemies. But this mighty power is clothed with gentleness.

Third, Jesus is the victorious Savior King. Zechariah 9:9, which Matthew quotes freely, includes the phrase, **“See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious....”** Jesus' life and ministry had been marked by victory over the powers that oppress mankind: the devil, sin and death. After receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus went into the desert and faced the devil in one-to-one spiritual combat. Jesus defeated the devil by standing on the word of God without wavering. From that time on, Jesus drove out demons with a word and set people free from their torment. Jesus told a paralyzed man, **“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”** Jesus proved his authority to forgive sins by healing the man's paralysis. Jesus accepted a public sinner, Matthew the tax collector, healed his sin-sickness, and raised him as a great man of God. A loving father told Jesus of his daughter, who had been sick and died. Jesus went to her, took her by the hand, and she got up alive. Jesus won the victory over death, sin and the devil. Jesus sealed that victory through his death on the cross and glorious resurrection. Jesus is the Savior King who can deliver us from all dark powers. Jesus gives us victory and rules over us with peace and love. One young woman has been struggling to manage her finances in this tight economy. Though it has been hard, she has resisted spending money on new clothes and beauty products. However, she found ingratitude in her heart. It was so distressing that she felt tormented and cried out to God for help. Then, as she listened to the word of God, she accepted Jesus into her heart. All of her distress vanished and she could have the peace of God and real joy. Thank you, Jesus, our Savior King!

Let's see how the coming of King Jesus impacted his disciples, the crowd, and the whole city of Jerusalem. In making his triumphal entry, Jesus told his disciples to bring a donkey and colt that belonged to another person. Jesus told them that if anyone said anything to them, they were to say, **“The Lord needs them,”** and Jesus promised that the owner would send them right away. Why did

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Jesus do this? He wanted to teach them his Lordship. Jesus is Lord of all creation, for he is God. The people who acknowledge his kingship, like the owner of the donkey, are willing to offer what they have for Jesus' purpose. The Lord has at his command innumerable resources of which only he is fully aware. As his disciples serve him, he may supply them with needed things through others in totally unexpected ways. The Lord will provide the means by which he wants to accomplish his work. This is why Hudson Taylor said, **"God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply."** Since the Lord has sent us into the college campuses of America for his purpose, we can believe he will supply whatever is needed to enable us to carry out his task of raising disciples among students. He will work in people's hearts and move them to commit their lives to him. He will work in the systems of universities and in businesses to open doors and provide what is needed for his work. Of course, we cannot go around claiming whatever we would like to have, saying, "The Lord needs them." But we can have great confidence that our Lord Jesus reigns over this world and be bold in carrying out his purpose for campus mission.

When the crowds saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, they began to spread their cloaks on the road and to cut branches and spread them on the road. For each one, it was personal participation in welcoming Jesus as King. Some went ahead of him and others followed behind, shouting, **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"** They welcomed him as the promised Messiah with praise and joy. This should be our attitude as well. When Jesus reigns as king in our hearts we cannot but praise and thank him. When we exude this kind of thanksgiving and joy, we can be a blessing to others. Though Jesus came on a donkey's colt, the shouts of praise for him stirred up the whole city and got everyone's attention (10). The city asked, **"Who is this?"** The crowds answered, **"Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee"** (11). When we praise Jesus for the wonderful things he has done, it is a powerful testimony to people of the world. Last week, nine young people were baptized. They shared beautiful testimonies of Jesus' forgiving grace with gratitude and joy. This pleased God and shook the powers of darkness. This kind of praise and thanksgiving should mark our lives always. This is why St. Paul wrote, **"Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"** (1 Th 5:16-18).

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II. Jesus enters the temple (12-17)

Upon entering Jerusalem, the first place Jesus went was the temple courts. These courts were supposed to be places of prayer for various groups including women and Gentiles. When Jesus arrived, he found people buying and selling there. Jesus drove them all out. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves (12). Then he said, **“It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers’”** (13). Here we learn that Jesus used his divine authority to honor God and to fulfill God’s purpose on earth. The temple was a place where people could meet God and find forgiveness of sins, spiritual healing, and the grace and wisdom to live as his people. This was necessary for the spiritual life of the nation. But this life had been cut off by the Jewish elite’s temple business. Jesus did not tolerate this. He challenged them with the word of God to repent and use the temple for God’s purpose. We should take warning from this. God’s house is a place of prayer, not a place of business. Fear of God and reverence for him should mark our attitude and conduct in God’s house. God’s house can be our church building, but it also means our own bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, **“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”**

As Jesus remained in the temple, many blind and lame people came to him. They had not been able to get in before, due to all the business traffic and animals. But now they came. They were marginalized and overlooked in that society. Yet Jesus valued them one by one and healed them. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6. This validated Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah promised by God. Many people were praising God, including the little children who had followed Jesus into the temple. However, the chief priests and teachers of the law implied that it was blasphemy. Jesus said to them, **“Have you never read, ‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise’?”** In the face of opposition, Jesus stood on God’s word and boldly and clearly identified himself as the Messiah. Furthermore, Jesus defended those who praised him as children of God. Then he left Jerusalem and spent the night in Bethany.

III. Jesus curses a fig tree (18-22)

Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it

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except leaves. Then he said to it, **“May you never bear fruit again!”** Immediately the fig tree withered. At first, this seems unlike gentle and humble Jesus. Did he curse the fig tree just because he was hungry and it had no fruit? Perhaps. But in light of the previous day’s events, there is a deeper reason why he did this. The tree can represent the nation Israel. God had blessed Israel with many great privileges, such as adoption to sonship, the divine glory of his presence, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and even the human ancestry of the Messiah (Ro 9:4-5). God gave them all these privileges to establish them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). But they had not fulfilled God’s will for them. They used his blessings for their own benefit and no more. They hindered the coming of the Messiah, and in fact were planning to kill him. Jesus’ curse of the fig tree foreshadows God’s divine judgment on the nation of Israel. When they did not produce the fruit that God desired, he would take away all of their privileges. This serves as a warning to us. We have received from our Lord Jesus a holy mission and many other blessings. He blesses us to use us for his world mission purpose. If we don’t bear his blessings well, we may lose them. It is so easy for us to be self-centered and to become lazy in evangelism and disciple-making. But we should remember that Jesus is looking for fruit from us. This is why we must pray that our gospel preaching and disciple-making ministries may be very fruitful for the glory of God.

When the disciples saw the withered fig tree, they were amazed and wondered about it. Jesus replied, **“Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”** Jesus wanted his disciples to experience his power in even greater ways than he had demonstrated. He cursed a fig tree, but he challenged them to move mountains. This may refer to the task of world mission. Jesus wants us to accomplish great things for him by the power of faith and prayer. President Ronald Reagan once said, “America is too great for small dreams.” In the same way, Jesus’ disciples are called to have a great prayer topic and vision that can change the world. We cannot live only for our own small success and the success of our children. Jesus challenges us to have faith that prays and to experience a miracle of God’s mighty power.

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus gave us the prayer topic, **“Your kingdom come....”** In the Great Commission, Jesus gave us the command to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and to go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus wants his kingdom to come to this world through us. For more than 20 years, we have prayed for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Recently,

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we found that this prayer topic was perceived as nationalistic and became habitual, so we took a break in chanting it together at the end of our worship services. However, Jesus teaches us to pray with a big prayer topic and with God's great vision and power in mind. So let's renew our prayer for America and for world mission but revise it just a little. Let's pray, **"Your kingdom come to us and through us...raise a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for your world mission purpose."** We will receive the answer to this prayer when we truly believe in King Jesus.