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Palm Sunday – Matthew 21:1-11 – Your King Comes, in Meekness and Majesty
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When the people of Israel woke up on that first Palm Sunday, they knew it not as the day when they would greet their coming King; this was the day when they would select their family's lamb for Passover. A year-old male without blemish or defect is what they chose, and they brought it home to live with them until the end of the week. Now think about how excited you and your kids get to have a new pet to play with, and you might be able to understand what the Jews went through on this day. You feed your lamb, you take care of it, maybe you give it toys to play with, you take it to the back yard to run and have fun, and in no time at all, it's part of the family and you've formed a bond that wasn't there before.

But then a few days later the time for the Passover celebration came, and that lamb that they had so often taken into their arms to love and hug and squeeze, they now had to take into their arms to slaughter for sacrifice. It must have seemed like such a paradox – such a seeming contradiction – as the blood of that innocent lamb ran red into the bowl beneath. Why did the *lamb* have to die? What did *it* do to deserve that?

Well, that was just a taste of the paradox that is Palm Sunday, the day when not only the Passover lamb was selected – but so much more importantly, the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. And the truth is, it wasn't just Palm Sunday that was a paradox. No, actually Jesus' whole life was a paradox. See, to the outsider, Jesus didn't seem like anything particularly special, until you got to know him and what he was about and what he was here to do. Then your perspective changed. Then the paradox that was Jesus really started to blow your mind. I mean, why would the Good Shepherd put himself in the place of the lamb for slaughter? Why would the King of Kings make himself a slave to his creation?

Jesus had much to teach his people at the outset of Holy Week, and it all began with the paradox of Palm Sunday. Even the casual observer could tell that what happened on this day was the stuff of kings – crowds of people lined the streets just trying to get a glimpse of Jesus and shouting praise to his name. But the externals just didn't quite add up. Who was this guy? What's that he's riding? Where did he come from, where is he going, and with what intentions? There's obviously something much bigger going on here than what meets the eye, they might think. And they'd be right. What was happening was that the paradox of Jesus' life was playing out right before their very eyes, but it was no real contradiction. The truth of it speaks to hearts of faith who really know their Savior: behold, your King comes, in meekness and yet in majesty.

So as Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover festival that day, Jesus stopped the group at the crest of the Mount of Olives as soon as the city came into view. Before they went any further, Jesus had to do something that was foretold over 500 years earlier by the prophet Zechariah. So he called a huddle with two of his disciples and sent them ahead to the next village to bring back a donkey for him to ride on the rest of the way into Jerusalem. Now a donkey wasn't really anything to get too excited about, but it must've seemed kind of odd to the disciples as they went to get that particular donkey for Jesus. Now ordinarily a donkey was a suitable ride, certainly more practical than flashy. It was a beast of burden, so today it'd probably be a lot like a minivan. It would get you from point A to point B with plenty of cargo in tow, but a Mercedes-Benz it certainly was not. It would get the job done, but it wouldn't normally catch any eyes or turn any heads. Nobody was ever too impressed with someone riding around on a donkey. And that was especially true about this one! This one hadn't even been broken in yet, and in fact had never even been used. That's not exactly a top-of-the-line ride for royalty. This donkey probably wouldn't have been very comfortable or very cooperative, and on top of that, it was borrowed! The disciples had to return it as soon as they were done using it. Yes, meekness certainly would have described that scene very well.

But then some pilgrims who were going along with them started connecting the dots. Didn't the prophet Zechariah say this was going to happen? Didn't he say, "*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*" (Zechariah 9:9)? Yes, there's definitely something more to this than Jesus just wanting to take a load off his feet for a while, they thought – and again, they were right. Jesus was riding along this path to Jerusalem in full view of God's people so that everyone would see and know that he was presenting himself as the Messiah, the Lord's true sacrifice for sin and our true Savior-King!

But Jesus would be a very unique kind of king. He didn't come holding a sword or bow like you might expect, but like Zechariah said, he came righteous and having salvation. He came as a great paradox—the mighty king who rode into battle in meekness, intent on dying for his people. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to declare himself the promised Messianic King, he came with no weapons, no ambitions of empire, and no over-the-top grandeur. He came only in the name of the LORD, to accomplish *his* purposes, to fight and conquer our real, spiritual enemies – and so that meant he went to his death. He was exactly the king we needed.

But that's not the kind of king everyone wanted. Lots of people expected the Messiah to be a strongman who would throw off foreign oppression. An empire was exactly what they

wanted him to start – they wanted him to take the nation of Israel straight back to the top, just like King David did.

But Jesus was no made-to-order king. He came to be God’s kind of king. And within a few days, when it became more and more obvious that Jesus wasn’t going to be the kind of king Israel was clamoring for, he quickly fell out of favor. The shouts of praise the city raised to him that Sunday were by the following Friday shouts from an angry mob to “Crucify!” And Jesus knew that was coming, yet in meekness he still rode on to die. You see, that was all part of the plan. Just like that Passover lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the people, so also this king would die a criminal’s death so that his sinful subjects could live like kings in heaven. What a paradox!

Jesus came to Jerusalem in meekness to die, but the story didn’t end with him being rejected and killed. No, his was actually a story of ultimate victory. See, Jesus’ death was no tragedy, because when he died, he won for us salvation and eternal life. Remember that a paradox means that sometimes things just aren’t what they seem. That certainly was true this Palm Sunday. You see, Jesus came in meekness to die on the cross—but he also came in majesty to reign from it. Now throughout his life he hid his majesty in humility, but make no mistake about it. His majesty was there for all the world to see.

And that’s the way it was even all the way back on that crest of the Mount of Olives. Did you ever wonder why Jesus sent those two disciples ahead to get a donkey and bring it back, when he could have just grabbed it on his way through? It’s because Jesus had an important spiritual message to send to his followers – and to us – that he didn’t want them to miss. Jesus wanted to show them the power and glory that he had as the Son of God. He wanted their faith to see the majesty of his reign that was hidden just beneath the surface. Jesus wanted them to know that he certainly was a King, but he was a king who had an altogether different and greater and higher purpose than most expected.

So Jesus gave the disciples specific directions: “*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, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.*” And when it all happened just as Jesus said, and only at Jesus’ name did the owners agree to let the disciples take the colt, the disciples must have come back to Jesus blown away once again at their Savior’s greatness.

They must have been amazed at the paradox. No matter what he looked like or what would happen to him, this wasn’t just some popular rabbi, some popular Jewish teacher sitting on a donkey. No, the God who knows all and sees all and controls all—that God was with them in

the flesh. God himself mounted that donkey and rode on, with a very definite plan to fulfill prophecy and die to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. This King came to reign as the Messiah promised long ago.

And that day... that day the people got it. Jesus rode into the city that was his own with a majesty meant only for the Messiah. People lined the roads and threw their cloaks down before him in honor. They cut down palm branches for his path and they waved them in the air to welcome their coming king. And with the very stones about to cry out and all the rest of creation barely able to hold back, they gave him all the praise and glory that he rightly deserves. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, they shouted. They called him the Messiah, and they called him their Savior.

See that’s what they meant when they rang out with that famous Palm Sunday cry, “*Hosanna!*” That comes from a Hebrew word that means “*Save us!*” And they were shouting that word to just the right person, because that’s exactly why Jesus was there – he was God’s answer to our hosannas. And with every new hoof print on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus’ majesty shined through that much more clearly as the one who willingly gave himself to be our perfect substitute, our perfect sacrifice, and our perfect Savior. No, our King’s majesty isn’t like the kingdoms of this world. It wasn’t a seat in some palace that Jesus rode on to take, but he rode on to be enthroned and to reign from the cross.

You see, our King’s majesty is a great and loving paradox. Our King doesn’t lord over his subjects like so many others, but he serves them and sacrifices himself for them. Our King conquers and defends us from sin, death, and the devil, and he wins for us salvation and eternal life in heaven. This is the King whose kingdom isn’t measured by square miles or border markers, but by souls. Ours is the King of heaven and earth who, with men and angels praising and glorifying him, laid down all that power and glory for our sake and marched on to death for us. My friends, Jesus’ kingly majesty shines out most brilliantly as God’s promised Messiah who so loved this world that he came to make good on his Word and fulfill his plan of salvation by giving his life to bring you into his heavenly Kingdom. Yes, your King came on that first Palm Sunday in meekness and in majesty—for you, to answer your cry of “*Hosanna,*” “*Lord, save us!*”

So on this Palm Sunday, let’s join with the crowds and let’s give Christ the glory he deserves as our true Sacrificial Lamb and our true Savior-King, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*” “*Hosanna in the highest heaven!*” because from the deepest depths to the highest heights, Christ Jesus will be forever proclaimed King of Kings who rode in on a lowly donkey to the acclaim of all nations, and who laid down his life to bring forgiveness and eternal salvation to this sinful world – to me and to you. God grant it, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.