

Title: Behold, your King!
Text: Matthew 21.1-11
Theme: The public presentation of the Kingship of Jesus
Series: Matthew #99
Prop Stmnt: The King has come to die

Joseph Goebbels was the propaganda director for Hitler and the Nazi Party. A new biography on his life built from an exhaustive study of his diary has just been published. I am a little more than 100 pages into it, but already, the message is clear. I will do whatever I have to do in order to get my way. I will lie, murder, betray, manipulate, scheme, intimidate and destroy. "I don't care if you like me, but you will respect me or you will pay."

Jacob, a junior in high school near Dallas thought the same way. When his girlfriend Rachel tried to break up with him, he felt humiliated and threatened her with consequences because he wasn't going to be treated like that. Schoolmates said he was angry and kept blowing up her phone with threats and intimidation. He confronted her and when she would not give in to his demands, he became so enraged he allegedly choked her death. This week, Jacob was charged with murder. The chorus line of this story is song all over this world. "I don't care if you like me, but you will respect me or you will pay."

There are too many girls like Rachel who get into an abusive relationship and no matter what they do they do not know how to get out. We feel pity for them. But, then there are other girls who, by all appearances could have any guy she wants and yet she gets into an abusive relationship and chooses to stay in it, and if she ever gets out of an abusive relationship, she gets into another one. We shake our heads in disbelief and if we know them well, we grieve with anguish because we know that this is not going to end well. Jerusalem is that girl. In our text, Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah who refers to the people of Jerusalem as, "*the daughter of Zion.*" For hundreds of years she has been ravaged and molested and now, the true lover of her soul has come. He has come to win her over. He has not come to frighten her, but to woo her. He has not come to destroy her, but to protect her. While this lover, this prince, this King is most deserving of respect, he is more eager for her affection. He does care if she loves him. He wants her to love him, not because he is needy for affection, but because he longs for her to be loved and to be in a loving relationship.

The theme of Matthew's gospel is the title of this message: Behold your King! This text presents Jesus to his people in unmistakable terms. There is no missing this. The King has come. And while by his sheer authority and power, he could demand that she bow and respect him, serve him and marry him, he, surrenders himself completely to her wishes. What will she do? What will she say? We want her to love him. We want her to be loved. We want to see her protected from her enemies. We want to see her flourish under his provision and rest under his strength. We want to see her at peace under his shadow and made glorious under his honor. What will she do? Surely, she will see how

beautiful and rich, how wonderful and wise, how amazing and kind this king, this lover, this suitor, this husband is. Surely she will accept his offer and be his bride.

In a few days Pilate presents him to the leaders and says, “Behold your King!” The chief priests respond, “We have no king but Caesar.” Defying all logic and grieving our hearts, we witness how Jerusalem turns her back on her only true love and gives herself again to an abuser. What does Caesar do? We do not have to wait long. In 70 A.D. he launches a full-blown assault upon the nation resulting in the utter ruination of Jerusalem, again. What does the King do, he dies on a cross. If it wasn’t for their conclusions, each gospel account would read like a tragedy. And there is nothing more tragic than what we are about to read. Our study of the final week of the life of Jesus before his death commences with this text and this sermon. His entire life and ministry has been aiming at this week. Everything that happens takes place with a heightened sense of drama and intensity. But, Matthew points something else out and that is this: There is always more going on than what you realize. The public presentation of Jesus to Jerusalem is the intentional fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. But, even as Jesus fulfills one prophecy he is orchestrating the entire event as a prophecy. This isn’t the last time that he will come as a king to Jerusalem. So, even though most of you are very familiar with this event, I want you to realize two things: 1) I want you to see how the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem is the fulfillment of an OT prophecy as well as a promise for his return. 2) I want you to feel the weight of this event. The triumphal entry of Christ is not all joy. Luke says that as Jesus drew near the city that he wept over it and said, *“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when you enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”* So, as you read of the people shouting and singing, remember that Jesus knew what was going to happen to him and what was going to happen to them. But, as I already mentioned, this is not the end of the story. And that is what is amazing about this story. We are living in between the two comings. This story is not over. What was fulfilled became a promise and we like Jerusalem are called to believe and love our real King or stay with our abusers.

Read Text:

I. **The setting** (1a)

A. **Geography**

Chapter 21 opens with Jesus and the crowd approaching Jerusalem. Jerusalem sits on a mountain about 2,500 feet above sea level. Chapter 20 concluded with Jesus and the crowd near Jericho. Jericho sits at 1,200 feet below sea level. The trip from Jericho to Jerusalem is only about 15 miles, but it is a difficult 15 miles. The road was rugged and the traveler was ascending over 3,500 feet. But, the rugged uphill climb would not be the most difficult part of the journey for Christ. He was going to Jerusalem, the city of extremes.

B. History

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem...” and with those words, Matthew begins his account of the last week of the life of Jesus before his death. This simple statement of fact barely obscures the layers of historical, global, universal, political, spiritual, theological, military, angelic, and demonic intrigue and significance. It has been said that all roads lead to Rome. I disagree. All roads lead to Jerusalem. No city in the history of the world has had the history, the controversy and the long-term standing of Jerusalem. For 3,000 years this one city has been the primary focal point of the world. She is the birthplace of three world religions and the capital of two peoples. “The history of Jerusalem is the history of the world...” So writes Simon Montefiore’s in the preface of his epic work on the history of this incredible city. The prophets spoke of her as a woman, at times a whore, sometimes a wounded princess abandoned by her lovers, a little girl abused by her captors, or a queen who shines in glory. Jerusalem is a city that is not strategically located. She boasts of no harbor on a great body of water, no river than runs through her, no major trade route naturally led to her gates. In the winter she freezes from her elevation and in summer she bakes in the legendary heat of the Middle East.

What natural resources surround her? None! There is no pure human logic that would explain her existence. Why, after the great temples of Egypt have fallen does Jerusalem stand? Why after Nineveh, Babylon, and Susa have crumbled does Jerusalem thrive? This holy city looks anything but holy to the average visitor. She has been hated, scorned, attacked, starved, defeated, destroyed and burnt. She has also been loved, adored, visited by millions, defended to death, rebuilt and repaired. She continues to be fought over, argued about, and remains a cauldron of intensity and a flashpoint that could ignite a world-wide war. Right now, on her temple mount, stands a sacred Muslim shrine called the Dome of the Rock. That shrine has stood there for 1,324 years. But, to the Jews, that Dome is an offense and even though it has stood for 1,400 years, it does not belong there, because before the Dome, was the Temple that was built about 1,600 years before the Dome. The tensions are deep because the animosity is old, very, very old. O Jerusalem! She is the inspiration to songs, not just in folklore, but in Scripture. God sings about her. God loves her and what we call heaven, he calls “The New Jerusalem”.

This is the city that Jesus approached. This is the city where the crossroads of history intersect time and time again. This is the city of David and the Son of David. This is the city of the Temple, ground-zero of the Day of Atonement, the Passover, and the place where Jesus would die, resurrect and one day return. No other city contains such extremes of violence and glory. Melville called Jerusalem a “skull” besieged by “armies of the dead.” He was speaking of her tombs and burial plots. Thousands of people have wanted to be buried there so that their bodies will be (they think) the first to resurrect. As a result the city is surrounded by cemeteries, which is fitting since more than once has she become an enormous grave and chamber of death. And yet, her most famous tomb sits empty. It’s occupant only borrowed it for a few days.

Like a girl who needs to be loved, but refuses to be faithful is the city of Jerusalem. And no one has loved her more purely, more intensely than Christ. This is the city where his glory sat in the Holy of Holies for hundreds of years. This is the city where his forefathers sat for short times on a throne that was only being kept for him. This is the city where the priests would offer sacrifices and offerings that all spoke of him. This is the city where the prophets who would represent God to the people would more often than not, pay for their boldness and clarity with their lives. This is the city that David conquered and expanded, that Solomon made into a brilliant gem, that Hezekiah defended from the Assyrians, but which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. This is the city that Nehemiah rebuilt and that Herod refurbished, only to have Titus destroy, seemingly once and for all, only for her to rise from the ashes again. This is the city where Jesus will descend to in order to save her from certain defeat at the hands of the antichrist. This is the city, hated by many, but most by Satan, and loved by many, but most by Christ. This is the city of Jerusalem.

On this day, this actual Palm Sunday, you could see crowds numbering in the thousands pouring into the city. The joy of reunion, the songs of Zion, the laughter of friends, the shouting of the vendors, the cooking of food and the continual sacrifices on the temple mount created a symphony of chaos, a whirling of sensory overload. This was the Passover and there was no place to celebrate it, but in Jerusalem. On this day, Jesus saw more than that. For several months now, he has been telling his disciples, that he was going to Jerusalem to die. And now, he has.

C. **Timing** (Passover)

Three times a year, the nation of Israel would gather in Jerusalem for their Holy Days. This meant that the roads leading to Jerusalem would fill up with thousands of people walking along in order to get to Jerusalem for the festivities. Your life would be marked by these major, national events. They were not only big, they were personal. You would travel the same roads from your home to Jerusalem. You would travel with the same people and meet up with the same groups year after year after year. You would not travel in a minivan with video games or Disney movies for the kids. You would walk and depending on how far away from Jerusalem you lived the trip could take several days. During the trip, the pilgrims (people making the pilgrimage) would often sing. Psalms 120-134 are called the songs of ascent. These are the songs that people would sing as they made their way up the roads that led up to Jerusalem. For example, Psalm 121.1-2 says, *“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD who made heaven and earth.”* That is a song of ascent. The singer is looking up because Jerusalem is up. Jerusalem is where the Temple is. The Temple is where God dwells. The singer is looking to the dwelling place of God as a means of encouragement and help. Psalm 122 begins with, *“I was glad when they said to me, “let us go to the house of the LORD!”* This is a Psalm of joy because going up to Jerusalem was a major event for a Jewish family. In the years of occupation and exile, these trips would be banned and the people could not get together as they did before. It would be akin to having all celebrations of Christmas declared illegal. Can you imagine the joy that we would have if after 25 years of not being able to celebrate Christmas, we were suddenly

permitted to do it again? Can you imagine the excitement that you would have after telling your children and grandchildren about the lights, the concerts, the services and the traditions now to be able to actually share that with them? The Passover was a major cultural, national and intended to be a spiritual event in the life of Israel. This year's Passover would be the most amazing one ever.

Jesus, the disciples and the crowd that not only followed him from Jericho but probably grew in size, came to the village of Bethphage, which was located in the area of the Mount of Olives. Jesus instructed two of his disciples to go to the village where they will find a donkey tied along with a colt. They were told, untie the donkey and bring them to him. This purposeful act by Christ reveals his intentional fulfilling of a promise that had been prophesied over 500 years ago.

II. The promise (2b-5)

The promise was made by the post-exilic (after the Babylonian exile) prophet, Zechariah. Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi were three prophets who delivered the Word of God to the people of Israel following their time of exile in Babylon. Zechariah's prophesy is the largest of the three and is fascinating. It actually has a great deal in common with the book of Revelation. But, here is the setting. The people from the Southern Kingdom (Judah) returned to their land about 20 years ago, but the glorious days of David and Solomon are long gone. Jerusalem is still in ruins, the foundation of the Temple has been laid but no construction beyond that has taken place. The country is under the control of the Persians (Medo-Persian empire) and the current king, Darius Hystaspes is preparing for a war against Egypt by taxing the bejeebers out of everyone, including the people of Judah. The nation of Judah is barely a shell of its former self. Zechariah is preaching to a people who are not only discouraged, but who are not following the LORD with their hearts. Granted, the exile cured them of Baal worship, but they are not all that serious about trusting God. Zechariah preaches to them both a message of repentance and one of hope. If you will trust him and seek him, he will be found. He will once again make Israel the hope of the nations. He has not forgotten about them. It is in this context of deep discouragement and need that Zechariah calls upon Israel to rejoice because her King is going to come to her. But, here is what is interesting about this prediction. Zechariah says that her king is going to come on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The prediction is specific. The King will come to you righteous and having salvation and he will be humble. In fact, he will be so humble that he will be riding on a donkey. He will be riding on a beast of burden. How intimidating is that? How many kings and generals and mighty men in history have their portraits painted with them on donkeys?

But, as we have seen, Jesus is unlike any King that you have ever seen. But now, about 550 years later, the Jews find themselves in a similar situation. They live in their land, but it is not theirs to control. The promise of a king came in the context of a need. The fulfillment of this promise came also in a time of great need, but Jerusalem was too proud to admit it.

III. The fulfillment (6-9)

The presentation of Jesus is the public declaration of the Kingship of Jesus by God. This is not only evidenced by Jesus actually fulfilling this prophecy by Zechariah, but the fulfillment itself was a major statement. Pilgrims were expected to walk into the city. Jesus rode. And while at the beginning of his ministry Jesus attempted to silence those who wanted to broadcast who he was, he now permits them to declare it loudly. Meanwhile, Jesus is riding a donkey into the city. This is exactly how David arranged for his son Solomon to be presented as the next king. David had Solomon ride on his mule. Solomon did not take over the throne by war, but he inherited it from his father. Christ is being pictured as doing the same thing. The statement by Christ is undeniable. He is presenting himself as the King who has come to take his throne.

The crowd is ecstatic. They are laying down their clothes and laying down palm branches. John's gospel points out the fact that this event took place not long after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead which only energized the crowd even more. This is the ANE version of rolling out the red carpet. The people are crowning him king and expect him to take over and restore Israel to her rightful place of glory and power. Now, because it was the Passover and because this crowd (accompanying Jesus) was made up of people outside of Jerusalem (most likely most of them were from Galilee) this crowd would have been viewed by the people of Jerusalem as being outsiders, even foreigners. Jesus spent very little time in Jerusalem up until this point. He was still a mystery. The massive crowd that was shouting, singing and declaring his kingship were singing, "Hosanna" which means, "save us now!" The disciples did not realize the significance of this until later. The cries of the crowd were truer than what they realized. The songs they sang and the titles that that ascribed to Jesus were indeed true. He was the one who could save them. He was the Son of David. He was the Blessed One. He had come in the name of the Lord. He was the one that the highest angels adored.

IV. The response (10-11)

And this is where Matthew wants to take us.

A. Enthusiasm

The enthusiasm is genuine, but misunderstood. The power that this King had to raise the dead was not going to be used to fulfill their version of the kingdom because this King was not really what they thought he was.

B. Praise

The praise that they offered was powerful. The words that they said and the scripture that they ascribed to him was the same language that you would use of God. Did they know what they were saying? Did they realize that these songs that they sang for the Passover were actually written about him?

C. Honor

Matthew says in v.10 that the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” They asked. They saw the adoration and honor that the crowds were heaping upon Jesus. They heard the stories of resurrection, of blind men being healed and other things that were amazing. We know that rumors of Jesus had already reached parts of Jerusalem before, so the people of the city were certainly buzzing. So, “who was this?”

D. Confusion

The crowds answer. “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” They still don’t get it. Back in chapter 16, Jesus asked the disciples what the people are saying about him. They said that most people think that he is a prophet. That is still the case. They do not realize who he is. He is not just a prophet, he is their King and that is why he is riding on a donkey. Even the crowd that hailed him misunderstood him.

At this point, there are basically four groups of people. 1) The leaders who hate him and are threatened by him. 2) The people of Jerusalem who know little about him and are curious. 3) The crowd (from Galilee) that is enthusiastic but still unclear as to who Christ is. 4) The disciples who are barely a step ahead of the crowd. On a day that should have been glorious, Jesus is not really understood.

Take home truths:

- 1) Following a crowd that follows Jesus does not mean that you are following Jesus.
- 2) Singing praise to Jesus is not a substitute for actually surrendering your life to him.
- 3) Rejecting Jesus brings devastating consequences. (the greater the offense, the greater the consequence)
- 4) Do not assume that you know who Jesus really is.