

**Matthew 21:1-11** *As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, “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. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup>“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.’” <sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup>They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” <sup>10</sup>When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” <sup>11</sup>The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

They had it all backwards. They thought that this was the time for glory. The Messiah had finally come! They had heard about Jesus recently raising Lazarus from the dead. They saw him fulfilling the prophecy from Zechariah and riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Their Messiah had come to free them from Roman oppression and to elevate them to the position of prominence as the leading nation of the world. They were excited for the earthly peace they expected the Messiah to bring. They were giddy about the glory that would come to them and their nation as their Messiah elevated them to the top. They were ready to celebrate and cheer and bask in the glory of their king.

But they had it all backwards. Their expectations were all wrong. While they were doing the right things and saying the right things, they were doing them for all the wrong reasons. They weren't looking for a spiritual king who would come to free them from the guilt of their sin and rescue them from the death they deserved. They weren't looking for a mediator who would reconcile them with almighty God in heaven and restore them to a peaceful relationship with him. These they thought they already had by means of their heritage. Because they were the Israelites, God's chosen people, they thought all these things were already taken care of. Therefore, they had no need for a spiritual king. What they needed...what they wanted...was an earthly king who would destroy the Romans and bring them the glory and peace Israel enjoyed when David ruled as king. They expected a Messiah who would come to fight an earthly battle to establish earthly peace and usher them into a period of earthly glory.

It was these expectations that brought them such disappointment during this week which we now call Holy Week. These crowds who cheered for Jesus on Sunday as they shouted “Hosanna” and “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” would by Friday be the ones yelling, “Crucify, crucify!” We wonder how they can so quickly change their tone from cheering on Sunday to jeering on Friday. Their expectations hadn't been met. The one they cheered as their Messiah allowed himself to be captured by the Romans without much of a fight. The one they expected to destroy the Romans seemed to have no power against them as he was brutally tortured. The strong King whom they cheered as he triumphantly rode into Jerusalem appeared weak and helpless as he was paraded in front of them by the Roman soldiers haggard, bloody and beaten. This obviously wasn't the king which they expected. He didn't bring them the glory they wanted. So they very quickly turned on him. They were mad. They were angry. They were disappointed that he didn't turn out to be who they wanted him to be. So they quickly joined with Pharisees in calling for his execution. All because they had it all backwards.

They should have understood. There was plenty of information to point them to the fact that Jesus didn't come to be the king which they expected. In Jesus' day, a king riding into battle would have ridden a strong, powerful, fast horse, not a lowly donkey. The donkey would have connected Jesus to David as this is what princes often rode in David's day, but it would not have been the animal of choice for a king going into battle. The battle that Jesus came to fight was not a battle against the Romans to restore glory to Israel and make them a nation to be reckoned with. He was going to fight the devil and sin, the enemies of each and every person in this world. To do that required a different kind of fight. This fight required submission and humility rather than power and strength. This too should have been a sign for these people. This is exactly what Zechariah had prophesied. The word translated, “gentle” can also mean “meek, humble attitude which expresses itself in patient submissiveness.” This is the type of king they should have been looking for. Jesus didn't come with an army full of armed soldiers, he came with a rag tag group of 12 disciples most of whom had come from the lowliest classes of life. Jesus didn't come with a protective guard dressed in the finest of battle ware. He came dressed as a common man riding a donkey. These are not the qualities you would look for in an earthly king. We wouldn't elect to president anyone who had the qualities of “meek” or “submissive” or “humble.” For the leader of a nation, we want someone who is strong, decisive and a force to be reckoned with. Zechariah had prophesied about a king would take his throne by humility, not by power. This should have been something that they noticed! Jesus meekness and lowliness did not come out of weakness, but out of necessity. This is what was required for him to be our substitute. Jesus had to submit himself to death, even death on a cross. Jesus willingly had to endure the unjust trial, the intense suffering and even the full wrath of God in hell. Jesus humbled himself—giving up the full use of his divine power and glory—to do just that because this is what was necessary for the salvation of mankind. This is the only way that he could have won the victory that he needed to win as our king—the victory over sin and death. Jesus understood the process. The suffering needed to come first before the glory. First the cross...then the glory. They should have understood. Instead, they had it all backwards.

Many people today have the same problem when it comes to following and worshipping Jesus. They have it all backwards. Those who follow Jesus must follow the same pattern as Jesus—first the cross, then the glory. Many people either fail to understand this or choose to believe differently. Many have the expectation that the life of a Christian will be one of glory and

peace here on this earth as soon as they come to faith. They expect that as soon as they become members in God's kingdom, life on this earth will become suddenly easier. They look for a Christian life that brings with it the removal of all hardships and a guarantee for no trouble at all. They see the Christian life as a glorious life, free from sin, temptation and strife, abundantly successful with power and success crowning them at every step. This message is even preached by so-called Christian preachers. Joel Osteen is among the foremost of these preachers. While this is found in all of his teaching, his book, "Your Best Life Yet" encourages that if you believe right and live right, then everything will be great and glorious.

But what if it's not? What happens when you do your best to do what's right, follow God to the best of your ability, try in all things to be the best of what you can be and trouble still comes and times get tight and life isn't so grand and glorious? That's when despair sets in. This is when many people fall away. They become disillusioned. They become like these followers on Palm Sunday who shouted "Hosanna" on Sunday and "Crucify" on Friday. The reality did not meet their expectations. They blame God when things don't go right. They proclaim their disappointment and frustration to all. Yet what is wrong is not God but they had the wrong expectations. Jesus never promised the good life here. In fact, what he promised is that while we are here on this earth, we should expect to face sufferings, trials and disappointments. Many today still have it all backwards.

Before we get too harsh on these Jews and these others in our world who look for the glorious Christian life now, let's make sure we take a look at ourselves in the mirror of God's law. Even though we know what Jesus said about the reality of our life in this sinful world, there's a little part of us that wants to think we are excluded from that. Deep down, we hope that the life we live for Jesus will result in better, easier, trouble-free life. When things don't go well for us, when our health declines or we receive a diagnosis that we didn't expect, we can find ourselves turning on God too. When we do all that's right and still face hardship, we are quick to blame God for our problems, accuse him of not caring or understanding and maybe even wonder if he is there to help us all. We become disappointed and maybe even disillusioned when life isn't so grand and glorious as we want or think it to be. Too often, if we admit it, we too have it all backwards.

Jesus lived right and did what was right and his life wasn't all that glorious. But he understood the process—first the cross and then the glory. Before he could bask in the glory that was his as almighty God, he needed to face the suffering and death of a human to be our substitute and rescue us from death. We begin this Holy Week by marveling at our Savior and his willingness to go forward into suffering and death knowing what was going to come this week. This was the beginning of Passover week. This was the day when the Passover lamb was chosen to be sacrificed in the Passover. Here, on this very day, we see Jesus offering himself up in humility and service to be the true Pascal Lamb to which all of those lambs had pointed. The king had indeed come to deliver his people from all his enemies and evil powers. Yet before he would enjoy the glory that was his as the victor, he first needed to face the suffering and the cross.

With his willing sacrifice, our King brought to us the peace which Zechariah promised. But this peace is not an earthly peace which comes from a glorious life here on this earth. It is a spiritual peace between God and man. This Holy Week, we have the extreme privilege to see again the battle Jesus fought against sin and the devil. As the victor in this battle, he brings to us the peace of sins forgiven and the peace of death conquered. He brings to us the peace of knowing that we are reconciled with God and made heirs of heaven. With his victory, Jesus promised that we will enjoy the glory with him in heaven when life here is over.

But as with Jesus, so also with us. First the cross...then the glory. Jesus hasn't promised that life here on this earth would be easy or glorious for his children. Truthfully, he promised just the opposite. He said, "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33) As sinful people living in a sinful world, you and I are not exempt from troubles. We will have people cheat us, take advantage of us and at times do horrible things to us. We will face cancer, Parkinsons, Alzheimers, Fibermyalgia, congestive heart failure and any other terrible diseases and illnesses you can think of. Life will not always be grand and glorious here on this earth, even for God's people. Like Jesus we must first endure the crosses of life here on this earth before we enjoy the glory of eternity with our God forever.

But here is what Jesus promised: even though you face these problems, you do so with the peace of being reconciled with God in heaven. Here's what that peace does for you: when bad things happen that are outside of your control, you have the peace of knowing God is not punishing you. He punished Jesus in your place once and for all. We will see that again this week. You have the peace of knowing God hasn't abandoned you. He promised he would never do that. You have the peace of knowing that God still loves you and cares for you. This is what is on display as we see what Jesus was willing to do throughout this Holy Week. You have the peace of knowing God will use even the worst of things for your eternal good. He promised he would. When you sin, you have the peace of knowing your sin is covered in the blood of Jesus. When you are buried in guilt and shame, you can have the peace of knowing the everlasting love of God and the certainty of sins forgiven in Jesus. You have the peace of knowing that through Jesus you were reconciled with God. No matter what happens, as we will see again this Holy Week, you can have the peace of knowing the victory has been won and cannot be undone. God doesn't promise glory here...but he does promise peace—the spiritual peace of sins forgiven and the glory of life forever with God in heaven.

This is why we shout, "Hosanna, loud hosanna," today, even if life isn't all that grand for us. Praise to our living God. He came in the name of the Lord to battle on our behalf and defeated the devil once and for all. He brings to us the peace that goes beyond all understanding and that will last forever. We praise Jesus because he got it right. Let's make sure that we set our expectations on reality and his promises. First the cross...then the glory. And what glory that will be when we join our victorious Lord around his throne of glory. Amen.