

## The Lowly King

Zechariah 9:9–10, Matthew 21:1–11

This message is part of a series based on texts which contain the phrase “that it might be fulfilled.” Today, we come to Matthew’s account of the Triumphal Entry. It is significant that this story appears in all four Gospels.<sup>1</sup> Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—all four authors—thought this story was important enough to include in their inspired accounts of Christ’s life. It is significant that all four Gospel-writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—tie this event in the life of our Lord with Zechariah’s prophecy in chapter 9 of the book that bears his name. Clearly, all the gospel writers recognize that this notable event in the life of our Lord was the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture.

Now skeptics might argue that this whole event was staged—that Jesus’ disciples pulled this off as a stunt in an attempt to bolster their case that Jesus was God.<sup>2</sup> If true, this would mean that this account recorded in the Gospels was nothing but a fraud—an event that actually never happened but was recorded as though it happened. But think of how many individuals had to be involved in this particular incident—individuals who, humanly speaking, would have to collude and plot to carry it out, all while keeping the utmost secrecy: Jesus himself, the twelve disciples, the donkey’s owner, the multitudes who surrounded Jesus and went before him and followed him—as well as the prophet Zechariah, who lived five-hundred or so years before Christ, and the translators of the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek that was made around 200 BC, from which this quotation is drawn. That’s a lot of people, living not only at the time of Christ, but also some 200 and 500 years before him—all having to agree to participate in the con. Moreover, if this incident were a fraud, that would mean that the four Gospels were written by known liars who are utterly untrustworthy. The Gospel—the Good News of salvation in Christ—would not be good news after all: Jesus is *not* the sinless One worthy of trust but a deceiver and con artist. There is no salvation; this present life is all there is; there is no hope of eternal life; we are all doomed to the Lake of Fire.

But let me ask you: does the gospel account that was just read in your hearing sound like a fraud? Does it not tell the truth about man, sin and salvation? Does it not have the ring of authenticity? Here is the Holy Bible, an amazing book written by about forty human authors over a period of 1,600 years—a book that has brought spiritual insight and truth and salvation to millions over the centuries. This is not the breathless rantings of a fast-talking deceiver but the word of the living God, and we do well to pay careful attention to it. As we look at this text, let our

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:29–38; John 12:12–15

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, <https://ehrmanblog.org/the-triumphal-entry-as-a-distorted-memory/>

focus be on Christ. Let his majesty and character move us. We have three points: (1) The King knows the future; (2) The King is worthy of praise; and most notably, (3) The King is lowly. First,

### **1. The King knows the future.**

This is the part that could have backfired, but Jesus pulls it off with aplomb. He sends two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” The disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. Can you imagine what they must have been thinking? *Did we really hear him right? What’s gotten into him? Isn’t this stealing? What if we get caught?* But the unnamed disciples had learned to obey their Master, and he, as usual, had everything under control. Everything went exactly as planned by our sovereign Lord. He shows himself to be the divine King, knowing the future. Jesus knew that the donkey’s owner would willingly loan his animals on this occasion. Donkeys were very valuable for transportation by the poorer classes—not just in the ancient Near East, but even today. But when the animals’ owner is informed that “the Lord has need of them,” he allowed Jesus to use them. Just as in the case where the Lord told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, in apparent contravention of the moral law written on men’s hearts, so in this case—and for us—it is always best for the disciple of Christ to obey his Master, even when the Lord’s command is counter-intuitive, such as when he says, “Do you want to be great? Then become servant of all.”<sup>3</sup> Those who want to be great in the eyes of the world do not want to take this advice. Do not the powerful people of this world boss other people around? But Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, “came not to be *served*, but to *serve*”—and that’s what he expects of us as well. We might think: *If I have a servant’s heart, then people will take advantage of me. I will serve, and other people will get the credit.* But the Lord, the Judge of all, knows everything perfectly. And at the final judgment our acts of service will not go unrecognized.

Jesus told his two disciples to bring the colt and her foal to him. If anyone objected, they were to say, “The Lord has need of them,” and when they said these words, “immediately he will send them.” All this happened exactly as Jesus had foretold!

His purpose was to enter Jerusalem—the city adopted as the royal residence of David and the kings of Judah—in a royal display of his kingship. Even though Israel was now under foreign domination, Jesus had gone around Judea preaching that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2, 4:17, 10:7). This message could have gotten him in trouble with Rome, but up till this point Rome did not consider

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark 10:44

Jesus much of a threat. But now that his earthly ministry was coming to an end, it was time for him to enter Jerusalem, “the city of the great king”—his words (Matt. 5:35). Calvin comments with irony that Christ, by this action, “intended to commence his reign openly on earth.” Our Lord “enters Jerusalem, riding on [a donkey]. A magnificent display, truly! more especially when the [donkey] was *borrowed* from some person, and when the want of a saddle . . . compelled the disciples to throw their garments on it, which was a mark of mean and disgraceful poverty. He is attended, I admit, by a large retinue; but of what sort of people? Of those who had hastily assembled from the neighboring villages. Sounds of loud and joyful welcome are heard; but from whom? From the very poorest, and from those who belong to the despised multitude.”<sup>4</sup>

Yes, Jesus reigns as king, but his rule is not with raw coercion and military might; rather, he rules his subjects by his Word and Spirit. And we who love his appearing do not serve him under threat of force but because his Holy Spirit has made us willing. Indeed, as Psalm 110 teaches, God’s people are *willing* in the day of his power. We voluntarily serve the King of kings; we delight to do his holy will—but not because he rules as a tyrant, throwing his weight around. The Holy Spirit of God has opened our blind eyes, enabling us to know our sinfulness and wretchedness, enlightening our minds with the knowledge of the Gospel, and renewing our wills, so that we bring forth fruit unto God.

We who love Christ do not know the future—but *Jesus does*, so we do not have to worry. He knows what is best for us, and he has planned *all things* for his glory and our ultimate good. Let us not forget that! The King knows the future. The second thing we see is that

## **2. The King is worthy of praise.**

We read that “the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Hosanna in the highest!’”

Here was a royal display. The King of kings and Lord of lords now enters Jerusalem, the city of the great King. But he does not enter with great ostentation and display, such as actors and actresses who dress in expensive clothing and hire limousines and drivers so they can arrive in style at an event and attract attention and have their pictures taken on the red carpet. The King of kings and Lord of lords does not come like an earthly tyrant and dictator who presides over a military

---

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (Logos Bible Software)

parade and grand display of all the weaponry and firepower of his realm. Rather, our King comes as the one who is “meek and lowly of heart”—despised by the world, but praised and worshipped by his people. Of him we read, in the very last chapter of the Bible, “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; *and his servants shall serve him*” (Rev. 22:3). How do we serve Christ? As we gather in worship! “*Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing*” (Ps. 100:2).

At the Triumphal Entry the multitudes—the rabble and despised of humanity—cried out, “*Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!*”

What does “Hosanna” mean? You can find the word in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary. It is “a cry of acclamation and adoration” that comes from the Hebrew *hōshī’āh-nnā* pray, save (us)! The word (actually a two-word phrase) occurs in Psalm 118:25ff., “*Save now, I beseech thee* [הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא], O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: We have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.” The word for “Save” is a common word in the Old Testament, occurring over 180 times. It also occurs in Hebrew proper names, such as the name *Joshua*, which means *Jehovah saves*, and comes into the New Testament as *Jesus*. “Thou shalt call his name *JESUS*: for he shall *save* his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

Jesus is man’s only hope of salvation, and you need him to be *your* Savior. That means you need to recognize that without him you are bound for eternity in the lake of fire. That is your ultimate destination apart from Christ. You, along with the rest of the damned, will hear at the final day, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). “It’s not fair,” you say? Yet the One who speaks these words at the final judgment is the Son of God, who came to earth to assume our nature and go to the cross to bear the full fury of the Father’s wrath on behalf of those he came to save—the One who during his incarnation went about *doing good*, caring for the downtrodden, healing those ruined by the fall, who never injured any man. He never did anything worthy of death but “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

At the Triumphal Entry there came together a spontaneous gathering of people who had heard Jesus’ teaching and seen Jesus’ miracles. They loved Jesus. They recognized him as Lord and Savior, and wanted to honor him publicly. And so they praised him with the biblical words, “Save now, I pray, O LORD.” O LORD, you are worthy of praise, for you are the Savior of your people!

Church of Jesus Christ, this is your Lord. This is the One who came to live and die for you. This is the One who lives in his people’s praise. This is he of whom it

is declared that “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.” Amen!

The church’s worship is to be full of *Christ*. God’s people should not be full of themselves, but of the Christ who lived and died for them. Man-centered worship is not worship at all, but a travesty. O my hearer, is your desire to lift up Christ? Do you want him to increase, and you to *decrease*—to melt into the background as part of the great company of his servants who sing the praises of the Lord? Biblical theology is God-centered and Christ-centered. We don’t go to worship to be entertained or to enjoy ourselves but to meet with Christ and focus on him, because he is Lord. *He* is to be the center of attention. In public worship we meet with the risen Christ. We sit at his feet and learn from him, as his word is proclaimed, declared, explained and applied. We sing his praises because we love him and can never forget that in him alone we are translated out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. We say with Paul, “For me to live is *Christ*”—he is my highest priority and my greatest good. We are in love with Christ. Now if you are listening to my voice and thinking to yourself, *That sounds pretty fanatical to me*, then that is a danger sign. That is a sign that you have never been born again, that you are still, inwardly, part of Satan’s kingdom—the kingdom of darkness. Your heart has never been regenerated by the Spirit of Christ. What should you do? Cry out to God for mercy! Ask him to give you a heart to know him. Ask him to touch you by his Spirit.

So the King knows the future; the King is worthy of praise. Thirdly,

### **3. The King is lowly.**

Now let us go back and focus on the middle of our text, vv. 4–5. Here we encounter Matthew’s recurring refrain: “that it might be fulfilled”: “All this was done *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”’” Here, as I mentioned before, Matthew, along with the other Gospel writers, alludes to a prophecy in the book of Zechariah where he says, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Notice first of all that Zechariah’s prophecy is addressed to the *church*: “Rejoice greatly, *O daughter of Zion!* Shout, *O daughter of Jerusalem!*” In today’s religious climate this point must be emphasized. The vast majority of evangelical Christendom today lies under the thrall of dispensationalism and doesn’t understand this. Dispensationalism posits that there are *two* peoples of God—not one. There is an Old Testament people, the Jews, made up of Abraham’s seed or descendants according to the flesh, who are promised an earthly inheritance in the land of Canaan. *Secondarily*, there is a New Testament people, the church,

redeemed by Christ through the gospel, who are promised a heavenly inheritance. Dispensationalism is not the historic teaching of the church. It arose in England not quite 200 years ago among the Plymouth Brethren, under the teaching of John Nelson Darby, who had been an Anglican priest, but later resigned in protest and began to teach that the “kingdom” described in the Book of Isaiah and elsewhere in the Old Testament was entirely different from the Christian church.<sup>5</sup> Darby’s followers separated from the church and began meeting in Brethren assemblies, convinced that the church was wrong.

But notice to whom Zechariah is speaking: the “daughter of Zion,” the “daughter of Jerusalem.” The writer to the Hebrews makes clear that those who have come to “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith . . . have come to Mount *Zion* and to the city of the living God, the heavenly *Jerusalem*, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:1, 22–23). This can’t be emphasized strongly enough: “Zion” and “the heavenly Jerusalem” are names for the *church*—the one people of God in every age, those saved by the blood of Christ (including Old Testament saints). There is *one* way of salvation and *one* people of God: the *church*. The expression “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!” refers to the church’s *worship*. The church rejoices in worship.

In what manner does the King come? It’s right there in our text: he comes “*lowly*, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The word translated “lowly” is also translated “meek” (KJV) and “humble” (ESV).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. But when he rides into Jerusalem he doesn’t come with the trappings of royalty, riding a magnificent steed, surrounded by armies carrying their weapons of destruction, threatening and intimidating the sons of men. No! Christ is the *lowly* King. His rule is extended not by force of arms but by the sweet influence of his life-giving Spirit. To the world, a *lowly King* is a contradiction in terms. Men run to be president of the United States, not to serve, but to throw their weight around, to make sure that people—and governments the world over—comply. But that is the way of the world, not the way of the cross, not the way of Christ. And we, Christ’s servants, are to be lowly. We come to Christ, not to build our own little empires, but to extend *his* kingdom. Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence (3 John 9), but Christ’s true followers want *him* to have the preeminence. All glory be to Jesus!

All human pride must be abased. We must be like our Savior, humbling ourselves, in order to be exalted. Amen.

---

<sup>5</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Nelson\\_Darby](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nelson_Darby) (accessed Jan. 2026)