

Sermon for April 2, 2023 – Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1–11 (EHV)

Theme: “Who is this?”

- 1) He is our God who knows all things.
- 2) He is our Messiah who fulfills all Scripture.
- 3) He is our humble King who deserves all honour.
- 4) He is our Saviour from all sin.

*<sup>1</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> telling them, “Go to the village ahead of you. Immediately you will find a donkey tied there along with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup> “Tell the daughter of Zion: ‘Look, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey’” <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did just as Jesus commanded them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their outer clothing on them, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their outer clothing on the road. Others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them out on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed kept shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” <sup>10</sup> When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, asking, “Who is this?” <sup>11</sup> And the crowds were saying, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

I think it happened during the winter of 1986/87. My schoolteacher in Wetaskiwin encouraged my class to attend an evening rally to welcome a travelling Canadian hero. Who was the man? I didn't know. My teacher and friends had to tell me, and what they said made me want to see him.

So, I stood in a cold arena with a sizable crowd – waiting to welcome a great athlete doing something remarkable. After what seemed like waiting forever, the time finally came. “St. Elmo's fire (Man in Motion)” started blaring over the loudspeakers, and the crowd started cheering. A few moments later, Rick Hansen rolled into view.

Some younger people might wonder, “Rick Hansen, who's he?” I am happy you asked: Rick Hansen is a famous Canadian paraplegic athlete who wheelchaired over 40,000 km through 34 countries to raise awareness about the potential of persons with disabilities. What he accomplished was nothing less than remarkable. And one of his brief stops, as he rolled back home to complete his journey, happened to be small Wetaskiwin, where I lived at the time.

Our sermon text speaks of a special rally filled with a cheering crowd, welcoming a man about to accomplish something far more remarkable than Rick Hansen's “Man in Motion” tour. Some people in Jerusalem asked: “Who is this?” It is a question that is still asked by many today as they observe Christians commemorating the event. Let us review what happened on Palm Sunday so that we can share the answer with those who ask us, under the theme: “**Who is this?**” 1) He is our

God who knows all things. 2) He is our Messiah who fulfills all Scripture. 3) He is our humble King who deserves all honour. 4) He is our Saviour from all sin.

Part One: He is our God who knows all things.

Our sermon text took place on the Sunday before Jesus' crucifixion. He had just celebrated a grand post-Sabbath party in Bethany with his disciples and Martha, Mary, and Lazarus at the house of Simon the Leper<sup>i</sup>. He was now walking toward Jerusalem for one last week of ministry before he offered the once-and-for-all sacrifice to forgive our sins.

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, telling them, "Go to the village ahead of you. Immediately you will find a donkey tied there along with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."*

What do these verses tell you about Jesus? That he must be more than a mere human because only God has the power to do what Jesus did. Jesus knows everything – even the attitudes of the heart. Think about that for a moment: Jesus knew that the owner of the donkeys would not just allow the disciples to take the animals but that he would even *send* them to be used in His service.

And if Jesus could see inside the donkey's owner's heart, he can also see inside yours and mine. What does he see when he looks at your heart? Sadly, I must confess that he sees sin in mine. Jesus knows all my angry thoughts, frustrations, doubts, and immorality. He sees it all. But, in mercy, He doesn't condemn me. Why? Because He came to save me.

Yes, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, he came in mercy – not to destroy the people in divine vengeance, but to offer the once-and-for-all payment for sin that would save the world.<sup>ii</sup> After doing that, he commissioned his apostles to preach the Gospel (the good news of what he did) so that everyone who would believe in him may have eternal life. And that Gospel has come to us. By the power of his almighty word, Jesus moved us to repent of our sins and awakened faith in our hearts to receive him as our LORD and Saviour. Because of that, whenever God looks at the heart of a believer, he no longer sees the sin that condemns us. Why not? Because our sin was crucified with Christ on the cross. Yes, whenever God looks at us now, he sees dearly loved children who follow him in love and faith. He sees his sons and daughters who face many threats and dangers on this earth as we seek to share his good news with others. Because he sees this, he takes it upon himself to watch over us - safely delivering us from this life into the next.

Who is the man we praise on the donkey? He is our God who knows all things and works in everything for our everlasting good.

Part Two: He is our Messiah who fulfills all Scripture.

After recording Jesus' command to his disciples, Matthew writes: *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Tell the daughter of Zion: 'Look, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey'". The disciples went and did just as Jesus commanded them.*

Who is this Jesus whom we worship? He is the Messiah who fulfilled every prophecy of Scripture concerning himself. Notice that Matthew, the writer of our text, does not quote this Old Testament prophecy after it was fulfilled but before. Why? To show that every step Jesus made was on purpose. Everything he did was to fulfill Old Testament Scripture.

Did you know that if Jesus had accidentally failed to fulfill even the most insignificant prophecy of Scripture, we would have to reject him as the Messiah? But thankfully, we don't have to wonder if Jesus is the promised Christ. Why not? Because he has fulfilled every prophecy concerning our salvation down to the littlest detail. For example, Zechariah (some 500 years before Jesus' birth) prophesied that the Messiah would ride on two animals: a female donkey and her colt. And that is precisely what Jesus did.<sup>iii</sup>

If Jesus fulfilled every jot and tittle of prophecy concerning himself, we can be confident that he will also fulfill every promise God made concerning us. He cares for us more than a mother cares for her children.<sup>iv</sup> While he may allow us to suffer great need for a time, allowing us to approach the brink of disaster, he will not let us fall. He will keep his promise never to leave or forsake us.<sup>v</sup> No matter what trouble or hardship we face, he will keep his commitment to work in all things for our everlasting good.<sup>vi</sup> Nothing can separate us from his love for us<sup>vii</sup> because he is our Messiah who fulfills every promise of Scripture.

Part Three: He is our humble King who deserves all honour.

Our text continues: *They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their outer clothing on them, and he sat on it. A very large crowd spread their outer clothing on the road. Others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them out on the road.*

It might seem strange to us: laying out expensive clothes for two donkeys to trample on. What would move the people to do that? They wanted to honour the man riding on the two donkeys as their eternal King.

And this king certainly deserves all our respect and honour. He does not ride into Jerusalem in pomp and luxury; he comes in humility and gentleness. This king's glory is in serving rather than in being served. Most kings ask their subjects to be willing to die to save them. In contrast, this king would die to save his subjects. From what? From their slavery to sin, death, and the devil's power. No praise could ever be enough for this king. No gift of ours could ever be too generous to thank the one who gave up his heavenly throne to be sacrificed in our place.<sup>viii</sup> Let us, then, willingly serve Jesus with our time, talents, and treasures - willing to give up everything for our king who emptied himself of everything (including his life) to save us!

#### Part Four: He is our Saviour from all sin.

We read: *The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed kept shouting, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*

Why did the crowds shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David”? Because the Scriptures say that the Messiah would be David’s descendant. Why did the masses cry out: “Blessed is he, who comes in the name of the LORD”? Because of a prophecy recorded in Psalm 118, which reads: “*O LORD, please save us now . . . Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*”<sup>ix</sup>

Did you know that the word “hosanna” means “Please save us”? When shouting “hosanna,” the people were asking Jesus to save them, just like the Psalmist did some 700 years earlier in the Psalm they quoted. So, who was this riding into Jerusalem that crowds of Christians still worship today? It is Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee, whose name means: “The LORD’s Saviour.”

Take some time to consider what this truth means for you. Because Jesus is your Saviour, you no longer need to fear God’s wrath over sin. You can go to him in repentance and faith, confident that he will forgive you because of what Jesus did on the cross. Moreover, he creates a new spirit within you through the Gospel – connecting you to himself in baptism to such a degree that when God the Father looks at you now, he sees Jesus and loves you. In the peace of His forgiveness, He sends his Spirit to help guide you in His word to live a holy life out of gratitude for what He has done. And he will keep his promise to deliver you from every evil attack to bring you safely to his heavenly kingdom.<sup>x</sup>

Many times, and in many ways, people ask us: “Why do you go to Church?” “Why do you love Jesus so much?” “Who is he?” Dear Christian, when asked these questions, boldly seize the opportunity to share the Palm Sunday truths with them: The Man we worship is Jesus of Nazareth. He is our faithful God who knows all. He is our promised Messiah, who fulfills all Scripture. He is our loving Saviour-King, who offered himself upon the cross to forgive everyone who looks to him in repentance and faith – no matter how great or many their sins have been. Yes, Jesus is our humble, loving king, who works in all things for the good of those who love him.” Let us celebrate this truth by never ceasing to praise him. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. John 12

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. John 3:16-17

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Zechariah 9:9

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Isaiah 66:13

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Hebrews 13:5b

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Romans 8:28

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Romans 8:38-39

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. Philippians 2:5ff

<sup>ix</sup> Psalm 118:25-26 EHV

<sup>x</sup> Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18