

# Palm Sunday: Jesus, our Servant King

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Through the events surrounding Palm Sunday, Jesus proves himself to be the ultimate Servant King—the one who instructed his disciples that the greatest in the Kingdom serves others, the one who rode into Jerusalem on a humble donkey, and the one who children in the temple courts and people on the streets shouted praise that their King, their Savior has come.

The children and people on the streets shouting “Hosanna” (which means “Savior,” or “save us!”) didn’t understand that Jesus wouldn’t save the Jewish people in the way they expected him to (by overthrowing the government). Rather, he would show himself not only to be a king, but a servant. He would pay the ultimate price by giving his life in death then coming back to life, and in doing this, swing the doors open wide for all those who trust in him to receive salvation.

This week, we’ll explore the stories of and around Palm Sunday, and how Jesus shows himself to be our Servant King.

## Day 1: The Servant King prepares his disciples

Our first peek into Jesus as Servant King comes in the time leading up to Palm Sunday when Jesus prepares his disciples for his coming death and resurrection by teaching them about servant leadership.

### Read the Word

#### Matthew 20:20–28

*<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.*

*<sup>21</sup> “What is it you want?” he asked.*

*She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”*

*<sup>22</sup> “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”*

*“We can,” they answered.*

*<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”*

*<sup>24</sup> When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> Jesus called them together and*

said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup>Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup>just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

## Think About

In the Old Testament, the language of “the cup” is used to talk about God’s wrath (Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17)<sup>1</sup>, and later in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus will refer to “the cup” again when he prays twice to ask the Father to take the cup from him (Matt 26:38, 42)<sup>2</sup>. Jesus ends both of these prayers with, “Your will be done” (v. 42), knowing that he is only one who can drink the cup of God’s wrath and punishment for humanity’s sins.

James and John, as ambitious as they are, could never drink that cup. Neither could we. Only Jesus could drink the cup.

Jesus, the clever wordsmith, replies, “You will indeed drink from *my* cup” (Matt 20:23).

They wouldn’t be able to drink *the* cup Jesus was about to drink, but they will share in *his* cup—just as all the disciples of Jesus throughout history and have done.

He reminds the disciples that the leadership of God’s kingdom is not like that of the power-hungry, domineering Roman occupation they lived under. The greatest in God’s kingdom are servants. They are leaders who desire to empower others rather than thinking of how they can gain more power for themselves.

Jesus came down from his place in heaven to be born as a newborn baby that he might walk among us. He touched and healed the sick, poor, and disabled in society. He washed his disciples’ feet hours before he knew he would be arrested. He let himself be wrongfully convicted, beaten, tortured, and nailed up on a cross to die as a criminal. He was buried and came back to life three days later to give us life. And this was all in service to the Father and to us.

He came “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28).

Jesus would drink the cup the disciples couldn’t drink. He would pay the price they couldn’t pay. He would die the death they couldn’t die.

And he would ask them to follow him in all of it—though they couldn’t drink *the* cup, they would drink *his* cup. They couldn’t pay the ultimate price, but they would give themselves fully in servant leadership. They couldn’t die the death he died, but they would daily seek to die to their sinful desires.

Jesus calls his disciples today (that’s us!) to do the same. When we drink the cup in communion, we’re reminded of the reality that we live because he died, and we’re called to join him in his death by dying to our self-seeking desires and wholly giving ourselves over to the one who we were made to love and worship—our Servant King.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 308.

<sup>2</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., [“Matthew,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 66.

## Reflect

- In what ways do you see leadership contrary to Jesus' model of servant leadership (at work, home, school, church, etc.)? In what ways do you see servant leadership carried out well?
- What does it mean for you to drink Jesus' cup? To be a servant leader? To die to your self-seeking desires?

## Prayer

Father, thank you that you love us so much that you wouldn't withhold your Son from us. Jesus, thank you for taking the cup we couldn't take. Thank you for paying the price we couldn't pay. Thank you for dying the death we couldn't die. Holy Spirit, help us to die to the parts of us that forget to think of you, forget to think of others, and only think of ourselves. We repent of the ways we have been selfish. And we turn to you, Lord, our Servant King. We want to be more like you in the way we serve others and live with the Father's will in mind. We love you, Lord. Amen.

# Day 2: The Servant King gets a donkey

Jesus had been preparing his disciples for what's to come, reminding them that he would die and be raised to life, continuing to instill in them the importance of servant leadership (while living as the perfect example before them). As Jesus nears the city of Jerusalem, he's getting ready for his triumphant entry by...getting a donkey?

## Read the Word

### Matthew 21:1–5

*<sup>1</sup>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.'"*

## Think About

By getting a donkey, Jesus was continuing to submit to the Father's will, knowing the prophecies about himself, the Messiah. But Jesus didn't just get a donkey to fulfill the prophecy. The prophecy has a good reason for why the king would come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and not on a horse and chariot. The prophecy referenced in the passage we just read comes from the Old Testament book, Zechariah.

### Zechariah 9:9–10

*<sup>9</sup>Rejoice greatly, 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.  
<sup>10</sup>I will take away the chariots from Ephraim  
and the warhorses from Jerusalem,  
and the battle bow will be broken.  
He will proclaim peace to the nations.  
His rule will extend from sea to sea  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

The word “lowly” used to describe the king carries with it the idea of “poor,” “afflicted,” and “humble.”

Jesus could’ve come riding into Jerusalem, standing on a chariot with two stallions charging ahead, but he was chosen to come in trotting on a donkey, a symbol of peace, humility, meekness.

Many of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah focused on kingship<sup>3</sup>. The Zechariah passage does not veer away from the idea of kingship, but it expands it, showing that a king can rule *and* serve, have strength *and* gentleness, and lead with greatness *and* humility.

Jesus, our Servant King, came to reign in this way, to bring peace to the nations through his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, that all who trust in him would be unified with him and with each other until he comes back again to bring fullness of peace to the world.

## Reflect

- What are other passages in the Bible that speak to God as a king who rules and serves, shows strength and gentleness, and leads with greatness and humility? In what ways have you seen this in your own relationship with God?

## Pray

Father, thank you that you are a God who is not only mighty, strong, and powerful, but you are gentle, humble, and kind. Thank you for bringing peace through the blood of Jesus. We look forward to the day when you will bring peace in its fullness to the world. May your Spirit fill our hearts with your peace today. May your Spirit fill our hearts with your humility. We love you, Lord. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> George L. Klein, [\*Zechariah\*](#), vol. 21B, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 71.

# Day 3: The crowds shout “Hosanna” to the Servant King

The time has come for Jesus to enter into the city of Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, a symbol of peace. The crowds would greet him as a king, laying down palm branches (hence the “palm” in Palm Sunday) and cloaks on the path before him and shout praises to him.

## Read the Word

### Matthew 21:6–11

*<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.”*

## Think About

The palm branches and cloaks are laid down on the road as a sign of celebration in honor of a king. In 2 Kings 9:13, we see this same practice of people laying down their cloaks for a king’s entrance<sup>4</sup>.

The people in the crowds shouted “Hosanna,” which was both a praise and petition. They were saying “you are the Savior,” and, also, “save us!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” comes from Psalm 118:26, which is a Psalm of praise when God has brought victory against enemies.

They believed Jesus was the promised One (true), the descendant of David (also true), and that he would overthrow and conquer the Roman government (not quite).

Since the depiction of the Messiah, the Savior to come, in the Old Testament was often that of a king who would reign and rule, it makes sense that they would think Christ would come to save them from their current oppressors (the Roman rulers)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., [“Matthew,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 67.

What they didn't understand is that he wasn't just the King, he was the Servant King—the One who rode in not on a horse and chariot but on a humble donkey. And as the Servant King, he would do something the crowds would've never expected from their Messiah. Jesus would die, come back to life, and swing the doors open wide for all those who trust in him to receive salvation and daily walk in a personal relationship with him.

Jesus was indeed “Hosanna,” the Savior and the promised One who came to save. And he didn't just come for those who were born Jewish or converted to Judaism, not just for those who were circumcised and practiced the law, but for anyone who trusts in him, he came to save and call his own.

## Reflect

- In your own words, describe the scene as Jesus enters the city. What would it have been like to be there among the crowd?
- Many people in our world are comfortable thinking of Jesus as a great teacher, leader, or friend, but struggle with the idea that he is a King. Why do you think that is?
- In what ways can we enter into celebrating Jesus as King and Savior?

## Pray

Father, we praise you as the King of all kings. Thank you that Jesus walked among us as our Servant King. We repeat the words of those who stood on the road to welcome you as we say, “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” You have saved us. You have called us your own. We see in full now what the crowds only saw in part. We know that you had a bigger plan, one that included everyone who seeks to follow you. Thank you, Lord, that your plan included our salvation by your grace. We love you, we celebrate you, we praise you, we honor you. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

# Day 4: The children worship the Servant King

In this part of the story, Jesus has entered into the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey as the people laid down cloaks and palm branches shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Then, Jesus enters the temple, drives out the money changers with their corrupt practices, and heals the disabled who come to him. And that’s when the chief priests and teachers of the law come to Jesus to confront him about what the children are saying.

## Read the Word

### Matthew 21:14–16

*<sup>14</sup> The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.*

*<sup>16</sup> “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.*

*“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,*

*“From the lips of children and infants  
you, Lord, have called forth your praise?”*

## Think About

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus responded by calling a small child to him and telling the disciples that to even enter the kingdom of heaven, they need to become like this child (Matt 18:1–5).

On another occasion, people were bringing little children to Jesus and the disciples told them that what they were doing was wrong and asked them to leave. But Jesus replied, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt 19:13–15).

Jesus welcomed children. He had a special place in his heart for them. And he instructed the disciples on multiple occasions to be more like children.

When the chief priests and teachers of the law come to confront Jesus about the children shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David” in the temple courts, Jesus reminds them of Psalm 8, and that God will be praised from the mouths of kids and babies.

### Psalm 8:2



*Through the praise of children and infants  
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

The religious leaders, of course, weren't looking for that kind of response. They were already angry that the children were saying Jesus was the Son of the David, the anointed King. Jesus not only affirms what the kids are saying, but by quoting Psalm 8, equates himself with God and the leaders with the enemies of God (though he does leave the latter part of the verse out and lets them fill in the blanks).

It's no wonder that the next thing that happens is that Jesus "left them and went out..." (Matt 16:17). Those men were ready to strangle Jesus!

The religious leaders and the disciples both had a lesson to learn: they needed to become like children in their humility and in their faith.

Jesus, though the King, embraced a childlike, humble nature in the way he served. And even though he's equal to God, embraced his position as "the Son" in the way he submitted to the Father.

## Reflect

- What does Jesus' interactions with children show us about the character of God? What does the childlike aspects of Jesus show us about God?
- What can we learn from children about our faith and relationship with God? In what ways do we need to become more childlike in our walk with God?

## Pray

Heavenly Father, we are in awe of the humility we see in you through Jesus. Thank for the way you love and welcome little children and how you use them to praise your name and to teach us more about you. Thank you that you love and welcome us as your children, no matter how old we are. Lord, help us to embrace a childlike spirit, to come to you daily with full trust in your goodness. In our Servant King's name we pray, amen.

# Day 5: Follow in the footsteps of our Servant King

In a couple days, Christ Fellowship and churches around McKinney, the U.S., and the world will celebrate Palm Sunday, the triumphant entry of the Servant King. Palm Sunday opens the door to Holy Week, a cascade of events leading up to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

As we wrap up our week studying the stories surrounding Palm Sunday, we'll read back through the Bible passages we've read each day and prepare our hearts for Holy Week as we reflect on how we can follow in the footsteps of our Servant King.

## Read the Word

### Matthew 20:20–28: The Servant King prepares his disciples

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### Matthew 21:1–5: The Servant King gets a donkey

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*“From the lips of children and infants  
you, Lord, have called forth your praise?”*

## Reflect

- In what ways does Jesus show himself as the Servant King throughout these passages?
- How has God spoke to your heart this week? What has stood out to you? What might God be saying to you?
- How might God be asking you to respond? In what ways can you follow in the footsteps of our Servant King?

## Pray

God, you are our Servant King—the One who came not to be served but to serve. Holy Spirit, open our ears to hear your voice, to what you might be speaking to us in this time. Open our eyes to see your work in us and in those around us. Open our hands to your plans for the days, weeks, and months ahead. And

lead our footsteps in step with yours. Jesus, help us to follow you as the Servant King, to walk in the example of servant leadership you've set before us, and remind of your Spirit's presence behind us, before us, beside us, and in us as we daily walk with you. In Jesus name we pray, amen.