

Jesus willingly went to the cross for us

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[0:00] Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he.

Humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations.

His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope. Today I declare that I will restore to you double. For I have bent Judah as my bow.

I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield your warriors a sword.

[1:14] Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.

The lords of hosts will protect him, and they shall devour and tread down the sling stones. And they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.

On that day, the Lord their God will save them as the flock of his people. For like the jewels of a crown, they shall shine on his land.

For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethpage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her.

[2:34] Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord needs them, and he will send them at once.

This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.

The disciples went and did, as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the ground, on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

And the crowds that went before him, and that followed him, were shouting, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this?

And the crowd said, This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee. I wonder when someone last made you a promise.

[3:53] Maybe your boss promised you a pay rise. Maybe your parents promised you could have a social media account at a certain age. Maybe you were promised a particular holiday.

It might be that you know the joy of promises fulfilled. It might be that you know the pain of promises not kept. But I imagine we're all familiar with the waiting.

Promises made, but not yet fulfilled. This kind of waiting is familiar to God's people. See, in Genesis 12, right at the beginning of the Bible, God promised to Abraham that through his family line, he'd

send a descendant who would be a blessing to the whole earth.

And a few generations later, in 2 Samuel 7, God promised to David a descendant who would be a king and would rule forever.

From then on, God's people waited for their king to come. It's fair to say they didn't wait very well. They were quick to question God, quick to doubt his promises, and quick to turn away from him altogether.

[5:11] But they waited nonetheless. A couple of weeks ago, I was outside Brixton Underground Station. Six o'clock on a Wednesday evening, people piling up the stairs into the cold air.

I knew Lizzie was on a tube headed for Brixton. At every glimpse of a grey coat, I'd look and think, ah, ah, ah, no. I waited, expectant, hopeful for Lizzie to arrive.

A little bit like God's people waiting for their king. Except instead of waiting half an hour, they've been waiting hundreds of years.

And so, with a sense of excitement, Jesus arrived. Born, as promised, by the Old Testament, in Micah 5, in Bethlehem.

Mother, as promised, a virgin. Hometown, as promised, Nazareth. Maybe in the surrounding towns and villages, there are murmurings. Could this be him?

[6:14] And then later in his life, stories get around about Jesus and his teaching and his miracles. More murmurings. Could it be? Is Jesus the king we've been waiting for?

You only need to read through the first few chapters of Matthew's gospel to see how many Old Testament promises and prophecies Jesus fulfills. In his opening sentence in chapter one, Matthew writes, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And then he spends the first 17 verses tracing Jesus' family line, showing that he's descended from Abraham and comes down the line of David, just as God promised his king would.

And so in our verses this morning, Matthew wants to make sure his readers are crystal clear that now, arriving into Jerusalem is the long-awaited king.

Matthew confirms for us, firstly, the king's identity is really him. And secondly, the king's mission, he's here to save. And it's all to do with a donkey.

[7:29] I might not sound very kingly, it doesn't automatically feel like it, does it? A king and a donkey. But the donkey helps us to see Jesus' identity and his mission.

There are headings on the back of the service sheet if you want to make notes or follow along.

Firstly, let's see the king's identity. It's really him. Have a look with me, Matthew chapter 21, verse 1, page 995.

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples saying to them, go into the village in front of you and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, the Lord needs them. And he will send them at once. And verse 6, the disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.

They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks and he sat on them. It's all a bit bizarre, isn't it? Why not walk into Jerusalem?

[8:45] Or if he's God's king, shouldn't he be riding in on a horse or something? What's Jesus' need for a donkey? Keep your finger in Matthew 21 and turn back to Zechariah chapter 9.

It's on page 963. Zechariah, he's an Old Testament prophet, a messenger from God, about 500 years before Jesus, telling God's people about the future.

And here particularly, what to expect about the king God will send. Let me read Zechariah 9, verse 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he. Humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

That's amazing, isn't it? Hundreds of years before Jesus is even born, Zechariah says that God's king will come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. So, as the disciples who would have been familiar with the Old Testament scriptures are sent for the donkey, they should be putting the pieces

together.

[10:06] And Matthew wants his readers to make the link too. Back in Matthew 21, Matthew quotes Zechariah. Have a look at verse 4 and 5. And this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.

It's pretty clear, isn't it? Matthew wants his readers to be in no doubt. It's as if he's saying, Hey, don't miss this. Remember what the prophet said all those years ago about God's king coming to Jerusalem on a donkey.

Well, here he is. This is him. Outside Brixton station a couple of weeks ago waiting for Lizzie, trying to spot her in the floods of people looking for the grey coat.

There's one. No. There's one. No. That's not her. It's only when I spotted a grey coat and saw the familiar yellow hat and her smile that I knew it was her.

And so for God's people waiting for God's king, hearing all the murmurings about Jesus, is it him? The donkey confirms it. The rumours are in fact reality.

[11:27] It's Jesus. He's God's king arriving into Jerusalem. So there's no more waiting and no more guessing.

The people can be sure and Matthew's readers today can be confident. But we might wonder why is that significant for us now? Well, if Jesus wasn't God's promised king, all of Christianity would fall down.

And in our post-truth, no such thing as truth, fake news culture, some would have us believe Christianity is a bit of a stab in the dark. A nice idea but a bit fanciful.

But Matthew 21 verses 1 to 11 means you and I can have certainty. Jesus, the man documented in history, he really is God's promised king.

And it means we can trust all the Old Testament prophecies and all the promises God has made about the future. So in a world where it can sometimes be hard to know who to trust, God is ultimately trustworthy.

[12:43] That's good news. Because of the donkey, the king's identity is confirmed. But with the help of the donkey, there's more to see. Matthew wants his readers to know, secondly, the king's mission is here to save.

Matthew puts this prophecy right in the middle of our passage, inviting us to focus in on the donkey, drawing our attention back to the original prophecy in Zechariah chapter 9.

Turn back there again, 9.6.3. Let's see together more of what Zechariah prophesies about God's promised king. chapter 9, verse 9.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey.

So we've seen already how Jesus coming into Jerusalem on a donkey confirms who he is. But the donkey also shows what kind of king God is sending.

[14:01] See, in Jesus' day, kings would come in wartime on a horse. But otherwise, as a symbol of their coming in peace, they'd ride in on a donkey. God's king doesn't come galloping in on a horse with soldiers in tow.

He's not coming to take power by force. God's king comes in peace. And it's confirmed there in verse 10 where it says, he shall speak peace to the nations.

His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. And he's a king who comes in humility to bring peace and also to save.

Notice what he brings with him there in verse 9. He has salvation. And that begs the question, what or who is he coming to save and why?

Look at Zechariah chapter 9 verse 11. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I'll set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

[15:13] imagine an empty, dry, cracked lake, totally parched. What would happen to people living there?

Well, they'd be dehydrated, shriveled up, and they'd die. Through the prophet Zechariah, God likens his people's spiritual state to a waterless pit they need saving from.

And it makes sense. If God is the source of life, and people turn from him, they essentially disconnect themselves from the flow.

They're living in the dry lands of this waterless pit that leads to death. But God has promised through the shed blood of his king to free his people from the pit and to save them to something wonderful, a new land, a land where God's king will rule forever in peace.

Have a look at verse 16, Zechariah 9 verse 16. It speaks of a future day, a day still to come. On that day, the Lord their God will save them.

[16:45] As the flock of his people, for like the jewel of a crown, they shall shine on his land. For how great is his goodness and how great is his beauty.

Grain shall make the young men flourish and new wine, the young women. So hold the two images in your head in contrast.

The dry and desolate waterless pit. And the picture of God's land where God's people are gathered like sheep by their good shepherd.

And they shine across this land like the jewels on a crown. They enjoy God's beauty and goodness and they flourish with abundant grain and wine.

It's a stark contrast, isn't it? It's a life and death contrast. When you're stuck on a motorway and the police and ambulance and fire engine fly by, you've a pretty good idea what they're headed for.

[17:52] There's been an accident and they're getting to the scene to try and save whoever they can. The vehicles and the blue lights confirm that, don't they? And so when God's people see Jesus arriving in Jerusalem on a donkey, it's as if the blue lights are flashing.

They know he comes to bring salvation, to free people from the waterless pit. Jesus is pretty clear about it himself. Come back to Matthew 21.

and look across the page to Matthew 20. 20. 17. And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and on the way he said to them, see, we're going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man, that's Jesus' title for himself, will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes.

and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. And he'll be raised on the third day.

And have a look across to verse 28. Jesus makes clear why he's going to die. He comes not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[19:24] He knows, he's clear, he's entering Jerusalem to give his life so that through his death, anyone who trusts in him can be saved from the waterless pit of life without God to eternal life with him.

Jesus is not a power-hungry president figure. He's God's humble servant king. come to give his life as a ransom to save.

And so in Matthew 21, given how long the people have been waiting and waiting for God to send his king, and given all they know Jesus has come to do, it's no wonder they see Jesus arriving and they celebrate.

Have a look at verse 8. Jesus is on the donkey riding into Jerusalem. And verse 8, most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

[20:48] Most of the crowd join the dots, and they get his identity spot on. They realise exactly who Jesus is. So verse 8, they roll out the makeshift red carpet, they grab whatever they can find, and they lay it before Jesus to welcome him.

It's a royal reception. Imagine the hordes lining the road into Jerusalem. like a less formal, no barriers to keep people away version of the procession that will no doubt take place for the coming royal wedding.

There will be huge numbers of people there cheering and celebrating Harry and Meghan. Like verse 9, the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, crying out, celebrating, Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna basically means God saves. We might imagine some of the people in the crowd, all sorts of people Jesus has encountered over recent years. Imagine the leper from Matthew chapter 8, no longer diseased and outcast, now healed, shouting. It's him, it's God's king, he saves.

[22:13] Imagine the paralysed man from Matthew chapter 9, walking in the crowd, leaping, shouting, it's him, it's God's king, God saves. Imagine the two blind men in Matthew chapter 20 with their recovered sight in the crowd, shouting, God saves.

We could go on and on, but the crowd speak for us. They see Jesus, they know exactly who he is, and they know what he's coming to Jerusalem to do, and so they celebrate.

And rightly so. But we can't quite stop there, because we need to notice verse 10. Not everyone is keen to celebrate God's king.

Have a look. And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, who is this? The crowd on the way into Jerusalem may be celebrating, but the people in the city aren't quite as impressed. In fact, compared to the crowd celebrating, stirred up gives a sense of agitation.

[23:29] And because we have the benefit of being able to read on in Matthew's gospel, we know that in a few days, in chapter 27, there'll be a gathering of people in the city, not celebrating Jesus, but instead shouting for him to be crucified.

You see, there are those in the city who don't want God's king. They're blind to who Jesus is, and they don't see why they need him. Matthew gives us the details of verse 10 as a warning, as if to say, don't be like the people of the city, don't miss God's king.

And then he gives us verse 11 as another piece of the puzzle, another chance for us to join the dots. The city are asking, who is this? And the crowd says, this is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.

God's people are expecting his king to have been born in Bethlehem. And they're expecting him to come from Nazareth. And the crowd tell them, this is him.

They want the city to grasp who is arriving in front of them. And Matthew wants his readers to see, in the end, there are only two real responses to Jesus.

[25:05] See him as the king he is, and celebrate his coming to save. Or ignore all the prophecies fulfilled, and all the cries of the crowd, and be like the people in the city who don't acknowledge God's king.

And in a few days we'll have him hung on a cross. I wonder which of those two groups you find yourself in. If you'd place yourself in the latter group, maybe you'd like to take another look.

Why not use this week in the run-up to Easter to ask, who is Jesus really? And why all the fuss about him? See, Matthew isn't a fictional writer putting together a fantasy novel.

He's claiming to be recording historical fact. And if it's true, it's massive. On the bookstall at the back, there are a few copies of Luke's Gospel.

Luke writes so that we can have certainty about who Jesus is. Why not take away a copy, free on the bookstall, read it through this Easter. But if you'd place yourself in the first group, you've seen Jesus' identity.

[26:28] You trust he's come to save. Celebrate him. Celebrate him. I wonder if as a church where lots of people are away over Easter time, we don't always make as much of celebrating Good Friday and Easter Sunday as we could.

In some ways, it might feel like it kind of falls off the radar. So this Easter, let's make a point of celebrating God's King coming to save us.

Why not spend some time each day this week reading of the cross, where Jesus does the work of saving his people? people? And why not make much of Jesus next weekend?

I wonder what it would look like to make as much of Easter as we do of Christmas. I've also been struck thinking all this through over the last couple of weeks.

When was the last time I genuinely celebrated Jesus? If I was there as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, would I have joined in celebrating, shouting Hosanna?

[27:51] Or would I keep quiet and reserved because I'm British and I don't like making a scene? Or I'm just not an excitable person?

I don't think this passage allows us to be lacklustre. So what would it look like for me and you to celebrate Jesus today?

Maybe it will mean singing with real joy on a Sunday morning, belting out praise to God. Maybe it will mean speaking about Jesus with genuine excitement at work rather than being apologetic. Maybe it will mean taking a chunk of time to pray more prayers of thanks to Jesus for all he's done in saving us. Why not chat about some ideas with someone over coffee after the service?

So we can help each other celebrate Jesus well this week. Because if you're anything like me, on Monday morning into the routine of normal life, it might be you're not that excited about celebrating Jesus.

[29:03] Emails piling up, reports to fill in, papers to mark, laundry to do, etc., etc. Jesus is miles away from the brain, let alone being celebrated.

So let's encourage each other and remember together, God's king has arrived in Jerusalem. His identity is confirmed.

It's really him. His mission is clear. He's here to save. So let's celebrate. Celebrate him. Let's have a moment of quiet to reflect and then I pray.

Amen. Set until 30 minutes. I have a nice clip of this clip, I've always be able to mute yourilar? Attachers.