

Who is This?

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[0 : 00] Well, it was the 30th of July, 1954, when Elvis Presley performed his first ever concert at Overton Park in Memphis.

So here is the Levitt Shell, which was the stage back in those days. And here is a very young looking Elvis on the first time he performed publicly.

He was one of the warm up acts actually for Slim Whitman. There's the original poster and he wasn't well known at all. So much so they actually misspelled his name, Ellis Presley.

But he made such an entrance to the music scene that night. He made such a statement that he created a stir and caused people to ask, who is this?

And after that night, everyone in the world came to know and spell correctly Elvis Presley. In fact, he became known around the world as the king of rock and roll or simply the king.

[1 : 06] Yeah, that's right. Now, the point is people can make such an entrance, such a statement that they create a stir and cause people to ask, who is this?

And that's what happened that very first Palm Sunday. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, you can see it there at verse 10. If you've got your sheets there, it's just below the fold line there. Verse 10.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this? Actually, the word stirred there is a bit of an understatement.

Some of you will know that the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. And the Greek word is where we get our word seismic from. In other words, the word stirred is of earthquake proportions.

It shook the city and caused people to ask, who is this? And so what was these statements that were made? What was this entrance like that caused this reaction?

[2 : 13] Well, let me show you. We're at point one on the outline and verse one in the Bible passage. There's lots. Matthew has packed. He's the master of Old Testament fulfillment. So he's packed a lot of Old Testament.

And believe me or not, I've actually cut a lot out. So anyway, let's see how we go. So point one, verse one. Here Jesus has headed towards Jerusalem for the Passover festival, like all the other Jews.

Jews traveled there to celebrate how God rescued them from Egypt with the Passover. But he stops just outside the city at Bethage and deliberately sends his disciples to get some donkeys. Matthew mentions two donkeys here, even though the other gospels mentioned one. And I'll explain that in a moment. A young donkey and its mother. The young donkey, the colt, would often be accompanied by the mother anyway, particularly with large crowds, as we'll see in a moment. And if the owner of these donkeys stopped the disciples, the disciples are simply to say the Lord needs them. And the owner will let the donkeys go right away. It's unsure whether Jesus had prearranged this with the owner or simply another example of his divine power.

[3 : 47] Either way, the owner will send them. But the question is, why does he need to ride on a donkey? Is he sick of walking? No. Like most people, he expected to walk everywhere.

In fact, this is the only time we're told he rode anything. And why donkeys? Why not a horse or a camel or a pink hummer? Well, because Jesus is making a statement.

And Matthew tells us what that statement is in the following verses. Verse 4. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.

Say to daughter Zion, that's Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you. Gentle or literally lowly, humble and riding on a donkey.

And on a colt, the foal of a donkey. You see, Jesus deliberately rides on a donkey to fulfill this prophecy about a king, which we heard from our first reading.

[4 : 50] And that's Matthew's focus in his gospel, fulfillment and kingship. They're his twin themes. And that's why he mentions two donkeys. Because even though the quote is really just talking about the same donkey in those verses, it sounds like it's two donkeys there.

He's pointing out that this is in fulfillment of the Old Testament. And in fact, there's other prophecies about kings and donkeys. But Matthew says Jesus fills this particular prophecy.

Because the statement Jesus wants to make is that he comes as a humble king. And when Alexander the Great rode into Jerusalem, history told us that he rode in his famous war horse, Bucephalus.

And here's a sculpture of it outside the city chambers in Edinburgh. I'm not sure why Edinburgh, but it doesn't look, the horse doesn't look all that big and massive there. But his name, Bucephalus, actually means ox head.

That's how big the horse apparently was. The horse was huge. And the point is, most kings or generals rode massive war horses to show off their impressive status.

[5 : 55] But Jesus deliberately rides on a donkey to show his humble status. That's the statement he's trying to make. For he'd come to Jerusalem not to show off to people, but to die for people.

To pay the price or ransom for our sins. In fact, just a few verses before this passage, Jesus said the Son of Man, that's him, did not come to be served like most generals and kings.

No, no, he came to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many. And in our first reading from the Old Testament, it talks about this king also being righteous and victorious.

You see, Jesus wouldn't just die for our sins. He would then rise again victorious over death. But it's his death that he's about to experience next week, that we're about to celebrate next week.

That takes the punishment for our sins so that we don't have to. Instead, we can be forgiven, reconciled, peace with God.

[7 : 05] That's why it says in that Old Testament quote that he will proclaim peace to the nations. And as we're brought into God's family, we'll not only have vertical peace with God, but we'd have horizontal peace with one another.

Who is this? Well, it's Jesus, the humble king. Come to die to bring us peace. That's his statement. And that's the type of king we need, isn't it?

Just last week, President Biden held his first press conference since his election. He had a go at Trump. He also stumbled a bit and lost his place. And so, of course, Trump then had a go at him. And then there's our own leaders and the issue of our federal parliament is facing over its treatment of women. Now, it's hard to get all the facts from the media these days, but it seems our world leaders, our kings, so to speak, don't seem to always act humbly, do they?

And I doubt they'd ever die for you and me to bring peace, would they? But Jesus is the humble king.

[8 : 16] You die for you and me, that we might have peace with God and one another. That's who he is. Well, that's the Jesus's first statement. Next comes the crowd statement, point two.

They seem to get the king bit, as Michelle said before. Maybe not the humble bit. We'll come back to that later. But look at what they do in verse eight. So the disciples get the donkeys.

Jesus sits on them. And then verse eight, a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Now, we need to remember that it's Passover time. And so Jews from all over came to Jerusalem. And historians think the population would have swelled from about 30,000 people to 180,000 people, six times the normal population.

So when Matthew says a very large crowd, we're talking very large, thousands probably. And John tells us that what happened was as he's on his way to Jerusalem, people who have come from all over, probably from the north as well, traveling down, who heard about his miracles, his ministry up north in Galilee.

[9 : 30] They hear about him. And so they go out to meet him with palm branches, which, of course, is why we get Palm Sunday. But as they come out, they use these branches and their cloaks as a kind of royal red carpet, don't they?

For Jesus. And again, this is a symbolic act of declaring someone king. It's what happened in the Old Testament to King Jehu, where they put their cloaks under his feet as a kind of royal red carpet for him.

And so here, the crowd's first part of their statement is to symbolically declare Jesus is king. And then the second part of their statement is to verbally declare it.

Verse nine. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that follow shouted Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Here they call Jesus son of David, which again is a title for God's promised king. Christian opened our service with these verses that God promised David.

[10:41] He said that when David dies, he's going to raise up someone from his own line, a son or a descendant. He will not only build his house for God, the temple that was Solomon, but there would be a descendant from David's line.

And God will establish his throne of his kingdom for ever. And so this phrase son of David referred to this king, this forever king who would rule forever, who might save them from their Roman rulers and establish God's forever kingdom.

And so also the words which are taken from Psalm 118. Again, this psalm was normally sung during Passover because it's a psalm of thanksgiving for salvation. So salvation from Egypt in the original Passover time.

It's the same psalm we get that kid song from, you know, that one that this is the day, this is the day. Anyway, moving on, let's move on. The word Hosanna, as we heard in the kids talk, does mean save us.

And so the psalms would cry out to save us just as God had done in the past. But in by Jesus's day, it actually become a term of praise. So it's more like praise the son of David.

[11:57] And the one who comes in the name of the Lord was the victorious king who led a procession up to the temple. And people from the temple would call back and welcome them.

And they go and offer sacrifices of praise. So here's the psalm. Oh, Lord, save us. Literally, Hosanna. Grant us success. And then the people from the temple would call out, blessed is he, the victorious king who comes in the name of the Lord from the house, the temple of the Lord.

We bless you. And then with branches in hand, they'd head up to the temple to offer sacrifices of thanks. But the point is, here are thousands of people shouting praise to the son of David because he is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

In other words, they're verbally declaring Jesus to be this promised king. Come to save what they thought from the Romans. I'm told there's nothing quite like going to an English football match, what we call soccer, with thousands of fans.

I like the fans of the Rangers football team, which is actually a Scottish team, whose best player is this guy, Jermaine Defoe. And he is like their king, if you like.

[13:12] And so if you go to one of the games and you hear them shouting and cheering, let's see if the video works. Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, who are you?

I want to know, Jermaine Defoe. Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, who are you?

I want to know, Jermaine Defoe. The video and audio clearly aren't getting on with each other at the moment.

But can you imagine being part of that crowd? I mean, that's as loud as I can. I wanted to kind of push it up to just to try and help you imagine the atmosphere. But as amazing as that might have been, this is even more so.

Can you imagine thousands of people shouting out together, Hosanna to the son of David? People are shouting out to their king, Jesus.

[14:17] I know it's not as catchy as, hey, baby. But it's so much more significant. No wonder we read then in verse 10, when Jesus entered Jerusalem with all this crying out going on, the whole city was shaken, seismic, and asked, who is this?

And the crowd following him answers in verse 11, this is Jesus of Nazareth. But they don't say the king, do they?

They say in verse 11, this is Jesus, the prophet. They're making another statement about him, but it's actually linked to being king too.

You see, in the Old Testament, God also promised Moses that he would raise up for them a prophet like Moses from among the Israelites. And Moses didn't just speak God's word.

He also led God's people like a king out of Egypt. In fact, while God saved them from Egypt, God also worked through Moses to save them.

[15 : 36] And so the people longed for this promised prophet, not only to speak God's word, but also to lead them as king through whom God might save them. Again, they thought from Roman rule.

And so, so much so earlier on when Jesus acted like Moses and he fed the 5,000, if you remember with bread, just like Moses fed thousands in the wilderness with manna, the people back then said this from John 6, surely this is, notice, the prophet who was to come into the world.

And then notice what they want to do to Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king. And so Jesus withdrew. But not now, for it was time for God to work through him as king to save them.

But not in the way the crowd thought, for there's something worse than Roman rule. And as we've heard from the kids talk, it's judgment for sin.

They needed to be saved from that much more than from Roman rule. Who is this? Jesus, the promised king who saves from judgment.

[16 : 51] And again, we need a king like this, don't we? Because we all sin. We don't always treat God rightly or one another rightly for that matter. And so we all deserve judgment, as did Jerusalem.

In fact, they were guilty of having their worship become a complete farce. You see, like in Psalm 118, Jesus the king does now go up to his temple.

But instead of being able to make a sacrifice of thanks, he makes another statement because of what he sees. Verse 12. Verse 12. Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. It is written, he said to them, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.

And now the temple in those days was the center of life. And here Jesus enters this center of life, overturns tables, drives out people.

[17 : 52] It would have been a massive stir, a huge statement. I don't know what the center of life is in Doncaster, maybe shopping town for the teenagers who like to spend too much money up there.

But can you imagine me going up to shopping town and overturning the tables of the food? Actually, they bolted down those tables in the food court, aren't they? Other tables that aren't bolted down and driving them all out of shopping town.

I mean, it would cause a stir, wouldn't it? And this statement is about restoring right worship. Because these people had two problems with their worship.

Firstly, it was selfish. You see, the problem wasn't so much that they were buying and selling animals. They needed that for the Passover. It's where they were doing it. They were doing it in the temple courts.

And so here is a scale of the temple. You can see it dominated the city, can't you? It was massive. It's a two scale scale temple. The big open spaces on the right and left there are the court of Gentiles, where they were having these markets.

[18 : 57] But it's also where the Gentiles, that is, non-Jews like us, could come and pray to God. In fact, the first quote Jesus makes about a house of prayer comes from Isaiah, which picks up this idea of Gentiles, foreigners, who bind themselves to the Lord.

These, says God, I will bring to my holy mountain that is on Jerusalem, Mount Zion, and give them joy in my house, my temple of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house, my temple, will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

But because the religious leaders had let the merchants inside the temple courts, it prevented the Gentiles from coming and praying. It's a bit hard to pray with the bleating of sheep in the background, isn't it?

It was selfish worship. But the bigger problem that Matthew seems to highlight is their empty worship. You know, they claimed to follow God with their mouths, but they dishonored God with their lives.

For starters, they brought animals into God's house. Where do you think the animals went to the toilet? On the floor of God's house. Can you imagine someone bringing their pet over and freely letting it do its business on your carpet?

[20 : 14] I wouldn't be too happy myself. It's unimaginable, isn't it? More than that, they would say they followed God with their mouths, but then they'd go out and do other things with their lives.

The den of robbers is from Jeremiah chapter 7, where the people back then seemed to be like the people like today. Steal and murder, may not literally, but they're being angry with one another, committing adultery, following other gods, and then they're rocking up to the temple as though they're safe and nothing's wrong.

And so Jeremiah says, this is the bit that Jesus quotes, has this house, my temple that bears my name, became a den of robbers? The robbers bit is not about merchants ripping people off. It's making the temple a den of crooks, people who have empty worship. It's like people coming to church on Sundays and then deliberately sinning and following other gods the rest of the week. It's empty worship. And so Jesus' statement here is that he's come to judge their selfish and empty worship and to restore right worship for all.

[21 : 26] In fact, for anyone who had eyes to see, he was really doing what Malachi promised in the Old Testament, that the Lord, the King, the Messiah would come. He would come to the temple, it says, but he would come and purify the Levites who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people so that then, right at the end, the offerings of the people of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord.

This is what Jesus had come to do, to judge but then purify and open right worship for all people. And again, ultimately, he would do that by paying for our sins at the cross and becoming the new temple, the place that we go to, to worship God.

And so we can pray through Jesus to God anytime, anywhere. We don't have to go to the court of Gentiles, which is good because it doesn't exist anymore. We don't have to go to a priest. We can pray to God anytime, anywhere, through Jesus.

And through Jesus, we are given God's spirit who works in our conscience. You know that voice that prompts you to do the right thing? Sometimes you wish you to be a bit more quiet, not just on Sundays, but the right thing during the week.

Who is this? This is Jesus, the judge king, come to restore right worship. The humble king come to die for our peace.

[22 : 46] The promised king come to save from judgment. Now, given who he is, then you ought to expect him worthy of praise, wouldn't you?

But look at the response of the religious leaders. Point four, verse 14. The blind and lame came to Jesus at the temple and he healed them. But then 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 happy. No, they were indignant, angry.

Can you believe it? Can you feel the disconnect of their statement here? They see the wonderful things. They hear what the kids are doing and they're angry about it.

They go on to say to Jesus, do you hear what these kids are saying? As if to say, you need to silence them. They just don't get it, do they?

[23 : 55] It reminds me of a sign I saw of people who don't get it, like this sign. All day breakfast is served till 11.30 a.m. This one's my favorite though.

Clearance was 97 cents, now \$2.50. Some people just don't get it. But the Pharisees are even worse, aren't they?

They just don't get it. And so when Jesus, I love Jesus' response, when the Pharisees or the chief priests say, do you hear what these kids are saying? Assuming that he'll silence them. Jesus simply goes in verse 16, yep.

And then he ups the ante, doesn't he? By saying, verse 16, have you never read from the lips of children and infants, you, Lord, have called forth your praise.

This is a quote from Psalm 8, which speaks about kids praising the Lord. But the Lord in Psalm 8 is God himself. Do you see how Jesus is upping the ante here?

[25 : 00] He's basically saying, I'm God. And I deserve to be praised. Jesus is not only the humble king who died to bring us peace, the promised king to come to save from judgment, the judging king come to restore right worship.

He's also God, the son. And so that's even more reason why he deserves our praise. And so can I ask, who is this Jesus to you?

Is he just a historical figure worth listening to occasionally? Or is he your king who died for you? In other words, have you put your trust in him?

Have you made him your king? A humble king, one worth following. And for us who have, then, do we praise him?

Not just with our lips at church, but in our lives at home or work or wherever. And does the way we live make a statement to those around us that he is our king?

[26 : 11] Not just on Sundays, but every day. And not begrudgingly, like following Jesus is simply a duty, you know, stiff upper lip kind of thing, but joyfully, because we know following Jesus is worth it.

There's a couple in my Bible study group where the wife has cancer. They found out last week the current chemo is not working, but they're still joyfully following Jesus. The husband said last week, where else would we go when Jesus has the words of eternal life?

What a statement. The wife is not sleeping well, and yet she joyfully said, oh, but it's okay because it gives me more time to pray. In that tone. What a statement they've both made.

Here are people for whom life is very hard at the moment, yet they're still joyfully following Jesus as their king, because they know what sort of king he is, that it's worth it. We all follow someone as king, whether it's ourselves, a loved one, a hero we look up to, or our society's values and so on, but none of them stack up to Jesus.

For he is the humble king who came to die to give us peace. He is the promised king who came to save us from judgment. He's the judging king who purifies and restores right worship.

[27 : 29] You won't find a better king to follow in your life, nor one more worthy of our praise. So will you keep praising him?

Let's start. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this reminder of that very first Palm Sunday, where we glimpse who this really is.

Father, we pray that you might help us to remember who Jesus is, that we might joyfully follow him as our savior king, and continue to praise him, not only with our lips, but in our lives as well.

For we ask it in his name. Amen.