Matthew 21:1-11 AM

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[0:00] Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer.

Amen. May you be seated. Amen. So as Will said, today is Palm Sunday. Jesus rides into Jerusalem.
It's the beginning of what we call Holy Week, for those of us that follow the kind of church calendar, traditionally so, and Holy Week is about what happens when the Holy God draws near.
So this is convenient, because over the last five weeks, we've completed a sermon series where we're in Leviticus and Hebrews, and the sermon series was about how the Holy God draws near.
And today in Holy Week, we see what happens when he draws near.
And beginning with this drawing near to Jerusalem in the triumphal entry, Matthew, and if you could turn to page 826 in your pew Bible, it would be really helpful. We're going to be in this Matthew passage, Matthew 21.
[1:11] Matthew says, they, Jesus and the disciples, draw near to Jerusalem. And here, Matthew starts focusing our attention on the events of the final week of Jesus's earthly ministry, what led to his death and what culminated in his resurrection.

And the invitation for us over the next seven to eight days is to slow our lives down, to keep watch with Jesus moment by moment, to fix the eyes of our hearts upon the author and perfecter of our faith.
As we watch him win our redemption and lay the foundation for our restoration and secure our resurrection. So today is Palm Sunday.
In the next seven or eight days, we get to watch the Holy God draw near and do what only the Holy God can do. Now, Matthew's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is situated in a very interesting context.
On the one hand, Jesus is called multiple times the son of David before and during and after this event. Before and after this event, he heals those who are blind and lame.
[2:19] And before this event, he asks two different groups of people, what do you want me to do for you? So in this moment, Jesus is intentionally, with all these swirling things around him, he is intentionally orchestrating a symbolic action, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

A symbolic action that not only publicly reveals who he is to the crowds, but drastically recalibrates people's expectations of what he has come to do for them.
As you can imagine, the energy on that road must have been electric. Thousands of disciples flooding into Jerusalem, and here is Jesus claiming to be the long-awaited king of Israel, returning to his temple to restore his people and to rule and reign over his city.
And Jesus stages this demonstration perfectly. So, he sends two of his disciples. You see this in verses 2 and 3. He sends two of his disciples to fetch a donkey and a colt for him.
So Jesus has decided, instead of walking with all the other pilgrims into Jerusalem, I want to ride on a donkey and on a colt. Deliberately, Matthew signals for us, evoking the imagery of the prophet Zechariah, who sees the hopes of Israel as hanging on a single royal figure.
[3:38] The king who comes riding in on a donkey, says Zechariah, that will be the one who will bring restoration and salvation to God's people. And they will bring him in glory to his presence.

And they will be made magnificent and full of splendor before the eyes of the world. And as the passage goes on, Jesus allows the crowds to lay down their cloaks and to get tree branches and put them on the road, in a sense, rolling out an ancient red carpet for him.

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And then Jesus does not silence the crowds when they shout, Hosanna. And think of how many times in the Gospels Jesus heals somebody and they say, you are the Lord, you are the Messiah, you are the Christ.
And he says, be silent, don't tell anybody. It's not my time yet. And here the crowds are shouting, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
And he does not silence them. He says, now is the time for people to know. And so here we see symbolic actions that in the ancient Jewish world have this rich, royal pedigree.
[4:40] Think of a president when he's inaugurated into office, putting his hand on the Bible and taking an oath. Think of the King of England, a more recent example, who sits on the throne in Westminster Abbey and holds a scepter and wears a ring and is cloaked with a robe and is adorned with a crown.

These are symbolic, visual statements that mean something. And the same is true here. Jesus is presenting himself unabashedly and unashamedly and publicly and royally as the King of the Jews. It's a title that hung over his birth. Remember what the wise men said as they came to King Herod? They said, where is he who is born King of the Jews?
And then it's the title that hangs over his death as he is bleeding, as he is wearing a crown of thorns, as he is hanging on the cross. And the soldiers put the crime above his name. And it says, this is Jesus, the King of the Jews.
So this triumphal entry is the public return of the King to his city, to his temple, to his people.
[5:55] Jesus is coming to reclaim his throne and to establish his kingdom forever. Now this is where it gets really interesting, as if that wasn't interesting enough.

For it appears that Matthew believes that the main point Jesus is emphasizing in doing this is his humility. This is royalty the likes of which the world has never seen before.
Matthew wants us to get this. Jesus is not just claiming to be King. He is fundamentally and foundationally and radically recalibrating people's expectations of what it means for him to be the King.
And this is going to have rich personal and spiritual application for us. We're going to get there in a moment. But I want us to be as clear as we possibly can first about the main point that Matthew thinks Jesus is making as he rides into Jerusalem mounted on a donkey.
Matthew draws out the main point by interrupting the action in verse 4. Notice how Jesus gives this command. And before Matthew says, this is the way it was fulfilled, Matthew inserts his own interpretation in verse 4 and says, Jesus did this to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet.
[7:13] And then he quotes Zechariah 9, verse 9 and verse 5. Say to the daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming to you. And here's the key word, humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.

And it's really interesting because when you go back to Zechariah 9 and you read the verse that Matthew is quoting, you realize that Matthew has left out a couple of words in the verse.
There are two words right before the word humble, righteous and victorious, that Matthew has actually dropped. Not because Matthew doesn't think those are true.
Oh, you wait. When Jesus hangs from the cross and he defeats sin and death and when he rises from the grave again, Matthew is going to say that Jesus says, all power and authority has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples. So Matthew is going to highlight the fact that he is righteous and he is victorious. But right here, Matthew drops it because he wants to draw our attention to the fact that Jesus is humble.
[8:17] And it's the same word that Jesus uses in the Beatitudes when he says, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And it's the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew chapter 11 when he describes his own heart.

It's the only place in the Gospels where we ever hear Jesus describe the nature of his heart. And he says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.
And here it is, for I am gentle, it's the same word, and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Humble, meek, gentle.
This is what Matthew wants us to see about the king as he rides into his city to win victory over the sins of the world. Now, what does Jesus and Matthew mean by this word humble?

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And it's interesting because if you look in ancient literature, there's this long tradition of discussion about what humility and gentleness and meekness is. And it's often understood in relation to anger. [9:29] Gentleness is meant someone who is both slow to anger and someone who has the ability to be appropriately angry at the right things at the right time.

So, for example, a gentle person will not get angry at a child if they come to them crying for help because that child accidentally broke their toy. But a gentle person will get righteously angry at a bully who intentionally breaks another child's toy for no good reason.
So, Aristotle says this about gentleness, for example. He says, Gentleness is someone who is not easily provoked to anger but free from bitterness and has tranquility and stability in spirit.
And then Aristotle says, Case in point, Jesus, as he enters into Jerusalem, goes and clears out the temple.
So, I like the way the New Testament scholar William Barclay summarizes the meaning of this word beautifully. He says, Blessed are those who are always angry at the right time and who are never angry at the wrong time.
[11:01] Understood in this way, humility describes, I want to suggest, both the tenderness and the toughness of Jesus' heart. Toughness. Tenderness. He will stop his mission to go and save someone's dying daughter because he sensed that a woman touched the hem of his garment and he wants to turn around and see face to face and know the name of the woman who touched him.

Tenderness. Toughness. He will not be stopped from charging into the temple courts and turning over tables and driving out merchants and challenging religious leaders who have lost the plot. Toughness. Tenderness. He is soft-hearted toward all those who need his help and ask for it. The blind and lame and the children and the tax collectors and the prostitutes he will not cast out if they ask for his help and they know they need it.
Tenderness. But toughness. He is firm-hearted toward all those who are proud and act like they do not need him. Or who want to use him to boast their own status and privilege in the eyes of others. Toughness. And so as Jesus rides into Jerusalem mounted on a donkey that first Palm Sunday, he is revealing not only his royal authority but his heart humility.
[12:23] He is genuinely gentle and lowly in heart. He is a king who comes into the city carrying the sins of the world and the burdens of his people. He is a king who welcomes sinners and sufferers while at the same time resisting the proud.

He is a king who despises the fame of transitory praises and chooses instead a crown of thorns and a throne which is a cross. Jesus is claiming to be king but he is recalibrating the world's expectations of what a king is and should and do and be and say.
Humble is not simply what Jesus does or how he behaves. Humble is most fundamentally who he is. Humble is most likely to be a king.
Humble is most likely to be a king. Humble is most likely to be a king. Humble is just a king and says, A mother of two of his disciples coming to him and saying, Hey, can one of my sons sit on your right hand and your left?
And also two blind men sitting on the roadside. Jesus asks them a question about the desires of their hearts. About their expectations. What do you want me to do for you?
[14:01] my brothers and sisters whether you are a seasoned christian or whether you're exploring the faith for the first time it is worth asking yourself what do i expect jesus to do for me and what do i want him to do in my life david recommended that i hand out post-it notes and i have everybody write down something and then we could put it in a can and burn it but i suspected that marian would not be okay with that no fire allowed jesus give me that position or promotion jesus relieve me of this depression jesus keep me from financial ruin jesus please bring reconciliation jesus let me make my own decision see jesus is keenly aware of our expectations of him and he knows who and what we want him to be and to do and to think and to say in our lives so when he enters into our lives and when he enters into our churches and when he enters into our cities as lord jesus the king one of the first things he does is seeks to recalibrate our expectations of what he has come to do for us he has not come to be a revolutionary prophet or a wonder worker or a keeper of the religious status quo he has come to seek and save the lost and the lame and the lowly wherever they are to be found and whenever they cry out to him so as he enters our lives as he did jerusalem that day jesus seeks to get underneath our circumstances and into our desires that's where he wants to reign so my application question for you today is do you want jesus to be the sort of king who will fit your desires or do you want your desires to be shaped to fit the sort of king that jesus is i

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think one of the ways of parsing this about a bit further is to consider four of the different characters that we have in and around the triumphal entry what did they want from jesus and how did jesus respond to them so we have the disciples and we have the crowds and we have the religious leaders and we have the lame and the blind what did they want from jesus and how did he respond to them so first the disciples did you notice that um jesus sends two of his disciples to get the colt and the donkey and just a few verses earlier in chapter 20 two of jesus disciples namely the brothers james and john of zebedee they see in jesus a means to status and influence and so we're told in matthew chapter 20 verse 21 that their mother approaches jesus on their behalf to ask if they can sit at jesus right hand and left hand in his kingdom basically can we be the two most important and powerful people next to jesus in the kingdom to come and we're told a few verses later that when the other ten disciples found out that these two disciples kind of requested this through their munder they were pissed at the other and they're really mad at those two brothers it says they were indignant at the two brothers and so when we get to the triumphal entry matthew is careful to tell us that jesus sends two of his disciples to fetch the donkey and the colt and i think it is very likely that the disciples who jesus asks asks who asks jesus for positions of power and authority are the ones jesus asked to go receive his symbols of humility and sacrifice the donkey and the colt they're the ones who need to learn the lesson of humility i think there's an interesting lesson is don't be surprised if jesus sends you on a mission or gives you a ministry or a vocation that is going to lead to you needing to spiritually mature in areas where you most need it and probably least want it jesus is intent involving people in his ministry and his mission to the world

not only so that they can serve those people so that they themselves can become certain sorts of people who reflect his heart of humility so mission becomes the occasion of formation which i think leads to this question how are you lord inviting me to learn more about your heart in the place and the job and the circumstance in the ministry that you have placed me right now so often we want to run from the place that god has actually placed us but maybe god has actually put us there because he knows there's part of us that needs to be there in order to receive the grace and be humbled in the way that the lord jesus wants us to to be more like him so there's the disciples and then second there's the crowds the crowds see in jesus this revolutionary prophet who can serve their political purposes he can make the changes they want to see in the world i mean who doesn't want somebody a political leader who can do what they think really needs to be done for society to be a good and just and flourishing place i'm sure i could give each one of you a blank sheet of paper and you could fill out what you think the leaders of our country should be doing right now and they aren't doing and this becomes clearer as the chapters go on in matthew and jesus's trial where the crowds who once praise him quickly turn on him in the name of political expediency and somehow we discover that in this moment jesus's humility is concealing from their eyes his true dignity and royalty as the son of god the king of the jews so there's this deep irony in the middle of the triumphal entry the crowds say that he is a prophet and matthew quotes the prophets that say he is a king because his heart and his way of being king is humble the crowds are blind to his identity as the king they get caught up in the moment in the fervor of hope for political and societal change but their praises only last for a moment and this is the lesson for us if your praise of jesus is dependent on the temporal privilege he can give or a temporal power he can wield then jesus will quickly disappoint you and your praises will not last very long because he has come to give you something much greater than what you want from him so we have the disciples we have the crowds and then we have third the religious leaders and the jewish leaders these are the chief priests and the elders of the people and the scribes they're the the davids and jordans and uh ben's and and chris lays of of saint john's they see in jesus a threat to their positions of privilege and power and to their beloved traditions and ways of life and they are indignant at the praises that he is receiving from little children after clearing the temple jesus is leading our children astray you can see them here the next day they question jesus about his authority what gives you the right to do what you're doing and in response notice jesus is not very canadian he does not quietly excuse himself to avoid confrontation i'm speaking as an american here jesus doubles down telling pointed stories that are scathing critiques of the jewish leaders and warning them of the judgment of god that is coming upon them if they do not repent because jesus is humble in heart jesus resists the proud he is not a pushover and the lesson we learn is that if we question jesus's authority in order to protect our own positions of authority

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he will confront us with a holy intensity and indignation because he is too loving to leave us in the blindness of our pride this is part of his humility that he resists the proud and that's why he begins his sermon on the mount with blessed are the poor in spirit not the proud in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and so you get the disciples you get the crowds you get the religious leaders and finally you get the blind and the lame i love this i love this so much i love that the triumphal entry is hemmed in before and behind by matthew saying jesus healed the blind and the lame who cried out to him for mercy because it shows exactly the sort of people that this king came to serve the blind and the lame see in jesus the source of healing mercy and their models for us all they see that jesus is a humble king who is especially fond of the humble jesus will not deny anyone who cries out to him for help jesus will not cast out anyone who cries out to him for mercy jesus will not ignore anyone who comes to him for rest and jesus will not condemn anyone who comes to him for forgiveness you see for jesus our blindness and our lameness and our helplessness when we recognize it and we bring it to him is precisely the thing that evokes his great kingly compassion to pour out upon us because his heart is humble he resists the proud but because his heart is humble he gives grace to the humble and the lesson for us here is come to jesus this is precisely what he says in chapter 11 come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and i will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for i am gentle i am humble i am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls brothers and sisters as we go into holy week that is what jesus is doing he is laying down his life taking away our sins he is conquering the grave taking away the sting of death all so that our souls may finally come to rest in him he made us for himself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in him and the king who rides into jerusalem the king who rides into our churches the king who rides into our lives will not allow anything that takes us away from his rest to stand in the way of his rule and reign in our lives so he comes to the crowds he comes to the disciples he comes to the religious leaders he comes to those who are blind and lame and he declares that he is the king humble and mounted on a donkey and so his people raise their voices and say hosanna to the son of david blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord hosanna in the highest my brothers and sisters i speak these things to you in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit amen amen amen amen you amen amen amen amen amen

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