

## CAP PALM SUNDAY SERMON 2024

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

**Date:** 24-04-2024

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:1-17

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*<sup>1</sup> When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to Me. <sup>3</sup> And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them on immediately." <sup>4</sup> Now this <sup>[a]</sup> took place so that what was spoken through <sup>[b]</sup> the prophet would be fulfilled:*

*<sup>5</sup> "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION,  
'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU,  
HUMBLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY,  
EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY.'"*

*<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, <sup>7</sup> and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their cloaks on them; and He sat on the cloaks. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road. <sup>9</sup> Now the crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David;  
BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;  
Hosanna in the highest!"*

*<sup>10</sup> When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the crowds were saying, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."*

*<sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all those who were selling and buying on the temple grounds, and He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. <sup>13</sup> And He \*said to them, "It is written: 'MY HOUSE WILL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a DEN OF ROBBERS."*

*<sup>14</sup> And those who were blind and those who limped came to Him in the temple area, and He healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant, <sup>16</sup> and they said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus \*said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'FROM THE MOUTHS OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF?'" <sup>17</sup> And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there."*

Heavenly Father, would You speak to us this morning? Would You, through Your Holy Spirit, help us to engage with this narrative of Your Son? We pray that even as we vicariously join Jesus in Jerusalem, that we would be mindful that there are things that You want us to take away, that will affect our lives and help us to draw closer to You. We ask, Lord, that You would do so. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

As you read through Matthew's gospel, you will always find that he has many references. 'As was fulfilled in' is a favorite phrase of his. The reason for this is that his gospel was written predominantly for the Jews. So he assumed that they had a fair understanding of the Old Testament. Remember he's writing this many years after Jesus' death, so he was at pains to continue to show to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah and that they had missed Him.

So even here, you can see that these verses are full of prophetic fulfillment. The first 7 verses itself, he brings in Zechariah 9:9,

*<sup>9</sup> "Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is righteous and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the <sup>1</sup>foal of a donkey."*

That's the fulfillment of that particular prophecy as Jesus came in.

Then in vs.8-11, we see the crowd's favorable response. They responded well to His coming because they quote Psalm 118:26,

*<sup>26</sup> "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord;"*

That was their response.

We see another prophetic fulfillment out of Isaiah 56:7, in vs. 12-13.

*"Even those I will bring to My holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;  
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."*

Then in vs. 14-17, we see the chief priests and scribes' unfavorable response to Him as they are indignant that everybody is just going 'gaga' over Jesus. Their response is so indignant when they talk to Jesus, who replies again quoting the Old Testament scripture. He says, "From the mouths of infants and nursing babies you establish strength; out of the mouths of infants and babies, you have ordained praise."

We see that this particular passage that Matthew is talking to us from is full of prophetic involvement. This particular passage is also in all the four gospels. In fact, this is the act in the drama of the life of Jesus – from an incarnated babe to the person who did amazing miracles and spoke with such authority. This was the final act in the drama of His life, and Jerusalem was the chosen stage for it. Why? Because the time was right. This was the time of the Passover. At the time of the Passover, it is said that over 2 million people visited Jerusalem, and were there for about 7 days to celebrate the feast of the Passover. All these people in Jerusalem at that time. It was called the Pesach, which celebrates the Exodus – the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Passover happened every year in the month of Nisan, which is around March or April. In Israel, it lasted for seven days. And the law was that every male who lived within a 20-mile radius of Jerusalem had to make the trek to Jerusalem and be there for the Passover. So, when Jesus went to Jerusalem, it was not a hasty decision. It was not unplanned. It was something that was planned in advance. Jesus knew that He was going to go to Jerusalem. In fact, as you read this passage, you realize that He had already made arrangements. He told His disciples, "Go, and you will find this foal of a donkey. If somebody asks you, say 'the Master has need for it', and they will give the animals to the disciples. And that's exactly what happened. Jesus was very comfortable in the area of Bethany

and Bethphage and had many friends there. the same thing happened when they were looking for where to celebrate the supper. He again had made arrangements.

The crowds received Jesus as king, spreading their cloaks in front of Him as they had done for Jehu when he was proclaimed king (2 Kings 9:13). It was a welcome that was given to a king, and they looked at Jesus as a king as He came in. in fact, they greeted Him with “Blessed in He who comes in the name of the Lord.” That was possibly a greeting that was given to all who came to Jerusalem. There were people who lived in Jerusalem, there were pilgrims who came from all over. John tells us that many of the people who came wanted to see Jesus because they had heard of how He had raised Lazarus from the dead.

So, when He came, apart from this greeting, they also used the word ‘hosanna’. Hosanna is more than just a ‘Hail Jesus’ kind of greeting. Hosanna meant ‘save now’. It was a cry of distress that was aimed towards the king. And also, they addressed Him with the messianic title “Hosanna to the son of David. Save now.

The children of Israel had gone through quite a torrid time in the 400 years or the silent years, when there’s no reference at all to what happened from the time of Malachi to the time of John the Baptist. When you read their history, it is fraught with the wars and the persecutions that came their way. In fact, historians tell us that in 175 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes captured Jerusalem, and then in a bid to wipe out Judaism, he actually offered swine’s flesh on the altar in the temple, and deliberately profaned it and used the temple premises as brothels.

Then it was the family of Maccabees who rose up against him and they defeated him and sent him out of Jerusalem. Then they restored, purified, and re-dedicated the desecrated temple. When they finished it, then too, people cried out with palm branches, celebrating the event. Save us now, and they were saved.

So Jesus wasn’t just going into Jerusalem. He was making a statement, and a bold one at that. in Old Testament times, when prophets spoke endlessly and nobody listened, they resorted to acting out things that would kind of sit in people’s minds. Look at the story of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Jeroboam was gaining in popularity and Ahijah was the prophet then. One day, he took his coat and he met Jeroboam, and he silently tore it into 12 pieces representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he counted 10 and he gave it to Jeroboam signifying that there were 10 tribes that would support him. He acted it out.

Then we read about Jeremiah, the weeping prophet as we call him. For 40 years, he kept telling the children of Israel and Judah that they were going to go down, into exile. They didn’t listen to him. Then one day, he put a yoke upon his shoulders and walked around Jerusalem signifying that this is what was going to come. You’re going to be under the yoke of slavery. There was another prophet who didn’t have a landline or any kind of line to the Lord, who took that yoke off Jeremiah and broke it, trying to signify that it wouldn’t happen. But it was true; it did.

So Jesus dramatically entered Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey with the telling statement that He was the savior. The ‘hosannas’ were a perfect and apt word as He entered Jerusalem. Sadly, we see that they misunderstood the essence of the salvation that He was offering. They wanted a king who would overthrow the Roman empire, their rule; and what Jesus was offering was Himself as a Savior who could overthrow the rule of Satan. He was not after the throne. He was after the hearts of men and women.

Also, by entering Jerusalem the way He did, He was deliberately provoking the religious leaders. They knew that they must be careful. Jesus was a popular healer of the sick. He was casting out demons and people were impressed. Crowds followed Him wherever He went, wanting to hear Him preach and teach them from the Bible. He spoke with that kind of authority. The religious leaders could not afford to let Jesus' power grow any more than what it was. Yet, they didn't want to do anything during this feast.

Matthew 26:5 says that they came to the conclusions saying, 'not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people.' And they wanted to avoid riots and uprising because that would bring the Roman soldiers into the picture. And they didn't want that yet. It would be best, they thought, to wait for the Passover to end. but a man named Judas changed all that when he went and met them, and promised to deliver Jesus during the Passover itself.

Three things we can learn about Jesus as we look at this picture, among many things that you could probably glean from it.

### **1. His boldness and courage.**

He knew it was dangerous for Him to be in Jerusalem, for the Pharisees were looking for a way to kill Him. He also knew that it would lead to His impending death, that He would suffer greatly. And in fact, He had also shared this with His disciples. Still, He went. In fact, His confrontations with the Pharisees had escalated to the point where they had said that anyone who refers to Jesus as the Messiah would be thrown out of the synagogue. We read about this in John, when Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth. Anybody who called Jesus the Messiah would be excommunicated. So boldly, He did what He had to do.

### **2. His statement.**

He was making a very bold statement. He was making a claim to show the people that He was indeed the Messiah that they had been waiting for. It wasn't enough for Him to be just a prophet because a lot of them thought that that's what He was. As a prophet, He didn't need to have died. His triumphant entry and His clearing of the temple were both acts that fulfilled prophecy regarding the Messiah. We read in Malachi 3:1 that the Lord would suddenly come to His temple, and that's what Jesus did when He reached Jerusalem. He went straight to the temple and overturned the tables of the moneylenders, threw out the people who were selling doves at exorbitant rates, exploiting the people. "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." He made a bold statement.

### **3. A clear purpose.**

He came with a clear purpose. It was not kingship of the throne that He desired, but kingship of their hearts. That was why he came riding on a foal, which was a pointed reminder. Jewish people knew through their history, of all the kingdoms that were around at that time, kings who came on horses were coming in war. They were coming to fight. But kings who rode on a donkey were coming in peace. that was well-established, and that was the kind of thing that Jesus was establishing as He came. He was coming as the King of Peace, not to destroy but to build, not to subjugate but to free people, not with swords and spears but with love and compassion, not to live in a palace but to live in their hearts, not to kill, steal and destroy but to offer life in all its abundance.

### **2 clear assertions from this passage:**

- He declared Himself to be Israel's King and Messiah. He made that declaration. It was time.
- He deliberately challenged the religious leaders. He had been in opposition with them all this time. But each time He would say something, and then He would go because His time hadn't

come. the time was right now and He rode right into Jerusalem into the thick of all the planning that was going on to destroy Him.

Jesus' life was in perfect accordance with the will of God. And the question that we must ask ourselves: are our lives also being lived in the perfect accordance with Jesus? Jesus entered the temple to clear the rot that had entered in. all the buying and selling that was going on was so pathetic. It fleeced the poor people who came from far away and they had to pay exorbitant prices for the doves, or high rates for changing money. The rot had set in and Jesus cleaned that out. I wonder whether there are things in our own lives where we recognize that things are not what they should be, whether there is something that's festering. Is there a rot that has somehow managed to find a place to stay in our own lives?

Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, said, "I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from His glorious unlimited resources, He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high and how deep God's love is for you. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

So beloved, the question for us, particularly in light of the fact that Jesus cleared the temple of the rot that had set in, is to ask ourselves whether He would need to overturn anything in our lives. Whether we have tables that are not used to function according to the will of God. Maybe there's something that you've tried hard to get rid of. Maybe through this, even this Lenten period, you've opened yourself to God's Spirit to say: Lord, work in me. Maybe every day, you've prayed, you've asked, you've read scriptures hoping that this particular thing can be overcome or rejected or thrown out of your life. Maybe it's some sin, some addiction, something. But you succumb to it every time.

I wonder today, if we were to look up to heaven and say, "Lord, we've been moved by what You did. We've been convicted but also encouraged that, through Your love Lord, we can experience a newness in our relationship even with You, that You are capable. Lord, as You live in my heart, You can clean house. Take the keys to all the rooms that I have held on to closely. They are rooms that don't in any way lift You up. I've tried hard in my own strength to break free and I've never been able to. And Lord, today I'm sitting, thinking that this is my lot, that I just need to let it be with me. Sit along with me." Beloved, that isn't the will of God for you, because as we think about ourselves and the number of times we have tried and failed, we recognize that everything we did was in our power. It's not and wasn't possible.

But look at what Paul goes on to say. "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." So at the point that you stopped and said, "It's not possible," stop. Look up and say: God's word says that He can do beyond anything that I can even think or imagine; he's able to do it. And then see the liberating words that follow – "according to the power that works within us". God is going to do that, beloved. That thing that you thought was impossible, He's going to do it through the power that is within us.

What kind of power rests in us? the power of the Holy Spirit. Dunamis power, from where we get our English word dynamite. The power is going to work to bring you freedom. Maybe it's something that you've gotten used to. Maybe even as we talk about the love of God, maybe you've never experienced God's love. You've never known how high it is, how deep it is, how wide it is, how beautiful it is to experience His love. And maybe today God is saying: I'll show you. There's a direct

connection between you and Me – My Holy Spirit. Maybe today, it's just a matter of saying: Lord, I want to experience that love.

Maybe you're asking for tenacity. Last week God did such a wonderful work in our midst. As we invited Him to come and be part of the healing process, so many of you came forward, and God did remarkable things. Would love to hear your testimonies. If you would write in to us on WhatsApp or email and just tell us what God did so that we can raise it as a bouquet to Him. God can still do those incredible things in your life. all He's saying is: Let Me. Let My love begin to change you. Let My power begin to give you victory.

Then he ends this by saying: To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever. Beloved, what we allow God to do in our hearts, in our lives, in our situations, with our emotions, with our habits, can become testimonies that will change the next generation. Do you know that? Your testimony can change the life of some family member as you speak about what God has done. That's how powerful it is. And God has lifted up generation after generation. We sit here because that happened, generations before us. that's our mandate to be able to do that.

Closing prayer.

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