

The Triumph of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. So, just before we jump into the sermon, and if you have a Bible, you can go ahead and start! turning to Matthew chapter 21. But before we get into that, just want to acknowledge, recognize, and appreciate those who pitched in and helped with last Sunday's celebration, whether it was cooking food or getting the place decorated and set up and ready to go. So, if you were involved with any of those things, would you just stand and be recognized? Allison, you'd just love this, and just, yeah, just thank you for all your hard work and the people that, like, pitched in and helped. And Lisa, you bet. Come on. Y'all are, like, so shy. My goodness, yes. Thank you for being silent servants, never demanding the spotlight. But anyways, very much appreciated. It was a lot of fun. Last week was very special. So, today kicks off the beginning of what is called Holy Week, and it is a week that follows the events that lead up to the crucifixion of Jesus, and then culminates next Sunday in Easter. But today is a special day because many call it Palm Sunday, but it's a remembrance of Jesus' epic parade into Jerusalem, often called the triumphal entry. But as we will see, and as we're going to read and discuss today, it is a triumph like no other. So, Matthew 21, verses 1 to 19. 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. 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, on a colt, the full 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 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. 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.

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, Hosanna to the son of David, they were indignant. And they said to him, Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them, Yes. Have you never read? Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise. And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. And in the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, May no fruit ever come from you again. And the fig tree withered at once. This is God's word. So quite the spectacle, quite the event happening here, something you'd want to try to get tickets for, no doubt.

Crowd singing, Jesus riding a donkey. He gets a little rowdy in the temple, right? Challenging the leaders, healing the sick and the lame that are brought to him. And then that poor fig tree, man.

Now, this all took place at the beginning of a major festival, the Passover feast that was coming. And it was kind of a week-long thing, celebrated, culminating in the Passover celebration. And because of that, Jerusalem would have swelled in population quite a bit as faithful pilgrims from all over kind of converged on the city. But Jesus, he comes, he arrives with his own crowd.

[4 : 47] And this crowd had been gathering to him over days as he's journeyed toward Jerusalem. For example, 18 miles from Jerusalem, just a day or two before, there was a city called Jericho of Judea that Jesus traveled through. And there he healed some blind men who then got up and followed him. He dined with Zacchaeus, a well-known tax collector who turned and became a disciple of Jesus. But along the way, you have the hundreds, if not thousands, that came to Jesus bringing their blind and their lame and their sick, and he healed them. And so you see these numbers leading up to this moment here, these numbers of the crowd following Jesus, they swell. But it is a crowd filled with the inconsequential and the infamous. And yet this is the crowd that went before Jesus and went behind him, ushering him into Jerusalem, shouting Hosanna, praising Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And here is the beautiful thing. Jesus has ordained that the humble get to shout his Hosannas. And this refrain of praise was directly from Psalm 118, verses 25 to 26 of that song. And it was a song. It was a song that was often sung during the Passover week. Hosanna comes from the Hebrew word, save us. It's a word that we find in verse 118 to 25, or it literally says, save us. And until then, it was a prayer of hope for God's rescue for his people. But today, coming into Jerusalem on this special day, it became a praise for God's provision.

But those singing Hosannas to Jesus, those in the crowd that were participating in doing it, they were not kings or dignitaries. They were not accounted among the priests nor the powerful.

These were people that were nobodies. Many of them once lepers, lame, blind, those that people, society would have looked upon in judgment, wondering if God wasn't punishing their sin or the sins of their parents, why they were in the state they were in. This crowd was filled with renowned sinners, prostitutes, adulterers, tax collectors, those that society despised for their brazen sin, those who didn't have a seat at the table. And among the multitude, singing praises were some former demoniacs, no doubt, those that people were afraid of and feared, but Jesus had set free.

It was a crowd of many who had been rescued, the humble and the lowly, the hopeless, those who had lived their life crying out in their soul, Hosanna, save me, save us, we pray, oh Lord. And then they met Jesus and their prayer became a song. Now, if you're Jesus and you're the Messiah and you're trying to convince all the big time people in Jerusalem that your messianic claims are legit, these aren't the folks that are going to get the job done.

Listen, what kind of people do we want vouching for us? I mean, nobody, you and I, we would not brag if Charles Manson said, you know, Jesse, that's a good guy. Like even if he claimed to be born again, right? I'd still say like, yeah, I'm not going to, I'm not going to put that one on my social media page.

[8 : 36] We don't put a six-year-old as a reference on a resume to get a job, right? They aren't, they aren't good to vouch for us and vindicate us in any meaningful way, but that's kind of what's happening here. This is the crowd that Jesus declares. I want them shouting my Hosannas, the despised, the lowly, the weak, the powerless, those he had healed, the penitent, the contrite, those who had been forgiven. These are the ones Jesus chose to vouch for him. And isn't it amazing?

God choose, that's his way, isn't it? He chooses the weak things. He chooses the lowly and it confounds the wise. It confounds the powerful. The chief priests and the scribes, they look on this and they know better. They tell Jesus to silence his groupies. They go to him and they say, can you hear what these are saying about you? It's kind of like you can just almost hear them get there.

Can you hear these idiots? Can you shut them up? Can you show yourself worthy Jesus and get on our side? We know better. But Jesus responds by quoting a Psalm out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies. God has ordained, God has prepared praise. You know, the proud, they despise the lowly, they despise the humble. And the proud, they come to God and expect him to do what they approve of.

But Jesus loves the praise of the humble. He loves the praise of those who are contrite in heart. And Jesus despises the approval of the proud. It's fitting. As we see here, it is fitting that the humble and the lowly get to declare Jesus as the Messiah and ascribe glory to him. Because Jesus is a king of a very different kind of glory. And this king's procession proves his nature and his kingdom.

This whole spectacle, Jesus' arrival and how it is done is a mockery of the Roman triumph, where conquering generals would ride in a chariot drawn by four horses.

[10 : 52] They would come and would be dressed in purple and gold. A laurel wreath would be placed, crowning their head, a scepter in their hand. And this procession would be accompanied by a display of the plunder of their military victories to include artifacts of those nations, the treasures of those nations, prisoners of war and the weaponry. And also in the parade would be soldiers, flag bearers, and musicians. And on the way to the temple, all the citizens of Rome would line the streets to cheer and praise their conquering king or the conquering general. And on the way, they too would mock and scorn the prisoners of war walking in that parade, those that were conquered. Now imagine the visual of that.

If you've ever seen the movie Gladiator, that scene where he rides in to the applause early on in that movie, that's kind of what you get there. This procession would then end at the temple of Jupiter, where the conqueror would go up to make sacrifices to thank the gods for the victory.

The Roman triumph was, it was a spectacle, but it was one that celebrated military might while humiliating those that conquered. Jesus's triumphal entry is a different kind of triumph altogether. And it proves that he is a very different kind of king, bringing a very different kind of kingdom. He rides in on a donkey, a beast of burden, not a chariot drawn by four horses.

He is not arrayed in flashy robes of purple and gold. He has no crown on his head, no scepter in his hand, no splendor. Where is the glory of this triumph? There is no parade of his vanquished prisoners going before him and behind him. Where is the glory of this triumph?

It is in fact there, it is the very people giving him praise. Because Jesus conquers with a different sword, one that makes the wounded whole, heals the lame, makes the blind to see and sets the sinners free from their captivity. His vanquished are those who shout and sing his hosannas. They are not those who paraded in shame, being mocked and scorned. And for good reason, that they get to shout his hosannas because Jesus is the champion of the humble and the lowly. While this procession proclaims that Jesus is a king of peace and his kingdom is one of peace and service, not of military power and earthly conquest, yet this moment isn't without incident. Jesus arrives at the temple, but he doesn't go up to make sacrifices for victories when he goes in and he starts turning the place upside down.

[13 : 59] This is unexpected combat on an unsuspecting battleground. Jesus is doing battle for the humble and the lowly. See, under the cloak of religion, the powerful were taking advantage.

They were growing wealthy by making it difficult to draw near and to be able to sacrifice to God. When someone would come to offer a sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem, that sacrifice had to be approved by a priest. The animal they brought had to be approved. It couldn't just be any kind of animal.

Not anything you brought was acceptable. It had to be spotless. It had to have no physical defects. It's all there kind of outlined in the law of Moses. And so a whole system was now set up to take advantage of that. There were inside the temple, priest approved animals being sold in the temple at a hefty price, kind of like buying a soda at Disneyland. You know, we got you in there. Now you're stuck.

Add to that, there's money changers, right? And they're there to help with the payments for these animals. And quite likely they were using imbalanced scales, unjust scales to line their own pockets.

So there's this whole commercial enterprise inside the temple overseen by the temple authorities to take advantage of people's need to make a worthy sacrifice. And here's the thing, it isn't the rich and the powerful that are paying the price here. Notice verse 12. Like Jesus goes in and he turns over the tables and the money changers and then the seats. It says, he turns over the seats of those who sold pigeons. Now it's interesting in the law of Moses, if you were too poor to bring a lamb or a bull or a goat to make a sacrifice, God actually made a provision for that. He said, you know what? You could bring a pigeon instead. You could bring something that you could afford. So who's being picked on here?

[16:02] It isn't the wealthy. It's actually the poor and the powerless. And Jesus had enough of that. The powerful had set up barriers to access God's presence and God's mercy, which is why he is indignant.

He is doing it, throwing tables and chairs. He is doing battle on behalf of the humble and the lowly. Jesus is their champion. Is he yours?

Some of us like the idea of someone being our champion, fighting for us, right? But some of us like the idea of being the champion. After all, the champion is the one who gets the glory.

It's their win through their power. But God is not one who shares his glory with another. No one else is worthy to be worshipped.

But that doesn't mean he will not share his power. Jesus doesn't share his glory, but he does share his power. There's this odd little episode attached to the triumphal entry where Jesus goes up to a fig tree, doesn't see any figs, and he curses it.

[17:20] Immediately it withers, right? Which seems a bit incongruous with being a champion for the humble and lowly. Like, man, what did that fig tree really do to Jesus? Like, what's going on here?

Is there kind of like some adrenaline leftovers coming out of the temple? Now, I would say this. There's a case to be made here that the fig tree represents the fruitlessness that Jesus found in the temple and in the old covenant.

And in a way, its withering is symbolic to the old covenant fading to give way to the new covenant that was to come. And about to be established in Jesus' death and resurrection. And I think that is a major part of why Jesus did that.

But there's more to it. When the disciples see what Jesus did and they see the fig tree wither, they say, how did it do that? How did it wither at once like that?

Which seems like a fair question until you realize that these guys had just witnessed Jesus in the temple healing the lame and the blind that came to him. And not too long ago, days, maybe just a week or two, they had that incident where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

[18 : 33] Like, to me, the question isn't like, how did the fig tree wither? It's more like, how did Jesus, how is Jesus still keeping you guys around at this point? That's why I'm not Jesus.

Interestingly, Jesus doesn't rebuke them, he teaches them. Jesus answered them, truly, I say to you, if you have faith, if you do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen.

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith. The apostle Peter remembers this a little bit differently, it's captured in the gospel of Mark.

He remembers that fig tree moment as well, but he remembers Jesus saying this, Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours.

And whenever you stand praying, forgive. If you have anything against anyone, So that your father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses.

[19 : 50] How can a fig tree suddenly wither? How can a mountain be moved just because somebody says so?

That's impossible. But it points to a greater question. How can sins be forgiven? How can a sinner be set free from the debt that he owes?

Does the power of mercy triumph over the mountain of judgment? If one has faith and does not doubt the power of God, then yes, mercy triumphs.

Trespasses can be forgiven. Every time you and I step into the power of forgiveness, We step into God's power that is able to move mountains.

The impossible becomes possible. For God alone can save. That glory belongs to him alone. But here we see that the power to forgive has been shared with us.

[21 : 00] How will you and I wield that? This power from God is interesting because the power to forgive is power to lose power.

When someone sins against you, they owe you a debt. Proverbs says the borrower is slave to the lender.

To be sinned against, no doubt, is a terrible thing. Sin hurts, it wounds, it brings suffering. But I would say this, be wary as a victim of sin because there is a temptation to power lurking in it.

And it is not a godly power. It is a power for vengeance and it is a power for dominance. It is a power that desires to exact judgment and even the score to right the wrongs.

We want the debt paid plus interest. We want our pound of flesh. And this power for revenge and judgment can turn any victim of sin into a terrible and demanding slave master.

[22 : 06] Holding back forgiveness can make you as grandiose and immovable as a great mountain. But there is a greater power that God is calling us to.

It is the power of mercy that triumphs over judgment. James 2.13 says, For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Which of these sounds more impossible to us? To release someone of a debt of sin they committed against you?

Or to command a mountain to be tossed into the sea? Mercy. Both require a power that only God can give. We like the triumph of Jesus.

The humble and the lowly. The penitent and the contrite. They are the ones who sing his hosannas. We want to be in that crowd and we should be in that crowd.

[23 : 10] We should be the humble and the penitent and the contrite of heart. We love to see Jesus our champion overthrowing the temple for the sake of the poor and the powerless. For those like you and me.

He fights on our behalf. He tears down every barrier that would prevent us to have access to God's presence and his mercy. We love it.

We see it. We're rooting it on. It looks like justice and judgment has won. And it seems so fitting to us. But it isn't the end of the story. To stop there would be missing the most important part.

Kind of like going to a fig tree that doesn't have any fruit. Within the week there would be another procession. And that procession would take Jesus out of Jerusalem.

And beforehand his captives would dress him in robes of purple and spit on him and mock him and pull his beard. They put a crown of thorns on his head. Not a laurel wreath.

[24 : 08] They would put a cross's beam on his back. Not a scepter in his hand. And they would parade him out as a conquered king to be despised and rejected.

And the crowds lined the robe coming out of Jerusalem. Not to praise him. Not to sing his hosannas. But to curse him. And to mock him.

And to spit on him. And he would climb a hill. Not to go and make sacrifices to the gods. But to be the sacrifice. For you and for me.

The glory of the triumphal entry had faded. And on the cross Jesus looked like a withered fig tree. Cursed.

Lifeless. But. We know that wasn't the end of it. Because Easter's coming. Reminds us that the mountain of judgment for our sins did get tossed into the sea.

[25 : 19] The power of God. Mercy. Has triumphed. Over judgment. This is the triumph of Jesus friends. As the band comes up.

We look to respond. The question for you and me today is. What do you believe? Do you count yourself among the humble and the lowly?

Do you count yourself among those that needed rescue? Lord save. Lord rescue me.

Does your soul cry Hosanna? Or do you have it all in control? Your plan. Your strength. Your wisdom. Your efforts.

If you're not yet a follower of Jesus. I want to say to you. Come to him. Come to Jesus. He can take the mountain of your sin. The mountain of God's judgment for your sin.

[26 : 18] And he can toss it into the sea. Jesus saves the humble and lowly. Jesus saves those who come. Repentant. Contrite of heart.

He does not reject. Those who come and confess their need for forgiveness. In a moment there's going to be an opportunity for you to respond. A prayer up on the screen. And I want to encourage you to do that today.

If you are a follower of Jesus. We're about to take communion. Before we come to the table.

Consider how God's mercy has triumphed over his judgment. For you. And for your sin. Consider that.

And let the hosannas start ringing. In your heart. And go to the table. With a heart full of those hosannas. Maybe. Maybe.

[27 : 16] You. Have been sinned against. Maybe you are holding on to some unforgiveness. The thing about holding on to another person's debts. Is that they become a heavier and heavier burden.

Instead of holding on to it. Bring it to Jesus. Lay it at the cross. The cross. The cross that. Moves mountains. Do business with God.

And when you're ready. Come to the table. Let me pray. Lord come. Be with us. We are. The humble. And the lowly.

We are the beggars. The blind. The lame. The sick. The helpless. The hopeless. The poor. And the powerless. But you came.

And you rescued us. You healed us. You forgave us our sins. And so we can sing hosanna.

[28 : 33] The Lord has saved. The Lord will save. Amen.