Come Alive - Part One

# Palm Sunday Message

# (Matthew 21:1-11)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. It’s so good to have all of you with us today as we celebrate Palm Sunday. This morning we’re beginning a brand-new series entitled “Come Alive” as we walk together through the events of what has been traditionally known as Holy Week or Passion Week. I’m believing that as we journey together through this last week of Jesus’ life on earth that his story is going to Come Alive inside of us, transforming us by his grace.

You see, almost 2000 years ago, the power of sin and death was broken by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On that very first Easter, God’s plan of redemption altered the world forever, as death was defeated and true life, eternal life in Christ came alive. Today as we celebrate Palm Sunday, Jesus comes alive in us who believe as we experience God’s power to transform us into new creations.

If you’d like to follow along in your Bibles, we’re going to look at Matthew chapter 21, as we open to the final act in the drama of Jesus life. Jerusalem was preparing to celebrate the Passover, and it was a particularly holy time in the Jewish calendar. During this season, thousands of people would converge on the Temple area, in fact, as we open God’s Word Jesus and his disciples were preparing to go to Jerusalem.

Now, for the last three years Jesus had been preaching, teaching, and healing people throughout the area. He was at the peak of his popularity, word spread about him like wildfire, and crowds gathered wherever he went. Matthew tells us beginning in verse one, that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, he said to two of his disciples,

“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he’ll send them right away” (Matthew 21:1-3).

Today, we can read this passage and just kind of skim through it, but we need to realize that these disciples didn’t have a clue as to what was happening. They didn’t recognize the significance of what Jesus asked them to do, but they were about to see something that was promised in Scripture, and many were about to come alive recognizing who Jesus was. And so, number one I want to talk to you about recognition, because we too need to recognize what Jesus was demonstrating here.

## 1. Recognition

You know, the word clueless is often used in such a derogatory sense, but it really simply implies a lack of knowledge or a certain innocence. For example, Noah had no clue that when he was 500 years old that he would build a really big boat. I don’t think that a young orphan girl named Esther had any idea that one day she would become a queen or that a young shepherd boy named David had any idea he would become a great King. Even Moses was clueless to the fact that he would go back to the land where he had fled as a fugitive from the law, confront the Pharaoh, and lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. He didn’t have a clue, and that’s what we see with the disciples here in this story.

< Skit Guys Video: The Disciples and the Donkey >

Matthew tells us in verse 4, that “this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them” (Matthew 21:4-7).

Now for the people in Jerusalem, most of them didn’t recognize the time of God’s coming, and even others like the disciples had limited understanding, but Jesus was about to bring about a drastic change in the climate. The spiritual atmosphere in Jerusalem began simmering as a crowd of curious onlookers gathered. Matthew tells us in verse eight that,

“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road” (Matthew 21:8).

As excitement was building and people ran ahead announcing Jesus arrival. Many recognized the symbolism; the prophetic fulfillment of what Jesus was doing, they could almost taste the sweet goodness of freedom, because finally this is what they’d been waiting for, their Messiah, their Savior had come. And so, they were cutting branches from the trees and laying their garments on the road as a sort of red-carpet treatment for their new King. But most didn’t understand, they’d seen and heard of the miracles, but they were clueless.

You see, the crowd would soon discover that this King wasn’t what they’d expected. Many were hoping that he was going to overthrow the Roman government and set up the perfect kingdom for the Jews, their own gated community, a private utopia on earth. But Jesus hadn’t come to set up an earthly kingdom, a political kingdom, instead he was doing something so much greater than what they’d imagined. He was a King, but he was a spiritual King and not an earthly king. He was their conquering King, but the freedom that he was bringing was much greater than freeing them from Roman oppression, he was freeing them from the oppression of their souls, he was conquering sin and death. He was making a way for every person have a right relationship with God. And so, this morning, as we Come Alive to Jesus life, we must recognize that he offers himself to us, but what he offers is so much greater than what we ever would’ve thought or imagined.

As this crowd followed Jesus into the city, they were saying the right words, but spiritually they had no idea what was happening. They didn’t recognize the time of God’s coming. But number two, they were about to be awakened.

## 2. Awakening

Spiritually, the temperature was rising in Jerusalem, but it was so subtle that no one noticed. There would be a great awakening, things would boil over in just a few days, but the crowd didn’t see it coming. You see, there were many who approved of Jesus as he rode into the holy city, but there were also many others who didn’t approve of Jesus, such as the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders who were threatened by Jesus popularity. None of them understood the magnitude of what Jesus was about to do, but they were seething as they heard the crowds shouting in verse nine,

“The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9).

Now tradition tells us that the crowds were waving palm branches, which was a traditional symbol of victory as they were shouting "Hosanna". This word hosanna is very interesting, considering the way that it’s used in its original context, compared to how it’s used here in the gospel, and in the way that we use it today in worship. This word “hosanna” literally means, to save, free, or get victory. This Hebrew word, pronounced “ho-shee-ah nah” is found only one place in the whole Old Testament and that is in Psalm chapter 118. In verse 25, we find that it’s a cry to God for help as the psalmist says,

“O Lord, save us…” (Psalms 118:25).

But something happened, the meaning changed, that cry for help was answered almost before it came out of the psalmist’s mouth, because it was immediately followed by the exclamation,

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalms 118:26).

And so, over the centuries the word “ho-shee-ah nah” changed from being a cry for help to becoming a shout of hope, of triumph, or jubilation. It used to mean “save us” but changed to mean “salvation has come”. And so, in a very real sense Hosanna means “Hooray for salvation! It’s coming! It’s here!”

This crowd of people in Jerusalem was awakening, they were acknowledging that salvation had come, that Jesus was the Messiah. They recognized that he was the one who would save them, they saw him as their Savior, but they didn’t really know what that meant. It was as if they’d been awakened from their slumber, they were still wiping sleep from their eyes, and they didn’t know what that salvation involved. They didn’t understand what John the Baptist had meant when he pointed out Jesus, identifying him as,

“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

And so, they didn’t realize that in just a few days he would be crucified for the sins of the world. They didn’t understand that through his death, through his shed blood, our sins would be forgiven, and that he was the gateway into eternal life. Even the disciples didn’t understand this in spite of all that Jesus had taught them. In fact, the apostle John said that it was,

“Only after Jesus was glorified that they realized that these things had been written…” (John 12:16).

But still this crowd was stirring from their slumber, they were welcoming him as their Messiah and they cried out, “God save us.” And it was this cry that was an invitation for Jesus to Come Alive in their lives. It’s a prayer that says, “God, I can’t save myself, I need you to be my Messiah, I need you to save me.”

And in the same way, this is where our relationship with God begins, by accepting Jesus as our Savior, even with limited understanding, because he is our Passover Lamb, he is our all sufficient sacrifice, and this is how it must continue day by day. We never get to the point where we don’t depend on him, where we don’t need him to save us from our sin, from ourselves, and from the situations we find ourselves in. And so, number three we need to make a declaration of our dependence upon him.

## 3. Declaration

It’s this declaration of total dependence upon God that must be characterized in our lives and it must be the message we communicate to our community. It’s not enough for us just to meet here, worshiping together, teaching and preaching if our faith and our message of salvation doesn’t go outside of this building. We need to attract the attention of others but that attention always needs to be redirected towards Jesus. The message of this church and the cry of our hearts must be the same as that crowd on that first Palm Sunday, “God save us”. Because Matthew tells in verse 10,

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (Matthew 21:10-11).

And so, on one hand, you have people who are wondering, “Who is this?” And then on the other hand, there’s all this confusion among the crowd of people, some who are rejoicing in their King, their Messiah who’s come, and then some who only have partial knowledge saying, “This is Jesus, the prophet...”

They were confused because they’d anticipated a conquering King riding on a mighty stallion, but they awoke that morning to a carpenter riding on a donkey. The crowds gathered wanting to see a mighty prophet, but what they got was a gentle Healer who was fulfilling prophecy in ways they hadn’t imagined. And so, their expectations were all wrong, they didn’t find what they were looking for, but they got everything they needed. If only they’d known that Jesus was about Come Alive in their lives and in history forever.

Now, up to this time Jesus had cautioned people not to tell who he was. He’d deliberately avoided public scenes, but on this day, he chose to come publicly declaring his true identity as Lord by riding on a donkey. He came into Jerusalem fulfilling prophecy and Matthew says “Yes, this is the one” and he quotes the prophet Zechariah who had written,

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

In other words, Jesus was declaring by his actions, “Yes, I’m your king!” And that’s what he meant by riding into town on this young donkey. Matthew recognize that and said, “See, your king comes to you…” And so, on Palm Sunday he comes gently, riding on a colt, because today is the day of salvation. He came offering salvation, terms of peace, the Bible says, he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him (John 1:11). But the next time he comes, Israel will see their king, and he’ll be riding on a white horse in power and glory (Revelation 19:11). However, this day, this Passion Week, he didn’t come in judgment, he didn’t come to make war, but he came to save. Hosanna!

Jesus came declaring himself King, riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. This colt that had never been ridden and yet on this day it calmly carried the King of Kings because it knew that its rider was the One who Psalm chapter 8 tells us was ruler over the flocks, herds, and the beasts of the field (Psalms 8:6-7). And so, by Jesus coming into Jerusalem in this manner, he incited the rulers of Israel to act, fulfilling prophecy, so that through them the Lamb of God would be sacrificed on Passover.

And while today marks Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem, as we close, I want to help you feel the wonder of this most amazing season in world history. Just consider with me for a moment that the day is coming soon, maybe sooner than you think, when Jesus will appear in a very different way. The apostle John described it in the last book of the Bible, he said,

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11-16).

This is so important, because when Jesus appears in the sky like that, it’ll be too late to switch sides, to claim allegiance, too late to shout hosanna! The Bible tells us,

"In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

This is what Matthew is trying to communicate to us this morning. He wants us to see that Jesus is King; not in a national sense, but in a global, universal sense. He’s the King of Kings and Lord of lords, and yet, today, this day, he’s gentle, welcoming, and patient. In fact, in just a matter of days, he’ll shed his own blood to save all who will accept his free gift of salvation and honor him as Lord in their lives.

He came the first time, gentle and riding on a donkey, and he’s coming again as the King of Kings. He is the King of Israel, king of all the nations, king of creation and King of the universe. And until he comes again, we’re in a day of grace, forgiveness, and patience. Jesus still rides a donkey, he’s yet to mount that mighty white war horse with a sword and an iron scepter. He’s ready to save all who receive him as Savior. Who come to know him, receive him, and live in allegiance to him.

What was once impossible because we were separated from God by sin is now possible when we Come Alive to the life of Jesus. Because of what he did on the cross, we can respond as the writer of Hebrews said,

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

That’s the invitation today, Come Alive to Jesus life, and as we continue our journey through passion week, prepare to come alive to Jesus sacrifice through his death on Good Friday and his power through his resurrection on Easter Sunday. Just as Jesus entered Jerusalem two thousand years ago, let’s invite him to enter our hearts and lives. Let’s shout praises of “Hosanna” recognizing our Savior, awakening to the Messiah, and declaring that he is King. With eyes wide open and hearts full of gratitude, let’s join that crowd that’s welcoming Jesus! Let’s lift our voices with the saints saying:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Revelation 5:12)

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April 14, 2019

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*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*