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Why People Praise Jesus Today

Matthew 21:1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, 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 foal 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!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

I want to talk to you today about why people are still worshipping Jesus.

Now, you know, you and I, as human beings, were designed by God in His image to be able to give praise and encouragement to each other. We naturally, when we see something of value to us or of worth to us, we will speak positively about those things or about a person that we encounter. This comes very naturally to us in our God-given image. In our fallen nature, we're naturally often doing the opposite: criticizing, condemning, or complaining. But we have this great capacity to bring praise. And when we encounter something valuable to us, it just sort of effusively comes out of us.

I don't know if any of you watched a certain basketball game last night, but there was a certain team in this state that was playing a pretty significant game. And if you happen to watch the beginning of that, you saw this occur. As we moved ahead by numerous points, the crowd was going crazy with praise. It was very loud on the television as well. Now, that praise didn't last throughout the whole game.

Another example of this can be found at Kinnick Stadium. Every fall at Kinnick Stadium, there is a ritual called the Swarm. And what happens is people from all over the state and even from around the

country who value this particular football team, the Iowa Hawkeyes, they come together and they gather in this stadium. And near the beginning of the game, a song starts to play, which is entitled “Back in Black.”

And as that song starts to play, the people are stimulated to excitement, enthusiasm, and praise of their team. As the song plays, the team comes down the tunnel towards the field, and then they gather outside of the tunnel. The team grabs hands together with one another, and then they swarm the field, and the crowd just breaks forth with great enthusiasm. If you've ever been there, you can feel the power of it.

This is likely a taste of what was going on on Palm Sunday in Jerusalem. Spontaneous praise and worship burst forth for Jesus on this day. The average population for Jerusalem at this time was 40 to 50,000 people. That's a lot like Cedar Falls. But because of the Passover celebration, near 125 to 240, 250,000 people would be in Jerusalem at this time for this specific week. Some non-biblical historians estimated at near 750,000 to 1 million would come through Jerusalem at this time.

We don't know exactly how many were there on this day. But as Jesus entered Jerusalem, spontaneous praise burst forth for him. These people were well studied in the Old Testament Scriptures. They knew the prophecies about a coming king that would free them from their oppression. They were under the great oppression of the Roman Empire and under religious oppression by the Sadducees and Pharisees and religious leaders. And they were longing for many, many years for relief from this, for salvation from this.

And so they had been hearing about Jesus. And John wrote about the fact that they'd heard about the fact that he'd raised Lazarus from the dead, and other stories about him were around. And so, as he was coming into Jerusalem, they anticipated this might be the guy. And so they started saying to him, “Hosanna, Hosanna, save us, save us!” Praising him, worshiping him, honoring him for who he was.

But it didn't last because their expectations were a bit wrong. I don't know if you've heard this definition of leadership, but one definition of leadership is disappointing people at a rate they can tolerate. What Jesus did during Holy Week was he disappointed people at such a rate that they couldn't take it anymore. And some of those same people who were praising him when he entered Jerusalem later that week started to cry out something else: “Crucify him, crucify him, crucify him!” And they did. They killed him there.

And as we move through Holy Week, we will celebrate that on Good Friday. And now, why do we praise Jesus today? Why are millions of people gathered around the world praising and honoring Jesus, some hiding in countries where they can't do it publicly, worshipping him with song and praising him in this way?

Our text gives some hints as to why. Matthew writes this: “When they, Jesus and his disciples, drew near to Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage near the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village in front of you.

“Go into it, and you'll immediately find a donkey tied and a colt with her.””

How did Jesus know this? I have a map that displays where they are and what's happening here. They're just coming from Bethany, where they've stayed at Lazarus and his sister's home with some hospitality. There, Jesus is deciding this is the time to go to Jerusalem. They're nearing Bethphage, and he sends—you notice it's the Mount of Olives there. You can't see Bethphage from Bethany. They're somewhere traveling on that road. And Jesus says to them, “Go into the city, and you'll find a donkey tied there and a colt with her.”

Jesus is now more publicly displaying who he is, his divine nature. What he is displaying here comes from two Latin words: *omnis* and *sentia*. It translates into our English word, his omniscience. All-knowing, all knowledge. It is not a big deal for Jesus to know where donkeys and colts are located at any given time. For the Bible reveals to us in his omniscience, he knows everything. He knows the number of hairs on each of our heads. He knows the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. He knows the location of every molecule in the universe. He knows the past. He knows the present. He knows the future. He is omniscient.

But people don't immediately worship Jesus for his omniscience, his all-knowing knowledge. As a matter of fact, when people are coming to terms with the fact that Jesus knows absolutely everything about us, it can be quite unnerving. It can create a reverence and a sense of trembling before him.

Jesus displayed this another time in John chapter four. He accounts for it in his writing. Jesus was visiting with a woman at the well, and in the midst of the conversation, out of nowhere, Jesus seemingly says to her, “Go get your husband and bring him here.” And the woman answered him and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘You have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

Immediately, she did not worship Jesus for this knowledge. Later, she would. But initially, she's trembling before Christ, saying, “What in the world? How do you know all of this?” Later in her testimony, she would say to the people that she was telling about this God, “This man told me everything I ever did.” And she would praise him. But initially, she said, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet,” and she tried to change the subject.

Do you know that God knows everything about you and me? And that may be unnerving to some of us. And quite frankly, it should be unnerving to us because everything about us is not right before God. We are not perfectly pleasing to him. The Bible says all of us are sinful, and we fall short of God's intent. And knowing that, it should create a reverence in our heart before the Lord, and eventually, it can lead us to worship.

A second aspect of his divine nature that Jesus displays is illustrated for us in Mark's accounting of this day, where he says, “Jesus said to them, ‘Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here.’” That's the one he's going to ride.

What is Jesus doing here? Jesus has displayed just a hint of his omniscience, his all-knowing knowledge. And now he's displaying just a hint of his, um, omnipotence. All-powerful nature. His power is being displayed here in just a small way of his power, even over biological animals, creatures of the earth.

I don't know if you've ever tried to ride an untamed animal, but it's not that easy. When I was younger on the farm, we used to clean out hog pens on Saturday morning, and when you're cleaning out hog pens, you get pretty dirty. And at a certain point, you're so dirty that it really doesn't matter anymore if you get much dirtier. And so that's when the hog-riding competition ensued. And what we would do is we would pick out some of the biggest hogs in the lot, and we would sneak up behind him and jump on their backs and grab their ears and see how long we could ride one of these untamed beasts.

And if you get a big... So it's quite interesting, these animals that have never had something on their back, they go quite crazy when you try to ride them. And my brother and I, we would take turns and time each other to see who could ride. Even up to five seconds was a good ride.

Sometimes when we were getting really daring, we would put a rope around the belly of a heifer or a steer, and we would enclose them just like they do at rodeos, and you'd get on that thing and you could feel the strength of that thing below you. You'd grab that rope and then, just like you were in a rodeo, you'd tip your hat, you know, and they'd open the gate and see what happens.

Jesus is choosing to ride on an untamed donkey. It's just a small display of his all-powerful nature. He's actually going public with this more now, because he's riding into Jerusalem to stir up the city himself so that he could accomplish his purpose, his passion. He did this at other times in private. Matthew records a time when he and his disciples were out in a boat on a lake, and a furious storm came up on the lake, and the waves swept over the boat. And Jesus was sleeping in the boat. So his disciples woke him and said, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown." And he replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" And then he got up, it says, and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him."

But we don't necessarily naturally respond in worship to great power. Sometimes we do. But extreme power like this makes us nervous because power can be dangerous. Knowledge can be dangerous. The reason we worship Jesus today, yes, includes these things, but another part of the text illuminates for us why people go nuts about Jesus in the present.

Matthew says it this way: "This took place to fulfill what was spoken." All of this, Jesus riding in on this donkey, to fulfill what the prophet was saying: "Say to the daughter of Zion, behold, your King is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."

Why is Jesus choosing to ride on a donkey? Well, for sure, he had fulfilled many prophecies about himself, and he was going to fulfill many more. And one of those prophecies is that this is what he was going to do. He was going to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. Zechariah nine nine, and he was illuminating the truth of the Old Testament prophecies about him.

But he's also doing this, choosing a donkey, because normally kings would ride in on a great horse, a great stallion, displaying their strength, destroying their power, displaying their victory. But Jesus chose to ride in so that he could display the nature of his kingdom more clearly, that it's a meek kingdom, a tranquil, peace-inducing, humble kingdom. Jesus was displaying the fact that his kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. It is a kingdom that has a more noble driving purpose.

Ultimately, I think Jesus chose to ride in on a donkey, just my opinion here, to depict his role as the burden bearer for all of humanity's corruptions and sins. Donkeys are different kind of animals. They're not overly attractive in their strength, like great horses. They have a wider back, and they look to be designed by God to be pack animals, helpful animals to carry loads for us. And that's what Jesus is illustrating when he rides in on a donkey. Matthew refers to it as a beast of burden, and Jesus was just hinting at what he was going into Jerusalem for: to be the burden bearer for all of humanity.

And what is driving him there is his love. Peter writes it this way: "He himself bore our sins in his body on a tree." We might think about the physical pain, but imagine the sins of the world crushing you and you bearing the weight of sin. Isaiah says it this way: "He has borne our iniquities, carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities." And the punishment that would bring you and I peace would be placed upon him.

So you and I could be healed for all eternity.

Why do people break forth in praise now of Jesus? Not ultimately because he's all-knowing. He is that. Not ultimately because he's all-powerful. He is that. But he is, at his very nature, loving. God is love. In him there is no darkness. And in love, he came among us to serve us by bearing the burdens for our greatest problem and our pains and our sorrows and our heartaches. Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends, taking our burden upon him.

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, saying, "God demonstrated his love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

At one point in Jesus' ministry, a lady came to him and took a very expensive jar of perfume in praise of Jesus, and poured it all over his feet and wept at his feet, just worshiping and praising him for who he is. And Judas was there, and Judas was disturbed by this. And he said, "Well, we could have kept that perfume and sold it and gotten some money for it." He was a deceptive man. Jesus said to him, "You don't understand, Judas. Look at this woman here." And then he said these words: "Those who are forgiven much, love much."

When you see someone who is just nuts about Jesus, praising him, worshiping him, dancing before him, honoring him, it is most likely because they understand how much he loves them in spite of their sin, in spite of their shame, in spite of their sorrow.

Why do people worship Jesus all around the world today? Because they have tasted of the love, the benevolence of God. If you've never tasted of his love, you've never felt it beyond your intellect and into your heart. We're praying for you that you could come to experience the love of God, which surpasses all knowledge, deep in the depths of your soul, so that the very core of your being, you change the focus of your life from idolatry of things of this world to worship and praise of the King of Kings.

Let's pray together.

Father, you have invited us into your family through faith and the confession of our sin before you. And then simply a trust, entrusting the atoning work, the burden-bearing work of your Son on our behalf. I

ask that if there are people here who haven't opened their hearts to you, you would continue to knock on the door of their hearts and help them taste and see your goodness, your love, your nature.

Thank you for being patient with the world, allowing more and more to come. Help those of us who know you continue to hold out the Word of Light in our world to be salt, so more and more could be brought into your family as we prepare the way for your return.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.