

# Palm Sunday

## Matthew 21 v 1-17

### Context:

It was undoubtedly the most significant week in the history of the world. There had never been a week like it before, nor has there been since. Maybe this is why Christians around the world and throughout history have called it 'Holy Week'. The cataclysmic events of that week that took place in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago began with the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city on what has become known as Palm Sunday. This is the theme for today's study. So, let's join the crowds and travel in with Jesus.

### Observation:

1. Where did Jesus come to as he approached Jerusalem (v 1)?
2. What did he send two of his disciples to do (v 2)?
3. What were they to say if they were questioned (v 3)?
4. Why did this take place according to v 4-5?
5. What did the disciples do when they had brought the donkey and its colt to Jesus (v 6-7)?
6. What did the crowds spread on the road (v 8)?
7. What did they shout as Jesus rode by (v 9)?
8. What was the reaction as Jesus entered the city (v 10-11)?
9. Where did Jesus go in v 12 and what did he do?
10. Which two prophets did he quote in v 13 and what did he say?
11. Who came to him and what did he do for them (v 14)?
12. What was the reaction of the religious leaders in v 15 and why?
13. What was Jesus' reply to their objection and which Old Testament text does he quote?
14. Where did he go to spend that night (v 17)?

### Meaning:

1. Do you think Jesus was being *practical* in making his transport arrangements in advance in v 1-3, or was he being *prophetic* in supernaturally knowing there would be donkey and colt available for him to use? What do we learn about Jesus from the answer to this question?
2. Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies over which he had no control (e.g. that he was conceived by a virgin, born in Bethlehem, lived in Nazareth, was crucified on a cross etc). However, he seems to have consciously and deliberately fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy (v 4-5). Read Zechariah 9 v 9-10 and discuss what Jesus intended people to understand about his identity and mission by deliberately fulfilling this ancient prophecy.

3. Up to this point, Jesus seemed to be quite shy about revealing his true identity, often commanding people he had healed not to tell anyone. So, why do you think he chose *this* particular moment to go public with his identity?
4. What was the significance of laying cloaks on the donkey and the road (v 7-8) – see 2 Kings 9 v 6-13 for a clue.
5. Some years before Palm Sunday, there was a political revolt in Judah, led by Jews yearning for freedom from Herod and his Roman overlords, and objecting to a new tax being levied on them. The symbol of the revolt was the *palm branch*. So, as the crowd lay palm branches on the road (see John 12 v 13 for evidence that the branches were taken from palm trees) and shouted ‘Hosanna’, which meant ‘Save us now!’, quoting directly from Psalm 118, which is a song celebrating God’s future victory over the godless nations which were oppressing Israel, what do you think the crowd’s eager expectations of Jesus were as he rode into the city that day?
6. Why would Jesus’ actions in the temple, which Mark’s Gospel tells us happened the next day, have taken the wind out of the crowd’s sails?
7. The area Jesus cleanses in v 12, which Jewish traders had made into a market place, was meant to be reserved for *Gentile* worshippers who were not allowed to go any further into the Temple because they were not Jews. Jesus explains his prophetic actions in v 12 by quoting two Old Testament prophets in v 13. Read Isaiah 56 v 1-8 and Jeremiah 7 v 1-15 and discuss what Jesus was trying to communicate by his provocative actions.
8. In the Old Testament, when David became King of Israel, he at first reigned for 7 years from Hebron. Then, in 2 Samuel 5 v 6-8, David attacks Jerusalem and captures the city to make it his new capital. When he faces resistance and mocking from the Gentile inhabitants of the city, David curses the blind and the lame, because the locals say David is so weak and pathetic that even the blind and the lame could keep him out! Against this background, how do the actions of Jesus in v 14 compare and contrast with those of David? [NOTE: It is interesting that that the only healing miracles of Jesus performed in Jerusalem that *John* describes in *his* Gospel are the healing of the *lame* man (John 5) and the healing of the *blind* man (John 9). Could he also have seen some significant connection with David in 2 Samuel 5?]
9. What does the presence and actions of the children in v 15 and the defence of them by Jesus in v 16 tell us about the place children have in Jesus’ mind and heart?
10. Why do you think the religious leaders got Jesus so wrong? How is this a warning for us today?

#### **Application:**

1. Jesus made all the arrangements for Palm Sunday, either by human or divine means. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is in charge of *all things*, even the small details of your very life?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the promised King and how do you show your allegiance to him?

3. What tables might Jesus want to overturn a) in your life, b) in the church, and c) in the world?
4. Jesus shows special care for those *least* respected and honoured in his society – the blind, the lame, and little children. Who are the least respected and honoured in our world today? How would Jesus treat them and how should *we* treat them?
5. How can we guard against holding views about the person and mission of Jesus which are sincere but nevertheless wrong?
6. Why do you think the tide turned so quickly against Jesus during Holy Week, from 'Hosanna' on Palm Sunday to 'Crucify him' on Good Friday?
7. The Jewish traders and religious leaders were very religious but their hearts were far from God ( see Isaiah 29 v 13). In what ways can 'religion' stifle and even work against spiritual truth and action?
8. How should the church follow Jesus' example towards children and what should this mean for the place children are given in our church today?

#### **Pray:**

- For eyes to see Jesus in his true identity as King and to welcome him.
- For grace to love the least as Jesus did.
- For forgiveness where we have held wrong views about Jesus.
- For forgiveness when we have allowed religion to stifle truth?
- For the marginalised and children to find a warm welcome at St James.

#### **Sermon Notes:**