

# King on a Donkey

by Mariano Di Gangi

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*Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfills a prophecy and demonstrates his kingdom's humility and service, pointing to his role as the Savior King.*

**Duration:** 25:54

**Scripture:** Psalm 118:25-26, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 21:5, Luke 19:38, John 3:16, John 12:12-16, John 14:6, Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:10-11, Revelation 5:9-10

**Topics:** "Jesus", "Jesus as King", "Humility in Leadership"

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## Description

Mariano Di Gangi delivers a powerful sermon titled 'King on a Donkey,' reflecting on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as described in John 12. He emphasizes the significance of Jesus riding a donkey, symbolizing humility and the nature of His kingdom, which is not of this world. The sermon explores the reactions of the crowd, the disciples, and the Pharisees, highlighting the joy and excitement of those who witnessed Jesus' miracles, contrasted with the envy of the religious leaders. Di Gangi calls the congregation to recognize Jesus as their King and to pledge their allegiance to Him, encouraging a personal response to His call. The message culminates in a prayer for hearts to be open to the King of glory.

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## Transcript

Our reading from Holy Scripture is taken from the Gospel according to John, the 12th chapter, and beginning to read at verse 12. Hear now the reading of this portion of God's written and inspired word. The next day, the great crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel! Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion! See, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt. At first, his disciples didn't understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him, and that they had done these things to him.

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, See, this is getting us nowhere.

Look how the whole world has gone after him. This is the account by the Apostle John of the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. When did it take place? Well, the account tells us that the next day this happened.

The next day after what? John has a sense of timing. There is a sequence in the way in which he presents things, and the triumphal entry took place the next day after another memorable event. Jesus was in the town of Bethany in the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and a dinner was being held in honor of Jesus.

Characteristically, Martha is busy in the kitchen getting that seven-course meal all ready. Characteristically, the man of the house, Lazarus, is at table with Jesus. Characteristically, Mary finds a way of expressing her devotion to Jesus by taking costly perfume, fragrant ointment, most expensive, and lavishing it upon the feet of Jesus and drying his feet with her hair.

Each of them acted in character on that occasion. So did Judas Iscariot, for he was there and he began to rumble and grumble and complain. What a tremendous waste! This perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor, and this Judas said not because he was concerned for the poor, but because he held the common purse and he was already known as a thief and a robber, and Jesus defended the action of Mary.

The poor you have with you always, meaning the opportunity to do good and to feed the hungry and shelter the naked and refugee, is always there, but me you have not with you always. Words most significant spoken at the beginning of Holy Week that would see him despised, rejected, and killed. And so the day after the dinner that was held in his honor, when Judas showed his greed and treachery, when Martha served her Lord with busy hands, when Lazarus raised from the dead by Jesus enjoyed the company of him who had resurrected him, when Mary had expressed her costly devotion to Jesus, the next day comes the triumphal entry, and we have to do with crowds.

And you've got to see the crowds moving in two directions, clustering around Jesus. On the one hand you've got the crowd that had been at Bethany and had heard about the resurrection of Lazarus and had actually seen Lazarus return to life. And they were filled with wonder, they were filled with awe, they were filled with excitement, with enthusiasm, and hearing that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, they all get into the parade and swell the ranks, moving past Bethany, past Olivet and its slopes, on to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, hundreds of pilgrims in Jerusalem, who have probably come down from the highlands of Galilee to observe the Passover, they too hear that Jesus has performed the miracle of resurrection, they too learn that he is on his way to Jerusalem, and rather than waiting for him to reach the city, they go out and meet him, that they might join the procession whose ranks are constantly being swelled. And so you have a crowd coming from Bethany, past Olivet to Jerusalem, and a crowd in Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover, going out to meet the party that is coming, so that together they may enter. And the people, having come to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, and knowing by heart the words of a group of Hallel Psalms in praise of Almighty God, begin to quote from Psalm 118, a messianic psalm that predicts the coming of the Lord's Christ.

And they draw upon Psalm 118, and they quote it, and they sing it as they march jubilantly onward. Hosanna. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed is the King of Israel. These are not mere words. These are words with a depth of meaning.

Hosanna. The word isn't even translated, it's simply transliterated from the Aramaic and given to us as it was then. Hosanna.

Crying out to Jesus, save us, liberate us. Repel the hated Romans from our shores. Revive the kingdom of David as you revive Lazarus from the grave.

Restore to us dominion over our land. Hosanna. Save us.

We're appealing to you as our liberator against the foreign pagan foe. You are the one who comes. And that does not merely refer to motion.

One who was here now is here because he comes. The one who comes is a title descriptive of the Messiah. Remember John the Baptist, plagued by doubts, despondent in his dungeon, wondering if he had really put his faith on the right candidate.

And he sends messengers to Jesus with a question. Are you the one who should come or should we continue to wait and look for another? Jesus is the coming one. The Christ is the one who will come from the Father into the world to save his people from their sins.

And his coming is celebrated every year in the season of Advent, climaxing at Christmas. Hosanna. Save us.

Blessed is he who comes. Blessed is the Messiah who coming from eternity into time and from heaven to earth will be the instrument of our liberation. He comes in the name of the Lord.

His authority is not given to him by the latest Gallup poll. His authority is not given to him by the democratic vote of the electorate. His authority is given to him by his heavenly Father.

He comes in the Lord's name, authorized by the Lord, gifted with power and might and majesty, not by the will of men but by the will of the Father. And he is the King of Israel. Why does all this happen? Why does Jesus come into Jerusalem to these shouts of acclamation based on Psalm 118? And why of all things does he come on the back of a lowly beast of burden? Well, you might say he did it in order to demonstrate that his kingdom was not of this world.

He didn't come in a chariot of war. He didn't come with tanks to crush people. He came on the back of a beast of burden.

He came on a donkey. He came to demonstrate that his kingdom is not of this world. It doesn't go by this world's standards.

It doesn't follow the practices of this corrupt world. It is one that draws its authority from God and demonstrates that the key to greatness is humility and service. And if that is the answer, you're right on target.

But there's more to it than that. Jesus comes on the back of the donkey not only to show that his kingdom is not of this world, that he is not the kind of conqueror that others are, who come to subjugate, he comes to serve, who comes not to sacrifice others for his own aggrandizement but to sacrifice himself for their salvation. And he demonstrates it, he dramatizes it in the way that he enters the city.

But more than that, he is fulfilling a prophecy that has waited more than 500 years to be fulfilled. It was a prophecy that was spoken by the prophet Zechariah. And in the ninth chapter of his prophetic book, written in the summer of the year 520 BC, Zechariah prophesied, and he called the people of Israel, behold, your king is coming.

He is meek and lowly riding upon an ass, and he is one who is determined to see that there will be justice, that there will be peace, he will show meekness, and he will bring salvation to his people. And so the prophecy and the promise given through Zechariah is fulfilled in Jesus, waiting five full centuries to be translated from prophecy into history. Therefore, fear not, your king, your savior comes to you.

Therefore, rejoice, for he comes with justice and with peace. Therefore, behold, your king, for in welcoming him you will be delivered from fear and you will experience joy. A most momentous event, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

But now in the second part of our study this morning, having thought of the event, we think of reactions to the event. Take, for example, the reaction of the disciples that's stated very briefly, very succinctly, but in a way that is most meaningful. It's in verse 16.

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. The reaction of the disciples to the event was one of bewilderment.

They didn't immediately understand what was happening or why. And only after Jesus was glorified, only after his mighty resurrection from the dead, only after his ascension to heaven, only after being at the right hand of God, only after pouring down the gift of the Holy Spirit, would the disciples really understand what it was that was happening at the start and through the days of Holy Week. And so was fulfilled the promise of Jesus given in this very gospel, that when the Holy Spirit comes, whom I will send from my exalted place at the Father's right hand when I am glorified, when the Holy Spirit comes, he will guide you into an understanding of the truth.

He will take the things that relate to me and make them plain to you. You and I will never really resolve the enigma of the Bible. You and I will never really understand the meaning of the person of Christ and get a glimpse into the significance of his work until the Holy Spirit, sent by the glorified Christ, enlightens our understanding and enables us to comprehend what he was saying and to see what he was doing.

It is the Spirit who enlightens us to understand the Scriptures, that there we might behold him who at one and the same time is our Savior and our Sovereign. Charles Spurgeon hit it right when that prince of preachers said, you have listened to the preacher, truth by him has now been told, but you need another teacher from the everlasting throne. Interpretation is the gift of God alone.

They didn't understand because Christ had not been yet glorified, nor had he yet poured out his Spirit, without whom comprehension would vanish and only confusion would stay. And therefore, when we open the Scriptures, we should always have the attitude, Spirit of God, enlighten my understanding and help me to behold wondrous things out of thy law. The reaction of the disciples, bewilderment.

The reaction of the people, the crowd that was with Jesus when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to spread the word. And many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. The disciples were bewildered.

The people were jubilant, enthusiastic, and they continued to spread the word that the miracle worker, Jesus, was in town. And they used the word sign, miraculous sign. The whole gospel of John is constructed on the skeleton of seven signs.

What do we mean by a sign? Get this because it's important and it gives you a key to opening up this entire gospel. The word sign occurs as part of a larger word, significant and significance. A sign is a miraculous work that points beyond itself and has an extraordinary significance.

For example, in the sixth chapter of the gospel according to John, Jesus performs a miracle and with a few loaves and fishes breaks them after blessing them and feeds thousands. That's the miracle. But that miracle is also a sign.

It points beyond itself. It's significant. It is not a pointless prodigy or display of power.

It becomes the starting point for Jesus to stress that he is the bread of life and that as bread feeds the body and maintains our physical existence, so when our faith feeds on his saving virtue, we live and are spiritually renewed. Jesus meets a man who is blind. He anoints the man's eyes.

The man washes. The man sees. A mighty miracle.

But that miracle is a sign. It is significant. It points beyond itself to what? To the fact that Jesus is the light of the world and that anyone who dares to follow him will henceforth not stumble along in darkness but enjoy the light of life.

Jesus speaks that magnificent powerful word and brings Lazarus forth from the tomb and he does that as a sign pointing to the fact that he is the resurrection and the life and that he cannot only quicken these bodies from the dust of death, but that he can take us who are dead in trespasses and sins and give us new life, life lived in fellowship with God, life that is indeed everlasting. A miracle is a miracle, but when it's termed a sign, it becomes a parable as well of who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do for your good and mine. The reaction of the disciples, the reaction of the people, the reaction of his enemies.

So the Pharisees, seeing the tide rising in favor of Jesus, say to one another, this is getting us nowhere. Our policy of delay and waiting for a moment to lay hands on him is not working. This man must die and the sooner the better.

Look how the whole world has gone after him. Here are men who are envious, men who are furious, and it is no hyperbole of theirs when they say the whole world has gone after him, and they will seek to extinguish the light of the world, and they will seek to shroud in death him who is the resurrection and the life, but in so doing they will lift him up on a cross and his word of prophecy will come true that I, if I be lifted up, will draw all kinds of men and women to myself. The whole world will indeed go after him, men and women of all sorts and every level of society, men and women of respectability, and men and women whose character to date had seemed reprobate.

He will draw them to himself, the rich and the poor, male and female, young and old, bond and free. The whole world will go after him. A word they spoke in envy and spat out with fury shall by God be brought to pass.

Think of that magnificent passage in Revelation chapter 5 that out of every tribe and language and people and nation upon the face of the earth, there is gathered a mighty choir that sings the anthem of

redemption in praise of this Savior. Truly the whole world has gone after him, and in the seventh chapter of the book of the Revelation, there is a multitude that no man can number, drawn out of every nation and every tribe, every people and every language, standing before the throne of God and the throne of the Lamb, dressed in robes that have been made white by the blood of Jesus, holding in their hands the palm branches that signify joy and victory. And they will shout that salvation comes from him who sits upon the throne.

And the only thing that we still need to do is to ask ourselves this simple, straightforward question. Jesus Christ is indeed a King, a Savior King. Are you and I numbered among his subjects? Have we given to him our pledge of allegiance, and does every passing day show that in word and thought and deed we are giving to him the willing homage of our devoted hearts? Let us pray.

Lord, you are the King of glory, and we would be your subjects, yielding to you the allegiance of our lips, the works of our hands, the thoughts of our minds, the choices of our wills, and the love of our hearts. May we swing wide the gates of our hearts and lift up the everlasting doors of our souls, that the King of glory, the Lord strong and mighty, may enter in through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

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