



## Questions from Jesus' Final Week

### Who Is This?

*Matthew 21:1-11 | March 25, 2018*

**Introduction:** Jerusalem was flush with pilgrims. Faithful Israelites had come from throughout the region to celebrate the Passover and to offer sacrifices at the temple. These Jews had filled the streets and inns of Jerusalem with people and dialects from across the Roman world.

Of course the Romans wanted to suppress social unrest. The Jews had a bit of a reputation for being difficult to govern, given to heresy (because they didn't worship the Roman gods) and insurrection. Within the previous generations several insurrections had been led to cast off Roman rule and to reestablish Israel as an independent nation. These revolts were popularly understood to be seeking a new monarch to sit on old King David's throne.

It is important to remember just what Passover is for the Israelite people. Passover remembers and celebrates God's powerful deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Do you think any of those gathered in Jerusalem for Passover might have been praying for another Moses to be raised up to deliver God's people from Rome? Of course, the answer is 'yes.'

God had promise that he would send another Moses, another Elijah, and that this one would redeem God's chosen people. Some had begun to whisper that surely this itinerant Galilean preacher was the promised redeemer of Israel. So when Jesus finally entered Jerusalem for this remarkable Passover observance, people were waiting to see if he would make a move. Jerusalem was on pins and needles to see what God would do.

In Roman culture, a victorious general returning from war would ride into Rome on a chariot drawn by four horses. It's what all the conquering armies did, usually dragging the subjugated and conquered through the city streets in a long train of humiliation. This was accompanied by feasting and public entertainment. This 'triumph' was at once a civil and religious ceremony, where the celebrated general would offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome. It's from this 'triumph' that we come to the title 'Triumphal Entry.'

But this was not how the King of Jerusalem would come. The prophet Zechariah said, "your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey."

So Jesus rides down the Mount of Olives, following the short roadway up the hill into Jerusalem. What was he riding? It's not a war stallion. It's not even a horse! A man riding into Jerusalem on a donkey? Could it be? I think it is... Might this be the king? "Who is this?"

So when the Passover pilgrims saw him that day their voices began to ring out: "Hail, David's son! Hosanna; save us, son of David! Blessed are you who come in the name of YHWH!" And they covered the road as God's chosen deliverer rode in humble triumph to the holy city.

**Pray:** Almighty God, you are faithful to do what you have promised. We have a tendency to misunderstand what it is you are giving us, and to misread the signs. We want you to come and make our enemies subject to us. We want your deliverance to include the destruction of those we oppose. But somehow that's not your way. Instead you are giving your son for the life of the whole world. Somehow you see past the external tyranny that distracts to the internal tyrannies which bind us fast. Come, Son of David, and be king of our hearts, leading us through the humiliation that saves the world. Grant that in this most holy of weeks we may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, taste the passion of your son, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

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**Read:** Matthew 21:1-11

#### **Discussion:**

1. Imagine that you are a Passover Pilgrim at the Triumphal Entry of Jesus. Why have you come to Jerusalem? What are you expecting to do there? What are you hoping to find? When you see the man on the donkey, what are you thinking? When children ask what is going on, what do you say? When your friend asks about the commotion in the street, how do you answer?
2. Read verses 2-6. Have you ever felt God instructed you to do something that seemed odd? Have you ever followed God into an uncomfortable conversation? Share that story and what it was like to hear Christ's uncomfortable command.
3. Read verse 8. Why would someone take off their coat to let a guy on a donkey walk upon it? What might be the symbolism of taking off one's coat at the approach of Jesus? Is there anything that you want to "take off" and lay before Jesus?
4. Read verse 9. The word Hosanna literally means "Oh, Save!" It recognizes that Jesus is the one who can save. Is there something from which you personally need a savior today? What about our city? Our nation? Our world?
5. Read Colossians 2:13-15 – The 'triumph' of Jesus is spoken of here by the apostle Paul. How does the triumph of Colossians 2 compare to the triumph of Matthew 21? What is the same? What is different?
6. Read Zachariah 9:9-12 – Describe an ideal king. What kind of king do you want? What does this text tell us about the king that God wants?

**Application:** Returning to question 4, take time this week to make a list of those principalities and powers from which you long for salvation. Having written a list, linger over each item and pray, "Hosanna, Son of David. Savior, save us."

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, Only you can save us. Only you are the Messiah, the only son of God. And yet you will not save yourself. Help us not to lose faith in your saving power in the darkness of Good Friday. Help us to remember that you triumph over the powers through your cross. Give us eyes to see and tender hearts to respond to you as you show us what a holy king is like. AMEN