

THE CROWN & YOU*Series: Easter & You*

Matthew 21:1-17

Chadron Berean Church

To understand the present, it's essential to understand the past. The present was shaped by the past. So good or bad, the moments and events in history have shaped the world as we know it today. In fact, there are moments happening today—right now—that are shaping the future. Everything from cultural and societal norms, beliefs and values, political and economic systems, technology and innovation, to geopolitical relationships have all been shaped by historical events as individuals, cultures, and kingdoms have left their mark on the world. As we talked about recently in Romans 5 with Adam and the effect that his sin had on the world, we are the product of those who have gone before us. Just this week I was listening to Nebraska football head coach Matt Rhule talk about vision for Nebraska athletics and he made the comment that he's in the position he's in because of the wise decisions of Tom Osbourne and Bob Devaney decades ago. He talked about how we are the return (the harvest) on the seeds planted before us. The then affects the now.

I just want to demonstrate this a bit. Today we think it's normal to gather in circular or oval-shaped stadiums to be entertained by sports or performers. We rarely think about how that goes back to the sports and theatre loving Greeks and Romans. Decrees have changed the world: the Edict of Milan allowing Christians to freely worship; the tearing down of the Berlin Wall; the Boston Tea Party sparking the Revolutionary War; the battle of Gettysburg, one of the bloodiest battles and a turning point in the Civil War; Rosa Parks refusing to sit in the back of the bus; the invention of plastic in 1907; the invention of the internet in 1989; the invention of the iPhone and Facebook in 2007 (so thankful I made it through high school without the social media daze); the covid shutdowns of 2020... these are all world-shaping events that left their mark. There is a link between the then and the now.

In our personal lives, we all have moments and events, good or bad, that have helped shape who we are today—for better or worse. One rabbi said, "The past is a part of each of us." Maybe it's a difficult situation in the past, an accident, a loss, a success, a failure, a find (like finding your spouse or finding Christ). Whatever it was, you were never the same after that. You operate differently. You became bitter or better because of what you went through. What happened then affects the now. The past affects today.

The reason why I want to make that point is because there is a blip in history that is so significant that we number our years based on it... We say it is the year 2024... 2024 years since what? A.D., Anno Domini, Latin for "the year of our Lord." Most people live, die, and are forgotten within a couple generations. But the short life of Jesus Christ was so influential upon our world that we actually started to base our calendar around His life on earth. All His life was important and influential, but there are moments in His life that even though they took place 2,000 years ago, we are still celebrating today like His birth at Christmas or His final week on this earth during Easter,

including His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His death, burial, and resurrection. Even though these events took place nearly 2,000 years ago on the other side of the world in a different culture, they are the most important events in history. They shaped our world. The world would never be the same again. One man said, “Simply put, had the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ never occurred, the world that would exist would be one that would be absolutely unrecognizable to us. Cultures have risen and fallen, all shaped around Him and these events that occurred on this very weekend nearly 2000 years ago.” That’s essentially what we’re going to talk about this Easter: how these events have not only shaped our world, but they shape our lives today, right here and now. These events in history have an ongoing reality today, changing our lives today.

My prayer is that you, Christian or not, will have encounter with God through the Gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—this year. Sometimes as Christians we tend to think or use the gospel simply as the main tool in our tool belt of evangelism. We think that the gospel is only there for the unbeliever to be saved and come to Christ. And it is! Hallelujah for that! But it’s also our lifeblood—our meat and drink—for new life and experiencing God in the here and now. It transforms your life here and now. My prayer is that God would refresh our understanding of the gospel this year and that we would have real encounters with the living God. In the words of the ancient Celtic Christians, that we would return to “thin places” where the distance between heaven and earth, God and us, becomes thin. We sense God working among us and speaking to us. That He’s real. That the events of the Gospel change our lives today. Don’t you want that? I do. I don’t just want to coast through life doing things for Jesus. I want to have a real relationship with Jesus. So we’re going to talk about what the crown, the cross, and the empty tomb of Jesus mean for our lives today. Today, we focus on the crown from **Matthew 21:1-17**.

I. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM. (21:1-9)

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. 8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. 9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”

So because we celebrate this moment nearly every year, most of us are familiar with the picture. This is near the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It’s the beginning of the last week of His life, what we sometimes call Passion Week or Holy Week. Jesus is coming to Jerusalem for the last time. He is coming from the east, coming down the Mt. of Olives toward Jerusalem riding on a donkey and

they're shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" as they lay their cloaks and palm branches before Him in a type of royal procession. This is something that in antiquity would be expected of a Jewish judge or ruler or of a conquering dignitary in the Greco-Roman background. Not to welcome a conquering dignitary would have led to dire consequences. But this is the picture: Jesus being presented as a **king** coming into his capital. Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9 about their King coming gently on a foal of a donkey. **Hosanna** essentially means "save us now" and the "**Son of David**" is a specific title that refers to the Jewish messiah king that was expected to come. Verse 15 says that even the children were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

It's important to understand why this is so significant. Ever since the period of the Judges, Israel has been longing for a good king. In the time of the Judges, *God* was supposed to be their King. They were each to keep the Law and God would continue to bless them and protect them and prosper them. But the people compromised. They did what was right in their own eyes and worshipped other things. They relied on other gods and other nations and on their own strength for peace and prosperity. They didn't take God seriously until they were in trouble and when they cried out to God, God would send them a political and military deliverer known as a judge and deliver them. Well, that period of approximately 400 years (from 1400-1000 BC) ended with Samuel, whom some say is the last judge (1 Sam. 7:15).

The people cried out to Samuel, "Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." Samuel was hesitant, but the people persisted, so he took it to the Lord and the Lord said, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them." Scary thought, huh? Sometimes His discipline is giving us exactly what we want. So God leads Samuel to appoint **Saul** as king. Saul is described as "choice and handsome" and that "there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people." Pretty impressive, right ladies? Men, how'd you like to go down in God's Word as the more handsome than all the rest? Those are some humble bragging rights for eternity, right? Let me show you what the Word of God says about me... j/k. But from a human perspective, externally speaking, Saul is the man. He looks to be the perfect king. And he accomplished some great things. However, it wouldn't be long before it was revealed that Saul did not walk with God. He struggled to trust God and the people, in conflict with the Philistines, longed for another king—a better king.

After Saul comes **David**. When young, shepherd-boy David visits the battle front with the Philistines and sees what is going on—how Saul was afraid to battle Goliath and Goliath was taunting the God of Israel for forty days—David couldn't stand it any longer. He said, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" This giant would end up just like the bears and lions he had fought and killed defending his flock—his body would be given to the birds of the air. So with slingshot and stone, and most importantly, faith in the living God, he takes out Goliath and the people begin to look to David. It would be a few years, but David would take the throne and the people would flourish under his leadership. Then they lived in peace and prosperity. However, being the fallen sinner that he is, he too disappoints the people by his sinful choices. The people long again for a better king and the promise from God was that it would be one of David's descendants.

David's son **Solomon** is born and he possesses the greatest Israelite kingdom. He did a lot of good. He built the first temple. He expanded the kingdom and brought great wealth to it. Israel was at its glory days—like Husker football in the 90's. Gold was so plentiful in his day that silver wasn't worth anything. People and rulers came from all over to see the greatness of his kingdom and hear his wisdom. The people wondered, "Is this the promised one? The king God promised? Surely it is." But as time went on, he proved himself human too. He sold himself to other gods through foreign women and left the kingdom divided. It fell apart. The promised "Son of David" wasn't Solomon. After him it was one king after another, some good and some bad, but none of them perfect. It's just like politics today: we all keep hoping that the next guy is going to be the answer. However, it's not long and their flaws are revealed, and another takes their place and makes us angry and frustrated all over again. None of them are the king we long for to set us free.

By the first century, Israel had been under the heel of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now, Rome. Many Jews had taken up arms, attempting insurrection, while others had given up hope completely. They longed—they ached deep down—for the promised king to come. And eventually, He did. They heard about the prophetic **birth of the King**—the wise men from the east followed the star and Herod's attempt to slaughter the royal baby. They witnessed His **baptism**—and heard an audible divine confirmation from heaven that He was the Son of God. They listened to the **teaching and preaching of the King**—and marveled at how He taught as one who had authority. It was unlike any other teacher they'd ever heard. People couldn't quit listening to Him. They began to follow Him everywhere and become His disciples. They saw the **proof of the King**—His power and miracles as He cast out demons, healed the blind, the lame, the mute, the deaf. For a short time in Israel there was virtually no disease or sickness or demon-possessed. It was as if heaven had come to earth.

After approximately 3 years of public ministry, those who were honest with the evidence realized this was their guy! This was their King they'd been waiting for! And we see them recognize that on Palm Sunday as they cut palm branches and lay them before their King as He enters Jerusalem. *However*, while they are shouting praises to the King, Luke tells us at one point Jesus is looking over Jerusalem and weeping over it (Luke 19:41-44) because He knows many of the people will turn on Him when they don't get what they want. He will enter the temple in Jerusalem but not be welcomed as would be expected of a conquering dignitary. Then He will turn around and leave, going back east of the city. He never builds His palace or sits on a throne. And by the end of the week, this Jesus they were hailing as King would be executed. This "Son of David" would be crucified on a cross. It's one of the most ironic events recorded in the Scriptures. Mark's account simply says, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve since it was already late."

I think the text is designed to leave you questioning your own response to King Jesus. Palm Sunday means "Jesus is King." But the question we must ask ourselves is: What is my response to King Jesus? Have I rightly received Him? Have I welcomed Him and bowed the knee? Shouted "save me now!" Or had His entrance into the temple of my heart fallen flat like a dud? Did He turn around and leave? Because years later, here and now, peoples' response to King Jesus is not much different, and the world is in many ways defined today by how people respond to Him—whether

they receive Him as King or not. Here are at least four of the responses that we see both then and now:

1) There are those who weren't looking for a King at all.

This is reading in between the lines, but you have to imagine there were all sorts of people around the Mt. of Olives and Jerusalem that day who just didn't care about the commotion surrounding this Jesus guy. Prophecy is being fulfilled in their midst and they are so busy with their agenda, their possessions, their property, and the cares of this life that they don't even give Jesus a second thought—even though He had transformed the world around them. To them, it's just another day of business for them. How many people *right now* are just having another day, taking care of business, unaware of the way that Jesus is King and their need to submit to His authority over their lives. Day after day they walk their dog past churches and drive by Christian gatherings, never stopping to consider their need for Jesus. All they're concerned about is making another dollar, building their kingdom, and living for the weekend. They are oblivious to what matters forever.

2) There are those who are opposed to the King.

The religious elite in Jesus' day didn't ignore Jesus—they opposed Him! They tried to stop the people from calling Him King and feared that the whole world would go after Him (John 12:19). They told Jesus to rebuke His disciples (Lk. 19:39). Indignant, they tried to stop the children from singing praises (21:16). Many people today oppose King Jesus by opposing the church, the truth, and the gospel of grace. They call Christianity an old-fashioned religion for the small-minded. Little do they know that Jesus is what they need to set them free from bondage to sin and religion.

3) There are those who recognize He is King but refuse to give up their own agenda.

Some people on Palm Sunday were simply looking at Jesus as the ruler who would overthrow Rome and make life easier. They wanted miracles and healings but not righteousness. They weren't interested in a humble, sacrificial leader who could grant them spiritual life and righteousness. They wanted the King, but it was always about them. In the words of one man, "They wanted revolution; Jesus had come for reconciliation. They wanted to be saved from Rome; Jesus had come to save them from their sins. They wanted relief [from Rome], but Jesus wanted repentance. Right King; wrong agenda."

Even today, there are those who say they love Jesus and recognize He is King, but they only love Jesus when He helps to fulfill *their* agenda and answers their prayers the way they want. Deep down, they want to use Jesus to build their own kingdom. They follow when things are easy but not when it gets tough. Whenever King Jesus calls them to submit to His leadership and give up their agenda for His, asking them to give their time or talent or treasure to further His kingdom purposes, they bail. They want enough to be saved, but not enough to be sanctified. They want the Jesus who died to forgive sins, but not the Jesus who calls them to repent and follow Him, living a radically changed life with radically different priorities and motives. A lot of people become disillusioned because they want Jesus but not a new life or new mission.

4) There are those who recognize Jesus is King and bow the knee in worshipful submission.

All over the world today, true Christ-followers are gathering to declare that He is King over their lives—as many of you are doing here this morning. These are those who can really call themselves disciples because they are learning to follow Him and do His will. They’ve given up their agenda for His, living for something more than their own little kingdom. Does that describe you? Or are you still wanting just enough of Jesus to go to heaven but not enough for Him to change your life and what you’re living for.

Today as the worship team comes up and plays, if you never have, I encourage you to cry out “Hosanna” for the first time. Cry out to Jesus and ask Him to save you now from your sin. But don’t stop there. Some people do stop there. Go further. Bow the knee. Say, “King Jesus, I’m yours. I’ve been so busy building my own kingdom and doing things my way. I’ve never bowed the knee to you or if I have in the past, I’ve certainly forgot that recently. This is me bowing the knee again and asking you to be my King. Help me to trust your kingship in my life and live for the things that matter most.” Let’s take a moment in reflection and do that this morning.

When you make Jesus your King, it changes your day-to-day decisions and what you’re living for. He calls you to a new life, new meaning, new purpose, new kingdom—something more and something bigger than your own kingdom. These are those who find love, joy, and peace in life because they know that no matter what the King’s divine orders are—no matter what He sends them through—they can trust Him and fulfill His mission to love God and love others. Those who refuse to bend the knee to Jesus and live for their own kingdom will be frustrated, dissatisfied, and disappointed. Jesus does not promise us an easy life serving Him and His kingdom, but it is abundant life, and it is always meaningful.