



Matthew 21:1–5

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” 4 This took place to ful-

fill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a don-
key.’”

Reflection

Seven days. That’s all that is left of Jesus’ life. Seven days. The next seven chapters, more than a quarter of Matthew’s gospel are dedicated to the last seven days of Jesus’ life. In Mark it’s one third, in John it’s close to one half. Why? To make sure that we realise that this is what it’s all about. Not miracles, not wise teaching, not lit-

the children sitting on his Jesus' knee but about his death and resurrection.

The one who was the greatest is about to become to least to save his little ones from their sins. The Son of God, the all-conquering Son of David from 2 Samuel 7, the mighty Son of Man from Daniel 7 is about to become the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 bringing together all the major prophecies about him in the Old Testament. The whole Old Testament has been moving towards the events of the next seven days. All of human history has been moving towards the events of these days since sin first entered the world in Genesis 3. In fact, the activities over the next seven days will go down in history as the climax and centrepiece of all human history. The bible says that even

angels longed to look into these things (1 Peter 1:12). We have the picture in our minds of angels craning their necks, peering down out of heaven to watch the king come into his glory. The greats of the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, Elijah and all the heroes of our faith from Old Testament times strained their eyes as if from a distance to see these events – they too longed to see the events that will unfold before our eyes over the next seven days. They longed to see their king come into his glory. The king is coming. He's about to enter Jerusalem, the city David founded, the city of the great king, the centre of Israel's spiritual life and messianic hope. And he will do so in the lead-up to one of the holiest days in the year.

Jesus approaches Jerusalem by taking

the Roman military road up from Jericho. It was about 27 kilometres long and climbed about 900 metres. Which meant six to eight hours of walking uphill. The road passed through Bethany, where John's gospel tells us that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead only a few days ago, and then through nearby Bethphage which lies on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives. The road then crosses over the mount and the Kidron Valley and enters Jerusalem.

Nearing Bethphage, after a good six hours of uphill walking, Jesus instructs his disciples and those travelling with him to stop. He says to two of his disciples, from verses 2 and 3,

“Go to the village ahead of you,

and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

Now our first thought has to be that if Jesus was going to get a donkey to ride on then why do so after having just walked 25 kilometres up hill and with only about one kilometre left until he arrives in Jerusalem? In fact, to get to Jerusalem Jesus and his disciples have now journeyed close to 200 kilometres from the far north of Galilee. And nowhere else in all of the gospels is Jesus recorded as riding an animal. He walked everywhere. What's changed? And why now?

Matthew is bursting to tell us. So much so that he interrupts his own story to tell us. In verse four he says,

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

This is the ninth time Matthew has specifically pointed out that Jesus has fulfilled a prophecy written about him hundreds of years before. Nine times, with allusions to many other prophecies fulfilled by Jesus.

Only this one is a little different to the rest.

It's hard to plan where you're going to be born, or the specific means by which you are going to die; prophecies written about Jesus that he fulfilled to the letter. In fact most of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled simply came about like these did, impossible to plan or to deliberately fulfil. For instance it's hard to plan for Roman soldiers to divide up your clothes by rolling dice while you're being crucified, near naked on the cross. That's what Psalm 22 prophesied about Jesus 1000 years before these exact events took place, before crucifixion even existed in fact. But this one is different to those. This prophecy, Jesus makes plans to deliberately and very publically fulfil. No secrets anymore. God's king is here and he's about to make his entrance. Jesus is deliberately making it plain for the world to see that he's the Messiah, the Christ,

the anointed one, God's long-awaited and long-promised king come to Jerusalem at last. God's king is about to make his entrance and Jerusalem, filled to beyond capacity with zealous Jews from all over the Mediterranean will not fail to notice the fulfilment of such a well know prophecy about the Messiah from the book of Zechariah.

And what an entrance the king will make! Not on a warhorse bought with funds from the royal treasury; this king arrives on a borrowed donkey. The king of kings and lord of lords enter Jerusalem not on stallion, but on a donkey, not warlike and proud, but gentle and lowly, as one who is truly great. Not an anti-Roman insurrectionist; as far as humankind goes, he's come in peace. Jesus' sights are set far higher than

the Romans. He's here not to take back Jerusalem from Caesar but to take back the entire world from Satan, the prince of this world. His battle isn't against flesh and blood; it's against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, against Satan and the path of sin and death that he led us down. He's come not to free Jerusalem but to free the entire world from slavery to Satan, sin and death.

Think & Pray

This time Jesus came in peace. But one day he will come again to do battle. Revelation 19 pictures the day when our king will come again riding a white battle horse, his robe dipped in blood, judging all peoples with justice and waging war against the enemies of God. If you have not ac-

cepted his offer of peace then accept it now before it is too late.

By laying down his life on the cross Jesus brokered peace between us and God. It could be no other way. Our sin makes relationship impossible with a God who is perfect, just and righteous. Sin must be punished otherwise God would no longer be God. How could a holy and perfect God turn a blind eye to evil of any kind? Justice has to be done. Someone must pay. Yet out of his great love for us God the Father sent his son to die on our behalf. And out of his great love for us Jesus put up his hand and said 'Take me instead.' He came down and died in our place. God punished him instead of us. All we have to do is say we're sorry, turn back to God and he will count our sin against us no more.

Make peace with God today before it is too late. Because if you don't when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead you will be found wanting on that great and terrible day.