

Christ, the King

Matthew 21:1-11

Recently I had a conversation with a member from another church, in which I was asked a very interesting question ... We had been speaking of Jesus and His ministry on earth ... when kind of out of the blue she said ... do I worship the right Messiah? And I must admit, at first this question caught me a little off guard ... But as she expounded on her question, I began to see more clearly what her dilemma was. She had been listening to a sermon on YouTube that caused her some conflict ... because as she listened, she very quickly realised that ... unfortunately ... in the world we live in today ... there are many different Jesus' ... and this is a very sad reality ... let me explain ... According to the Center for the study of Global Christianity ... there are currently over 45 000 different denomination around the world ... and a lot of these denominations have formed from differing opinions on Who Jesus is ... and what He came to do ... and this is not a modern threat or controversy ... as early as fourth century AD we have the Arian controversy in which Arius, a priest from Alexandria, Egypt, claimed that because Jesus was "begotten," or brought about by God, he was a lesser divinity than God. This caused a major stir in the early church as you can imagine ... and eventually led to The Council of Nicea where a group of theologians and scholars were gathered together by the Emperor Constantine the 1st ... and there after much deliberation they ultimately sided against Arius... and their reason for standing against him was simple ... they could not find sufficient scriptural evidence to back his claims ... I mean one need only look at Jesus' own claims to rule out that heresy, just look in the gospel of John chapter 10 where Jesus says, 'I and the Father are one' ... but I digress ... As we look around at the various denominations today ... we see clear evidences of differing views of Jesus ... and perhaps one the most popular at the moment ... Is Jesus as a genie ... because after all Jesus is just there to answer every demand we make of Him ... and if He does not give us exactly what we want... when we want it ... it because of a lack of faith ... They turn Jesus into a God of health ... wealth ... and prosperity ... something I struggle to find in the Scriptures ... we need only look at our sermon two weeks back to see why ... And this was exactly why the woman asked me the question she did ... because she struggled to see the Jesus of the Bible in the teachings of many of these 'famous' pastors ... and why ... well the apostle Paul says it best, "a time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions". You see beloved, far too often we build up expectations of the Messiah that are not based off of the Scriptures ...

And beloved, we will see that in this morning's Scripture reading ... because we should not forget that the very people laying down the palm branches and their cloaks ... will be the people calling for Jesus' crucifixion ... and why ??? because He did not do what they wanted Him to do ... Though they recognised Him as King ... they were expecting a militant liberator ... not a suffering servant ... William Hendriksen says, "Jesus shows the crowds what kind of Messiah He is, namely, not the earthly Messiah of Israel's dreams, the One who wages war against an earthly oppressor, but the One who came to promote and establish the things that make for peace, lasting peace... reconciliation between God and man, and between man and his fellow man."

And so, as we turn our attention to the scripture reading for this morning we will be breaking it into 2 parts. First, we will be looking at verses 1 to 6, The anticipated King. Followed by verses 7 to 11, The true King.

Matthew chapter 21 verses 1 to 6 says, "As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone

says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: "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.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them."

Beloved, the week of the Passion, which is followed by the Resurrection begins here. And so, in order to gain a better understanding of the events that are about to take place, we are going to rewind a little bit to see the journey that led to Jesus and His disciples arriving at this point. If we turn back just a little, Matthew has informed us of Jesus leaving Perea, crossing the Jordan and in Jericho restoring the sight of two blind men... from Jericho Jesus and His disciples made their way to Jerusalem ... and on reasonable grounds it may be assumed that they reached Bethany before sunset on the Friday... it is helpful to note here that for the Jewish community the Sabbath is celebrated from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset ... Now Bethany was the home of Simon the leper, Lazarus, Mary and Martha... So, Jesus enjoyed His sabbath-rest with His friends and on the Saturday evening a dinner was given in His honour ... the next day, being Sunday, sees Jesus and His disciples departing from Bethany and making their way towards Bethpage ... and it is at this point that Jesus instructs two of His disciples to go and fetch the donkey and her colt ... now there is much debate surrounding the collection of these animals ... did Jesus prearrange for the collection of these animals ... did He, by His divine nature, know of the donkey's whereabouts ... or had He been informed by a passerby or traveller as they made their way towards Jerusalem... beloved ... this should not distract us from the true purpose of these events ... the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures ... Jesus was revealing Himself as the One of Whom the prophets had spoken of ... and it can be seen in Jesus' very direct statement of His Lordship ... as He tells the disciples ... if anyone says anything to you ... say The Lord needs them ... not your Lord ... The Lord signifying the fact that He is Lord of all. And before we as the readers are informed of how the disciples fared ... Matthew marks this event as the fulfilment of the prophecy made in Zechariah chapter 9. The humble, yet great ... lowly, yet exalted King is about to make His triumphant entry ... though in no uncertain terms ... He is the One who in this very act is riding to His death ... and thus to His victory ... a victory not only for Himself ... but a victory for all those who are known and loved by Him. And the sad reality is that this is the very reason the same people we are about to read about now ... would in just a few days ... call for His crucifixion ... Because as I said earlier ... they were expecting a militant, political Messiah ... not the humble ... gentle ... suffering Servant ... Who would reveal His true Kingship by laying down His life for those who He loves and has set apart.

Matthew chapter 21 verses 7 to 11 says, "They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Beloved, everything happens just as Jesus said it would ... The disciples find the donkey and her colt exactly where Jesus said they would ... and in the gospel of Luke we learn that as they were unhitching them the owners did come out and object to their livestock being taken ... but as Jesus instructed the disciples ... they informed the owners that 'the Lord needs them' ... and without further debate they were released ... and the donkeys were brought to Jesus. So, the King takes His place on the donkey and the entry begins. And having witnessed the disciples laying down their coats for Jesus to sit on ... The crowds now begin to lay down their coats and palm branches before the feet of the King's noble steed

... and the use of branches to pave the way recalls the people of Israel waving palm branches in celebration as their enemies were expelled from Jerusalem during the Maccabean revolts ... which once again suggests the political expectations of the Messiah. Which is further seen in their cries of Hosanna ... Hosana meaning "save now," or "save, pray." There is a clear combination of prayer and praise ... and as one commentator says perhaps it could be understood as the people saying, "We beseech thee, O Lord, save now, grant victory and prosperity at this time, since because of thy goodness the appropriate moment has arrived." And by the proclamation of Jesus as the 'Son of David' there is a confirmation of crowd's perception that He is in fact the long-awaited Messiah... which does not contradict their description of Jesus as a prophet in verse 11... this was merely the reputation He had built up during His earthly ministry ... but now ... they saw before them the Messiah that Zechariah had prophesied would come ... And so quoting from Psalm 118 the crowd sing His praises ... and beloved I would encourage you to read Psalm 118 ... it is a beautiful Psalm ... and perhaps if the crowd had understood Psalm 118 along with Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 9 they would have recognized in Jesus ... the Messiah Who came to set His people free from the grip of sin... the one and only Saviour of the world. But none the less the cries of Hosanna and shouts in honour of Jesus cause an overflow of excitement ... and as is natural ... curiosity creeps in ... what is going on? Who is this? And it is with pride that the Jews from Galilee claim Him as their very own prophet... because surely they were about to witness the start of the Messiah's rule on earth ... no longer would they be oppressed ... no longer would those of other beliefs from different nations be able to rule over them and force them to follow their practice and their ways ... So perhaps the expectation was that Jesus ... the Messiah ... was going to march up to the temple and with a loud cry announce their liberation and the institution of their rule ... for surely now they were going to be the most powerful of all nations ... no one would defeat them with the Messiah at the reigns ... but ... this is not why the Messiah had come ... and though it was their desire ... Jesus would not be a political, militant leader... the Messiah they wanted ... was not the Messiah the prophets had said would come ...

And so beloved my question to you this morning is this ... which Jesus do you serve? Which Messiah do you worship? There are many different "Jesus'" in the world today ... but there is only one true Jesus ... and that is the Jesus of the Bible ... He is the way ... the truth ... the light ... He is one with the Father and the Spirit ... He was in the beginning and everything that was created was created through Him ... No one comes to the Father but through Him ... for our salvation is made complete in Him and through Him alone ... and though many will claim to know Him ... their lives will give evidence to the fact that they are not known by Him... As believers we are called to submit ourselves to Him fully ... and all that we do should be for His glory ... and though we will fall short ... when we are weak ... He is strong ... He is the author and perfecter of all things ... He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow ... and His command is for us to love as He loved ... Beloved ... turn to the Jesus we find in pages of this beautiful Book ... the One that turned your heart of stone to a heart of flesh! When you worship the Messiah, know that you are worshipping God incarnate! Very God and very man... sinless and blameless ... righteous and holy ... perfect and sovereign.

Quoting David Zimmer, 'Christ our glory, Christ our hope, Christ our King forevermore. Come joy or come sorrow, whatever befalls. The light of the Saviour will outshine them all.'