

Well, it was Palm Sunday, and sadly Susie's little three-year-old Billy had strep throat, and so he couldn't make it to church and had to stay home with the babysitter. And all of a sudden his family came home from church and they had palm branches. And Billy asked his mom, like, what are the palm branches for? And his mom said, well, people wave these over Jesus when he walked by. And Billy was fumed and said, the one Sunday I don't go, Jesus shows up. Anybody want Jesus to show up today? Yeah. Amen.

Yeah. Palm Sunday is that day where Jesus shows up, and not in the typical way you would expect. Today I begin in the Old Testament prophecy, Zechariah chapter 9, verse 9. It says this, rejoice greatly daughter Zion, shout daughter Jerusalem, see your King comes to you righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey on a colt, the foal of a donkey. This prophecy was given like five centuries before Jesus walked this earth. There was a lot riding on this prophecy. People were expecting it. People were planning for it. They were ready for it.

And I think we all have those moments in our lives where we plan and expect and get ready for like the big day. Some of you might remember younger, you know, you went through those countless hours of driving with mom and dad before the day comes when you get to drive with the friendly DMV person. That's some reason going to make you parallel park, right? Or maybe you've been preparing for the ACT or the SAT or a law, you're preparing to pass the bar. Maybe for you, you've been working hard to show up for the workout, to try out for the sports team, or maybe you've been sinking so much time, energy, attention, and money into your business idea. And today's the day you get to launch it or potentially launch it before some sharks.

We all know what it's like to have a big day, to work hard and prepare and be ready for it. And that is this day. Palm Sunday was the day they were waiting for, the big day. So I want to read it to you today from Matthew chapter 21, starting in verse one. It 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 Peyton Manning by her. Or is it Peyton Manning? Anybody? Okay. Anyway, I'm going to keep moving. Thank you. Thank you. I got applause over there. Okay.

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 fulfill what was spoken through the prophet, what we just read. See daughter Zion, see your King comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt the full of a donkey. So the disciples did as Jesus instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and place 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 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. The Greeks like agitated, irritated, and they asked, who is this? Come on. Everybody say, who is this? That's the name of my sermon title today. Who is this? Palm Sunday kind of forces you to ask that question and to answer it. Who is this? Who is Jesus to you?

We're going to be starting a series next week on Easter called where's God? And I thought it would be appropriate before we do a whole series that maybe we should have a Sunday talking about who is Jesus. Your answer to the who is this Jesus question can change anything and everything. And so I want to break down the story a little bit. It tells us that Jesus entered Jerusalem again. This was the big day. Just like Zachariah had predicted and according to the gospel of Matthew, this is the first time Jesus had broken into the great, powerful, bustling city of Jerusalem.

It's a big city. It's like Jesus spent the first three years prior to that kind of in remote towns and villages like Nazareth and Bethsaida and Capernaum. But this is like the big leagues for Jesus. It's like a baseball player that his journey is not complete until he gets to play at Wrigley Field or an actor, actress that gets their chance finally on Broadway in New York. That's what Jerusalem is. And again, they'd been waiting for centuries for this to happen. And as he came into the city, there were different types of responses. There were some that were shouting Hosanna, which means save us now. Hosanna, blessed is he that comes the son of David, Hosanna, save us now.

And they were taking their cloaks and they were first putting some of them on the donkey because it had no saddle and then others were lining the road with it. They were also taking palm branches and lining the road with the palm branches as well. So there is safe passage as well as holding other palm branches in their hands, declaring Hosanna is he. But a majority of the crowd was on the outside, the sidelines, agitated, stirred and asking who is this? Almost as if this guy was a threat. And that's exactly what he was.

Today I want to open this story more and show you three things about Jesus that are true, the type of king that he was. And I think they're all very valuable and valid points that maybe one or two or all three of them will hit you in an important way today. But what I want you to do is as I'm going through the sermon today, as I want you to personally wrestle and grapple with this question, who is this? We all, every one of us in this room need to have an answer for who Jesus is. And if there's ever a week where this question comes to the forefront, it is the coming week.

So let me share three things about this type of king that is different than the kings of our day. First, Jesus is the humble king. You ever noticed that everywhere in the Bible, it seems Jesus walks. He's a walker. Some scholars say he walked over 3000 miles in his three year ministry. One time he didn't even need to walk. He could have just ridden in the boat with the disciples and he decided to walk on water just to show him what I can do. So it's kind of interesting.

Beth page is only two miles from the entrance of Jerusalem. You would expect Jesus to walk there, but instead he rode on a donkey and all four gospels show this. It's so intentional that Jesus chose to ride in on a donkey.

And I would say he absolutely did what Jesus chose to do on that donkey that day was through his actions, declare to everybody that I am the long awaited prophesied king that is coming on the donkey. That's me. He is that king. And I find it fascinating that he would come of all things on a donkey. Donkeys represent humility and peace and in the Roman world, influenced by Roman government, when powerful kings came, they came with horses and chariots. And when they came into a city with trumpet blasts and everybody shouting that they were coming with horses and chariots to show we're going to bring peace, but we're going to do it through army and sword, whereas a donkey is we're going to bring peace, but we're going to do it through humility and patience.

And I know that the prophecy said that Jesus would ride in on a donkey, but don't you think some of the faithful Jews were like, yeah, but can't you start on a donkey and then jump up to a horse, right? You can go through the gate, just, you know, check that prophecy off the list. But like, let's get onto a horse, right? Because that's powerful and that's strong. And that's a lot of what the people expected. Now we don't deal as much with donkeys and horses, but in our day, when we have powerful people come, they come with their brigade. And I think in our nation, a lot, especially we see like a lot of souped up black Cadillac escalades. All right.

You know, if there's a whole line of those things, those are important people. And so in my world, this is Jesus not coming in a black Cadillac escalade with a large group. It's not even a Mazda. It's not even a Toyota Prius. It is Jesus coming in a smart car. If that helps. Y'all know a smart car, right? I think you like wind them up in the morning and they through the day. I don't know why I always have the urge of like, I wish I wasn't so busy. I'd call my friends and I just want to pick this smart car up and move it just because I can. And I think we can, at least. I don't know. It's just not a part of the sermon or needed necessary information, but that's how I feel. Anyway, smart car. This is the equivalent, right? Jesus is not coming in the way we would expect him to come.

We are not taught humility in our world. We are taught power. We are taught how to rise. We are taught not how to, how to serve you, but how to get others to serve you. Whereas Jesus earlier in the chapter before said, the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And so Jesus is not coming on a horse high up and saying, who am I to you in a powerful, combative, forceful way. He's coming low on a donkey. I level with you probably maybe even seated lower than you would be standing.

And he's coming not just low, but he's coming slow because donkeys don't move fast. And so low and slow is a great recipe for cooking brisket and ribs. It's

also the way in which Jesus comes to you low eye to eye. I want to have a conversation with you. And many times when Jesus shows up, even still today, it is not through, again, the combative forceful loud. I'm not saying he can't come in might and power and forces. Sometimes he does, but many times, what does he do? He comes through the still small whisper. He is a humble King.

Number two, Jesus is the eternal King. People were looking for Jesus to honestly, if Jesus, you could just restore the nation of Israel. That'd be great. Blessed is he the son of David, right? That was one of a common name and, and in the Israelites in those days, most of them, what did they want? They wanted him to be like David in old Testament times, Israel was the most at peace and the most prosperous when David reigned. And I believe they thought that when Jesus came or the long awaited King would come, that he would overthrow whatever the government was of that day. And he'd be like a David figure and maybe a little bit better.

If you can do that, Jesus, that's what we really want. Hosanna means save now, save now, save now. And let's let, I think sometimes we place a little too much blame on these people. They do turn on Jesus in this coming week, but, but we have to understand about them is that there was real oppression largely from Roman government and Roman influence on them. And so the, the idea of somebody coming and restoring them and not just restoring them, but allowing them to be at peace and not just at peace, but to be prosperous. Are you kidding me? That's exactly what they want.

We face a lot worse, a lot better consequences, I should say, than they do in the world in which we live. And we still are looking for political figures in our day to help us escape from whatever it is we need to escape from the crowds. They looked for a Messiah who would rescue them politically and free them nationally. But Jesus came to save them spiritually and mankind, womankind, our humankind's greatest need is not anything to do with a national salvation or political or cultural ideologies. Our greatest need is and will always be spiritual. And that is what Jesus came to bring to us.

And yet the ones that were around that crowd and so many of us today, we miss the fact that the primary message of the prior three years that Jesus over and over and over came to talk about was not restoring a nation, but it was bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth here right now. And that is always accessible and available. But through Jesus, it is now available to you, not as a shadow, but in its pure light. And you can get in and you can bring his kingdom now.

That's the message that he was always long term forever thinking of reigning, not just temporarily making them get out of their oppression and getting them good for the day, but then later would be overthrown again by some other political power. They missed it. And we miss it too. And so can't imagine the excitement and the tension of that day. Again, I know that he's starting on a donkey, but he's got to get on a horse, right? What are we going to do? Jesus stormed the Roman Praetorium and have a people's revolution. I mean, that's

what the Roman government, the officials thought that Jesus is going to stir it up a rebellion so much that it was a threat to them. And that's really the reason why he got thrown onto the cross in just a few days.

I can imagine their hearts beating. I can imagine their palms sweaty like a warrior about ready to go to battle before the bugle sounds. Is this how it's going to happen? Jesus is the humble king. He's the eternal king. And Jesus is the suffering king. The Palm Sunday account is found in all four gospels. And in one of them, it really speaks of it more than the others that Jesus wept that day.

It was a celebratory day in so many ways. And yet Jesus wept because he knew unlike the crowd that day, he knew why he came and he knew that to get to the eternal reign that we just talked about of the kingdom of heaven, that he would first have to go through the suffering of the cross. The enduring, the brutal execution and murder in the harshest and most insulting of ways that he would have to go through this excruciating pain and agony.

And that word excruciating was invented from the cross. Ex means out of, crux means the cross. There was no word to describe the torture and pain and agony that Jesus went through. And so they invented excruciating out of the cross. It is a tragic thing to see the king of kings and to miss the point of who he is. And yet I believe that just like the crowd that day, we might be quick to blame them.

But so many of us and so many that live in our state and our nation are still doing this. We have 70% ish of people in Nebraska that profess a faith and adhere to the Christian belief and yet the numbers just don't make sense when we look at how our influence is just lessening and lessening and lessening. There are people that half-heartedly adhere to Jesus, sadly, and I know that you're here and so that's a step ahead potentially, but I also know that we can struggle with this in this room or whatever room you're listening to me, that we will follow Jesus as long as there is no suffering, that we will go with him when it's convenient.

And as long as I can still build my own platform and accumulate my own things and build my kingdom in this world, as long as Jesus doesn't mess with me in those areas, then I'll kind of conveniently have him as an add-on to my life in this world. But the moment there's any suffering, man, we panic and we flee because how in the world could this be the will of God? Even though the Bible says that suffering, I don't fully understand it, but it produces perseverance and perseverance character and character hope. And so there's something to it.

And in the midst of the weeping and the celebratory nature, these emotions going on that would later that week lead Jesus to the excruciating pain and the brutal torture that he went through. Do you know the most common emotion attributed to Jesus while he was hanging on the cross? Hebrews 12, 2 says, encourages us that we ought to be fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter, some translations I like, author and finisher of our faith.

For the, what's that word? For the joy. That's the common emotion attributed to Jesus while hanging on the cross for the joy set before him. He endured the cross, scorned at shame, and is now not seated low on a donkey, but seated high on the right hand of the throne of God. He endured the suffering because he had joy. And what was the joy? The joy was that one day there would be another Palm Sunday where people from every nation, tribe and language could join in with their Palm branches because that's really all that Matthew 21 is, is it's a foreshadowing, a shadow of what one day we'll see fully lit.

That there will be a second Palm Sunday, the second Palm Sunday that the apostle John writes about in revelation where John says, after this, I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, not just from one big city, but instead from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and before the lamb. They were wearing white robes, white symbolizing purity because our sins have been cleansed and taken care of. And they were holding what? Palm branches in their hands and they were crying out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne.

He once sat on a donkey, but he's sitting on a throne right now and salvation belongs to him. And that's the day that's coming by the way, Palm Sunday is a foreshadowing of that day. And I really believe that our, our greatest mission in this world is to do all that we can to give glimpses of what one day we will see in the kingdom of heaven.

And so when it says that one day there will be every nation, people, tribe, and language around that throne, that's why the church pursues diversity and rejects racism and any type of injustice, because that's not the church of the future that we'll be worshipping with forever and ever. So anything and everything that we can do now, that's a foreshadowing or that gives a glimpse of what one day we'll see fully lit is a beautiful way to live Jesus.

One day we'll be bowed down to and every tongue will confess. He is the king of kings, but is he your king of kings coming back to you? Who is Jesus to you? Jesus is the humble king. Jesus is the eternal king. Jesus is the suffering king. And again, all three of those types of kings go against what we teach in this world.

We are not taught how to be humble. We are taught how to be powerful. We are not taught to keep our eyes on eternal. We are taught to, you only live once. Our version today of seize the day, *carpe diem*. And so get it all while you can. Accumulate as much as you want. Build your platform. Gain influence. And we are not taught the way of suffering, but rather when you suffer, that couldn't be from God is what the world would tell you.

And so who, who is this? Is he your king of kings? We can put, put it on our church as the name of our church, but is it your king of kings? Is he your Lord of Lords? Who is God? Who is Jesus to you?

Every week when we open up scriptures, we try to tackle different images and

metaphors to help you see that Jesus is this. Today we looked at the metaphor of the king of kings and in coming weeks when we look at where's God, you're going to see God show up in different ways. And that's exactly the beautiful point is that God will continue to show up in different ways and he'll be the God that you need him to be on the day that you need him to be that.

And that's why we open up all of scripture, the old Testament and the new Testament. And we talk about stories today because the same God then is the same God now and he still shows up. And so we've got to look at the whole of scripture and we've got to teach the whole of scripture so that you can see who Jesus, for who he really is.

And so we can go all the way back and we can see who is Jesus. I mean, he is the, the creator of the world and the heel crusher in the garden in Genesis. He is the burning bush in the living tabernacle in Exodus. He is the Avenger of blood in numbers. He is the mighty savior in Joshua. He is the guardian redeemer in Ruth. He is the mighty warrior in first Samuel. He is the good shepherd in the book of Psalms.

He is the branch of righteousness in the book of Isaiah. He is the faithful husband in the book of Hosea, the fourth man in the fire in the book of Daniel, the second chance in Jonah, the humble eternal suffering King in Zachariah. He is the promised Messiah in Matthew. He is the suffering servant in Mark. He is the savior of the world in Luke. He is the son of God in John. He is working through the Holy Spirit and the apostles in the church in acts. He is the author and the finisher of your story in Hebrews. He is the alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the great white rider of the horse and the new bridegroom of the whole city of Jerusalem. The one seated on the throne, the lamb of God, that is the lion of Judah that said, I am the king of kings and I'm coming back soon.

That's who he is. I should say that's who he is in history. But who is he in your story? The history that we have of Jesus is a history of a lot of past and some beautiful promises that will still come. But your story is in the present and it moves on into the future.

And I will tell you that one day your tongue will confess whether you do it willingly now or not. And one day your knees will bow and you will confess that Jesus is the king of kings. So why wouldn't you do it on a week like this?

Let me tell you who Jesus is to me, lately at least. 2024 was an interesting year. It started with kind of in my mind, just out of nowhere, failed business expectations and if I'm honest with you, just revenue just was out of nowhere, just way lower than it had been. And it caused just a tailspin for me last year.

And on top of that, and trying to figure out the complications of that and questioning and being even angry with God in that, there were personal challenges laid on top of that. There were medical uncertainties. There were unanswered questions and doubts. And when someone asked me how I was doing last year,

I would say, good, doing really good. But if I really got to talk to them, I would say, honestly, I'm not doing good. And the word I just used to describe last year just felt heavy and it felt like it was getting heavier and heavier.

And what I would have preached to you was in your heaviness, go to God who, right? His yoke is easy and his burden is light and he will take off that heaviness. And what God ought to have been last year for me, more than any years prior maybe, was he ought to have been, he's my rock and he's my refuge and he's my fortress and he's my safe place, man, when nobody else, like he is. And he wasn't those things for me. He was a distant friend.

And that was not one ounce his fault. That was all on me. Because the stuff I'd have been preaching you and telling you to do, I was not doing myself. And I got relaxed in my disciplines and the more stuff that piled on, the harder and harder it got for me to connect with God. And coming into this year, so many of those things that were unanswered or not complete or that I had doubts, so many of them, if I'm honest with you, God worked in my favor to my liking still, not all of them, but a lot of them.

And the moment I started seeing God answer prayer after prayer, after complication, after uncertainty, after doubt, I felt super guilty of what a crappy friend I was to him. And I've gotten to see him as I've gotten, thankfully, back into better disciplines. I've got to see him not as the combative, who am I to you? Not as a condemning, a rebuking friend, but as a loyal, committed, patient, low and slow friend. It welcomes me back with his grace. It's not like making me pay for what I've done and not labeling and calling me an imposter for how I acted, but instead, it's so excited just that I came back.

Wow. Who is Jesus to you? My challenge for you this week, my call to action is on a week that is so important. The greatest week of human that has ever lived. You can just plow through it. Don't. My challenge is to write, who is Jesus on a piece of paper and spend as many minutes as you need. Just this is who Jesus is to me.

And after you do that, I think the only proper response for you and for me is to say, I'm done giving half measures of my heart and my soul over to God. I'm all in.

I want to close with a quote, a little story from John Ortberg from his newest book, Steps, where he writes about how, honestly, the church would be far more effective if it was more like an AA meeting. So far, it's been my favorite book of the year. He quotes C.S. Lewis first, and he says through C.S., Christ says, give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want you. I've not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good.

It is striking that in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous, precisely the same phrase is used. We thought we could find an easier, softer way, but we could not. Half measures availed us nothing. Half measures, when you're talking about life



change, don't work because this step involves the basic orientation of our soul, and this cannot be divided into parts. No one can be a little bit pregnant or a little bit married.

Someone I know well, he said, whose life motto is, I'd rather be dead than cold, always enters a swimming pool using the half measures method. She submerges at the rate of one inch per minute, standing on her tiptoes so that she is lowering herself into the water and fighting it simultaneously, prolonging the torture and saying non-faith based words while she is half in, half out, half wet, half dry, half warm, half cold.

When all of her is miserable, would that she were hot or cold, better to dive in and get it over with. Because when you dive in after the bracing for shock, you know the joy of being all in. When you give yourself wholly over to the water, it holds you up. You can float, you can even swim. Half measures don't work.

And so who is Jesus to you? Answer it and then get in and swim. You who are being baptized today, is there not a more beautiful analogy? Get the water on you today, but do not half hearted step in. God is worthy of so much more. Amen.

Pray with me. God, thank you for who you are. Thank you that when we are just bad friends, bad disciples, bad representatives, when we are faithless, when we are distant from you, thank you for your grace, for your loving and your kind voice. And for your welcoming us right back into your loving, compassionate, powerful, strong arms that not just saved the world, but saved me. May you be greatly glorified this week. We love you, Jesus.

And the church said, Amen.