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A KING LIKE NO OTHER
Matthew 21:1-11
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Why Jesus? What is it about him that makes him so important to us? Why Jesus and not Buddha or Mohammed or Nothing? Why am I a Christian, a Christ-follower, a disciple of his? Why do I want others to know him and serve him?

I can honestly say it is because there has never been anyone else like him. No one who promises and delivers what he promises and delivers. I have discovered in him the hope of the world and a strong foundation for my life. And that is why I hope none of us who love him are taking him for granted. He is precious beyond comparison.

This week that we call Holy Week reveals the uniqueness of Jesus. It is this week 2000 years ago that causes me to bow at his feet and to love him with all my heart. I am going to share with you in a series of sermons how he is like no other: A King like No Other; on Good Friday, A Love like No Other; on Easter, A Power like No Other; the Sunday after Easter, A Presence like No Other.

I. Jerusalem

On this day 2000 years ago Jesus began his life-changing week by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. We call it his triumphal entry. Now, I want us to understand some things about Jerusalem so we can see the significance of what Jesus did.

At the time of Jesus, Jerusalem had been the religious and political capital of the Jewish people for almost 1000 years. King David conquered Jerusalem in 1004 BCE and established his monarchy there and housed the Ark of the Covenant there. He believed God gave him Jerusalem and so he decided he wanted to build a temple for God. God had other ideas. God told David that the building of the temple would fall to David's son, Solomon. That's what happened. Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem and it was magnificent. It was an architectural wonder of the ancient middle east. It was lavish with gold covered walls and embedded precious metals. For the Jews, Jerusalem became symbolically and in fact the dwelling place of God on earth. It was the Jewish Mecca, the place for pilgrimages and national festivals.

However, Jerusalem did not always remain under the control of the descendants of David. Foreign nations seemed to treat it like a ping pong ball, taking turns conquering Jerusalem and in some instances destroying it. You can imagine the heartbreak when the Babylonian armies swept into

Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. and not only destroyed the city wall but also stripped and tore down the 400 year old temple of Solomon.

In the midst of the rise and fall of Jerusalem over the 1000 years, God raised up a class of people called the prophets. The prophets had two jobs. First, they called the people to repentance, warning them that they would continue to experience devastation as long as they disobeyed God. Secondly, the prophets assured the people that God would not abandon, in spite of their sin. In fact, God would send a new king like no other. He would be righteous in all ways. He would be just. He would be a great king who would establish peace and prosperity, not only in Jerusalem, but throughout the world.

One such prophet was Zechariah. About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, he wrote these words in chapter 9, verses 9-10.

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

II. Jesus like no other

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, according to Matthew's gospel (21:1-11), he purposely enters Jerusalem as the king prophesied by Zechariah. Jesus prearranges the whole thing, beginning with borrowing a donkey and her colt. Matthew makes it sound like Jesus rides on both donkeys, a somewhat humorous thought. What he means is that Jesus rides on the young colt that has never been ridden while the mama donkey follows along behind to make sure her baby comes to no harm. Jesus comes as the humble king of peace. He comes to cut off the chariot and the war horse, the most feared weapons of war, and to break the bow. He comes to do for Jerusalem what no other king has ever been able to do.

No wonder the people were ecstatic, waving tree branches and laying their sweat-soaked cloaks on the ground like a poor man's red carpet. No wonder they were singing hosannas at the top of their lungs. They truly believed Jesus had the moxie and chutzpah to drive out the foreigners. It was like they were welcoming General Eisenhower at the liberation of Paris in 1945. Pontius Pilate was no Hitler, but he was a foreign occupier, a pagan

who dipped into the offerings of the temple to pay for his latest whim. You remember the widow's mite, her last penny given to God? It just as likely went into Pilate's pocket. The people couldn't see his backsides on the way out of town soon enough. And Jesus was the man to do it. So they believed.

What I want us to see is why the people turned on Jesus later that week to demand his death on a cross. When Jesus got hauled in to stand before Pilate, bound with mere ropes, making no defense of himself, the people believed Jesus had made a fool of them.

What people believed they needed was a protector, a liberator from foreign control, a strong economy, and lower taxes wouldn't hurt either. What they got in Jesus was a pantywaist, a ne'er-do-well, a milquetoast, a doormat, an amateur pretender. Or so they thought.

What the people didn't know was that Jesus came to be a king like no other king. He came to liberate them, but not like any other king had ever done it. Not by raising armies. Not by amassing great wealth. Not by setting up a police state ruling through fear. Not by making political alliances. No, he is a king of a much different stripe. He enters Jerusalem knowing that the only path to peace and prosperity is through his death and resurrection. *Jesus knows that what is needed is a spiritual solution.* What is needed is an act so bold and so overwhelming that it turns hearts to God and steers life in a new direction.

So he rides into Jerusalem as a symbol of authority and yet as one who comes to serve, to give his life for the world. He comes to liberate hearts enslaved to sin. To open the gates of heaven. To change how we relate to one another and to God. To conquer death, not to wield it like Damocles' sword over the lives of others.

III. Why I am here

And that is why I am here today. Jesus rides into Jerusalem and into my life as the spiritual solution to the puzzle of my soul. I am Jerusalem. He rides my dusty streets right to the heart of the matter. He turns the dry desert landscape of my inner being into a garden full of potential and life.

In Luke's gospel, it says as Jesus came near the city and saw the people, he wept because they did not recognize the things that make for peace. A weeping king for whom no sacrifice is too great and no life is too small. Not even my life is too small for him. He weeps for me.

To tell you the truth, I have always wanted to stop Jesus from going into Jerusalem. I know where he is headed. I know the radical renovation he wants to do on me. But then I know that if he doesn't go there, if he doesn't die there, then nothing much is going to change. Nothing much would have

changed in me or for me if he hadn't taken that final ride into the heart of the pain and misery and evil in this world. If he hadn't died for me.

What impresses me about Jesus is that he could have raised an army and ruled in Jerusalem. He could have had everything we dream about having and spend our lives trying to get.

Instead he stayed the course. He stuck with the mission given him by his Father in heaven. He did the right thing, the good thing, even though it was hard and the cost was great.

And in my experience, I have discovered that doing the right thing is often the hardest thing to do. Like following Jesus. Jesus said whoever wants life like his must take up a cross and follow him. Do you want a life of peace, purpose, and promise? Then follow him into the city. Follow him in obedience to the will of God. Ride with him, go with him all the way to the cross. Maybe that is what the other donkey is for, the mama donkey. For us to ride. To see who might join him. To die with him, and to let all our inner fear and selfishness die with him, so something more wonderful, more marvelous can be born in us from above.

As we watch Jesus ride that donkey, the question that occurs to me is this: To whose authority do we bend? Who is Lord of our lives and the Shaper of our souls? Who has the ability to give us what we need, to take us where we need to go?

For me, it is Jesus. I know where he is coming from, what he does. He heals the sick. Forgives sinners. Casts out demons. Feeds the hungry. Gives sight to the blind and makes the lame to walk. He raises the dead to new life. That's the kind of king I want to obey, to follow, to give my life to.

Do you know this King? Do you know this One who is like no other king?