

Matthew 21:1–11 — Bible Study Handout

Big Idea

Jesus reveals Himself as the promised King, but He comes in humility, peace, and obedience rather than force. In His entry into Jerusalem, Matthew shows that God’s salvation arrives in a way many people longed for, but few fully understood.

Context

- Occurs near the end of Jesus’ public ministry in Matthew’s Gospel.
- Follows Jesus’ ministry of teaching, healing, and preparing His disciples.
- Marks His deliberate public entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah and King.
- Takes place during Passover season, when messianic hopes and political tension ran high.
- Begins the final movement toward the cross, where Jesus’ kingship will be revealed in suffering love as well as public praise (France).

Key Themes

- Jesus as the humble King
- Fulfillment of prophecy
- Messianic hope and misunderstanding
- Salvation that comes through peace rather than force
- The contrast between worldly power and the kingdom of God
- Welcoming Jesus on His terms instead of our own

Passage Overview

Verses 1–3 — Preparation for the King’s Arrival

- Jesus nears Jerusalem and sends two disciples ahead.
- He tells them to bring a donkey and a colt.
- His instructions are exact, showing purpose rather than improvisation.
- “The Lord needs them” carries quiet authority and signals that Jesus is acting intentionally.

Verses 4–5 — Fulfillment of Prophecy

- Matthew connects Jesus’ actions to Zechariah 9:9.
- Jesus presents Himself as Zion’s king.
- He comes gentle and riding on a donkey, not on a horse of war.
- His kingship is real, but it is marked by humility and peace (Keener).

Verses 6–8 — The Crowd’s Welcome

- The disciples obey Jesus’ instructions.
- The crowd spreads cloaks and branches on the road before Him.
- These are signs of honor and royal welcome.
- The people sense that this moment carries deep significance.

Verse 9 — The Cry of “Hosanna”

- The crowd shouts, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”
- “Hosanna” means “save now” or “save, please.”
- “Son of David” identifies Jesus with the promised royal line.
- The crowd speaks more truth than it fully understands, because Jesus truly is the King who saves.

Verses 10–11 — The City Is Stirred

- Jesus’ arrival unsettles the whole city.
- People ask, “Who is this?”
- The crowd answers that He is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.
- Their answer is true, but incomplete. Jesus is a prophet, but He is also Messiah and King.

Important Observations

- Jesus enters Jerusalem on purpose. Nothing about this moment is accidental.
- Matthew highlights prophecy to show that Jesus fulfills God’s promises.
- The donkey matters because it reveals the kind of king Jesus is.
- The crowd’s praise is genuine, but their expectations are still mixed.
- Jesus does not reject kingship, He redefines it.

- The question “Who is this?” becomes one of the central questions of the Passion story.
- Matthew shows that true salvation comes through the humble King, not through worldly displays of power (Wright).

Wesleyan Insights

- **Prevenient Grace:** Jesus comes near before the city fully understands Him. Grace moves toward people before they fully grasp what God is doing (Collins).
- **Awakening Grace:** The crowd begins to see something true about Jesus, even though their understanding is still incomplete.
- **Transforming Grace:** Jesus’ kingship does not simply rescue people from circumstances, it reshapes their understanding of power, salvation, and discipleship.
- **Holiness and Humility:** The character of the King shapes the character of His people. If Jesus reigns through humility, then Christlike holiness must include humility too.

Life Application

- We often want Jesus to work in ways that match our expectations, but He comes as He is, not as we try to remake Him.
- Humility is not weakness. In Jesus, humility and authority stand together.
- God’s salvation may arrive in ways that look quieter or costlier than we expected.
- Jesus does not avoid places of tension, grief, or conflict. He enters them with purpose.
- The church bears faithful witness when it reflects the character of its King, truth, humility, mercy, and obedience.
- We are called not just to praise Jesus with our words, but to receive Him as King over our whole lives.

Reflection Questions

1. What does the crowd understand correctly about Jesus in this passage?
2. What do they still seem to misunderstand?
3. Why is it important that Jesus enters on a donkey instead of a war horse?
4. How does Jesus’ humility challenge modern ideas about power and leadership?
5. In what area of your life might Jesus be asking you to welcome Him on His terms rather than your own?

Key Verse

“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey.’” — Matthew 21:5

Cross References

- Zechariah 9:9
- Psalm 118:25–26
- Isaiah 62:11
- John 12:12–16
- Philippians 2:5–11
- Revelation 7:9–10

Takeaway

Matthew 21:1–11 shows that Jesus is the promised King, but He comes in humility, peace, and saving purpose rather than force. He still comes to His people in ways that challenge expectations, reveal God’s heart, and call us to trust Him as the true King.