

## Palm Sunday: What We Mean When We Say God Gimme, Gimme, Gimme, I Need! I Need! I Need!

Matthew 21:1-17

By Pastor Gerald Harder

### Man on a Mission

Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, from Mt 21:1-17, continues to help us understand *what we mean when we say God*. Jesus has made arrangements to have a donkey and her colt brought for him to ride as he approaches the city. This fulfills what the prophet Zechariah had spoken, as recorded in Zech 9:9, as to how the long-awaited Messiah would come to his people; "gentle and riding on a donkey".

Just before this occurred, Jesus had encountered two men who had been born blind (Mt. 20:29-34) and they shouted to him, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" This proclamation of the identity of Jesus contravened the way Jesus had previously been instructing people to keep this on the down low. The first rule of Jesus – you don't talk about Jesus.

But now, Jesus had turned his face toward Jerusalem, well aware of the abuse, torture, and death that awaited him there. He was a man on a mission – to fulfill the purpose for which he came. But most of the people identified in this passage of Scripture are in for a big surprise, as what Jesus does is not at all how they expected Jesus to assert himself as King.

### What Do You Want from Me?

When these men who were blind called out to Jesus, the growing crowd that was following him tried to mute them. But Jesus noticed them, and directly posed this question to them: "What do you want me to do for you?"

This question was not posed to anyone else in Matthew's account of Jesus entry into Jerusalem – but that doesn't mean that each group represented didn't answer it anyway.

**The disciples:** Just before Jesus encounter with the 2 men, his disciples had been arguing because James and John were requesting the seats of honour, flanking Jesus' kingly throne. Even those closest to Jesus had this hope that following him would result in power and prestige.

**The entourage:** This large crowd was comprised mostly of Galileans – country bumpkins in the minds of the Jerusalem city folk. Mix in that angst with the nations frustration at being under Roman rule and these people were ready for a revolution. They shouted exactly what they wanted from Jesus, "Hosanna!" Which is translated as "Save Us!" The salvation they had in mind, however, was for Jesus to crush the enemy which would make their lives a whole lot easier, better, richer, and more honoured and esteemed.

***The temple-tantrum:*** This apparent outburst on the part of Jesus may not seem to align with the King coming to you gentle. But don't confuse being gentle with being a pushover. There was a centuries-old ongoing confrontation between God and his people. Throughout the books of the prophets we find many examples of fraudulent and abusive worship practices that make the temple and tabernacles less than inviting for would-be worshippers. Cruel to be kind is a clumsy description of Jesus' motivation behind 'turning the tables' on the balance of power in the temple courts. Jesus' *anger* is actually prompted by his great love – for the ones who were being extorted by those Jesus confronted, and also his love for the perpetrators themselves. For a parent to love a child well, corrective discipline is a definite requirement.

Jesus needed to confront how: 1) the temple court was being abused; 2) those desiring to worship were being exploited; and 3) God's chosen people are living completely opposite to how God intended.

**Israel was to be a nation of priests, God's special people out of all the nations. But this was not for his own sake. Israel was to be God's special people in order to be the light of the nations. N.T. Wright**

But the buyers and sellers and money changers wanted a King that recognized that they were justified in their behaviour and let them be.

***The chief-priests and teachers of the law:*** Of all people, this group should have been fluent in the Old Testament prophecies with regard to the coming Messiah. However, by their reaction to Jesus, it would seem that they had lost touch with the Scriptural accounts of what to be waiting for. They took great offense to how the children were singing and shouting praise to Jesus. They wanted a King who would not undermine the authority that they felt they had.

### **The King We Need**

The common thread between the responses of each of these groups is a desire to say to the adversary, "You're wrong. I'm right!" Which is a germination of pride. And when pride is not properly dealt with, it can lead to some horrific outcomes. (Tyrants like Hitler, cult-leaders like Koresh, etc.) Extreme examples to be sure, but each case has the underlying thought that one person is superior to another – that I deserve more than you – which likely we have all be guilty of considering at some point in our lives.

"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." – Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

We need our King to come to us, gentle, to stop us from our horrible tendency to try to do things our own way. Jesus comes and saves us from ourselves – our self-directed, self-agenda, pride-fueled tendencies. Our king Jesus comes to confront and correct the desires of our hearts and to help us turn our attention upward and outward – to put his desires and the needs of others ahead of our own.

**Are we really welcoming the true Jesus, the one who denounces evil and then takes it upon himself in the final great act of love? Or do we prefer, like the crowds a few days before, to welcome the 'Jesus' who happens to fit the imaginings and agendas that we have worked out for ourselves. N.T. Wright**

Is the king that we want - one who would take extreme measures to combat what is wrong with the world? King Jesus takes extreme measures to combat what is wrong with the world!

**For Jesus, there are no countries to be conquered, no ideologies to be imposed, no people to be dominated. There are only children, women, and men to be loved – Henri Nouwen**

Jesus takes extreme measures to show his love to each and every one of us – he lays down his life and by doing so He confronts our deepest need and offers us a life of freedom.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him – John 3:17

### **Discussion & Reflection Questions**

#### **Open Up:**

Describe a time when you expected a particular outcome but were pleasantly surprised by things turning out way better than expected.

#### **Dig In:**

1. Why do you think that the two men who had been born blind, who probably knew many other struggles and challenges, only asked Jesus for one thing?
2. Walk a mile in another's shoes. If you were a disciple, part of the entourage, in the temple courts, or a religious leader in Jerusalem, how do you think you would have been behaving? What similarities to each group? What differences?
3. How does seeing your King come to you gentle align with or differ from how you would like Jesus to show himself in your life?

#### **Share and Pray:**

Read **Philippians 2:1-8**. Share how this helps us to understand our King coming to us gentle and pray that we may be shaped to behave like him.