

Introduction

We love the hometown hero.

Yes, here in Kamloops we love our local hometown heroes, but there is often a real excitement that surrounds anyone who comes from a small town and makes it big.

Today we're going to look at the greatest hometown hero of all. No, He's not from Kamloops, He's from a place called Nazareth, a little town of about 500 people in that Northern Province of Israel called Galilee.

We'll see that He fulfills longings that were even deeper than we thought, and that we have even more to celebrate than we could have imagined.

Matthew 21:1-11:

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴ *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

⁵ *“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.’”*

⁶ *The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.*

⁷ *They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.*

⁸ *A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*

⁹ *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!”*

¹⁰ *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”*

¹¹ *The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

I. The Exuberant Crowd

We see a tone of joy and excitement and celebration among the exuberant crowd that ushers Jesus into the great city where He has come to show that He truly is the King.

The crowds shout ‘Hosanna:’

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!”
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!” – Matthew 21:9b*

Cloaks are spread on the road. Perhaps the only jacket that these people have, and they place them on the dusty ground... creating something like a red carpet for Jesus to walk on as He enters the city. A way of deeply honouring Him.

Branches are spread on the road as well. John’s Gospel tells us these were palm branches. And for the Jewish person, to wave palm branches signaled celebration, victory and triumph.

And so, this tone of optimism, joy, excitement and anticipation is all over the place in this portion of text.

This crowd is full of joy; and I think that joy connects to their deep longings. *The measure of joy we experience is often connected to the fulfillment of longings that had not been previously met.*

The crowds shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matthew 21:9b) because many in the crowd think that perhaps Jesus is that Messiah – the Son of David, who, like the great King David, would usher in a new era. An era where the political situation would be overturned, and Israel would no longer be this oppressed group.

At least part of why I think the crowd is so stoked: is that they are thinking, ‘this person, who just might be that Messiah, is one of them.’

This exuberant crowd ushering Jesus into Jerusalem – who are these people?

Most of the people in this crowd are probably from Galilee – they are those backroad, small-town folk from the North.

Why do I say that?

¹*“When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.
²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.” - Matthew 19:1-2*

What do these people call Jesus in today’s text - “...the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (Matthew 21:11b).

Biblical commentator Leon Morris writes:

“The crowds proclaim Jesus as God’s representative, one who would set forward the divine purpose... It was because they foresaw a Galilean King that the crowd of pilgrims got so excited.”¹

The crowds do get some things wrong here. But there’s at least one thing that they get right, and it’s this - **They’re stoked about Jesus!**

If you’ve experienced Jesus, here’s the encouragement: allow yourself to be excited about Him. Allow yourself to express your love for Him.

This text invites you, in this way, to be like this crowd... a crowd whose response to Jesus is in vast contrast to the way another group responds to Him.

II. The Stirred-Up City

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’” - Matthew 21:10

That word ‘stirred,’ it’s the Greek word ἐσεισθη (eseisthē), which could also be translated ‘to shake.’ The same root word shows up when the Bible says an earthquake happened. One Greek dictionary defines it in this way, “To shake or tremble, often with the implication of fear and/or consternation.”²

Feelings of fear, consternation and anxiety – that’s what arises in the city of Jerusalem.

This verse is probably meant to be heard as an echo of Matthew 2:3, “*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*”

The whole city was stirred...feelings of fear, consternation and anxiety arise...why? Because to those in Jerusalem – especially the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and others who had a measure of influence in the city – Jesus was a threat - and that becomes even more clear in the verses that follow.

He drives out those who are selling stuff in the temple courts. He flips over tables. He signals that the whole religious establishment is about to be shaken up. Jesus is a threat to the religious establishment.

¹ Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1992), p. 523.

² Louw, Johannes P. & Nida, Eugene. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. (United Bible Societies, 1996).

Question: Who is this? Who is Jesus?

To the crowds, Jesus is the hometown hero! He’s someone worth celebrating!

To the people of Jerusalem, Jesus is a threat! He’s someone worth eliminating!

We should ask ourselves, do we primarily see Jesus as “hero” or “threat”?

While at first glance, yes, the exuberant crowds give us a picture for how we should respond to Jesus, with enthusiasm and joy... at the end of the day, *both* of these groups get something right... and something wrong about Jesus.

Because sure, Jesus may be the hometown hero... but He’s a whole lot more than that too.

He is the Messiah, and the Messiah who has come to do something a whole lot different than simply improving the socio-political situation for Israel.

He’s the one who has come to shake things up. Not to shake up and kick out the Romans, but to shake up the whole religious system. To shake up how we come to relate to God. To shake up the old order of things.

Who is this? Who is Jesus? In order to answer that question a little more thoroughly, Matthew tells us a little tale about an animal.

III. A Different Kind of King // He Fulfills the Deepest Longings

Yes, the donkey...this is not a side detail in this text.

As Jesus enters the city here, He intentionally sends His disciples to get Him a donkey to ride on... actually, a mother donkey along with her young one... and Jesus sits on this young colt as He rides into the city.

Matthew includes this really significant narrator’s comment in verses 4-5. He writes:

⁴ *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

⁵ *“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.’”*

Matthew 21:4-5

When the Messiah showed up, the expectation was that He would show up on a war horse. He would show up ready to fight. Ready to kick out those Romans. *But* Jesus rides in on a donkey. A young donkey, at that.

It tells us that Jesus is a different sort of King who will usher in His kingdom in a different kind of way.

He's the King who, as He (Jesus) said earlier, is "...*gentle and humble in heart*" (Matthew 11:29). The kingdom He brings is not one that advances through violence and force, but through love and service.

The Galileans hoped for a hometown hero who would be a warrior – fighting for their political freedom. What they get is something far different - Far better.

And that language of 'fulfill,' what's that all about?

This is about fulfilling a prophecy from the book of Zechariah. Yes, Zechariah, many years earlier, prophesied that there would be a king who would come in just this sort of manner.

This is about more than *just* fulfilling what an ancient text said this future person would do.

Jesus comes as the climax to the whole story of God. He's 'Filling Full' all the hopes and expectations that the story of God had been pointing toward. He's ushering in the kingdom of God.

And in Jerusalem, just a few days later, He'll be enthroned as King as He's nailed to a cross.

The cross means that Messiah Jesus actually isn't doing a whole lot to improve the socio-political situation for Israel.

But Jesus' coming, His enthronement on the cross, and His resurrection on the third day means that He now fulfills even deeper longings of our hearts than we realized.

Yes, He fulfills our hearts' deepest longings in a way that nothing or no one else ever could.

The longing to know we are loved no matter what.

The longing to know we belong.

The longing to know that we are fully forgiven for all the ways we've messed things up.

The longing to know a life of purpose and meaning.

The longing to know that there is a sure hope for a good future.

What do we do in response to all that?

IV. Let's Celebrate!

For those of us who have experienced Jesus – for those of us who have tasted what it means for those deepest longings of our hearts to be fulfilled – here's the encouragement - **Let's Celebrate!**

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” - Philippians 4:4

As much as the crowds don't fully 'get it' in terms of the full meaning of what Jesus has come to do, there is something they do that's right - **They celebrate!** They honour Jesus and express their joy!

How much more should we celebrate, how much more should we rejoice, knowing that He's actually so much more than they imagined that He was!

This is the Son of God – God the Son, who has come to not only make a dent in the world, not simply make things a little better in the socio-political situation for one group of people.

This is the King who has come to fulfill the very deepest longings of our hearts.

So, **let's celebrate – let's rejoice** – because of who Jesus is, and all that He has done!

Life Group Questions:

What has been your experience with Palm Sunday? Is this typically a joyous day of celebration for you? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 21:1-11

1. Pay attention to the response to Jesus among the exuberant crowds in verses 8-9. How do they express their love for Jesus? If you're someone who knows Jesus, what are some ways you outwardly express your love for Him?
2. Do you think that this kind of enthusiastic expression is sometimes discouraged in Christian circles? Why do you think that might be?
3. Pay attention to verse 10. The people of Jerusalem respond to Jesus very differently than the exuberant crowds. To the crowds, Jesus is the hometown hero. To the people of Jerusalem, Jesus is a threat. Is your tendency to see Jesus as a “hero” who has come to improve your life or as a “threat” who has come to “shake things up”?
4. Are there ways that you have experienced Jesus fulfill deep longings of your heart like nothing or no one else ever could? How is Jesus' coming as Messiah even better than we thought?
5. According to Galatians 5:22, ‘joy’ is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Is ‘joy’ one of the main words you would use to describe your experience of the Christian life? If not, what do you think is preventing you from experiencing a greater measure of this?

Prayer

Take some time to share prayer requests and pray for each other. Pray that your group would experience a deep measure of joy that comes from knowing our King and Saviour Jesus.