

## **“The Lord Has Need Of It” – Sermon: April 9, 2017**

Dr. John W. Howe

And this is a reading from the 21st chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning at the first verse:

When Jesus and his disciples had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethpage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent to the disciples saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.” If anyone says anything to you just say this, “The Lord has need of them”, and He will send them immediately. This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophets saying, Tell the daughter of Zion, look, your King is coming to you humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt the foal of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them. And he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest heaven.” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “this is the Prophet Jesus from Nazareth, in Galilee”.

The word of God for the people of God. Please be seated.

Palm Sunday is easily the most ironic day on the church's calendar, we waive our palm branches and join the crowd in crying Hosanna which means save us We beseech you. And bless it is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And yet we know that just five days later another crowd would be shouting, crucify him. Crucify Him. How was so complete a reversal in such a brief period of time, even possible? The explanation most frequently proposed is that of radical disappointment. In spite of everything Jesus said to the contrary, My kingdom is not of this world; The unshakeable expectation was that when push comes to shove, Jesus will rise up and lead a rebellion against Rome, throw off the yoke of oppression and establish a new golden age for the people of Israel. And when it finally became evident, that wasn't going to happen, the very people who hailed their Palm Sunday Messiah demanded their good Friday execution.

I think there's an element of truth in that, but it's a little too easy. Certainly there was disappointment. I think of Peter, vowing at the Last Supper, "Lord, even if all of them desert you, I'm ready to go with you to the death." And he meant it. So long as there's going to be a revolution. When Judas came with a little band of soldiers to arrest Jesus, Peter whipped out his sword and took a hack at the first guy he could reach, cut off his ear, obviously aiming for his neck. Peter put his life on the line. But when Jesus said, "Put away your sword, there's not going to be a fight tonight." Peter's heart melted within him. And moments later, he's denying he even knows the man. And in the real sense, he didn't. He was following a Christ of his own imagination. And

when Jesus disappointed him, he denied even knowing him three times in a row. So yes, I'm sure there was disappointment in the crowd as well. But I don't think that can explain them going from adulation on Sunday to demanding crucifixion on Friday.

We need to remember there were two entirely different constituencies involved. The common people who Mark tells us heard Jesus gladly and the fairest SAIC party who were his implacable enemies, almost from the very beginning of his ministry. We've seen them trying repeatedly to do away with him. And it was to them that Jesus that Judas turned when he decided to betray Jesus Paul Mayer writes that on Good Friday morning, the shouting multitude in front of pilots tribunal consisted primarily of the priest controlled temple staff. Their police alone numbered 10,000. It was an almost entirely different mob. The irony of Holy Week is not the fickleness of a disappointed Palm Sunday crowd, but the triumph of power politics, protecting a religious establishment determined to destroy their own Messiah. The wonder of the Gospel is that the man at the center of the drama rode into town on a donkey, knowing that the salvation people were begging for, save us We beseech you would come only at the cost of his own betrayal, abandonment, false accusations, lying witnesses, derelict verdict, mocking, scourging and unimaginably excruciating execution. And he came willingly the prophet Zechariah that's the second to last book in the Old Testament, said that the ruler of God's people, their king, would come to them riding not on a stallion surrounded by military pomp and circumstance, but humbly riding on a donkey. And scholars tell us that when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem

coming down from the mount of Olives, on that donkey punch, his pilot was also coming into the city on the exact opposite side, perhaps at the exact same time, only he would have been mounted on a war horse. With all the insignias of Rome's empire, he represented the Caesars, and they claimed to be Gods. Caesar ruled by brute force. And in those days, conquered enemies, were paraded on donkeys before being tortured and killed. The contrast could not have been greater. All four gospels tell us the story of Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but with different details. Mark and Luke both mentioned that this stone key had never been written previously. And yet, apparently it didn't fight its rider. It was as if it had been kept for this holy purpose. And whereas John says simply that Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. The first three gospels all say that Jesus instructed His disciples to go untie a donkey. And if asked by its owner, why are you doing this? Be ready to answer the Lord has need of it. Matthew alone says there were two animals involved a donkey and a colt with her. And many commentators suggest that Matthew misunderstood Zacharias prophecy, Zacharias said that the king would come quote, riding on a donkey comma, on a cold, the foal of a donkey. The argument is this was an example of Semitic parallelism, saying the same thing in slightly different ways to different times. For instance, Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and again, let all that is within me bless His holy name. The argument is Zechariah didn't mean to different animals he meant the donkey is a cold, the fall of a donkey. And some have actually ridiculed Matthew For making it sound as if Jesus rode into town, straddling two beasts at once, in some kind of a circus act. But the historical Jesus scholar John Dominic Crow, sans suggests quite a

different possibility that Jesus very deliberately chose not to ride a stallion, or a mayor, a mule, or a male donkey, and not even just a female donkey. But he rode the most unmilled Attari mount imaginable, a female nursing donkey, with her little colt, trotting along beside her.

Unknown Speaker 9:41

Well, as I said, the nearly universal expectation was that when Messiah comes it will be as a military political liberator, who will mobilize the armies of Israel overthrow the pagan oppressors reestablish the throne of David and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity. That's what's that's what is so jarring about Zacharias prophecy. He says your king comes to you triumphant and victorious. He will cut off the chariot from refereum and the war horse from Jerusalem, he shall command peace to the nations and his dominion shall be to the ends of the earth. But he will come humbly riding on a donkey. That's why the Lord has need of it. It wasn't just to make a statement. This is my preferred style. It was to fulfill prophecy. Of course, in one sense, Jesus didn't need it at all. He owns the cattle on 1000 hills, the wealth in every mine. To Him belongs power and glory might majesty Dominion kingship, he could have had the most triumphal entry the world has ever seen if he'd wanted it. He could have asked his father for a legion of angels to transport him into the city. And I'm pretty sure he would have gotten it. Or, for that matter, he could have walked in great dignity as some of our presidents elect do on the way to the Capitol. But in order to fulfill prophecy, he gave somebody the incredible honor of having his or her donkey used for that bittersweet ride down all of that, past the Garden of

Gethsemane where He would pray A few nights later, across the Kidron Valley and up through the Golden Gate into the holy city. On that first Palm Sunday afternoon. Don't you wish it could have been your donkey? If he had needed it? Would you have lent him your dodge Colt? Or for that matter, your Mustang? It's not clear whether all of this was prearranged or whether Jesus was asserting his right to ask. The point is he did ask. And somebody said yes. This is a great passage for a stewardship discussion. God doesn't need our money. But he's chosen to make himself dependent on us to a significant degree so that we might enjoy the privilege of participating with him in accomplishing His purposes. We prayed a few minutes ago for the Pillai family in India, that through our prayers and our giving and their labors, many may come to know love and worship this Lord Jesus. That's how it works. God seldom does things by himself when he can use others. We read in the book of Acts that when the Roman centurion, Cornelius was praying and seeking to know God, an angel from the Lord said, go send for Peter to explain the gospel to you. Well, why didn't the angel just explain it? Because God gave Peter the privilege of introducing Cornelius and his family, to Jesus. And he gave the unnamed owner of a donkey the privilege of participating in the Palm Sunday pageantry. So I wonder what he's asking of you. And me today? Do you dare to see him in the unexpected interruption? Do you hear his voice when someone makes a request, you'd pretty much rather ignore? Are you willing to have him borrow your stuff? For his purposes? Have you ever considered how really strange it is that the God of all creation who existed independently and self sufficiently from before all time should ask or expect or even demand that his creatures

praise Him? Make a joyful noise to God all the earth, sing the glory of his name, give him glorious praise? Well, it's not that he needs to receive it. It's that we need to give it and we need to give him whatever else he asks. Is your trust in him sufficient that you're prepared to yield whatever he might ask? Whenever we hear him say, The Lord hasn't heard of it. Jesus Christ accepted the prayers and praises the shouts of Hosanna. And bless it is he the coats and palm branches that adorned his pathway and somebody's donkey to make his way into the city, where a few days later he would break the Passover bread and say, This is my body. He'd pass the cup of thanksgiving and say, the new covenant in my blood. He gird Himself with a towel and wash his disciples feet. Do this to each other. And then he'd go to an olive garden where he would pray in such anguish that his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground. Three times he prayed, Father, if it'd be possible, let this cup pass from me. Spare my life until he heard his father's unmistakable reply, my beloved Son the Lord has need of it.