

Missed by a Mile
Matthew 21:1-11

Imagine that you are an emergency room doctor. The bustle of activity is interrupted when your pager goes off and you are called in to assist a patient who has suffered cardiac arrest. You are told that the patient has no pulse or brain activity. There are no vital functions registering on the monitors. Rushing into the room your heart skips a beat as you find out it is a friend. You golf together, attend the same church, spent time in his home eating and watching the big game. Clinically he is dead but you bark orders and equipment is handed to you in successive rapid order. You grab the handles of the defibrillator and holler “clear” and the electric current pulsing from the crash cart jolts the body. A moment seems like an eternity, but there is some activity on the monitor. The line that monitors heart rhythm begins to jump and jump again. Heart activity is resuming. You see respirations and blood pressure. Vital signs appear. You command other activity from the staff. Thanks to you he’s going to make it.

Several weeks pass after he has been released to go home and his family invites you over for dinner to honor you. You were just doing what you were supposed to, but you accept the invitation, after all he is a friend. The mood is light and joyful. Glances in your direction from your friend indicate his deep gratitude. The entire family can’t thank you enough. His sister bought you a bottle of Old Spice. They want to make a toast. There’s talk about raising money for some surgical equipment. Even though the room is still filled with the electricity of excitement they are quieted when you stand to speak. The anticipation of what this honored guest will say is almost unbearable. You clear your throat and thank everyone for their kind words and accolades. Your next words penetrate deep into the consciousness of those in attendance and the air in the room is summarily sucked out. It becomes hot, some feel faint. The room falls silent.

Wide grins turn to deep frowns. Even though you feel fine and look healthy, the news you have just shared is that you have a terminal illness with only weeks to live. The joy has evaporated into thin air as quickly as a magician’s hat trick.

It was almost time for the Passover. A week before its observance Jesus along with His disciples neared Jerusalem in order to celebrate this annual event. They would be staying at the home of His friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. It was Lazarus whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead. For her love of the Master, it was there in that home. She didn’t know either the significance of her actions nor of the nearness of the event of which Jesus spoke. Hers was a demonstration of devotion, the act of a grateful and adoring follower. One thought the perfume should have been sold to feed the poor even though he didn’t care for them. His intentions were purely selfish. His heart was set on what he might have gained from embezzling a little. Jesus cloaked his own upcoming death in his next remark that the poor would always be around, but He would not.

It was a sobering revelation to them. It is from this home the next day that Jesus will strike out toward the goal for which He came to Jerusalem and to this earth, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves. That’s for next week’s message. For today turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 21:1-11**. Jesus has just spent 3 ½ years of his life showing people that He was the Son of God. He was the Messiah the Old Testament prophets spoke about, the One devout Jews were looking for. God had made the promise of His coming to the first couple in the Garden of Eden after their sin and because of their sin.

[The other day I was driving to therapy. I left at the normal time – early – 5:45a.m. Turned right on Hill Road and then on to the highway. About a mile down the road or maybe I should say up the road, I realized I was headed north in the opposite direction of where I was supposed to be going. The next](#)

available turn around was not for another mile. I'm not sure what I was thinking about that morning as I drove right past the south ramp to get on the highway. I got on the expressway as I would normally do to pick up David, but it was much too early for that. I was listening to the radio, singing along, but I can't blame it for my mistake. I guess it was just habit. Have you ever inadvertently missed something even though the signs were all very evident?

This account gives us three things that the people missed the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

They missed the prophecy.

They missed the prayer.

They missed the person.

I. THEY MISSED THE PROPHECY – v. 1-5

Some scholars believe that in a previous visit to Jerusalem Jesus had made arrangements with the owner of these donkeys that He would need to borrow the colt the next time He was in town.

Other scholars believe that this is in fact a miracle of Jesus telling the two disciples to go into town where they would find the colt and if anyone should ask what they were doing, just tell them the Master needed it. There are good arguments on both sides.

In any case they do what they were told. Matthew interjects a note here in the story that it fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet. For this we need to visit Zechariah in the Old Testament. It's the next to last book in that section. Turn to chapter 9 and verse 9, **Zechariah 9:9**. Let's compare the two for a moment. **“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)** Notice **Matthew 21:5** **“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”**

It's unclear why some phrases are omitted. Maybe he wanted to focus on the person of Jesus rather than on what He came to do. Maybe as he wrote he reflected on the attitude of the revelers and remembered that they wanted nothing to do with why He really came.

Notice first that Matthew's quote speaks to Jesus' gentle nature. This is certainly not the demeanor of a conquering king. It is interesting to note that the Greeks used this word to speak only of an outward behavior. To the Greek meekness or gentleness, especially in a man was considered weakness. But in Scripture we see it used in a much deeper and fuller sense. Gentleness in Scripture is spoken of as being a godly trait that is very much a part of the fabric of the soul. It is not just an outward gesture, but through God's Spirit has become a trait that is closely blended with other character traits. It is a grace that does not fight against the will of God, but instead yields to Him, just as we see Jesus yielding to the will of the Father. As it is used here in the New Testament of Jesus we see that He was meek because He had the infinite resources of God at His command, yet He chose to restrain His power. It is what we would call controlled strength. Everyone who attacked Him or rejected Him He had the power to snap a finger and they would disappear. Just as He was able to miraculously heal He could have also spoke and some guy's healthy hand would become shriveled or some guy who could walk became lame. He bridled His strength and cloaked it in gentleness.

Matthew 11:28-29

While working in hospice there was a nurse who boarded horses. One of the horses she boarded was a rescue horse. But it was no ordinary horse. He was the grandson of a famous race horse, but had some birth defect that rendered him unfit to sire any other race horses. So, someone bought the horse and boarded it there with my nurse friend. She told me about taking it for a ride one day. As she was riding she could feel the horse's muscles tense up

ready to bolt into a fast gallop, but it restrained its power to do what the new master wanted.

That is meekness. That is Jesus. Restrained power. Controlled strength.

Jesus rode into town gentle and riding on a donkey. One day He will come riding into town on a white horse wielding a sword, ready to battle His enemies.

But did you notice what was omitted? They neglected to speak of His righteousness and salvation. Now, understand that this verse is about His earthly entry. The prophecy that Jesus fulfilled was always according to the Father's will. It was a way to bring glory to the Father, something He prayed about in John 17.

What was happening right then was what the Old Testament prophets spoke about, but even though they were familiar with its words and they longed for it to happen they missed its significance. Jesus speaks of fulfilling their words in **Matthew 5:17**. It was an event that they longed to see happen. But the prophet spoke of two entries – the first occurring at that time in Matthew 21 and the one yet to come. They thought them to be one and the same

They focused on what He could do rather than who He was and neglected the character of the One who would come, that He would be the Divine standard of morality. That it refers to Him as being righteous describes both His character and His reign. When He comes morality, right living will be the hallmark by which people will live. From our viewpoint today, the news will be boring. Murder and thievery and infidelity and deceit and anger and bitterness and unforgiveness and revenge will be things of the past. There will be no wars to report, no movie stars ranting, no mob scenes to cover, no stories about teens like Trayvon Martins being killed. They will not be the kinds of character traits that we see so rampant today. A world of peace is yet to come, but not now.

Zechariah 9:9 then is speaking not only of the present event taking place in our text but also of an event that is yet to come – His second coming.

They ignored, as well, that He will bring with Him salvation of a spiritual kind. They totally missed it. Their notion of salvation was entirely different from the salvation that Jesus was offering. That He came riding in to town on a donkey instead of a prancing horse was symbolic. The donkey symbolized peace. It was a symbol of humility. You cannot have peace without humility. That it was unused was recognized as especially suitable for religious purposes. Jesus came on a donkey not for political purposes, but for spiritual reasons.

They missed the symbolism of the event and the prophecy that was being fulfilled that day. Jesus came in order to bring about peace between God and man. Sin has made us enemies, but God has reached out to offer peace and it is only through Christ. The Bible makes plain for us what the people missed that day. Jesus is the only one who can bring salvation and through Him He brings the possibility of peace.

John 14:6

Romans 5:1

Do you have peace with God today? He came, not just to fulfill Scripture by riding on a donkey into some town. He came to die for your sins and for mine. He came to bring salvation to the spiritual soul that is lost due to sin. He offers peace through His shed blood.

Hebrews 3:15 “...”Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”

Please don't leave today and miss the purpose for which Jesus came. He wants to bring reconciliation between you and God.

They missed the prophecy.

They missed the prayer.

II. THEY MISSED THE PRAYER – v. 6-9

Obedying the command of the Master two disciples ventured into the nearby town. They found the donkeys, mother and colt, just as Jesus had said. Returning, they took the colt and placed their outer garments on the beast as a makeshift saddle. Others took off their outer cloaks and began to place them on the dirt road in front of the animal. Those that didn't have a coat stripped off palm branches from nearby trees and laid them down on the road as well. It was all a symbolic gesture on their part. It was an act of royal homage.

Revelation 7:9 speaks of palm branches being a symbol of joy and salvation. That they cast them down before the riding Messiah was a symbolic act of submission. It was a way of telling Jesus of their willingness to follow Him; they're willingness for Him to be their king. They would do whatever He asked in order to bring in His kingdom then and there.

By this time a very large crowd had gathered. A census taken 10 years later gives strong evidence that nearly 2 million people were in Jerusalem at this time for the Passover. Like Jesus and His disciples, many were still approaching the city of Jerusalem. They were part of this massive crowd. News spread ahead of them and reached the city so others who were part of this throng came from the city itself. In any case there were upwards of hundreds of thousands of people lining the road leading into the city. They had come out to pay homage to the new king. (Winterjam 2012 had a crowd of nearly 10,000 people standing in line singing and cheering.)

Along the road to Jerusalem they would sing the Hallel Psalms, chapters 113-118. They were prophetic Psalms speaking of the deliver, the One who would come to save. The throng quote from **Psalm 118:25-26**.

Previously in His ministry any time someone brought up the subject of His ascension to the throne, wanting Him to become king, He restrained them. It wasn't His time. There was even a time when they were going to forcibly make Him king, but he left. But here He allowed it, He welcomed it. It's not, as liberal scholars believe, that He was caught up in the frenzy of the moment which had gotten so out of hand that He couldn't stop it, so He just let it run its course. He allowed it because it was true. He was also allowing it in order to stir up the religious leaders so that they would move up their time table of assassinating Him. They wanted to wait until after the Passover, but Jesus was the Passover. Besides who was in control of these events – them or God?

So, here are the crowds shouting in unison. The exuberance of the masses evoked great joy in many and great jealousy in others. Many rejoiced in Him, others rejected Him. They were ignoring the earlier edict of the Pharisees that if anyone saw Jesus they were to report it. (**John 11:57**)

They first of all shouted "**Hosanna!**"

It's an English word that comes from a Greek word that comes from a Hebrew word (hoshaya na).

Hosanna is a word to ponder.

Hosanna is a word of petition.

Hosanna is a word of praise.

A. Hosanna is a Word to Ponder

That it is a word to ponder I mean that we should pause and consider its meaning. It's a word that needs to be considered carefully, its intent should be weighed out due to its significance. It would be like thinking about the words of songs we are singing.

If the Passover worshippers had given serious thought to what they were saying and to whom they were saying it, their outcome would have been entirely different. The fact is, as they shouted Hosanna they wanted Jesus to be an earthly king. But you will recall that Jesus made it very plain that His kingdom was not of this world.

Had they really pondered what that word meant they would have responded appropriately and understood the reference to the Old Testament prophecies they were quoting and what it meant.

Hosanna is a word to ponder.

Hosanna is a word of petition.

B. Hosanna is a Word of Petition

The word literally means “Save, we pray.” It is a request on their part petitioning God to save them. Notice that they identify Jesus’ lineage. They acknowledge His right to the throne as being from the family of David. The term “Son of David” was a popular Jewish title for the Messiah. They were banking on Him being the Messiah. By stating **“blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”** also acknowledged their understanding that He came from God. He was who He claimed to be. They were calling on Jesus to deliver them. They were calling on Jesus to be the One who would deliver them from their enemies, the Romans. They had been under subjugation by them for many years and they were growing weary of oppression. They had long anticipated the One whom the Old Testament prophecies had spoken. Now they believed He had come. Many had witnessed His miracles. Many had heard His teachings. Most had heard second hand the things He said and did. They were petitioning God to let this be the One who would deliver. It had been over 400 years since they had a king. They were praying that Jesus would be their king. The problem was they wanted Jesus to be king on their terms. If Jesus had accepted their invitation to become king at that time, we would still be lost in our sin.

Theirs was a cry for help. They needed someone to save them. It’s not all that different from a person floundering in the water crying out for the lifeguard to save him. We’re like that we need someone to save us. We have been under subjugation from sin.

Maybe you have shouted out a similar cry for help.

Hosanna Lord! Save me. **But save from what?**

Save from difficulties in life?

Save from a bad financial decision or from debt?

Save from a bad work situation or difficult boss?

Save from a test?

Save from an illness or other health concern?

What was it the Jews wanted to be saved from?

They only had one thing on their mind and they were asking Jesus to be the deliver from that oppression. Don’t get me wrong, it’s okay to ask the Lord to save us from those things. But understand why Jesus came in the first place. Those things are all secondary and pale in relation to the real reason Jesus came to save. His was an entirely different agenda. He came to save from sin. **“For the Son of Man has come to seek and save those who are lost.” (Luke 19:10)**

How disappointed they would be in just a few short days because Jesus did not become who they wanted or give them what they wanted. They did not want what He had to give.

Maybe like the Jews that day you have cried for the Messiah to save you, you’ve shouted hosanna. But don’t stop short as they did and miss why He came – to save you and me from sin. Don’t become disappointed and disillusioned if Jesus doesn’t give you what you think you need or want when you cry out hosanna in the highest. It is a word to ponder.

Hosanna is a word of petition.

Hosanna is a word of praise.

C. Hosanna is a Word of Praise

Hosanna is not only a word of petition, a prayer, it is also a word of praise. Over time the word shifted from its original meaning to include not only a word of petition, but also a word of praise. By using this term some were in essence giving a cheer that help had arrived.

Imagine that it's the 9th inning in game 7 of the World Series. The Tigers are at home playing the St. Louis Cardinals. St. Louis is at bat with bases loaded and 2 outs. Albert Puljos is up to bat. The Tiger fans start shouting hosanna. The Tiger's manager, Jim Leyland, strolls to the mound and takes the ball from the pitcher. He motions to the bullpen and in an unusual move out trots Justin Verlander. The roar of hosanna becomes deafening. Some use it to mean that if we're going to win we need help, save us. Others use it to mean that help has arrived, we're saved. Half believe he will get him, the other half believe that he already got him.

That is what's happening in Jerusalem as Jesus approaches the gates. Some are praying that Jesus will save them. It's a cry for help. Others are praising that Jesus has now arrived on the scene and they believe He will help them. It's like saying hooray for the king, 3 cheers for the king. Hosanna in this sense is a shout of confidence that Jesus is going to save them. There is a collective sigh of relief.

Once again though, their exclamation of prayer and praise fell short of really understanding what it was they were saying, what they would be saved from.

They missed the prophecy.

They missed the prayer.

They missed the person.

III. THEY MISSED THE PERSON – v. 10-11

In the angelic visitation to Joseph before the birth of Jesus, the angel was explaining to Joseph about the miraculous conception. That Mary was carrying the Divine child, the very Messiah they had been waiting for. Listen closely to the words of the angel. **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21**

Now, here He was, ready to do what He came to do, ready to go to the cross. This was why He came. He came to save the lost. He would become the Passover lamb and the people totally missed who really was. Save us from all this stuff that's happening to us, never once recognizing that they had something worse going on. They were sinners, just like you and me. They needed to be saved, just like you and I do. It's not that they were ignorant of sin or their need for redemption. Its meaning was threaded throughout the Old Testament Law. The entire sacrificial system pointed to the Savior.

In connection with the prophecy about their king coming to them riding on a donkey from Zechariah they also needed to go a step further and be reminded of the prophecy found in **Isaiah 53:6** that the Messiah would come to bear their sin. **“All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, but the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”**

Matthew describes the scene in Jerusalem that some didn't even know who Jesus was. Notice the response. They had just proclaimed He was king along with their willingness to follow Him. They had indicated their acknowledgment of His coming from God. They believed Him to be the Messiah, yet here when asked by residents **“Who is this?”** they could only respond that He was a prophet. They were rejecting who He really was. In the gospels we see reference to Him as a prophet. Jesus referred to Himself as a prophet. But He was so much more and they were missing who He was.

You may have read the story from March 23, 2012 of the couple in England who were getting married on a day that Queen Elizabeth II was going to be in town, so on a whim they invited her to the wedding. They received an official but polite response from the Queen's officials indicating she would be unable to attend. However, they were totally surprised when the Queen actually showed up. Of

course they recognized her and gave the appropriate genuflections.

The Old Testament said Jesus would come. The people were expecting Him and lo and behold He showed up. Hosanna was an appropriate response, but it fell short of who He really was and what He was about to do for them.

Matthew Henry notes that Jesus came to rule over us, to rule in us and to rule for us. He came riding on a donkey to symbolize that He was bringing peace between God and man. There is a day coming when He will ride a white stallion not to bring peace but to bring judgment. They wanted judgment not peace. They needed peace not judgment. **Jesus has come, how have you received Him?** Communion is a great time to shout hosanna – that salvation has come. Don't miss Him.

As the men come to serve and before we take communion turn to **Hymn #297 – Hosanna, Loud Hosanna.**