

A GREAT SAVIOR . . . A HUMBLE SERVANT

STUDY ONE

That's Who? Riding on a What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

Talk about an unusual celebration. Some would be cheering. Others staring. A study in contrast to be sure. The Lord Jesus Christ was coming for the last time into Jerusalem. He would not leave before He would be nailed to a cross. But before all of that, on this original Palm Sunday, He would arrive, and there would be some who would have no clue who He was.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE scene that unfolds at the beginning of Matthew 21 fits the category of the unusual. As Jesus approached Jerusalem not long before He was arrested and put on trial, He entered as the Israelites' King in the oddest way. Unlike all other potentates, He rode in on a donkey—actually, He rode a little colt of a donkey! There was a reason for all of it . . . as we shall see in this study.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Come close to God, and God will come close to you. (James 4:8)

The Easter season provides a wonderful time to renew our earnest commitment to our Savior—to reestablish a time when we draw near to Him daily with the promise that He will draw near to us. Take a few moments and bow in prayer before the Lord your King. Invite Him to reveal Himself anew through His Word and receive Him to His rightful place on the throne of your life.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 21:1–11* to get an overview of the passage. While you read, pay attention to things in the passage that seem familiar to you, and make notes about details that you haven't noticed in prior readings. Record your thoughts in the space provided.



Observation: Preparing for His Arrival—Matthew 21:1–3

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. We look for central ideas, such as the overall principle Paul stated in *Matthew 21:1–11*.

Where Was Jesus?

Read Matthew 21:1–3 and observe important details about the setting of this scene.

Who was Jesus traveling with according to Matthew?

What geographical clues emerge that help you place Jesus' whereabouts?



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Look closely at the [map](#) or check in the map section of your study Bible and locate a map titled “*Ministry of Jesus*” or something similar. Find Jerusalem and see how many of the cities and surrounding landmarks are mentioned in Matthew 21:1. What do you see? Make notes about your discoveries.

This would be a good opportunity for you to consult a Bible dictionary and look up the city of *Bethphage* and the *Mount of Olives*. Study what is written about these historical sites. Write down relevant observations.

What Did Jesus Do?

Trace the sequence of events in Matthew 21:2–3, and list some observations about what Jesus directed the disciples to do.

Jesus seemed quite determined to make certain all went according to plan for this significant occasion. How would you summarize the instructions He gave to His disciples (Matthew 21:2–3)?



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As enigmatic as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was, even more stirring was the response of the people. What wonder there is in considering the significant meaning in the exuberant praise offered to this donkey-riding King!



Interpretation: Fulfilling the Prophet's Prediction

At times, the meaning of a passage is made apparent by the passage itself—in other words, either through dialogue or the author's clear interpretation. That's the case especially when the gospel writers referenced an Old Testament passage to explain their meaning.

Matthew, passionate for his Jewish readers to embrace Jesus as their Messiah King, invoked the revered words of Isaiah to build his case.

*“Tell the people of Israel,
‘Look, your Savior is coming.
See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.’” (Isaiah 62:11)*

To understand why Matthew included this story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey colt, we must look to Isaiah:

1. To demonstrate that prophecy is fulfilled in this event
2. To identify Jesus as the promised King of the people of Jerusalem
3. To make plain that Jesus embodies genuine humility

What impact do you think Matthew's use of Isaiah's prophecy had on his Jewish audience? Why?

Still, Isaiah was only one among many Old Testament writers who envisioned Matthew's scene when they penned their words.



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Correlation: Responding to the King

Correlation compares different passages of Scripture to help interpret the passage in view. In Matthew's description of the crowd's response to Jesus, he invoked another Old Testament passage. This time, one of the psalms:

Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God for the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!

Praise God in highest heaven!” (Matthew 21:9)

In this case, Matthew lifted from the Psalms a worship expression well-known to his Jewish audience to further strengthen his appeal to Jesus as their Messiah King.

Please, LORD, please save us.

Please, LORD, please give us success.

Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD. (Psalm 118:25–26)



Application: What about You and Me?

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate the heart. Take some time now to reflect on where you would be in this story—peasant or priest, scoffer or seeker, wonderer or worshiper. Think about each of the many individuals who encountered Jesus that day. Who heard the throng of witnesses shouting “Hosanna!”?

Would you find yourself among one of Jesus' close followers? A disciple? If so, how does your life today reflect your devotion to Him, not just as Savior but as Lord of your life?



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Would you be among the crowd of willing participants caught up in the excitement of the moment but not yet ready to commit to Him? What keeps people from making a full commitment to Jesus as King?

Would you stand at attention, aloof as a dutiful Roman guard, not wanting to make a scene but perhaps gripped with curiosity? Describe a time when you were curious about faith while stuck in a place of doubt.

Do you remain a cynic, hardened by your stubborn refusal to believe that anything about Jesus could really be true? What keeps individuals from turning to Jesus in faith and declaring Him as King?

Perhaps you're one who knows about Jesus, but you've never put your trust in Jesus as Savior and King of your life. Is that you? Are you ready to surrender? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to Him?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You ordained all that Your Son, Jesus, would endure once He entered Jerusalem on that fateful day. What it meant to me was a way to You through His violent suffering and death, which satisfied the penalty due for my sin. How I thank You that You did not withhold Your only Son but freely offered Him as a substitute for me. He took my sin to the cross and bore it there in love. Do not finish Your work in Me, Father, until He is made fully Lord and King of every aspect of my life. Until I yield in full surrender to Him, I ask in His regal name, amen.

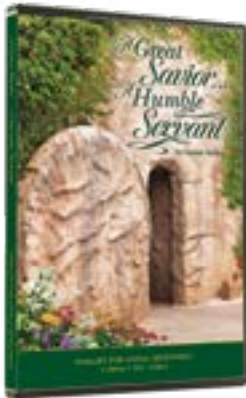


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Tools for Digging Deeper



**A Great Savior . . .
A Humble Servant**
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



Sunday to Sunday
by Charles R. Swindoll and
Insight for Living Ministries
softcover book



Suddenly One Morning
Radio Theater
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

