

Series: Treasure in Heaven – Palm Sunday

April 13-14, 2019

Title: Hidden King

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Text: Matthew 21:1-11

A Borrowed Ride

Passover, A.D. 33

Passover. The very word screamed “Freedom.” Every year Jews from far and near made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and its great Temple to celebrate the night that God led their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt and on their way to the Promised Land.

For Jesus and His disciples the journey took them up the 18 mile climb to Jerusalem. They stopped in a little village named Bethany, just a couple of miles from the city.

Now it was time to finish the journey down the Mt. of Olives and into Jerusalem. As they did, they would be accompanied by thousands of fellow pilgrims, each one longing for the day when God came to rescue His people from Roman rule.

The search for a King:

But how would God come? Who would He use to set His people free? Who would be the new Moses? Who would be God’s King?

And what would it look like when God came and rescued His people? Would there be fire in the sky? Would God rip the mountains apart? Would He send armies of angels with flashing swords? Or would He empower His people to rise up and throw out the pagans?

What better time than Passover for God to act! Devout Jews were already assembled from all over the world. Passover Night commemorated the very moment when God had rescued Israel from Pharaoh and made them a free people devoted to Himself alone.

A borrowed ride:

Little did they know, but the King was already present – hiding in plain sight. He had climbed the steep road from Jericho to Bethany with them. Today He would offer clues to His Kingship.

Before heading down the Mt. of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples off on a strange mission: to procure for Him a borrowed ride:

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Matthew 21:1-3 NIV

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

Jesus would ride the little colt into the city that day. Mother donkey and her colt would have to come together. His borrowed ride would be a key clue to discovering the Hidden King.

Hiding in Plain Sight

"Daughter Zion"

Jesus chose a little colt for a borrowed ride into Jerusalem to remind His people of how God said deliverance would come. Matthew gives his readers the inside scoop on what Jesus was doing that day. He writes:

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Matthew 21:5 NIV

*"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.'"*

The first clue is in the first line of Matthew's quotation from the Old Testament: **"Say to Daughter Zion..."** This little phrase is found in a

wonderful description of what it would be like when the LORD came and once and for all delivered Jerusalem from her enemies.

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Isaiah 62:10-11 NIV

*Pass through, pass through the gates!
 Prepare the way for the people.
 Build up, build up the highway!
 Remove the stones.
 Raise a banner for the nations.
 The LORD has made proclamation
 to the ends of the earth:
 "Say to Daughter Zion,
 'See, your Savior comes!
 See, his reward is with him,
 and his recompense accompanies him.'"*

"Say to Daughter Zion" means "Announce the Good News to Jerusalem!" As readers of Matthew's Gospel, we are in on what was really going on that day. Jesus was acting out the Good News – news that would look very different from what Jerusalem and the thousands of pilgrims were expecting.

A King on a donkey:

The second scripture that Matthew quotes spells out the identity of the Hidden King even more clearly. It comes from the prophet Zechariah:

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Zechariah 9:9 NIV

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
 Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
 See, your king comes to you,
 righteous and victorious,*

*lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Notice first that Matthew does not quote the beginning of this prophecy: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!" As we have already seen, he quotes Isaiah in saying: "Say to Daughter Zion." Jesus is not expecting Jerusalem to "shout greatly" for Him as God's true King. Jesus is announcing His kingship – the kingship of the Hidden King.

Hiding in Plain Sight:

And so Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem as God's King:

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Matthew 21:6-9 NIV

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!"

To the Roman soldiers on the walls and at the city gates the whole spectacle must have looked pretty tame, if not ludicrous. A peasant rabbi on a donkey, surrounded by pilgrims spreading clothes and tree branches on the road in front of him. They may have been suspicious of such a rowdy demonstration, but the man in the middle of things looked pretty harmless. And he wasn't going to lead a battle charge on that little colt.

But for the pilgrims on Palm Sunday the message was unmistakable: This must be the long-awaited King. After all, wasn't this the rabbi who had raised Lazarus from the dead right here in Bethany? Hadn't He fed 5000 on a hillside in Galilee?

God's long-awaited King was making His entrance into Jerusalem, bringing the Presence of the LORD with Him.

Hidden King

But what kind of king?

Isn't it funny how we see what we *want* to see.

If you want a King to solve all your problems and conquer all your enemies, then a rabbi on a little donkey can look like the long-awaited Messiah. His entrance is a clever signal to those in the know that deliverance is at hand. This Passover will be exciting to say the least!

I'm sure that Jesus' disciples were just as excited about King Jesus as everyone else that day. If Jesus were the King, then they were His court. Their most cherished dreams were coming true right before their eyes.

Jesus might be riding a donkey today, but the Romans would soon discover that He would ride a white stallion as well.

"Who is this?"

Matthew tells us that Jesus' symbolic entry into Jerusalem raised the Big Question for the people of Jerusalem as well:

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Matthew 21:10 NIV amended

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?"

"Who is this? Is he a king? Is he a peasant from up north? What's all the fuss? Are you planning some sort of uprising? What's going on, anyway?"

Matthew tells us the pilgrims' answer:

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Matthew 21:11 NIV

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

On one level, the pilgrims are stating Jesus' earthly identity: a miracle-worker from Nazareth in Galilee. Could they also be saying that He was the promised "prophet-like-Moses" who would set God's people free in a New Exodus?

The question of "Who is this?" hangs in the air, waiting to be answered. That's how it is with a Hidden King.

Hidden King:

The greatest Treasure of all is to discover the Hidden King. To do so, we have to put aside *our* perspective, *our* aspirations, *our* demands. We have to let the King be who the King truly is.

The Palm Sunday pilgrims saw Jesus on a donkey and thought: victory, conquest, retribution. All of their ancient scores would now be settled. The hated Romans would feel the wrath of Israel's God. Wasn't that what Passover was all about?

They didn't see the deeper message of Zechariah's prophecy. They could not comprehend how God's King could be gentle and humble. They could not possibly imagine their King on a cross.

You and I face the same challenge today. King Jesus is here right now at the gates of your life. But you won't see Him on a white horse. You'll still find Him on that little donkey. When things go wrong in your life, He will be there to show you how to respond in a way that brings forgiveness and mercy, not vengeance and anger. No, He won't smite the people you are angry at. No, He won't send fire from heaven down upon a wicked world. Instead, He comes to heal and restore. That's what God's New Creation is all about.

He is right here with you in whatever challenge you may be facing. So look away from your idea of how things should be and put your focus on Him. What you'll find is the greatest Treasure of all: the Treasure of the Presence of the Hidden King.