

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: April 2, 2023**

**Title: WELCOME JESUS**

**Text: Matthew 21:1-17**

*“Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. <sup>3</sup>And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.’ <sup>4</sup>All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: <sup>5</sup>‘Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ <sup>6</sup>So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. <sup>7</sup>They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. <sup>8</sup>And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!’ <sup>10</sup>And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, ‘Who is this?’ <sup>11</sup>So the multitudes said, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.’ <sup>12</sup>Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>13</sup>And He said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.’ <sup>14</sup>Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. <sup>15</sup>But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant <sup>16</sup>and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’ <sup>17</sup>Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.”*

Matthew 21, in a manner of speaking, begins the final act in the drama of Jesus’ earthly life. It is PASSOVER time – which corresponds with Easter – and this was a particularly sacred time in the Jewish calendar. During this season, a host (thousands) of people would converge on Jerusalem. Jewish law was that every male within 20 miles of Jerusalem must come to Passover; Thousands more from every corner of the world would also make the journey every year. As Passover approached, Jesus and His disciples prepared to go to Jerusalem. He was at the peak of His popularity. For the last three years He had been traveling throughout the area preaching and teaching and healing people, and word about Him had spread. Now that people had come to Jerusalem from all over the world, there were those who were eager to see this “new prophet.”

Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem was set. He sent a couple of His disciples into a nearby village to get a donkey and a colt, and He rode them through the streets of Jerusalem. This was quite significant; in that, it was the fulfillment of a prophecy from the Old Testament book of Zechariah. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”* (9:9, ESV). Matthew quotes this prophecy in verse 5. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, a large crowd gathered. Some spread their cloaks on the road. Others spread palm branches – and as Jesus rode through the streets they followed him, shouting... *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”* (v. 9). Afterwards, Jesus went into the temple and created quite a scene: He overturned tables and chased out the merchants who were doing business there. Why? We’ll get into that in a few minutes.

Today, as we look more closely at this text, there’s a lesson for us – as individuals and as a church – in how we need to welcome Jesus into our lives and into our church. There are several prayers we need to pray – things we need to cry out to God so that HE WILL HAVE THE PLACE HE DESERVES IN OUR LIVES. Here’s the first prayer...

**1. SAVE US.** As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowd followed Him and cried out “*Hosanna!*” The word “hosanna” means, literally, “Save, we pray Thee” or “God save us.” These people were acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, as the one who would save the people of Israel. THEY saw Him as their SAVIOR – they just didn’t know at this point what all that meant. They didn’t realize that in just a few days Jesus would be crucified for the sins of the world. They didn’t understand about His atoning death – that through His death our sins would be forgiven, and we would have eternal life. Not even the disciples fully understood this, despite all that Jesus had taught them, BUT... Still this crowd welcomed Him as their Messiah, and they cried out to Him: “Hosanna” – “GOD SAVE US.” With this prayer (HOSANNA – God save us!) WE welcome Jesus into our lives. It is a prayer of total dependence on God. It says, “God, I can’t save myself; I need you in my life. I need you to be my Messiah. I need you to be my Savior.” This is where our relationship with God begins – by accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior – and this is how it continues day-by-day. We NEVER get to the point where we don’t need to DEPEND on Him. We NEVER get to the point where we don’t need Him to SAVE us – to save us not only from OUR SINS, BUT... from OURSELVES, and from the SITUATIONS we go through, and from our ENEMIES. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. We live in an evil world; I need God to save me from this evil world. I get so angry when I see the pictures from the Nashville Christian School shooting. Those 3 children slaughtered were beautiful. They were at a Christian school, a place where any of us might have sent our children. Have you seen the picture of the pastor, his wife and 3 children? This Easter their beautiful 9-year-old daughter will be absent from their table. A hurting transgender texted moments earlier to a middle school friend that she needed to die. I’m not okay with suicide, BUT... Why take out 6 others? Was she ignorant of the hell she would put others through? OR... Was that part of her intent? And that’s just a tiny part of the monstrosities happening around our world. What do you think the Christian’s prayer in many a struggling, war-town country is? “Hosanna – God save us!” WE need to join them in that prayer. Wherein your immediate situation I trust is not so dire – you may be struggling with a situation that you cannot fix in your strength; you need His help. ASK FOR IT! Perhaps some of you – and maybe you’ve been a believer for a long time – are struggling with sins and self-defeating habits that have tormented you for years. You’ve tried one self-improvement plan after another, and you keep finding yourself in the same desperate circumstance. Make this your prayer – GOD SAVE ME! Know that I’m not JUST talking about the initial salvation experience; I’m also talking about everyday Christian living. This must be our prayer: “God save me from my sins, from myself, my enemies, from the situations I am facing. I cannot make it without you.” If we want to make the journey in holiness, the foundation of our lives must be total and complete dependence on God. The same can be said for our church. If we want this church to fulfill the purpose God has for us, we must, as a people, depend on God with all that we have. Our attitude must be, “God we cannot do this without you. We need your help to accomplish what you have called us to do.” AND... This attitude of total dependence upon God must also be the message we communicate to our community. It is not enough for us to build a building and put together a worship team and provide classes and preach sermons if all we’re doing is attracting attention to ourselves. We need to attract attention, but the attention must be directed toward Jesus. We need to make it clear to those we are reaching: This church can’t save you, JESUS CAN! This church can’t get your life straightened out, JESUS CAN. The message of this church and the cry of our hearts must be the same: “God save us! We can’t save ourselves. God, we can’t do it without You. We depend TOTALLY upon You.” You WELCOME JESUS into your life with a prayer of dependence: GOD SAVE ME.

**2. CLEANSE US.** AFTER the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus did something that may seem shocking at first. Listen to what Matthew wrote... “*Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves*” (v. 12). WHY did He do that? As I mentioned earlier, thousands and thousands of people had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. ONE of the requirements of this event was for the worshippers to pay the temple tax and offer a sacrifice. The amount of the temple tax was one-half shekel, and it had to be paid in a certain currency. Throughout Palestine there were several different currencies used in commerce, and all were equally valid. BUT... The TEMPLE TAX had to be paid with a SPECIFIC type of currency. In the temple there

were moneychangers; if you didn't have the correct currency, they would exchange it for you – like changing pesos into dollars. Here's the catch. There was a SURPLUS charge added to the exchange. AND... If you didn't have the exact change, there was a surplus charge on top of that. So, the moneychangers were cleaning up. They were making out like bandits. Basically, they WERE bandits. Sincere people were making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from all parts of the world – where different types of currency were used – and they were forced to pay exorbitant exchange rates. It was a corrupt and oppressive system, and JESUS DIDN'T LIKE IT! Another transaction that took place in the temple was the selling of doves. Doves were used in the sacrificial ritual, and Jewish law required that the dove be spotless and without blemish. AND... Of course, they had a priest on hand to inspect each dove to make sure they were spotless and suitable for sacrifice. You could buy your own dove outside the temple, but it was common knowledge that if you brought a dove that was bought outside the temple gates, there was a likelihood that it wasn't going to pass inspection. To get a dove that was SUITABLE for sacrifice, you had to BUY IT AT THE TEMPLE. And... Guess what? THOSE doves were VERY expensive. It's kind of like going to a stadium event or amusement park where they won't let you bring your own food, and they charge you \$10 for a \$1 hotdog and 5 or so dollars for a 50-cent bottle of water. The merchants in the temple had the same racket. The result was that sincere people who just wanted to worship God according to Jewish rituals were being forced to pay through the nose. It was a corrupt and oppressive system, and Jesus objected to it. So, He came and made His presence known. He wreaked havoc. He overturned tables and drove out those who engaged in the practice. In John's gospel it says that He made a whip and set all the animals loose. Then He said with authority, *"It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers"* (v. 13). Jesus cannot ignore corruption, either in the system or in people's lives – especially when it comes to matters of religion. Perhaps you've heard sermons on this story before where the emphasis was placed on our doing the same thing Jesus did: We need to stand up to sin. We need to cry out against corruption. We need to turn over tables and take a whip to the sinners, and so on. There's no question that we need to speak out against corruption, but before you go on a rampage, let's look at this from another angle. Ask yourself this: If Jesus came into the temple of my life, (*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost..."*) what tables would He overturn? ASK YOURSELF: What elements of my life would He want to drive out? In what areas of my life have I made an alliance with corruption that goes against the grain of what He has called me to be? Our prayer needs to be, "God, CLEANSE me. Cleanse my life like you cleansed the temple. Drive out everything that isn't pleasing to You." In a few moments we will go to the Lord's table; before partaking of the symbols of the Lord's body, we must cry out, "CLEANSE ME." The thing about corruption is that it rarely happens overnight. It's a gradual process. We move a little bit away from the middle towards the left, until the left becomes the middle...and then we move a little bit more. Eventually one's life is so far removed from what God intended it to be – and it happened little by little, compromise after compromise – till we get to the point where we feel comfortable with corruption. Our prayer must be, "Jesus, cleanse us. Drive out everything in our lives that isn't of You."

**3. HEAR US.** *"But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant. 'Do You hear what these children are saying?' they asked him." Listen to what Jesus said... "'Yes,' Jesus replied, 'have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?'"* Jesus was quoting Psalm 8:2. And this is what He wants to hear from us – PRAISE! Do you know why we make praise and worship such an important part of this service? Because PRAISE IS IMPORTANT TO GOD. Throughout the Bible we are exhorted to praise Him... *"I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh praise the greatness of our God!"* (Deuteronomy 32:3). *"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise"* (1 Chronicles 16:25). *"Sing to the Lord, praise his name. Proclaim his salvation day after day"* (Psalm 96:2). *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name"* (Hebrews 13:15). The way we welcome Jesus into our lives – and into our church – is through praise and worship. God INHABITS the praise of His people. If there is no praise here, we are guilty of removing the habitation – the dwelling place – of the Lord. When we begin to praise Him, He begins to move

among us. There's a mistake that many people make. The mistake is to think, "I'm not worthy to praise Him. I've still got too much stuff in my life. When I get myself cleaned up, then I will praise Him." So, some people hold back during the worship service BECAUSE they feel unworthy. AND... They don't praise God day-to-day in their private devotions because they feel unworthy. Of course, we ARE unworthy. Even the BEST among us is unworthy. That goes without saying. But HE IS WORTHY of our praise. Praise ISN'T about, "Lord, look at me. Look at how CLEAN I am. Look at how WORTHY I am. Look at how HOLY I am." It's NOT about us at all. IT'S ABOUT HIM. HE is worthy of OUR praise. Each and every one of us needs to make it a habit – a daily habit – to offer up praise and worship to God. If children and infants can praise Him, then so should we. Our third prayer should be, "HEAR US, Lord, as we offer You praise."

**4. USE US.** *"The blind and the lame came into the temple, and he healed them"* (v. 14). This verse teaches us two important things about the ministry of Jesus. People's needs are important to God. People came into the temple and Jesus saw the blind and the lame, and He was moved with compassion and began ministering to them. That's what we need to do. There are hurting people all around us. There are likely hurting people seated among us. There will be hurting people on the church grounds in a few hours. We need to reach out to them and bring the healing power of Jesus into their lives. Jesus stayed focused on His top priority. Jesus' primary purpose for being here was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). After He cleansed the temple, He resumed His ministry of helping people. He didn't get side-tracked. He didn't make cleansing temples the new focus of His ministry. I can't remember reading that He ever turned over another table. He went back to doing JOB #1. He began healing the blind and the lame. In our lives we need to stay just as focused on doing JOB #1. We need to avoid the temptation of getting side-tracked on issues that are NOT our top priority. Yes, there are times when secondary issues demand our attention, but we need to remember that our TOP priorities – especially as a church – are glorifying God and bringing people into the kingdom of God. Some churches get sidetracked by a political agenda, or a social agenda, or an economic agenda – but... Our agenda needs to be, first and foremost, glorifying God and bringing people into the kingdom of God. Our prayer must be "God, use us to do Your work here on earth. Just as Jesus reached out to hurting people, help us reach out to hurting people. Help us make a difference in people's lives."

**CONCLUSION.** Do you want to see the glory of God rise up in your life? Do you want to see the glory of God rise up in this church? Then we need to focus on these four prayers: God SAVE US...we depend completely on You. God CLEANSE US...remove everything that isn't of You. God HEAR US...as we offer You our praise. God USE US...to do YOUR work in THIS world. This is how WE welcome Jesus into our lives. This is how WE give Him free reign to do His will through us.