

Exceeding Every Expectation - Palm Sunday

Steven Morris

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

I've shared this before, but I want to share it again because it's just the perfect lead-in to where we're going in our text today for Palm Sunday.

Several years ago, I had the really fun privilege of taking the kids to Disney World. It was a great week. It was a very exhausting week to do that with little kids, but it was a lot of fun. We did the rides, we did the parks, and we were walking around.

We did it in December, so it was decorated for Christmas. That was pretty, but it was also cold. As we were walking around the park on one of our last days, we came around the corner and the kids saw this. If you look up, that is Splash Mountain. As soon as we came around the corner and that came into view, I was trying to shield their eyes and steer them in a different direction because I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to get cold and walk around cold and wet the rest of the day from that ride.

I'm shielding them, but they see it. It's too late. They're like, "We want to do that!" They're begging to go, and I'm like, "No, we're not going to do that."

They go to Mom, to Chelsea, and Chelsea's like, "Yeah, that'll be great. You guys will love it. Hey, babe, why don't you take them? I'll stay here with the baby."

And so that's what happened. I went on the ride, got wet, and got cold with the kids. But if you've been on the ride, you know that you go inside, get in that little log deal, and start going through it really slowly. It tells a story. I don't remember what it's about. I think there was a bunny rabbit in the story. But you're going through this ride, there's music, and it's slow and calm.

When we experienced the first little dip, where there was a little bit of speed and a little bit of a drop, it was fun. The kids loved it. The kid sitting next to me, my son, looked over at me and said, "Dad, I have been waiting for this moment my entire life."

I was like, "You didn't know this moment existed 30 minutes ago." But I do appreciate the enthusiasm, right?

Here's the deal: He's all in, and he was loving the moment. At that point, he had just had a small taste - just a small taste - of what that ride had to offer. There was something infinitely greater coming up around the next corner. Something bigger, something better, something that was going to blow away everything he had experienced thus far, and it was just around the corner.

I can't help but think of that story as we look at Palm Sunday. If you've got your Bible, look at Luke 19. Go ahead and open your Bible there. That's the story referred to as Palm Sunday. As we study it, I can't help but walk away with this clear message: The people in Jerusalem were no doubt expecting big things from Jesus, but in reality, there was something far greater than they could ever imagine coming, and it was just around the corner.

If you're taking notes today, our title is "Exceeding Every Expectation." I'll give you the application up front. Here's my goal for all of us - for myself, for you, for me, and for my family: At the end of our time in the Word today, I want our hearts and minds to be focused on and thinking about Jesus as we head into Easter week.

Jesus Goes Up to Jerusalem

Luke 19, starting in verse 28, says:

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

— Luke 19:28

We're going to pause there.

I mentioned that today is Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. You'll see why as we unpack the text here in a few minutes, but I want to make sure we all have the context of this.

In this chapter, we're going to see Jesus enter the city of Jerusalem. It's a huge event in the life of Jesus and in His work for my salvation and yours. It's one of the only events written down in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four Gospels that outline the life of Jesus include this entry into Jerusalem, this Palm Sunday moment.

If you read the rest of the Gospels, you know that for the three years leading up to this moment, Jesus had been preaching on the kingdom of heaven. He had been performing miracles and loving the unlovable. Just days before, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Now, as the people of Israel begin to gather in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover week, Jesus is stepping into the city as well.

This signifies the beginning of what we now call Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter. There's no way we could ever overstate the significance of Holy Week and what we read about Holy Week in our Bibles.

During the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, Jesus enters Jerusalem. We're going to study that today. He clears out the temple. He goes toe-to-toe with the religious leaders of the day. He institutes the Lord's Supper, which we're going to observe as a church family on Good Friday. We'd love to have you back to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us on Good Friday.

We're going to see that Jesus is arrested. He's tried. He's nailed to a cross. He's crucified. Then He rises from the dead. That's a week. It's a week that impacts human history unlike any other week. It's a week, honestly, that the entire world at that time had been waiting for.

The entirety of the ministry of Jesus begins to prepare for these moments. It points toward these moments. In

the Gospel of Luke, you see that in a really neat way. Luke zeros in on this journey.

You're in Luke 19 now. If you flip back to Luke 9 and just hold those pages in your hands and see everything that happened there, I want you to understand that there's a lot of teaching and miracles that happen there. But really, starting in Luke 9 and leading up to Luke 19, we have this one long travel log where Luke is highlighting the mission of Jesus, leading and pointing us to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Luke wants us to make no mistake about what Jesus is doing and why He's doing it. In Luke 9:51, it says that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He knows where He's going and why. He knows that the cross is waiting for Him, and so He begins the journey there.

Luke 13: Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem. Luke 17: Now on His way to Jerusalem. Again and again, Luke is saying, "Hey, this is where we're going. This is where we're headed."

He's performing miracles, He's teaching, and all of that is building up to this moment when He's going to the cross in the city of what? Jerusalem.

Then, in Luke 19:28, we just read that He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. That leads to the triumphal entry, the Palm Sunday moment.

Look with me now in verse 29:

When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying,

Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you shall say this: "The Lord has need of it."

So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them.

And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

And they said, "The Lord has need of it."

— Luke 19:29-34

We'll come back to "The Lord" later.

Bethphage, where this is going on, is a town a little less than a mile east of Jerusalem on the slope of the Mount of Olives. If you've been on a trip to Israel with Champion Forest or with another group, you've been to this spot where this is happening. It's that picture moment where you take a picture with your group as you're heading into the city. Just to the right, there's a little road that's going to wind its way down the side of the mountain and into the city.

It is from approximately this area that Jesus begins His descent off the Mount of Olives and down into Jerusalem. According to Scripture, He does it riding a colt.

This matters. The fact that He's on a colt matters for a reason. It's not that His legs were tired. He could have

made the walk. It's not that long. But He doesn't walk. He rides.

As He rides, He's telling them, He's telling us, and He's telling everyone who is paying attention, "There's something major going on here."

Matthew 21:4-5 also describes this Palm Sunday moment:

This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

*Say to the daughter of Zion,
Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.*

— Matthew 21:4-5

The prophet who originally spoke that was Zechariah. Zechariah 9 is a chapter where God talks about saving His people, with the Messiah, the Savior, riding the donkey into Jerusalem.

As Jesus does this, He's fulfilling yet another prophecy that God promised. He's stepping into the city, and He's declaring who He is. He is the King who is coming to save, just like God told us time and time again in the Old Testament.

I'm telling you, as we read the story, He is going to end up being a King who went beyond anything the people that day were expecting. So the simple donkey ride is critical to the story.

A Royal Welcome

Look at verse 35:

And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road.

As he was drawing near - already on the way down the Mount of Olives - the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

— Luke 19:35-38

The donkey gets situated, Jesus gets on, and He goes into the city. He begins to be greeted by some of the crowds, and they're praising Him. They have a name for Him. They're looking to Him as King. That's what it says.

I want you to think back to Christmastime, Luke 2. The angels are there, right? The shepherds are out in the fields, watching their flocks by night. We know this. Charlie Brown told us. Luke told us this. That's what's happening.

As the angels appear, what do they say? Glory and peace. Glory and peace.

This is a full-circle moment because now, as Jesus enters the city at the end of His ministry, the crowds are shouting the same thing as the angels: glory and peace. He's going to bring it in a way that exceeds every expectation.

John describes this Palm Sunday moment as well:

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him.

— John 12:12-13

Jesus is coming in, and the crowds are going out.

There's a lot in this that you and I need to understand contextually. Jerusalem was full of people on Palm Sunday. It was the beginning of Passover. That's the feast mentioned here in John 12, and it really impacted the city that week. The crowd that week was six times the normal population of the city.

Anybody ever been to the Promised Land? Oh, well, sorry - not the Jerusalem Promised Land. Anybody ever been to College Station, Texas? Is that the promised land? Okay.

It has a small population that increases by over 100,000 on weekends when there's a home football game. There's this massive influx of people. There is anticipation. There is excitement. The traffic is terrible. It's just this big buildup to something that's going on.

That's what's happening in Jerusalem right now. There are a lot of people in the original Promised Land. A lot of people who don't normally live there are there to celebrate the feast of the Passover. It's a big, big moment.

This big crowd hears that Jesus is coming before He makes it into the city, so there's this anticipation. People have been wondering, "Is Jesus going to show up for the Passover? Is He going to be here?"

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was a very impactful moment for a lot of people - Lazarus mostly, but a lot of people. The location of that miracle was very important.

A lot of the miracles Jesus did - the feeding of the 5,000, for instance, and walking on water, for instance - happened far away from the city of Jerusalem. Maybe some people in the city had heard about some of these things, but there's a good chance that a lot of them had never directly experienced one of these miracles of Jesus.

But when He raised Lazarus from the dead, that was significantly closer. People from the city may have been there. They certainly heard about it. So there was this buzz around the city: "There's this teacher who can perform miracles. And not just perform miracles - there's this teacher who can raise people from the dead. We've got to meet this guy. There is something special going on here."

As excited as the crowds were about Jesus, the religious leaders were the opposite. They were trying to dump water on the excitement of the people. It's no secret that the religious leaders had it out for Jesus at the time.

There's this buzz. There's this curiosity, anticipation, and excitement. Will Jesus show up? There's tension

building. Now they hear that He's coming. He's riding down off the Mount of Olives. There are already people there singing and calling Him King. Of course, these crowds who had been wondering with anticipation go out to meet Him as well.

Make no mistake: As Jesus comes in, He gets a hero's welcome. He gets a royal welcome as He rides the donkey into the city. We see it with the coats and the palm branches.

The coats on the ground weren't to keep the donkey clean. This was a symbolic gesture. Laying down the coats like that for the animal to walk across was reserved for royalty. You didn't do that for rich people, famous people, important people, or kind people. You didn't do it for anybody else. You only did it for royal people.

The crowd is there, and they're signifying, "This guy riding in - He's the King."

What kind of king were they anticipating? That's a great question, and the answer to their expectation is in the palm branches.

For first-century Jewish people, the palm branches would have been like a national symbol. About a hundred years before this moment, when Jesus was riding in, there was a guy named Simon the Maccabee who entered Jerusalem. This guy was a soldier. This guy was a warrior. He defeated the enemies of Israel at the time, about a hundred years before Jesus, and he delivered freedom for the people. He delivered them this sense of peace.

He's looked at as a hero, and he gets this palm branch treatment as he's coming in. The Jewish people of Jesus' day would have looked back at that moment with Simon the Maccabee and thought, "This is our Fourth of July. This is the moment we got freedom."

That's why they're giving the same palm branch treatment to Jesus as He's coming in. They're expecting a similar kind of freedom to be delivered to them from Jesus - freedom from Rome.

This entire moment, as Jesus is coming down the mountain on the colt, the crowds are coming out, the coats are going down, and the branches are going up, is driven by expectations of what is going to happen next.

On April 11, 1945, close to the end of World War II, there was this moment when American troops broke through the gates of the Buchenwald concentration camp. As they broke in, they found people in this camp who had been living in conditions that, frankly, you and I could never understand or imagine. There was unbelievable suffering, evil, and cruelty there.

As you read the stories of those who survived and those who were able to preserve some kind of journal, you read that so many of them dreamed of a day when they would be free. They dreamed of a time when someone - they didn't know who it would be - was going to break through and set them free.

As the American troops marched in, the German troops threw their stuff down. They fled. They ran. In the pictures from that day, the American troops were being celebrated as heroes, liberators, and freedom-givers. The American flag was picked up, hung, and waved by so many of the survivors, at least those who had the strength to do so in that moment.

One of them was a 16-year-old. Imagine that - 16 years old, living in those conditions in a camp like that. His name was Moshe Avital. He wrote extensively about his experience and his family's experience through World War II and the concentration camp.

As he wrote of that moment when the American troops came in and the flags were waving, he said that everybody who had the strength to pick up a flag and wave it did so not because of what was happening, not simply because the troops were there. They waved it with great anticipation of what was going to happen next. They knew that moment meant that very soon they would be free.

Imagine being in that camp. Imagine the years of torture and suffering. You see the soldiers, and you know what it means. You know what's going to happen next. After all of their suffering and oppression, there's this welling up, this intensity of joy and anticipation. Freedom is coming.

As the people in Jesus' day waved those palm branches, they were doing it with great anticipation and expectation about what was coming. It was a massively emotionally charged moment for them.

But they were thinking too small with Jesus.

They were thinking He was coming to Jerusalem to bring freedom. He was, but He was going to do it in a way that exceeded their expectations.

This is a huge day. The crowds are already charged up for the Passover feast. The recent miracles of Jesus had people wondering. The entrance into the city with the coats and the palm branches is just building on this expectation that something is coming. There's energy, hope, and joy. They're looking out to the future.

For so many people in the days of Jesus, in that first century, they had been waiting their entire lives for this moment - for what they thought was about to happen. They were waiting for that king who would come and save them from the Romans and their oppressors.

Now they have this guy who can perform miracles and raise people from the dead. This has got to be the one.

It's clear where their hearts and minds were that day. They were focused on an earthly king, but Jesus rode in to establish a heavenly kingdom. He exceeds every expectation.

On this side of history, you and I can look back. We can see how the week played out and everything else that happened that week. We can see that with everything Jesus did in His arrival into this city, He was saying, "Pay attention. There's more than what meets the eye. There's more. Pay attention. I am the King, but not in the way that you think."

For you and me today, I want to take a closer look to make sure we prepare our hearts for Easter, learning the lessons Jesus was so intentional to teach us on that Palm Sunday.

What Kind of King Is Jesus?

What kind of King was Jesus as He rode into the city? Let me share four with you.

First, we see that Jesus is the divine King.

In Luke 19:31, Jesus tells the disciples:

If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you shall say this: "The Lord has need of it."

— Luke 19:31

"The Lord has need of it."

Jesus, in that moment, is declaring His divinity once again. He's not saying, "A lord needs it," or, "My lord needs it." He's saying, "The Lord needs it. Don't speak of Me as a personal rabbi. Don't speak of Me as a personal teacher. Tell them that the Lord of all needs it. Spread the word."

Don't miss the message. Jesus is saying that He is Lord of all.

Second, Jesus shows us that He's the promised King.

Zechariah 9:9 says:

*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.*

— Zechariah 9:9

This prophecy was written approximately 500 years before Jesus was even born.

I love the way God has given us the Bible. From the very beginning in the Bible, we see God pointing us to a Savior, to Jesus, who would come. We see it all the way back in Genesis 3. Then, throughout Scripture, God promises a Savior and gives prophecies that will be true of our Savior, so that we can know that we know that we know, when the Savior appears, that's the One we've been waiting our whole lives for.

Depending on how you want to count it, Jesus fulfilled, conservatively, 300 prophecies from the Old Testament. Being born in Bethlehem is one of them. Riding this donkey into Jerusalem is one of them.

God told the people of Israel through Zechariah that the King was going to come. He was going to bring peace, and He was going to come in this way. As Jesus is riding in, He's saying, "Pay attention."

I want to point something out with this. The religious leaders of the day didn't like Jesus. Look at Luke 19:39:

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."

— Luke 19:39

The disciples are saying, "That's the King who comes in the name of the Lord." The Pharisees are saying, "Make them stop saying that You're the King."

Jesus says in verse 40:

I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

— Luke 19:40

What's happening with the religious leaders here? This is a warning for us - for me and for you - even today.

The religious leaders knew that in Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that a King was going to come through his line and set up a throne that would reign forever and ever. The religious leaders knew the promise, the covenant, that God made with David in 2 Samuel 7, that from his line a King was going to come whose reign would never end. That's only true of Jesus.

The religious leaders knew what God had promised through Zechariah the prophet in Zechariah 9:9. They knew all of that, but they missed Jesus.

Why? There are a lot of reasons. Here's the main one: When they finally met Jesus, He didn't fit their expectations. He didn't fit their ideas or their ideals.

Their minds were focused on the here and now. Their minds were focused on themselves, an earthly kingdom, and political freedom. They missed Him because they were looking for something they weren't going to find in here.

This is a huge reminder for me and for you: Don't create a version of Jesus in your head or in your heart that you think you need or think you want. Jesus didn't come to be a genie in a bottle. He's not a King reigning on the throne to do my will or your will.

Jesus is the promised King, the Savior of the world, completely dedicated to the glory and will of the Father. We see who Jesus is right here in Scripture. Don't miss Him because you're looking for something different. Look into the Word and surrender your heart to the promised King you have here.

When you do, you're going to experience a peace that's only possible through Him.

That's the third kind of King He is: He's the peaceful King who can bring peace.

That's part of riding the donkey as well. Kings would ride donkeys. It wasn't an uncommon scenario, but they would also ride horses. They'd ride horses to show power and to show, "We're going to war. We're prepared for war. The battle is coming." They're sending a message.

They'd ride donkeys to send the opposite message: "We're in a time of peace. Peace is here. Peace is coming. I have brought peace."

Jesus is painting a picture in everything that's going on. He's showing us. He's giving us these signs. Let's make sure we don't miss it.

If you keep reading in Zechariah 9, that same prophecy tells us He's the King who would bring peace to the nations. The crowds hoped for peace. Jesus entered to bring peace, but on a whole other level.

Not peace with the emperor and freedom from having to pay taxes. Jesus brings peace with God and freedom from sin. He always exceeds expectations.

Finally, fourth, Jesus entered the city as a Savior King.

When Matthew writes about this Palm Sunday, this triumphal entry moment, Matthew 21:9 says:

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

— Matthew 21:9

That was a title reserved by the Jewish people of that day for the Savior, and only the Savior. They're not saying He's the literal son of David. They're saying He is in the line of David, and He's going to establish the throne God promised generations before.

They knew that He's the One who could save, and they're crying out to Him, "Hosanna!" It was a call for help, almost with desperation in their voices. Hosanna means, "Save us," or, "Save us now."

It's incredible. They're looking to Jesus to be saved. They know He is the only One who can save them, and He's going to save them, but not in the way they expect. Jesus isn't there to save them from a moment. He's there to save them for eternity.

The way God sets this entire scene up is so beautiful. Not only does Jesus clearly show us the kind of King He is, but the timing of it all is absolutely miraculous.

He enters the city at the beginning of the Passover celebration. The day Jesus entered the city would have been the same day the Passover lamb was selected to be sacrificed.

This feast, the Passover, was commanded by God for the people of Israel to observe every single year, beginning with the moment God freed His people from Egypt. The entirety of it is pointing forward to what's going on with Jesus, making the people think, know, remember, and understand that God had saved them through the blood of the lamb.

Jesus enters the city as the King who would save, no doubt about it, but not like the crowds expected that day. He was going to save like John the Baptist had told everybody He was going to save at the very beginning of His ministry.

John 1:29 says:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

— John 1:29

Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the perfect Passover Lamb, the last sacrifice for sin that would ever be needed. He went into the city fully planning on going to the cross to take away the sins of the world.

He was, and is, a King of far greater power than the crowds that day could imagine. They weren't thinking big enough. That day, with all the excitement, energy, and joy, they weren't thinking big enough about the power

and glory of Jesus.

He exceeds every human expectation.

Think Bigger About Jesus

As we step into Holy Week, you and me, right here in 2026, I want to encourage you to think about Jesus. I want to encourage you to think bigger about Jesus in your life. Think bigger about Jesus in every situation you face.

Think bigger about His glory. Think bigger about His power. Think bigger about His provision, His peace, and His holiness. Think bigger about His faithfulness.

As we look to Easter, think bigger about His sacrifice, understanding that His sacrifice changes everything. Think bigger, and tell others in your life how Jesus exceeds every expectation.

Will you pray with me this morning?

As you bow your head, I just want to encourage you: Think bigger. Think bigger about Jesus, knowing that no matter how big you can think, it's not big enough.

Your mind and my mind can't even begin to fathom how big He is, how glorious, powerful, and majestic He is. Think big about Jesus this morning. Thank Him for His love for you. Thank Him for His sacrifice. Thank Him for all He's done and all He's going to do.

Think big about Jesus this morning. Ask Him to capture your heart and your mind. Heading into Easter week, let it truly be a week of worship before Him.

If you're here this morning and you've never trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I want to encourage you right now. There is no decision greater in your life than trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and I want to invite you to do that with us today.

In just a moment, we're going to stand and sing one last song. We'll have pastors and prayer partners down here at the front. We'd be honored to pray with you.

If you're ready to trust Christ, come tell us. Just say, "Hey, I need to know Jesus." We'll walk you through it.

Maybe baptism is your next step. Just come on down and say, "Hey, listen, I'm ready to be baptized. I want to get baptized. Help me set it up." We'd be honored.

Maybe you're walking through a scenario in your life, and you're facing hardship, trouble, or uncertainty. You just want someone to pray over you, and we'd be honored to do that as well.

Whatever God's stirring in your heart, as we stand to sing, that'll be your invitation to come.

Heavenly Father, we love You and trust You. We thank You for Your incredible love for us. God, help us to think bigger about who You are and about what You've done. It's in Your name we pray. Amen.