

GOOD NEWS IS COMING

Series: Good God
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Adam Mosley
Jesus, Triumphal Entry, Good News
Matthew 21:1-11

When I was 17 years old, I turned a classic car into a cloud of smoke. It was the annual homecoming parade for my school, and my girlfriend at the time was in the “queen’s court” for homecoming, a silly tradition where students vote on a “king” and “queen” of the high school for the evening. It’s essentially a popularity contest where the prettiest and most popular kids tend to come out on top.

For my part, I was tasked with procuring a cool vehicle (one with a convertible top, so my girlfriend could be seen in the parade), and driving her from some set starting point, down the parade route, and into the stadium. And, for a 17 year old who didn’t have a lot of money, I think I did pretty well. I was able to borrow a sweet ride - a classic American muscle car - a bright red, 1965 Ford Mustang with a white convertible top.

The car was a thing of beauty, and the engine made that perfect, throaty rumble when you fired it up. There was only one problem. I didn’t know how to drive it. You see, in the U.S., a large majority of cars these days have automatic transmission, and at 17 years old, that’s all I knew how to drive.

But the Mustang wasn’t an automatic. In fact, it was fitted with a “three-on-the-tree” gearbox - a three speed manual transmission with the shifter mounted to the steering column. And, of course, to top it off, the engine produced nearly 300 break horsepower. The car was *way* beyond my driving capabilities.

Understand, I had attempted to drive a car with a manual transmission before. My sister had a little 5-speed Honda, and she had tried to show me how the whole accelerator/clutch tandem worked. I spent quite a bit of time chugging and rocking and over-accelerating in that Honda, but never got the hang of it.

But, you know, when you’re a 17 year old boy, there is no greater motivator than an opportunity to impress a girl. So, I managed get the car a few days early, and I went to a nearby carpark, determined to figure out how to drive the thing. And after some chugging, some tire squeals, and some stalls, I actually did manage to, somewhat, conquer the beast.

Now, to really appreciate this story, you have to understand the area where I grew up. The town where I spent my first 18 years of life is called Johnson City, Tennessee. It sits in the

southeastern part of the U.S., on a mountain range called the Appalachian Mountains. So, of course, it is not a flat place. Our town was *full* of hills, and the parade route was no exception.

So, on top of just generally knowing how to drive the car, I knew I needed a plan for all the stops and starts that would take place on hills. And I figured out that when starting on a hill, I was better off to over-rev and risk squealing the tires, than to under-rev and risk stalling. I decided that, on the parade route, in front of my friends, the squealing tires would be cool, stalling would be lame. So, that was my plan - rev that sucker up, dump the clutch, and go.

When the big day came, I approached the parade with confidence. I had been driving the car around a little bit for a couple of days (occasionally a little faster than I should have), and I had no doubt that I could navigate the parade route without the spits and sputters and stalls that had been the source of my anxiety a couple of days earlier.

That confidence lasted for about 300 feet. That's when I faced my first start on hill. And it was a steep hill. As I sat there in that beautiful car, the parade crowd looking on, my girlfriend propped precariously on the boot with her feet on the back seat, I was terrified. If I didn't give it enough punch, I would stall, or worse, start the crazy jerking motion. If I dumped the clutch too fast, the girl would do a back-flip onto the tarmac. So, I did the safest thing I could think of. I put my foot down pretty hard on the accelerator and slowly lifted the clutch.

This was, perhaps the slowest and loudest way of starting on a hill, but at least it wasn't catastrophic. It was noisy, but it worked! Off we went again, slowly following the rest of the parade in front of us. I had done it! I had conquered the hill...the first of *many* hills.

And each hill I faced, I used the same over-revving technique. And every time, though it wasn't very graceful, I managed to get the car going and not dump the girl.

Unfortunately, about half way through the parade, my driving technique began to take its toll on the clutch. Something started to smell funny. I started seeing a little bit of smoke. I didn't think much of it at first, but then it kept getting worse and worse, and those over-revved hill starts became harder and harder to execute.

By the time we made it into the stadium, what had been a beautiful red classic muscle car with a pretty girl on the back had turned into a noisy cloud of smoke with a perturbed girl on the back and a red-faced guy in the driver's seat. I remember stopping that car, helping her down, and then driving off to park the poor thing and let it rest. The happiest moment of the evening was when I finally got to park that car and turn off the engine.

That was the most stressful parade I've ever experienced. I was driving an unfamiliar vehicle through throngs of people who had certain expectations, and with someone I was really

close to sitting behind me, sensing that maybe I wasn't going to be able to pull off what she expected me to pull off.

Today, we're starting a new series called *Good God*, and I want to take a look at a little parade Jesus was part of. One which, in some ways, is not all that different from my teenage homecoming experience. I've titled this talk, "Good News is Coming."

But before I go any further, let me pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

The story of Jesus' homecoming is told in all four of what we call the gospels - the biblical accounts of Jesus' life - but we're going to hone in today on the story as it's told in the book of Matthew - the first book in the New Testament. In Matthew, chapter 21, starting in verse 1, it says this:

*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."
This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

*"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 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!"
When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"
The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."
Matthew 21:1-11*

Now, there are some interesting things going on here, but let me give you a little bit of the geography.

Jesus was coming toward Jerusalem, most likely from the city of Bethany, where his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived. He had probably spent the Sabbath day at their home, then headed down through what's called the Kidron Valley, then back uphill toward Jerusalem. And on the way, as they headed down from the Mount of Olives, Jesus made a strange request (as he was prone to do).

He said, "Go into that village there, and you'll find a donkey and a colt tied up. Bring them to me." Now, it's not really clear whether Jesus had pre-arranged with someone there to borrow these animals, or if Jesus just knew they would be there, or how this went down, but the real point to be noted here is that Jesus was borrowing these animals. For one, he wasn't stealing them! But also, he was borrowing them because he didn't have any of his own.

This should have been a clue to his followers that this trip to Jerusalem was going to be a little different. You see, Jesus went to Jerusalem all the time, and he didn't typically ride a donkey (because he didn't have one). Instead, he normally walked. It was a difficult trek, but one Jesus made all the time. He could have easily done so again, but instead, he asked for this donkey.

And whether pre-arranged or prophetic or just spur of the moment, we should recognize the role that the animals' owner plays in this story. Jesus is trying to accomplish something, and he looks to this person to provide the animals for his purposes. What if the guy had said no?

You know, one of our great privileges in life is when God asks us to partner with him in what he's doing. In this case, Jesus could have probably just made a donkey and a colt materialize out of thin air, but instead, he borrowed some from this willing person. He invited someone else into the process, to contribute in a way they were capable of contributing.

And he does that to us, too. You know, it's easy to look at a church fundraising drive or a request to borrow a vehicle or something like that - it's easy to say, "Man, I don't want to be taken advantage of. That's *my* stuff." And no, you don't want to be taken advantage of, but let me tell you, one of the most freeing things you'll ever do is to make the shift from "That's my stuff. That's my money. That's my whatever," to "Everything I have belongs to God, and he can use it any way he wants."

That's what this donkey owner did. He offered his possessions for the use of Jesus.

You know, back in the U.S., before we moved here, Melody, Lucy, Ellie, and I lived for several months in a guest house owned by a generous family in the Houston area. This family had built the guest house specifically for the purpose of housing missionaries, pastors, and the like - people in need of temporary housing during home visits or transitional times.

And they offered the house free of charge - they wouldn't let us pay them for anything - and they continue to offer the house to others now that we're gone. For us, it was an incredible answer to prayer. It was God working on our behalf to provide a place for us to stay. But for the family who owns the house, it was an exercise in saying yes to God - to saying, "Yes, we could probably rent this house out. It's a nice place. But instead, whatever we have, including this guest house, belongs to God, and we will allow him to use it for his purposes."

You know, this church only exists because of people who have agreed in that kind of way to allow their resources and possessions to be used by God. Our meeting place, our equipment, my family's living expenses have all come about as a result of people giving sacrificially and willingly. These are people who, in some cases, don't have much, but what they have, they offer to God. These are people, many of whom who regularly give 10-15% of their income to their local church, but still give generously to help this church.

I want to take this opportunity to encourage you to do the same. You know, we're never going to just pound you about money around here. But it does take money to get stuff done, and I want to encourage you to give generously to the work God is doing here. This is not money that lines anyone's pockets. In fact, my salary is currently paid from outside donations. Every shilling you give here goes right back into the work of this church, so I can say, without reservation, give generously, give lavishly. We have a lot of work to do here in Nakuru and beyond, so let's get to it.

Like the guy whose donkeys Jesus used, commit yourself to giving of what you have for God's purposes. Say yes to God and his plans, and watch how he uses you and your stuff.

So, Jesus tells his guys to get these donkeys and Matthew inserts a little aside here. In verses 4 and 5, we're told:

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

*"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.'"*
Matthew 21:4-5

This is a quote from the book of Zechariah. Zechariah was a Jewish prophet that lived about 500 years before Jesus. And he had prophesied some things about the Messiah - the one who would come to save the world. And this is one of the things he had prophesied - that the Messiah, the new king of Israel, would arrive "gentle and riding on a donkey."

Now, at the time, a donkey wasn't an unusual form of transportation, even for important people like dignitaries and judges. However, most kings, and certainly most revolutionaries didn't like to arrive "gentle and riding on a donkey." They liked to ride into town on war horse, ready for battle, exhibiting their might. But here comes Jesus on a donkey.

This is an interesting way to come into the city. And it's not what people were expecting. They were hoping for someone more like Judah Maccabee, the Jewish revolutionary leader and general who had overthrown the Greeks two hundred years prior to Jesus. Judah Maccabee was a military hero, a great conqueror. When he came to town, he did so with gusto - with power and authority. Jesus came...on a donkey.

This was different.

Jesus was coming into town, being bowed down to, people were shouting and dancing. But Jesus wasn't in the same kind of celebratory mood. They were awaiting his revolution - waiting for him to overthrow the occupying Roman forces, but Jesus, as he rode into town on that donkey, surrounded by worshipers, wasn't in party mode. In the book of Luke, chapter 19, we're told:

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.

Luke 19:41-42

Theologian N.T. Wright captures the scene remarkably well. He says:

The crowd went wild as they got nearer. This was the moment they'd been waiting for. All the old songs came flooding back, and they were singing, chanting, cheering and laughing. At last their dreams were going to come true.

But in the middle of it all their leader wasn't singing. He was in tears. Yes, their dreams were indeed coming true. But not in the way they were imagining.

He was not the king they expected. Not like the monarchs of old, who sat on their jewelled and ivory thrones, dispensing their justice and wisdom. Nor was he the great warrior-king some had wanted. He didn't raise an army and ride to battle at its head. He was riding on a donkey. And he was weeping, weeping for the dream that had to die, weeping for the sword that would pierce his supporters to the soul. Weeping for the kingdom that wasn't coming as well as the kingdom that was.

The kingdom that wasn't coming and the kingdom that was. You see, Jesus knew that ultimately, what was going to happen in Jerusalem - his arrest, trial, death, and then

resurrection - was really good news. But it wasn't the news the people were looking for. So he wept for them, because he knew they didn't get it. They were looking for a warrior instead of a peacemaker. They were looking for someone to fight for them instead of one who would die for them.

Still, the crowd was undeterred. This group of people so desperate for a king, many of whom had witnessed Jesus healing people and heard the wisdom and authority of his teaching, they wanted a king so badly that they were willing to overlook his "humble king" bit. They were ready to enthrone him then and there.

Matthew 21, Verse 8:

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!"

Matthew 21:8-9

Here comes the king! "Hosanna!" The word hosanna means "save us now." By this point, it had become a kind of general shout of praise or acclaim, but the meaning of the word was "save us now." They were shouting ancient phrases that had been shouted at other savior figures. They likely shouted these same kind of things at Judah Maccabee, the warring general.

They were convinced that this whole gentle, humble, meek thing was a ruse. Jesus was going to save them, to overthrow the Romans, and to establish the sovereign kingdom of Israel again.

And it wasn't just the ignorant masses who believed this. Some of Jesus' closest followers - his closest friends - thought that's what he was up to as well. They were looking for Jesus to save them from their national enemy, but he was looking to save them from something much greater.

Have you ever been that wrong about God? Like, you asked him for something that you thought was the fix for your problems, and he answered you in a way that was completely different from what you expected - what you asked for - but he *did* answer, and he answered with the *real* fix for your *real* need?

A loved one gets sick and you pray for healing - you ask God to restore the sick body of that person. You think that's the fix. But sometimes God doesn't heal them. Sometimes they get

worse. And maybe God is saying, “You know, their sickness is not the problem that needs fixing.” And this is tough, because, like the crowds in Jerusalem, sometimes we have a hard time seeing beyond our short-term problems.

When my friend is sick, I don’t want to think about the larger issues of faith and dependence on God, of the long-term work of God’s kingdom, or of my role in taking the broken things of this world and bringing them to restoration. I just want my friend to get better. I’ll get to that other stuff later.

But sometimes God looks at me and says, “No, you’ll get to that stuff now. And you’ll do so with renewed enthusiasm.” It’s hard to walk that road, but sometimes, we aren’t given a choice. Yet, when we lean into God - when we trust that he knows what we need even better than we know what we need - he has proven himself over and over again.

In the book of Ephesians, we’re told that God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” He fixes things we didn’t know were broken. He restores things we didn’t know had been destroyed. He meets the needs we didn’t know we had. He far exceeds our expectations of him time and time again.

From the beginning of time until now, the story of humanity and of our God leans in one direction. It leans toward the Good God. Sure, there are trials and challenges, there’s brokenness, there’s evil in the world, but ultimately, the Good God saves and restores. He does it in the little moments in our lives, and he does it in the big moments in history.

You may not always feel like that’s true. You may feel like the darkness is winning. But remember this, the darkness will not ultimately win. God will win, and he will win for you. But his ways are different than your ways. His purposes are higher. His methods don’t always make sense to us. But his heart is true. His motives are pure. His love is real. And he’s coming.

Jesus is the Good God that has come, is coming, and will come. He came to those first century Jews and many of them didn’t recognize him. He is coming to you and I every day in ways that we sometimes fail to notice. And he will come again one day, in a way that everyone will take notice of, and he will make things right in this world. The Good News is coming.

And he’s asking us to join him. I don’t have a donkey or a colt, but what I do have, I give to Jesus, and I trust that he can do something better with it than I ever could. Will you join me?

I’m going to close today with a time of personal response. And there are 4 ways we would ask you to consider responding:

1. Singing

We're going to sing a few songs that help us reflect on God's love.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything - maybe you heard something today that made you think, or maybe you or someone you know has a physical, emotional, spiritual, or other need.

Whatever the case, if you would like someone to pray with you, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember him. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us. Over here, we have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

Closing Prayer