

March 29, 2026 – Matthew 21:1-17

The crowds lined the road. They laid their cloaks on the ground. They waved branches in their hands. And their voices rose together in a single cry: *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

Our school children led us in singing those words a few minutes ago, just as the children of Jerusalem led the crowds two thousand years ago. Out the mouths of infants and nursing babies – preschoolers and kindergarteners – you have prepared praise. And they are indeed wonderful words of praise.

But they're not just random words. They're not empty excitement. Every word, every phrase that the people cried out that day in Jerusalem is loaded with meaning. Centuries of promise, of longing, of prophecy, of hope compressed into three important sentences as Jesus rides into Jerusalem.

The funny thing is that we might assume that the people of Jesus' day understood those words better than we do. Hosanna is a Hebrew word, after all. We don't even speak Hebrew. They did! Of course they understood what they were saying!

And yet, for all their shouting, I don't think they did. Everything they said was absolutely correct. Perfectly quoted from scripture. Inspired by the Holy Spirit. Worth recording in scripture once again. It was completely true. But they were shockingly oblivious to that truth.

So, this morning, we have an opportunity to understand what those three sentences mean better than the people who actually said them in the first place. Because in those cries, the Holy Spirit teaches us exactly who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

We start with the first one: “Son of David.” Now, this sounds like it might just be an honorific title. A way of saying that Jesus is kinda like King David. Just as important as him. But it goes way beyond that. Son of David is a confession of faith. A Messianic confession.

God made a promise to David long ago. In 2 Samuel 7, He swore that one of David's descendants would sit on his throne forever. Not for a generation. Not for a dynasty that would rise and fall like all the kingdoms of the earth. Forever. It would be an eternal kingdom.

The prophets picked up that promise and expanded upon it. Isaiah spoke of a shoot from the stump of Jesse. Jeremiah declared that a righteous Branch of David's tree would reign as king. Ezekiel described the Lord coming to his people as a shepherd-king just like David, who would gather and care for His people.

The “Son of David” wasn't merely a biological descendant. He wasn't merely a guy with similar characteristics. He was the fulfillment of prophecy. The King in whom all of God's promises would be realized. So when the crowds call Jesus the “Son of David,” they're saying: This is Him. This is the King we have been waiting for.

But what kind of king did they expect? A king like David, probably. A warrior. A liberator. One who would drive out the Romans, restore political independence, and reestablish the glory of Israel.

They're not wrong to call Jesus “Son of David.” But they misunderstand the nature of His reign. Because this Son of David doesn't ride in on a warhorse. He comes on a donkey. Gentle and humble, as the prophet Zechariah foretold.

This is a different kind of kingship. Not a king who conquers by the sword, but a king who conquers by suffering. Not a king who destroys his enemies, but a king who dies for them. Not a king who establishes an earthly throne, but one who ascends to a cross.

And this is where the tension begins. Because we, like the crowds, want a king. But, quite often, we want the wrong kind of king. We want relief from temporary circumstances. We want solutions to visible problems. We want strength, success, vindication.

But Christ comes to address something deeper. He comes for sin. He comes for death. He comes for the power of the devil. He comes for you and your salvation.

Then they cry, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.*" These words come directly from Psalm 118. And that psalm isn't incidental. Not only is it a psalm traditionally sung at the Passover, coming just a few days later. It's also one of the great Messianic psalms, filled with anticipation of God's saving work.

Psalm 118 calls the Lord's Messiah "*a gate of righteousness*" into the Lord's house. One who makes us righteous by entering through Him. And for that reason, He has become our salvation.

And yet, he'll be a stone that the builders reject. He'll be cast aside, dismissed, and condemned by sinful men. Yet, despite all of that, the Lord will use him as the cornerstone of his entire saving plan. Which is, as the psalm itself admits, entirely the Lord's doing and a marvelous act of divine grace.

Such that when we see that marvelous work with our own eyes – when the women and the disciples see Jesus die on the cross, when they see the empty tomb – they can't help but think, "*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*"

You see, Psalm 118 is talking about Jesus' death and resurrection. And when the crowds cry, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,*" the blessedness of he who comes in the name of the Lord is utterly different than anything they are expecting. They're expecting him to be blessed with strength and power and victory over Rome.

But, in reality, He's blessed with obedience. With suffering. With laying down His life. He comes in the name of the Lord to accomplish the Lord's will. And it is the will of the Lord that the Son should be rejected, that He should suffer, that He should die, and that He should rise again.

This is the day the Lord has made. Not the day of triumphal entry alone, but the day of crucifixion and the day of resurrection. This is the coming of the Lord's salvation. Not in a simple parade through the streets of Jerusalem, but in sacrifice and new life.

And finally, the cry that frames it all: "Hosanna." We often treat this as a word of praise. And it is. But that's not its origin.

"Hosanna" comes from the Hebrew: "Save us, we pray." It's a plea. A desperate cry for deliverance. And it's also from Psalm 118, just before the other line the crowds quote: "*Save us, we pray, O Lord!*" Hosanna isn't about celebration. It's about supplication. Save us. Rescue us. Deliver us.

The crowds cry it out as Jesus enters Jerusalem. But again, what do they mean? Probably, save us from Rome. Save us from government oppression. Save us from our human enemies.

And Jesus hears their cry. But He answers it in a better way than they ever imagined. Because the real enemy isn't Rome. It isn't evil governments or corporations or criminals or any other power of this earth.

The real enemy is sin. The real enemy is death. The real enemy is the devil. And these enemies can't be overthrown with swords or politics or earthly power. They require something else. They require a divine sacrifice.

So the One to whom they cry "Hosanna" – "Save us" – will provide exactly that. Not by taking up a throne. But by taking up a cross. Not by shedding the blood of others. But by shedding His own blood.

That's the great irony of Palm Sunday. The crowds shout "Hosanna!" on Sunday and by Friday they'll be crying "Crucify Him!" They want salvation, but not His salvation. They want a king, but only a king of this earth.

But Christ won't be that kind of Savior. He won't treat the symptoms while the real disease goes untouched. The problem we face is one of sin, death, and the grave, so that's where He goes. All the way into the grave. Because that's what it takes to answer the prayer: "Hosanna." Save us.

The Son of David reigns, not from a palace, but from the cross. The One who comes in the name of the Lord fulfills that mission, not in triumphal power, but in obedient sacrifice. The One to whom we cry "Hosanna" answers, not with temporary relief, but with eternal salvation.

Even though the crowds misunderstand Him, He still comes. Even though they would soon reject Him, He still goes to the cross. Even though we misunderstand Him, He still saves.

He didn't wait for the crowds to have perfect faith or perfect understanding. He came anyway, for those who cry out without even knowing what they really need. And so He comes for you this day as well. Amen.