

“Dawn of a New Era”  
Matthew 21:1-17

In our lifetime there have been a number of events that have brought an end to an old way of thinking and living and began a new era. For example, on July 16, 1945: the nuclear age began with the detonation of the first atomic bomb in the desert of New Mexico. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court, in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, ushered in the age of desegregation in our public schools. I think you can argue that the age of personal computers began the day Paul Allen and Bill Gates founded Microsoft on April 4, 1975. And of course, there's September 11, 2001, when Islamic terror came to our country and with it all the changes that have taken place in our lives, especially when we travel by airplane. Each of these events ended an old way of doing things and ushered in a new era. On Palm Sunday, nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus entered Jerusalem declaring a new beginning. He declared Himself the king ushering in a new kingdom, a new order of truth, a new order of reality in human history. That event did not produce a new era in terms of technology, education, or the military. However, with His kingdom life would never be the same, because He began a new order in the realm of the spirit. In Jesus' kingdom, we will think differently, we will live differently. Please note that Jesus arranged what happened. What happened this day was not a spontaneous, unplanned outburst of excitement on the part of the people, in which Jesus gets caught up. No, it was all carefully planned by Jesus, as He deliberately made a very public and open statement about Himself. There were two ways that Jesus declared He is the king ushering in a new kingdom. Both of them are Jewish. Jesus was a Jew, and He was fulfilling promises God made to the Jews about the coming king. You may say, “That's nice for the Jews, but what does it have to do with me, a non-Jew, 2000 years later?” We'll see that these promises Jesus fulfilled are bigger than the Jews and their religion. Jesus presents Himself as the king of the Jews, but also as the king whose reign and rule is universal; it extends to everyone, to you and to me.

First, Jesus declared He was beginning a new era by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. He did this to fulfill a promise God had made through His prophet Zechariah 520 years before. Matthew tells us of this prophecy in verses four and five: “This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ‘Say to the daughter of Zion’ [that is, the people of Jerusalem], ‘See, your king is coming to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” To us, a donkey has no significance. It's a farm animal, a beast of burden not nearly as glamorous as a horse. But to the Jews, the donkey had tremendous significance, because it was the way their leaders traveled. When King David appointed his son Solomon to be his successor, he had his son taken out to be anointed on his personal mule. By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus very deliberately presented Himself as the king of the Jews. But in doing this He was saying, “I come to you gently, humbly and peacefully. I'm not coming on a war horse, I'm not coming with a sword in my hand to capture my city. I am not coming to conquer you, but to convict you. I am not coming to slay you, but to save you. Today is the day of salvation.” The reason I say this is that the whole of Zechariah 9:9 says, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” On Palm Sunday, Jesus was presenting to His people the one thing they needed—the way to get right with God, the way to be saved and accepted and welcomed into God's kingdom of peace and hope and meaning and joy. You might think, the day of salvation may be here for the Jews, but where's the universal application? Let's look at the rest of the Zechariah passage King Jesus fulfilled that day. Verse 10 of Zechariah 9 says, “He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.” Jesus' kingship is certainly Jewish, but it's universal, too. It applies; it has impact on everyone.

Second, Jesus declared a new era was beginning when He cleansed the Temple. Verse 12 says, “Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables and the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.” To explain His violent action, He quoted Isaiah 56:7:

“It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a robber’s den.’” Jesus’ words jump out at us here for at least two reasons. One is that Isaiah 56 is talking about the coming kingdom of God. By quoting this verse, Jesus was saying, “I am the king of this promised kingdom.” The other significant point is that again, this coming kingdom is not exclusively Jewish, it’s for everyone. Listen to Isaiah 56:6-8: “And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve Him, to love the name of the Lord and to worship Him...these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer...For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” When Jesus chooses a prophetic word to interpret His cleansing of the Temple, He selects one that underscores the fact that He is the coming king, and the kingdom He has come to establish is “for all nations,” for all people.

A new era was inaugurated on Palm Sunday, an era of righteousness and salvation to everyone who will receive and believe in and give their allegiance to Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and King. The king and His kingdom were established in the events of the last week of Jesus’ life, as He is betrayed, arrested, tried, and crucified on the cross. The king and His kingdom were established in authority and power with Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday.

Our celebration of Palm Sunday looks back to that great day, to those great events, but it also looks ahead, because we know that Jesus is going to come again to usher in and establish a new and very different era in the future. Revelation 19:11-16 tells us that when Jesus comes again, He will not come on a donkey, but on a white horse. He will come to bring judgment and to make war. The armies of heaven will follow Him. With a sharp sword He will strike down the nations. This is the name He will be known by: King of kings and Lord of lords. The first time Jesus came, He came with gentleness and humility. When He comes again, He’ll come to wage war against His enemies, against all who are not His followers, against all who have not sworn allegiance to Him as King, Savior, and Lord. He will defeat all His foes, but that’s not all. In Matthew 25, Jesus promised that with His second coming He will separate in a final judgment His friends and His foes. His friends will be welcomed to eternal life, His foes will be cursed and punished and cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his followers. Obviously, the way Jesus presented Himself in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is very different from the way He’ll present Himself the second time. Until then, Jesus’ rule is creating a season of salvation in world history during which men, women, boys, and girls can still switch sides and be saved from His coming wrath, judgment, and condemnation. The question I pose to you is this: Whose side are you on? This season of salvation is one that is gentle, forgiving, patient, and loving, but it will not last forever. Jesus is ready to save all who receive Him as Savior, Lord, and King. Has He saved you? Have you received Him? If you have, if you do call Him Savior, Lord, and King, let me ask you, does your life show it? Does Jesus Christ rule in your life, your thoughts, your words, and your actions? Does He rule in the way in which you use your time, talents, and the resources with which He’s blessed you? Would your spouse or a friend or colleague say about you: “Yes, Jesus Christ is in charge of his / her life”? If you have not been saved, if you have not received Jesus Christ as your Savior, Lord, and King, know that there is still time, even this morning, to renounce your allegiance to self or worldly success or money or material possessions or physical pleasure or whatever else rules you in the place of Jesus Christ. Anyone or anything else that rules you in the place of Jesus Christ makes you His enemy. If you do not acknowledge and receive Christ into your life before He comes again, it will be too late to switch sides, too late to be saved from wrath, judgment, and eternal punishment. This is the era, today is the day of salvation. You can bow and receive Christ as your King and give Him your allegiance, be on His side with the salvation, the life, the victory, and the joy that last forever. Jesus came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to usher in a new era, the era of salvation. It will not last forever. Now is the time to be saved.