

A King on a Donkey

5-DAY HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL

Based on the Palm Sunday sermon from Matthew 21:1–11, this five-day devotional guides you through Holy Week with open eyes and an unhurried heart. Each day invites you to slow down, sit with the story, and discover what it truly means to follow a King who chose the hard road – for you.



The King Who Arrives Differently

"Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey.'" — Matthew 21:5

If you were designing an entrance for a king, a donkey would not be your first choice. You might imagine a powerful warhorse, armor gleaming, crowds parting in awe and a little bit of fear. That is how power usually announces itself — with force, with spectacle, with unmistakable dominance. And yet, on that first Palm Sunday, Jesus chose something altogether different. He chose humble. He chose gentle. He chose the road that looked nothing like victory but was, in fact, the most triumphant journey ever taken.

There is something quietly stunning about that image. The crowd is wild with energy, tearing branches from trees, throwing their cloaks on the road, shouting themselves hoarse. And in the middle of all that noise and fervor, Jesus rides in — calm, sober, purposeful. He is not caught up in the hype. He knows exactly where this road leads, and He rides forward anyway. Not in spite of what is coming, but toward it.

We often carry an image of strength that looks like control, certainty, and an easy path forward. But Jesus reframes strength entirely. Choosing the donkey was not weakness. It was the most intentional act of power imaginable — power poured out in love rather than wielded in dominance. This week, we are invited to reconsider what we think we know about strength, about victory, and about the kind of King we have actually been given.

Reflection Questions

- Where in your life are you expecting God to show up in a way that looks like power, but He may be arriving quietly and gently instead?
- What assumptions do you carry about what a "victorious" faith should look like?
- How does Jesus riding on a donkey challenge or comfort you today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times I have wanted You to show up on a warhorse when You have always chosen the way of humility. Open my eyes this week to see You clearly — not the version I have constructed, but the King You truly are. Teach me that Your gentleness is not weakness but the most profound strength I will ever encounter. Amen.

The Crowd That Missed the Point

"The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'" — Matthew 21:9

There is something both beautiful and heartbreaking about the Palm Sunday crowd. Their enthusiasm was real. Their hope was genuine. They had heard the stories — the blind receiving sight, the dead raised, the sick healed — and now He was here, right in front of them. Of course they cheered. Of course they waved those branches and threw their cloaks into the road. Who wouldn't? And yet, there is something haunting about the scene when you hold it alongside what happens just days later.

The crowd was celebrating, but it is worth asking: what exactly were they celebrating? Many in that crowd were hoping for a political deliverer, a military leader who would overthrow Roman oppression and restore the glory of Israel. They wanted liberation, yes — but the kind they could see and touch and measure. They projected their deepest desires onto Jesus and cheered for the version of Him they had imagined rather than the One who was actually riding toward them.

It is easy to judge that crowd. But if we are honest with ourselves, we do this too. We cheer for Jesus when life is going well, when prayers are answered the way we hoped, when faith feels electric and momentum is building. We love the Hosanna moments. But when the road turns difficult, when the answer is not what we expected, when God seems quiet — we can find ourselves confused and even disappointed. This week, Holy Week invites us to love Jesus not just for what He might do for us, but for who He is and what He has already done.



Reflection Questions

- In what ways have you cheered for a version of Jesus that aligns with your own desires rather than His actual character and mission?
- When has God disappointed an expectation you held — and what did you discover about Him in that moment?
- What does it mean for you to love Jesus for who He is, not just what He provides?



Prayer

Gracious God, I confess that I sometimes love the idea of You more than I seek to truly know You. I come to You with my preferences, my plans, my timeline — and I ask You to fit inside them. Forgive me. This week, strip away my projections. Help me to see Jesus clearly, and to love Him for exactly who He is: my Savior, my Lord, and the King who chose the cross for me. Amen.

The Gift of Holy Week

"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." — Hebrews 12:2

We live in a world that loves quick fixes. We want the resolution without the process, the harvest without the planting, the resurrection without the death. And if we are not careful, we can approach Holy Week exactly that way — rushing from the palms on Sunday straight to the empty tomb on Easter morning, skipping everything in between. It is an understandable impulse. The middle of the story is heavy. It is uncomfortable. It asks something of us.

But the Church, in its deep and ancient wisdom, slows us down. Holy Week is not a liturgical formality or a relic of a bygone era. It is a gift. It is the gift of being allowed to stay with the story long enough for it to do something in us. Maundy Thursday invites us to the table — to the tender intimacy of Jesus washing feet, breaking bread, offering Himself. Good Friday holds us in the grief of the cross — the staggering reality that Love went all the way there, for us. And then, Holy Saturday, that quiet and aching space between death and resurrection that so many of us know in our own lives.

If we rush past the suffering, we miss what love actually looks like. Not a polished, convenient, abstract love — but a love that is costly. A love that is poured out. A love that does not flinch in the face of pain. Resurrection is real and glorious, but it means infinitely more when we have first sat at the foot of the cross and let the weight of Good Friday settle on us. Don't rush. Stay with the story this week. Let it find you.

Reflection Questions

- Is there a part of Holy Week you tend to skip — emotionally or spiritually? What might you be avoiding?
- Where in your own life are you in a "Holy Saturday" season — waiting between loss and hope?
- What would it mean for you to let the suffering of this week deepen your understanding of God's love?

Prayer

Lord, slow me down this week. When I want to rush to the empty tomb, remind me that the cross was not a detour — it was the destination of Your love. Help me to sit with the weight of what You endured and to let it break my heart in the most beautiful way. Give me the courage to stay with the story, because it is here that I begin to understand just how much You love me. Amen.

He Walks the Hard Road First

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." — Psalm 23:4

There are seasons in life when faith feels harder than it should. When relationships fracture and don't seem to mend. When health lingers in uncertainty. When grief stays far longer than anyone warned you it would. When you pray and pray and the silence feels deafening. In those moments, a quiet and corrosive thought can take root: that something must be wrong with you. That your faith is too small, your prayers too weak, your devotion too inconsistent. That God is working just fine for everyone else — just not for you.

The Palm Sunday sermon reminds us that this is not how Jesus operates. Jesus does not stand at a safe distance and call us to follow Him into suffering. He walks the hard road ahead of us, and for us. He enters Jerusalem knowing full well what awaits — the betrayal, the denial, the kangaroo court, the crown of thorns, the nails. He knows the details of every dark moment to come, and He keeps going. Not in spite of the suffering, but through it, and for the sake of those He loves.

When your road is hard, Jesus is not absent. He is not confused or disengaged. He has walked through the worst of it — the suffering, the abandonment, the death — and He is still, always, moving toward you. We are not saved by how perfectly we navigate the difficult roads. We are saved because the One who walked the hardest road first has made a way through. Whatever valley you are walking through today, you are not walking it alone. He is with you. He has been there before you. And He is leading you through.



Reflection Questions

- Is there a difficult road you are walking right now where you need to be reminded that Jesus has gone before you?
- Have you ever believed that a hard season meant God had abandoned you or that your faith was failing? How does Jesus's own journey challenge that belief?
- What does it mean to you personally that Jesus walks the hard road for you — not just alongside you?



Prayer

Jesus, I am grateful that You did not choose an easy road. I am grateful that when I walk through my own dark valleys, I am not charting new territory — You have been here. You have felt the weight of suffering, the sting of betrayal, the silence of abandonment. And You kept going — for me. Walk with me today. Walk ahead of me. Remind me that the hard road is not a sign of Your absence but the very place where Your presence is most real. Amen.

The King Who Comes for Us

"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." — 1 Corinthians 15:57

We have traveled far this week. We began with palm branches and the electric energy of a crowd that had no idea what it was cheering for. We sat with the haunting beauty of a King who chose a donkey. We let the weight of the cross settle on us, and we walked the hard road with the One who walks it first. And now we arrive at the truth that makes everything else possible: the King came for us. Not to impress us or make life comfortable. He came to defeat death and bring life.

This is not a story about power as the world understands it. It is a story about love so fierce and so committed that it would not stop at anything — not betrayal, not suffering, not even death. And this same Jesus — the One who rode on a donkey, who washed the disciples' feet, who hung on a cross, who rose from the dead — is the One who meets us here. Week after week, in the Word, in the bread and wine, in the water of baptism. He is not distant. He is still coming toward us.

As you prepare to celebrate Easter, carry this with you: the joy of the resurrection is not separate from Good Friday — it is made complete by it. The empty tomb means everything because the cross was real. And so we say, with full hearts: Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Thanks be to God.

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Reflection Questions

- How has this week of reflection changed or deepened the way you will celebrate Easter?
- Where do you most need to experience the resurrection hope of Jesus right now — in your relationships, your fears, your grief?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus did not come to impress you, but specifically to save you?

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You. Thank You for the donkey, for the table, for the cross, and for the empty tomb. Thank You for not rushing past the hard parts, and for inviting me to stay with the story this week. I come to Easter not with empty hands but with a heart that has sat at the foot of the cross and found You faithful. You are the King who came for me — and that changes everything. Alleluia. Amen.

- 📖 **Holy Week Services:** Don't rush to Easter alone. Come on **Maundy Thursday** and **Good Friday**. Stay with the story. The resurrection means more when we have first sat with the cross.