

Matthew 21:1–11: ¹Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵“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.’”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹⁰And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” ¹¹And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Hosanna! Save Us We Pray

INTRODUCTION

“Repent or you’re going to hell!” You’ve probably heard sermons like that back in the old days. Or, if you’re feeling guilty about something, maybe every sermon sounds like that, even in this age. Whatever the situation, sometimes we think that all God wants to do is send sinners to hell, which means God is a God whose anger must be appeased. So, if you think about it, the whole idea that people are saved by their good works comes from the belief that we need to satisfy this angry God with our good works or our offerings or our sacrifices. In other words, God puts up all kinds of barriers to salvation, and like an obstacle course runner, we need to overcome these obstacles to please this angry God.

But the thing is, it’s people who put up barriers to salvation, not God. God actually puts up barriers to damnation! On that first Advent of Christ, as He entered Jerusalem to shouts of

Hosanna! God was answering their prayer. There was Jesus, coming to save them, because that's what Hosanna means, "Save us, we pray!"

That's who God is—not the One who desires to condemn, but the One who desires to save.

So, on this first Sunday in Advent, let's reflect on the fact that God has overcome all kinds of barriers to answer your prayer for salvation, because He doesn't want to see any human being suffer eternal damnation.

In order to save you, God has to overcome all kinds of barriers that human beings put up to salvation: disobedient hearts, resistance against the Holy Spirit, rejection of His Word—but also His own righteous wrath against sin!

First, let's talk about God's righteous wrath against sin. Because God is righteously angry against sin, the instinct of the unbelieving heart is to portray God as a vengeful God. But God didn't put together a plan of damnation. He put together a plan of salvation—a plan He put together before He even created the world! God's plan of salvation is simply this: God's plan to satisfy His own righteous wrath against sin, Himself!

God could have said to sinful mankind, "I'm through with you," or, "You're on your own"—like we do with a child who is persistently disobedient. And He would have had every right to do so. But God loves His creation with a thoroughly endless love—and in that love, He doesn't want to see anyone die, much less to be damned.

So, the first barrier to damnation that God set into motion in the Garden of Eden was this: God Himself would satisfy His righteous judgment against sin by paying the price for sin Himself.

You see, though virtually all the world's religions ultimately put the appeasement of God in the hands of human beings, God knows that such an enterprise is futile. The Bible is very clear on this—and so is human experience—we are by nature sinful and unclean—something most people don't want to hear or believe, but something that's completely true. None of us is able to stop sinning—even for ten minutes! Like raccoons eating trash in the GEICO commercial—it's what we do! Try to say the Lord's Prayer just once without your mind wandering or being distracted.

God knows that the greatest barrier to salvation is the condemnation we deserve for our sins, so God has to overcome sin for us. And to do that, God became a human being—God became Man in Jesus. For only God can make right what billions of people have made wrong.

So, we begin Advent with the Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where God's plan of salvation had been unfolding for centuries. Jerusalem is the place where God built His Temple—where God makes contact with human beings to give them His grace. Jerusalem is the place where sacrifices are made—not because the sacrifices appeased an angry God, but because the bloody sacrifices looked ahead to God's own sacrifice by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross.

That's why Jesus says, "It is finished," as He dies on the cross—because God's work of redeeming sinners from His own wrath is completed in the sacrificial death of Jesus.

But Jesus enters Jerusalem facing more obstacles to salvation. He has to overcome hearts that are, by nature, disobedient. And here you see the miracle of faith—yes, the miracle of faith. For in order for hearts to believe, they must be changed—and Holy Spirit does that through the power of God's Word. Last Sunday, as we listened to Jesus on the cross, the heart of one thief

was changed—changed by the Words of Jesus. And to that new believer, Jesus said, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” No longer disobedience and unbelieving, but the thief now fully entrusts his life in the hands of His Savior.

And so you see in today’s Gospel reading, the disciples obey Jesus’ rather strange order to go into Bethphage where they will find a colt and its mother tied up, and to untie them both and bring them to Jesus. Think about that for a moment. Would you walk up to someone’s house and take their only mode of transportation because I told you to do it?

But here you see Jesus overcoming our natural tendency to disobey God so that God’s plan of salvation wouldn’t be derailed. Nothing was going to stop Jesus’ fulfilling what God had said through the prophet Zechariah: “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”

But then, of course, think about the owner of those two animals. Jesus told His disciples to say to that person, “‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” “At once”—those two little words imply that nothing is going to stop what Jesus had to do. This man obviously trusted Jesus and allowed the disciples to take his animals for Jesus’ use, without hesitation!

But as Jesus entered Jerusalem He faced more barriers to God’s plan of salvation. The religious leaders watched as Jesus’ words and actions were changing hearts and changing the whole religious landscape. That was a threat to their way of life and their control of the people.

But the thing is, what the Pharisees and Sadducees taught was leaving the people in their sins and leading the people to damnation. Earlier in His Galilean ministry, when Jesus saw the people at the mercy of their leaders, Matthew records, “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). And as Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem for this last time, Luke records that their

unbelief and their resistance to God's plan of salvation in Christ Jesus led Jesus to weep and say, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:41).

That's what false teaching does—it leads people away from God and into hell, like sheep without a shepherd—so God puts up His Word of Truth as a barrier to damnation. And there is Jesus, the ultimate Word of God in the flesh, seeking to save lost sheep.

The leaders of the Jews do their best to stop Jesus. They join forces to conspire against Him and kill Him—and get rid of this threat to their power and control.

But nothing can stop Jesus. For death is why He enters Jerusalem. The very thing the Jewish leaders want is the very thing that God must do—die for sin. The fear of betrayal and death is no barrier to salvation, for this is what Jesus was born to do. Rather than working against God, they play right into God's hand as Judas betrays Jesus into their hands, and they hand Jesus over to Pilate for execution.

The devil seems to have His way, but the death of Jesus on the cross is the completion of Christ's first advent—He came to die for you. He came to be God's satisfaction for sin. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to change hearts through His Word from unbelieving to believing, from disobedient to obedient. He came to fulfill God's plan of salvation and overcome all our barriers to salvation.

Conclusion

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, He entered to shouts of, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" The people really didn't know what they were saying. They were praying for salvation from the Romans. What

they received was so much better: salvation from sin.

Hosanna, save us we pray. And God has answered your prayer. He has overcome all the barriers you put up to His grace, so that you may have forgiveness and life and salvation in Christ Jesus. But not only does God give you His Son as a barrier to damnation, He gives you His Word that makes you wise unto salvation, and His Church that cradles you from font to grave in this salvation, His Holy Spirit, who creates in you life-changing faith in Jesus, and His Sacraments—the means through which Christ’s saving work comes to you.

Far from being closed, the gates of heaven are open to you, for God has prepared you for the next Advent of Christ, when Jesus comes to take you home.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.