

God Changes the Heart

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're preaching on the passage that Hannah read earlier in the worship service, Matthew 21:7-14. So today we're talking about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and I get the fortunate joy of talking about history without anybody interrupting me.

So Hannah and I have this agreement that when we're out to dinner with friends and someone wants to order a Coke and I start giving the history about Coca-Cola and how they actually are the ones who decided that Santa's coat would be red. Did you know that, by the way? Or going on and on and on, she puts her hand on my leg – stop now. So I get to talk a little bit about the history but anyway.

Today, I just want to say something very simple to you: the Lord sees what you're going through. He sees how stressful your life is. He sees the challenges that you're facing: sickness, maybe some of you are going through relational issues, financial trouble, maybe some of you are even possibly looking at death in the eye, or you just lost a loved one. And can I just say something that all of us could probably agree with and that is this: life is too difficult to handle on your own. It's too much. It's too, too much.

And the purpose of a church is that we incarnation ally experience God's love through other people, but also a life of faith, a big part of that

is handing over this stuff that people can't help us with – to God. And trusting that no matter how bleak it looks, how bad it looks, how terrible it feels, how isolated you feel in whatever it is you're going through, trust it to God. Trust it to your friend Jesus, and just believe that wherever you are now, that God can turn it around for good.

When we get into positions where we feel put into a corner, we feel like there's no way out, my temptation is to power up; to get control. Get control of the situation. And that is the opposite, usually, of what God wants us to do. Typically in the kingdom of God, we learn that His is the opposite. That instead of getting closed fist, instead of getting defensive, instead of getting bitter, angry, instead of letting unforgiveness get in our hearts, we hold it loosely. Doesn't mean we stop hoping, doesn't mean we stop trying, but we hold it before the Lord and we say God, I don't understand this. You can even say something like God I don't understand how you can call yourself loving and let this happen to me. And watch if you're that honest with the Lord, very quickly He can do something special in your life, and reveal His love to you in a new way that will help you endure whatever trial it is you're going through.

So life is too much to do alone, and too much to handle on your own. So much of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ is getting into the rhythm of Jesus' yoke where you hand these things to Him. Whether it's your future. How many are worried about your future? Worried about

going back to work tomorrow? Or worried about going to the doctor?

Look your future, your sin, your glory, your achievements, your failures, your family, your death, give it to the Lord and He'll give you something better.

This is the kind of God we serve and this is what it means to live in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is what Jesus was proclaiming. It is the thesis of His sermon – every sermon, every message is that the son of man has come to enter into His kingdom, the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God means that everything is under God's prevue, its under His order, under His command, under His blessing, and that is what it means to live as a disciple, and that's how you're saved. You are saved by entering the kingdom of God; by submitting your life to Jesus Christ.

In America, we don't think in kingdom terms. It's hard for us to think of the kingdom of anybody, right? I am king Bobby! Right? With my chair, and my iced tea, and my baseball. This is my TV. This is my house, right? So this is a very American way of thinking and doing things. We're very independent people and God blessed that. I love being American. I love living in America. I love not having some tyrant over me.

But if you were to go to somewhere that's still a kingdom, maybe England, for example, everything belongs to her majesty, right? It's her majesties road, her majesties courthouse, her majesties gate. Everything belongs to the queen. And so British people have this way of thinking;

the ships have HMS on every single boat – her majesties service. And it's this idea that everything is in the kingdom of the queen.

And this is how the thinking changes for a disciple. This is God's house, these are God's kids, I am God's servant, my parents are God's, this sickness is God's, this body is God's, my future is God's, my life is God's. He cares more about my troubles than I do and He is strong enough to care for them.

And so living in the kingdom of God means when we are tempted, and this is a big temptation for Bobby Schuller, when things get bad and we want to power up, we want to control others; we call manipulating leadership. That's something I've done before. It's time to let go and to trust our lives and our circumstances with faith to Jesus Christ.

I believe most of all this is the core message that we see through Jesus and through the whole Bible, but it's so clearly exemplified in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is so interesting when you understand the background of that story of what Jesus is thinking versus what everybody else is thinking. And how ultimately the triumphal entry is probably the biggest single event in Jesus' life that leads to His crucifixion because He does not allow people to push Him or make Him what they want Him to be.

See Jesus' day, everybody wants Jesus to be a general, a military leader, and Jesus is not there to create war, He is not there to fight Romans, He is there to touch the heart of His people, the Jews; to invite

them and everyone else through them into the kingdom of God, into a new covenant.

So in Matthew 21, before we get there, there's this long build up. I feel like so much of the Old Testament just builds up to this one week of Passover that we call Holy Week. It's this one week where this amazing stuff happens and the whole universe alters course. But we see in the Old Testament just this constant power struggle in the Middle East of people powering up, and then being corrupted and hurting everybody. It begins with Cain. Cain is the first murderer. Powers up, kills his brother, and from there goes east and cities are built, and all of these things become these power structures of people killing, murdering, conquering one another, and then even historically you see all of these incredible empires in the Bible interacting with this nation of Israel, which is right in the middle of three continents. You have Africa, Asia, Europe and then Israel is kind of this cog in the middle of a wheel. It's a tough place to be.

And so here are these Jewish people, and there's always; people are always wanting to go through Israel to conquer each other, and they just conquer the Jews on the way. And so you see first you have the Acadian/Assyrian Empire. Brutal. They existed two thousand years and many of us have never even heard of the Assyrian Empire because when they were destroyed, they were so evil that when they were destroyed, the Babylonians and Scythians who conquered them tried to obliterate their history because they were so utterly evil. And then in turn, ended up

copying them. And you see, actually, even to the empires today, that every empire has copied the method of the Assyrian Empire.

So you have first the Assyrians, and then they're beat by the Babylonians, and then there's the Egyptians come up, and all of these empires keep conquering Israel. And then every once in a while, you get a king that will rise up, and now Israel will be independent, and you think oh this is a good king. Finally! You've got a good king that doesn't murder and pillage everyone and kill everyone, and then they do that. And then even the best king.. so it's just like conquered, and then a new king, and then another king, and then this kingdom and that kingdom, and they're all evil. They're all evil. And they're all greedy. And they're all reckless. And they all fall. And they all fall.

And even when you have these great kings, like even the really good ones, the first ones that come to mind are like David or Solomon, they were honestly pretty bad, too. The only difference between David and Solomon and like everybody else, is they repented of their sin. Every other king just went to the grave shaking his fist at God. But I mean David murdered. David was an adulterer. When David was given a choice to either go into hiding for his sin, or to allow a curse to fall on his own people at the end of the Old Testament book of David's life, he chooses put it on the people!

So what we see in the Old Testament is the story of kingdoms rising, evil kingdoms rising, and even rising in the name of God, but

when men get power, the power corrupts. And so goes the old phrase – power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And this is what we have.

And so when you read the Bible then there's this huge gap where after the Babylonian exile and the return to Israel, there's this big gap where people who read the Bible don't know what happens between then and the gospel. And there's this amazing story. There's a guy, you might have heard of him named Alexander the Great, a Macedonian. That's how you pronounce it, by the way, who conquers pretty much the whole world as this young guy, and then dies and all of his land is split up between his generals.

And one of these generals is Seleucid, and he's the one that controls the Middle East and it's in his prevue that Israel falls. And in the Seleucid Empire, these Greeks sort of take the Jewish state and they take the temple and they turn it into a pagan temple, they fill it with all of this pagan symbolism, and the Jews are furious, right? And out of this group emerges this Braveheart-like character named Judas Maccabeus. Anybody seen Braveheart? One of the best movies ever, right? Just is so awesome to see little guys beat up big guys.

So you got Judas Maccabeus, his father's this priest, and he and his brother Shimon they raise up this little army and through guerilla warfare and all this stuff, end up kicking out the Seleucid Empire. They create their own Israeli state called the Hasmonean Dynasty. I think that

this point, Hannah's hand would be on my leg. But I'm going to keep going!

And in this thing called that Hasmonean Dynasty, and there's this amazing scene, and this is important, it's relevant to this passage, where Shimon Maccabeus, this great priest in warrior and his brother Judah, they enter into the city of Jerusalem and everybody is saying Hosanna, and they're putting palm fronds on the ground, which is the symbol of the Hasmonean Dynasty, and it's the symbol of the Hasmonean family. This is the coin from that dynasty, and what's right in the middle? The palm frond, right? That is the symbol of an independent Jewish state; free of paganism, a true Jewish theocracy, and this is an amazing story, right?

And so you think great, and they lived happily ever after. Well you thought wrong. Because every single thing that happens in the Old Testament happens to the Hasmonean's: civil war, Judas and Shimon die, and then there's just this fight over who has the power in these two groups of in-fighting and assassination and betrayal, and it all crumbles because men want power.

And it's into that that one side in the civil war calls up their friends, the Roman Empire, and they say hey, can you help us beat the other side? And Rome says no problem, we'll help you, and then they come on in, and then they win, and then they say okay thanks, Rome,

you can leave now. And they said actually no. You guys make good food. We're staying. And that's how Rome enters into the story.

And so now you've got this scenario where there's this story, Judas Iscariot for sure is probably named after Judas Maccabeus, this great patriotic hero that lived 180 years before this story we're in now, and there's just all of this legend surrounding it, and myth, and it has become such a part of the national identity that we kicked Alexander the Great out, we can kick Rome out. We just need a Shimon Maccabaeus/ Judas Maccabeus type leader, and we can do this.

Jesus comes into this world preaching. You've got Jesus preaching the kingdom of God. Well what does that sound like? To contemporary ears, it's a new government. It's a new ruler. And yet Jesus is crystal clear that this is a different kind of kingdom. That in the kingdom of God, the last will be first, the first will be last. In the kingdom of God, the wise become foolish and children become wise. In the kingdom of God, in order to lead, you must serve. In the kingdom of God, if you want life, you must lose it.

So there's this strange thing where it's the opposite where you overcome evil, not with evil, but you overcome evil with good. And over and over Jesus is trying to teach the rules of this kingdom, that you enter this kingdom through this one word, faith. Faith is just a fancy religious word for trust; that you have this thing that God gives you, it's

a gift from God, that as you exercise this you're able to enter into His kingdom.

And so there's all these times where Jesus is inviting His disciples to let go and to stop powering up and to enter God's kingdom through faith whether it's the storm on the sea, and they're all freaking out, and He says just trust me. Or with the feeding of the five thousand, they're in the middle of nowhere and there's thousands of people, and they have no food, and they're a long, long ways from an In and Out, and they just don't know what they're going to do. And Jesus says, here, just look at this boy. This boy has two loaves and five fish. We're going to feed everybody with this, right?

Or whether it's the time in Luke chapter 10 when Jesus sends out His disciples to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God, and He says don't take anything with you. Don't take a sack, don't take an extra cloak, don't take a sword, just go and watch. And at the end of Luke, He says remember that? Did you lack anything? And they said at no time we lacked nothing, Lord. We never lacked. See Jesus is inviting His disciples to come into the kingdom of God where there is no lack. There's no fear where we can trust every step of the way, no matter how bad things are, that God always has the last word, and His word is good! God is good and only good. The only thing He does is what is good. And the biggest problem is that His timing is annoying is the word I'm looking for. Annoying. At least it's predictable. And it's predictably annoying.

It's always so just like.. what is this, a 1980's action movie where you got to cut the thing at one second left on the bomb? But that's kind of how it is, very often, in the kingdom of God. And these things stretch us and they make us better.

So Jesus is proclaiming a kingdom of God that is most exemplified through the Sermon on the Mount where He teaches us that when we love our enemies, when we pray for those who persecute us, when we live honest lives, when we stop trying to worry all the time and we just pursue His kingdom and His righteousness, that things naturally fall in place. And it takes faith to do that.

So the core of Jesus' sermons and message is overcoming evil with good. And in trusting your life and all your difficulties to God and living at peace in the kingdom of God, and doing things at God's pace, and doing things God's way, and not powering up all the time.

And so here's the scenario. So the triumphal entry. So we finally get to this thing where there's prophecies in the Old Testament that this exact thing would happen, but it goes deeper than that. There's this city Jerusalem on a normal Monday in the summer or something, it's going to be.. two hundred and fifty thousand people live in Jerusalem in the first century. But some original sources say that during Passover, which is the highest holiday in Judaism, that there could have been as much as two point five million people in Jerusalem. Okay? So you have ten times as many people, right? There's going to be camps around the city

walls, every inn is going to be overflowing, and more importantly, these people who are there, most of them are going to be young men. The reason is during Passover and this is when you pray for the forgiveness of your sins, if you have a family of say twenty that lives hundred/ thousand miles away or something, they usually send one person on behalf of the family and it's the adventurer, the young guy, the 26/27-year-old person, and he goes on behalf of the family.

So imagine this: you have a city that has at least two million people in it, most of them Jewish, most of them young men full of testosterone and like patriotism, and all of this religious stuff, and it's during this incredible time of religious observance and celebration, and there's probably drinking and there's this like all of this stuff where this Jerusalem has become in the Roman Empire's eyes, just a giant pile of dynamite.

And then you have Jesus who just raised Lazarus from the dead and it's the greatest miracle up to this point. Everybody sees it. There's like a huge crowd of people that see it and everybody freaks out because for them, the coming of the kingdom of God is the resurrection of the dead so this is a sign of the end times.

So these hundreds of people that see their friend, this leader in the community, Lazarus raised from the dead, they are running ahead to Jerusalem, Jesus is back at Lazarus' house having dinner, and then He comes down later on, he comes down from the Mount of Olives into the

city, and everybody is shouting Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! And they're laying down palm fronds, the symbol of the Hasmonean Dynasty; the symbol of Judas and Shimon Maccabeus. It's this very patriotic, rich thing. It'd be like if we were laying down American flags, even though we'd been occupied by some foreign power. It was this very patriotic, nationalistic thing where everybody's really excited that this rabbi, who's clearly from God, is going to do something awesome, right?

And so He's coming in to Jerusalem, but what they don't notice is that even though they're laying down palm fronds, He's riding on a donkey. So normally when kings enter a city, they come on a horse. And the horse is like I'm the general coming in on my horse, like you remember Napoleon in the cartoons, little Napoleon and a giant horse. And here's Jesus on a donkey, and when a king in those days would enter into a city on a donkey, it's a way of saying I'm not coming for war, I'm here for peace. I'm not here to war monger, I'm not here to fight, this is the kingdom of God. I am the prince of peace.

And so as He comes in, there's all of this celebrating and elation, and people are jumping up and down, and they think He's going to go to this part of the temple on the opposite side called the Antonia Fortress, and this is where the Roman garrison is; it sort of looms over the court of the temples. I think we have a picture of it. You have this Antonia Fortress, and then like this little area below. Yes, see that? Right up top

on the top right, that's the Roman fortress attached to the temple, and that is full of archers and javelin guys who at any time are ready to just kill everybody down there if something happens. So it's a hot box.

And so here comes Jesus and they think He's going to go right there to that Antonia Fortress. That is where Pontius Pilate is. He's the governor from Rome. That is the courthouse, that is the center of Roman authority in the city of Jerusalem. And it reminds me of kind of like.. we all go to Disneyland, right? Not you watching on TV, I know. If you come to Disneyland, come to Shepherd's Grove. We'd love to see you. At Disneyland they have like this parade line. Everybody knows where the parades going to go, and it just kind of winds through Disneyland, and it would almost be like if the parade just like.. the people with like the little.. the guy with the thing.. like just kind of turned and like went through the crowd and went to like Toon Town, or went to like the Anaheim Convention Center or something. Everybody would be like what is going on.

And this is what happens. I picture Jesus literally cutting through a parade crowd and he's like oh He's not going to Caesar. Where is He going? Oh, where is He going? Oh, He's going to the temple. Oh. And then we forget, this is a part of the triumphal entry. The first thing Jesus does when He gets off the donkey, He grabs a rope and He starts weaving it together. They're like oh what's He doing? Is He making a basket? Weaving it together. And then He just goes crazy and starts knocking

over tables, kicking people out, and yells.. what does He say? This is my Father's house. It shall be a place of prayer, not a den of thieves.

And what we don't understand is this exchange table is a symbol of religiosity taking money from people. This is how the Pharisees were able to unfairly tax people if they wanted to go into the temple. And then the last thing that He does is He just starts healing people. Like it's just like this abundance of miracles and nobody knows what is going on. And everybody is trying to figure this out.

And five days later, they're shouting what? Crucify Him. Crucify Him. Kill. Barabbas, give us Barabbas. Barabbas was not a thief; Barabbas was a murderer, but he was a murderer because he was that Braveheart type character. He murdered a Roman soldier, right? So he was a fighter. They wanted a fighter. They wanted a violent man. They wanted a general. They did not want whatever this was.

So today when we look at the story of the triumphal entry, I look at the way in which human nature is: that we always want God to change everything else except me. Lord, change my husband. Lord, change my kids. Lord, change my school. Change my boss. I could totally see us saying Lord, go to Washington DC and Jesus walks right into the church and starts kicking stuff over. And we're like crucify him. Get him out of here. We don't want that Jesus guy in our church.

And that's the question. Is that what we do? I think it's what I do. And this is something that all of us have to recognize a part of human

nature is that God is way more interested in changing you before He is about changing your circumstance. God's desire is to make you and craft you into a Jesus kind of person, the kind of person that can raise the dead. Before He's interested in getting your boss to be nicer to you, or getting your husband to stop changing the channel all the time when you're trying to watch something. You're trying to watch Hour of Power and he keeps changing the channel.

So that's what we're doing today. So today we're going to reflect and we're going to say Lord, how can I let go to you? Lord, I love my kids, I love my spouse, I love my parents, I love my church, I love my school, I love my country. Lord, how can I give these things to you, trust them to you, and invite you instead of to Antonia Fortress, invite you to the temple, invite you to come into my heart and kick some things over, ruffle some feathers in my life so that you can start to heal me. And that's the prayer.

So Lord we say: save now. Save us, Lord. And we invite you to be the king of our hearts. We invite your kingdom into our bodies, into our minds and our soul. We pray, Lord, that you'd teach us what it means to forgive, to hold our lives loosely, to be patient, to be kind to our neighbor, to be honest, to stop worrying, to stop dwelling on tomorrow, or dwelling on the past, but to be here today with you, Jesus. Lord, forgive us of our sins. Free us of our sins. Help us to walk in righteousness and goodness in everything we do. Pick us up when we mess up. Help us and go along

the right path. Lord, we trust you and we love you, and it's in Jesus'
name we pray, amen.