

A GREAT SAVIOR . . . A HUMBLE SERVANT STUDY ONE

That's Who? Riding on a What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

Talk about an unusual celebration. Some would be cheering. Others staring. A study in contrast to be sure. The Lord Jesus Christ was coming for the last time into Jerusalem. He would not leave before He would be nailed to a cross. But before all of that, on this original Palm Sunday, He would arrive, and there would be some who would have no clue who He was.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE scene that unfolds at the beginning of Matthew 21 fits the category of the unusual. As Jesus approached Jerusalem not long before He was arrested and put on trial, He entered as the Israelites' King in the oddest way. Unlike all other potentates, He rode in on a donkey—actually, He rode a little colt of a donkey! There was a reason for all of it . . . as we shall see in this study.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Come close to God, and God will come close to you. (James 4:8)

The Easter season provides a wonderful time to renew our earnest commitment to our Savior—to reestablish a time when we draw near to Him daily with the promise that He will draw near to us. Take a few moments and bow in prayer before the Lord your King. Invite Him to reveal Himself anew through His Word and receive Him to His rightful place on the throne of your life.



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Matthew 21:1–11



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 21:1–11](#) to get an overview of the passage. While you read, pay attention to things in the passage that seem familiar to you, and make notes about details that you haven't noticed in prior readings. Record your thoughts in the space provided.



Observation: Preparing for His Arrival—Matthew 21:1–3

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. We look for central ideas, such as the overall principle Paul stated in [Matthew 21:1–11](#).

Where Was Jesus?

Read Matthew 21:1–3 and observe important details about the setting of this scene.

Who was Jesus traveling with according to Matthew?

What geographical clues emerge that help you place Jesus' whereabouts?



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Look closely at the [map](#) or check in the map section of your study Bible and locate a map titled “*Ministry of Jesus*” or something similar. Find Jerusalem and see how many of the cities and surrounding landmarks are mentioned in Matthew 21:1. What do you see? Make notes about your discoveries.

This would be a good opportunity for you to consult a Bible dictionary and look up the city of *Bethphage* and the *Mount of Olives*. Study what is written about these historical sites. Write down relevant observations.

What Did Jesus Do?

Trace the sequence of events in Matthew 21:2–3, and list some observations about what Jesus directed the disciples to do.

Jesus seemed quite determined to make certain all went according to plan for this significant occasion. How would you summarize the instructions He gave to His disciples (Matthew 21:2–3)?



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As enigmatic as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was, even more stirring was the response of the people. What wonder there is in considering the significant meaning in the exuberant praise offered to this donkey-riding King!



Interpretation: Fulfilling the Prophet's Prediction

At times, the meaning of a passage is made apparent by the passage itself—in other words, either through dialogue or the author's clear interpretation. That's the case especially when the gospel writers referenced an Old Testament passage to explain their meaning.

Matthew, passionate for his Jewish readers to embrace Jesus as their Messiah King, invoked the revered words of Isaiah to build his case.

*"Tell the people of Israel,
'Look, your Savior is coming.
See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.'"* (Isaiah 62:11)

To understand why Matthew included this story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey colt, we must look to Isaiah:

1. To demonstrate that prophecy is fulfilled in this event
2. To identify Jesus as the promised King of the people of Jerusalem
3. To make plain that Jesus embodies genuine humility

What impact do you think Matthew's use of Isaiah's prophecy had on his Jewish audience? Why?

Still, Isaiah was only one among many Old Testament writers who envisioned Matthew's scene when they penned their words.



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Correlation: Responding to the King

Correlation compares different passages of Scripture to help interpret the passage in view. In Matthew's description of the crowd's response to Jesus, he invoked another Old Testament passage. This time, one of the psalms:

Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

"Praise God for the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!

Praise God in highest heaven!" (Matthew 21:9)

In this case, Matthew lifted from the Psalms a worship expression well-known to his Jewish audience to further strengthen his appeal to Jesus as their Messiah King.

Please, LORD, please save us.

Please, LORD, please give us success.

Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD. (Psalm 118:25–26)



Application: What about You and Me?

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate the heart. Take some time now to reflect on where you would be in this story—peasant or priest, scoffer or seeker, wonderer or worshiper. Think about each of the many individuals who encountered Jesus that day. Who heard the throng of witnesses shouting "Hosanna!"?

Would you find yourself among one of Jesus' close followers? A disciple? If so, how does your life today reflect your devotion to Him, not just as Savior but as Lord of your life?



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Would you be among the crowd of willing participants caught up in the excitement of the moment but not yet ready to commit to Him? What keeps people from making a full commitment to Jesus as King?

Would you stand at attention, aloof as a dutiful Roman guard, not wanting to make a scene but perhaps gripped with curiosity? Describe a time when you were curious about faith while stuck in a place of doubt.

Do you remain a cynic, hardened by your stubborn refusal to believe that anything about Jesus could really be true? What keeps individuals from turning to Jesus in faith and declaring Him as King?

Perhaps you're one who knows about Jesus, but you've never put your trust in Jesus as Savior and King of your life. Is that you? Are you ready to surrender? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to Him?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You ordained all that Your Son, Jesus, would endure once He entered Jerusalem on that fateful day. What it meant to me was a way to You through His violent suffering and death, which satisfied the penalty due for my sin. How I thank You that You did not withhold Your only Son but freely offered Him as a substitute for me. He took my sin to the cross and bore it there in love. Do not finish Your work in Me, Father, until He is made fully Lord and King of every aspect of my life. Until I yield in full surrender to Him, I ask in His regal name, amen.



A GREAT SAVIOR . . . A HUMBLE SERVANT STUDY TWO

A Resurrected Christ . . . A Transformed Life

John 11, 14, and 20

If you've got questions, ask them. If you've got reservations, say so. There is nothing wrong with either. What's wrong is sitting in silent unbelief, acting like you get it, acting like you go along with it when, in fact, you don't. Thomas didn't do that, and he's a pretty good model to follow.

—Charles R. Swindoll

As we approach the Easter celebration, our hearts joyfully turn to thoughts of Christ's resurrection. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Those are the words exclaimed by countless believers around the world each Easter. But we have the benefit of reading the witness of centuries of faithful followers telling of God's gracious gift of new life. What if you were among the first to hear of the empty tomb? What would be your response? Would you so quickly believe? Or would you remain, like Thomas, shrouded by doubts?



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Come close to God, and God will come close to you. (James 4:8)

The Easter season provides a wonderful time to renew our earnest commitment to our Savior—to reestablish a time when we draw near to Him daily with the promise that He will draw near to us. Take a few moments and bow in prayer before the risen Jesus. Invite Him to reveal Himself anew through His Word and to draw you to experience the power of His resurrection.



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John 11, 14, and 20



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Take time to read John chapters 11, 14, and 20. Read slowly and reflectively as if reading these great passages for the first time. God desires to speak to you from His Word, so each time you read, you should *read with expectation and confidence*. Make some notes about your impressions as you read.



Observation: Three Scenes—A Snapshot of Thomas

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. We look at key places, dialogue, and central ideas, such as the overall principle. In the three scenes Chuck Swindoll examined, take time from each to do some careful observation.

Scene 1: The Raising of Lazarus—John 11

In this story, Thomas was among the disciples, listening to and watching Jesus as He responded to the tragic news of Lazarus' death.

Let's trace the events as they unfold. One way to use observation is by paying attention to dialogue. What is being said can unlock clues to the meaning of a passage. Let's focus on the words of Jesus to put together a snapshot of Thomas' response.

In John 11:7, Jesus "said to his disciples, 'Let's go back to Judea.'" What is significant about Jesus' desire to go back to Judea?



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How did the disciples respond to Jesus' plan (John 11:8)? How would you explain their response?

How does Thomas' response to going back to Judea contrast with the reaction of the other disciples (11:16)?

Thomas refused to be influenced by the majority of those around him. —Chuck Swindoll

Scene 2: The Upper Room in Jerusalem—John 14

In this scene, the gospel writer focused on Jesus' explanation for returning to Jerusalem. His words sound cryptic, but there is enough understanding to cause uncertainty and anxiety among the ranks of Jesus' closest companions.

“Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:1–2)

What about Jesus' words likely stirred anxiety in the hearts of His followers?



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Would you characterize His words as vague or clear? (HINT: Think about the context!)

How did Thomas respond (John 14:5)?

Does Thomas' response reveal doubt or realism? Explain your answer?

Thomas refused to act like he understood what was unclear and strange. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Transforming Doubt to Faith

At times, the meaning of a passage is made plain by the passage itself—in other words, either through dialogue or the author's clear interpretation. The third scene Chuck examined sheds light on the meaning of John's focus on Thomas.

Scene 3: Not Long after Jesus' Resurrection—John 20

Read John 20:24–30. In this remarkable passage of Scripture, John described the stirring scene when Jesus appeared to His disciples—except for Thomas—following His resurrection. Naturally, they were huddled in a closed room in fear for their lives. Once they realized they had seen the Lord, they sought out Thomas to declare to him what they had seen (John 20:25).



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How did Thomas respond to this report (John 20:25)?

What does this response reveal about Thomas' mind-set regarding Jesus' resurrection?

Thomas refused to accept what his mind could not perceive and his heart could not believe.
—Chuck Swindoll

Tenderly, Jesus greeted Thomas and invited him to put his hands in His wounded side and to observe the wounds in His hands (20:27).

In response, Thomas declared, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28). Thomas moved from being stuck in his disbelief to making a bold appeal to faith! What impact do you feel Thomas' words had on the other disciples?

Jesus' final words in John 20 reveal the ultimate interpretation of this masterful biblical scene.

Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.” (20:29)



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John 11, 14, and 20

What do Jesus' words mean for individuals today who've never seen Him in the flesh but who are confronted with evidence of His resurrection through the witness of Scripture?



Correlation: Declaring Him Lord

Correlation compares other passages of Scripture to help interpret the passage in view. At the close of his gospel, John provided a mission statement of sorts that explains his reason for writing his message:

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. (John 20:30–31)

How did Thomas' story help John fulfill his mission in writing his book, the gospel of John?



Application: What about You and Me?

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate the heart. The only response to this story of transformation is to believe!

Oh, listen to me—especially all of you who are like Thomas among us: You are your own person, but the Lord wants you to be His. Yes, you are independent and strong-willed, but the Lord wants you to surrender to Him. You've refused to accept until now. Accept Him now! He is risen! He is risen, indeed! —Chuck Swindoll



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how I praise You for raising Jesus from the dead! And I praise You for dealing patiently and kindly with me even when I remain stubbornly bound by my doubts and fears. Thank You, Father, for extending Your kindness, which ultimately led me to repent and to believe. I give You my life, my all. In the name of the resurrected Jesus, amen.



A GREAT SAVIOR . . . A HUMBLE SERVANT

STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

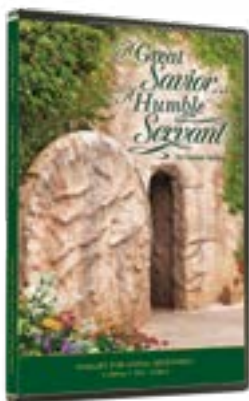
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A Resurrected Christ . . . A Transformed Life

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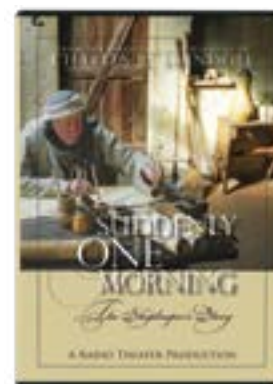
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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