

## I. Introduction

## A. Scripture

1. “As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. “Go into the village over there,” he said. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me.
2. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will immediately let you take them.” This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said, “Tell the people of Jerusalem, ‘Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt.’”
3. The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
4. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!” The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked. And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”” (Matthew 21:1-11)

B. The Sunday before Easter is traditionally called Palm Sunday. This is the scene where that idea comes from. The scene itself is called The Triumphal Entry. Jesus—the carpenter, the teacher, the friend, the miracle worker, the human who is also God—enters the city of Jerusalem and is given a hero’s welcome.

C. The people assemble and celebrate him.

D. That word the crowd is shouting, Hosanna! is a religious cheer.

1. Hosanna is an English version of a Greek word, which is the Greek version of a Hebrew word, which is a little phrase that means “*Lord, please save me now.*”
2. The people were calling out for salvation, but salvation from what? They were thinking about the wrong salvation by the wrong messiah, because they had the wrong diagnosis.
3. When they cried for God to save them, they meant:
  - a) Overthrow the Roman Empire.
  - b) Restore Israel’s political power.
  - c) Set up a new Golden Age, like when David and Solomon were king.
  - d) Create an earthly kingdom of military might.
4. They figured that’s what the Messiah would do, and if Jesus was that Messiah, count me in.
5. But they made a fatal mistake. They got the word Hosanna from their ancient book of hymns, called the Psalms. The only time the word Hosanna is there it’s in the 118th Psalm. But when they chose that word, they got the right Savior, but the wrong message.
6. Psalm 118 is not a prayer for political liberation. It’s a prayer celebrating spiritual salvation.
7. It’s about God’s grace, through faith, and the work of God in the whole wide world, not just their own nation.
8. Jesus’ response to their “Hosanna” was essentially: You’re praying for the wrong thing because you’re diagnosing the wrong problem.
  - a) From God’s perspective, that wasn’t their greatest need. Their deeper oppression was internal: the darkness separating them from relationship with God.
9. Rome was a symptom. Sin was the disease.
10. They wanted deliverance from Rome, when what they needed was deliverance from sin.
11. And there’s a really tragic arc to this triumphal entry.
12. On Palm Sunday, the Jewish people...welcomed Jesus, celebrating Him as the Messiah with shouts of ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Save us, Lord!’ But five days later, they screamed ‘Crucify Him!’ Many of the same people were in both crowds.

E. And right into the middle of that fever-pitch expectation... rides the world’s unlikeliest King.

1. He doesn’t show up in a Ferrari, he shows up on a donkey.
2. He doesn’t show up with a display of his own wealth, it’s a rented donkey.
3. Nobody rolls out the red carpet, just cloaks and palm branches.
4. He isn’t carrying a sword, he is armed with nothing but grace and truth.
5. He doesn’t lead an army, he leads the rabble of the city.

F. He looks weak. He looks entirely unimpressive to a world addicted to celebrity and power.

G. This is the gigantic secret code of Palm Sunday, every feature of which is designed with great detail to point to the central mystery of the Gospel:

1. God’s way of salvation is the polar opposite of what most people expect.
2. And I’m going to prove it.

H. Let’s look at how that donkey changes everything.

## II. Series

A. Welcome to our ongoing series, the Mysteries of the Resurrection, getting ready for our giant Easter Celebration. This is part 7 in the series.

B. My talk today is called “The Mystery of World’s Unlikeliest King.”

III. The World’s Answer: **The Religion of the Ladder**

A. Every religious system and every philosophical system has its own idea of salvation.

- B. You can search the entire globe. You can study every world religion and dissect every dominant human philosophy. You will find brilliant minds, complex rituals, and deep devotion.
  - C. But if you strip away the cultural paint, you will find a shocking reality: They all sell the exact same product.
  - D. They hand you a ladder and tell you start climbing.
  - E. They tell you that salvation, or wholeness, or peace, or nirvana, or good karma depends on your effort, your performance, and your morality. The burden is on your shoulders. Climb. Climb harder. Climb faster. Climb more.
    - 1. Islam hands you a ladder of submission, where your good deeds and bad deeds are weighed on a scale, and you hope you've climbed high enough to earn mercy.
    - 2. Hinduism hands you a ladder of karma, demanding you pay off your own moral debt, even if it takes you a million lifetimes of climbing.
    - 3. Buddhism hands you a ladder of personal discipline—an eightfold path to save yourself through your own realization and self-negation.
    - 4. Stoicism hands you a ladder of willpower and mental toughness. Master your emotions, so you can master the world.
    - 5. Secular Humanism strips away the gods entirely and hands you a ladder of social ethics. Just work hard, be a "good person," and save society yourself.
  - F. This is the constant, exhausting pattern of human history. The engine is always the same: Ascent. The finite human must sweat and bleed to climb up to the infinite, divine approval.
- IV. The Catastrophic Flaw
- A. These are serious, historically massive systems of thought. But they share one **catastrophic flaw**.
  - B. They assume that if you just try hard enough—if you are just disciplined enough—your finite human effort can somehow bridge the gap to the infinite.
  - C. But you cannot build a ladder to the moon. No matter how hard you work or how badly you want it, you will run out of strength long before you run out of oxygen.
  - D. You cannot cross the chasm between a temporary, flawed human and a perfect, eternal God with your own moral effort. Finite effort, multiplied over an entire lifetime, is still finite. The math is impossible.
    - 1. No wonder people are emotionally exhausted.
    - 2. No wonder people in this room are spiritually burned out.
  - E. Because whether you realized it or not, you have adopted an operating system of endless effort that is destined to fail.
    - 1. It is destined to fail emotionally.
    - 2. It is destined to fail logically.
    - 3. It is destined to fail theologically.
    - 4. It is destined to fail you personally.
  - F. You wake up every day trying to climb a ladder of self-justification that has no top rung.
  - G. You don't need a better ladder. You need a rescue.
  - H. You need a wildly different, totally counterintuitive approach... something like the Savior of the World—who is the King of the Universe—riding in on a donkey.
- V. The Brutal Diagnosis: Dead People Don't Climb
- A. Why do so many people keep falling for the religion of the ladder?
    - 1. Partly because it's flattering. It's the message: "You've got this. You're just a little off track. You're just a little broken. Read this book, try this routine, dial up your energy, get a better strategy, and you can fix yourself."
    - 2. It feels so logical. Striving, straining, trying, reaching... it's the way of the world, so it has to be that way with God, right?
  - B. Wrong.
  - C. The Bible refuses to flatter you. It delivers a diagnosis that is brutal, offensive to your pride, and absolutely necessary to get your heart where it actually needs to go.
  - D. The brutal diagnosis isn't just that you fall short, so try harder. And it isn't that you're a little off track, or a just a little broken.
  - E. The diagnosis is that **you are dead**.
    - 1. It's why, when Jesus spoke to a religious leader, he didn't tell him to try harder or do better—he told him, You must be born again.
    - 2. It's why St Paul didn't say that humanity was just stumbling—he said: You are dead in your trespasses and sins.
    - 3. He said, you think the problem is that Rome reigns over you... the real problem is that sin reigns, and because sin reigns, death reigns.
    - 4. It's why St John didn't say that Jesus helps us pass from bad to good—he said Christ pulls us from death to life because Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.
  - F. The Christian version of the human story is not a narrative of incremental improvement, moral performance, or religious ritual. It comes down to this one, inescapable conclusion:
    - 1. **God doesn't work by rewarding the improvable. God only works by raising the dead.**
  - G. You cannot hand a self-help book to a corpse.
  - H. You cannot teach a dead soul to climb a ladder.
  - I. This is the ultimate tragedy of every other religion and philosophy on earth: they are essentially handing out instruction manuals to people in a graveyard that don't know they are in a graveyard. They are yelling at you to climb, while you are buried in the casket.
    - 1. Critics say that Christianity is a crutch for weak people.
    - 2. No it's not.

3. Christianity is a stretcher for dead people, you're dead.
- J. Christianity is the only voice in the universe that looks at you and says: You don't need better instructions. You don't need a better ladder. You need a life from the dead.
- VI. The Divine Descent: Grace in the Graveyard
- A. If a finite human cannot climb up to the infinite God, and if a dead soul cannot climb a ladder into life, there is only one logical move left on the board.
- B. God has to come down to rescue us.
1. Every other system on the planet operates on human Ascent—you sweating, striving, and bleeding to work your way up to God. The Gospel is the exact opposite. It is the only system in history that operates on **DIVINE Descent**—God tearing through the heavens to get himself down to you.
    - a) This is the beginnings of the Bible's teaching called GRACE.
- C. And this is why the donkey changes everything.
1. When the crowd yelled "Hosanna," they wanted a King on a warhorse. They wanted to throw off the shackles of the Roman Empire. They wanted political power, economic dominance, and social revenge. They had the wrong diagnosis, so they demanded the wrong cure.
- D. So Jesus rides in on a donkey.
1. He's painting an entirely different picture than any of them expect.
  2. He rides down into the dirt. He deliberately enters the contamination zone of earth. The contamination zone of your messy, broken, finite life. He is completely flipping the script on how the universe operates. He is showing you that God doesn't save you from the top down with force; He saves you from the bottom up by entering your mortality.
  3. He doesn't save you by insisting you improve yourself; he saves you by raising you from the dead. From spiritual death to spiritual life. From alienation from God to reconciliation with God. From an enemy to a friend.
  4. And it's all a gift.
  5. And it's all based on his sacrifice, his death, his kindness, his love, his substitution
- E. The King on the donkey is not riding toward a political throne; He is riding toward execution.
- F. The disciples tried to talk Him out of going to Jerusalem. But the Bible says he set his face toward Jerusalem and stepped out.
- G. He moved intentionally toward an Old Rugged Cross and a substitutionary death. He knew that the only way to get you out of your spiritual grave was to go into a literal one Himself.
- H. He didn't come down to hand you a ladder. He came to die your death, so He could raise to a new kind of life, so he could take away the ladder, throw it in the dumpster, and lift you to heaven on the effortless elevator of grace.
- I. And he did it all because he loves you. He knows all about you. He's known you from the beginning. He cares for you. All life long, he's been calling you home.
- J. And there are people here who love you, too. We've been praying for you that you will find the treasure we found when we found Christ.
- VII. The Ultimate Apologetic: **The Logic of Grace**
- A. You might be sitting in this room today with your guard up. You might be wrestling with the history, the miracles, or the sheer impossibility of an empty tomb.
- B. But even if you walked into this room doubting the historicity of the Resurrection, you cannot deny the breathtaking, impossible logic of Grace. Grace is the ultimate apologetic. Grace is the absolute proof that this message did not come from human minds.
- C. Go ahead. Search all the rival systems of the world. Memorize the ancient hymns of Hinduism. Study the Buddhist texts with all your enthusiasm. Read the Q'ran. Pore over the wisdom of Confucius. Turn to the philosophers and master the Stoics of yesterday, the secular humanists and postmodernists of today. Listen to the existentialists, the hedonists, the nihilists and the modern day Machiavellis. Dig into all of it.
- D. You will find thoughtful moral codes. You will find human wisdom, some of it profound. You will even find inspiration and motivation.
- E. But you will hit one **staggering conclusion**:
1. In all the grand sweep of philosophy and religion and motivation and thought, there is one thing you will never find: You will never, anywhere else, find the concept of Grace.
  2. Pure, loving, unmerited, undeserved, unrecompensed, blood-bought, grace. Amazing grace. Free grace.
- F. Jesus cornered the market on grace from the foundation of the world.
1. Every other text, religion, and philosophy has humankind reaching up, and climbing the ladder of merit before blessing or heaven or god.
  2. Not Jesus. He climbed down to lift you up. He climbed down to unburden you. He says,
    - a) "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29)
      - (1) The donkey proves it.
- G. If human beings were going to invent a religion, what would they invent? They would invent a ladder of performance and duty and religion.
- H. And that is exactly what the record shows for all of humankind's sad tale.
- I. If Christianity were merely another human invention, it would just be another ladder, slightly improved.
- J. But it's not. The Gospel destroys the ladder.

- K. It looks you in the eye and tells you that you are completely bankrupt. It tells you that you get exactly zero percent of the credit for your salvation. It tells you that the King of the Universe had to ride a rented donkey into the dirt, get nailed to a cross, and pay your infinite debt because you were completely, hopelessly incapable of paying it yourself.
  - L. No human being would ever invent a system where they are that helpless and salvation is that free. Grace is so alien to human nature, so offensive to human pride, and so completely counter-intuitive that it couldn't have originated on earth, and the record shows that it didn't.
    - 1. It is the great differentiator.
    - 2. It is the ultimate defense of this faith.
    - 3. And nobody else anywhere has anything like this system.
  - M. And this is exactly where the Resurrection comes in. The Resurrection isn't just a magic trick; it is Grace completely victorious. Vindicated. Proven and true.
    - 1. The death and resurrection stand entirely apart from all human effort.
    - 2. You didn't help God raise Jesus from the dead. That was all God, all miracle, all super-human, all supernatural, all God's work, God's power, God's love, and therefor all grace.
    - 3. So it is every time someone gets saved, because every salvation is God raising somebody, anybody who will have him, from death to life.
  - N. Grace is a force in the universe because it is a force in the heart of God.
    - 1. Grace drove the entire plan of salvation.
    - 2. Grace put Jesus on the donkey.
    - 3. Grace held Him on the cross.
    - 4. Grace blasted him out of the grave to give you the gift of a brand new life, now and forever.
    - 5. The blood of Christ was the price of grace.
    - 6. And the resurrection of Christ was its proof, its vindication, and its guarantee.
- VIII. Your "**Hosanna**" Answered
- A. Think back to that crowd in Jerusalem, shouting "Hosanna! Save me now!"
  - B. They wanted a Warrior King, and when Jesus refused, and when he was arrested, they turned on him. They thought he failed. He didn't fail. He just refused to give them a shallow answer to a terminal disease.
  - C. They wanted a temporary fix for their circumstances; He executed an eternal fix for their souls. They wanted to be saved from Rome; He saved them from death itself.
  - D. Some of you walked into this room today praying your own version of "Hosanna." Save me from this anxiety. Save me from my failing marriage. Save me from this crushing, suffocating exhaustion of trying to prove I'm enough.
  - E. God hears that prayer. But He is not going to insult you by handing you a 10-step self-improvement program. He is not going to hand you a ladder.
  - F. He is handing you His Son. He wants to give you a peace that defies logic, a grace you could never earn, and a resurrected life that never ends.
- IX. Conclusion: Drop the Ladder
- A. What is your response to the absolute, staggering logic of Grace?
  - B. Get off the ladder once for all, and receive the Savior once for all.
  - C. Aren't you tired of making a life without God, of striving to please God? Aren't you tired of looking for love? Tired of caring what everybody thinks about you?
  - D. Let it go. Let that endless ladder hit the dirt. Step away from it.
  - E. You don't have to earn His love. His love is a free gift, bought with His blood, and guaranteed by His empty tomb.
  - F. Today, the King on the donkey is riding right into the middle of your complicated life. He is not asking for your performance.
  - G. He is offering his grace. And you can receive that today.
  - H. How? By faith. By asking. By believing.
- X. Salvation Prayer
- A. Lord Jesus,
  - B. I ADMIT that I am a sinner and I need a Savior.
  - C. I BELIEVE that You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead.
  - D. Right now, I CHOOSE to trust You as my Savior and receive You into my life.
  - E. Forgive me, save me, and make me Your child forever.
  - F. In Jesus' name, Amen.
- XI. Prayer
- A. Father,
  - B. I thank You for the absolute fire in this room. I look at these people and I see a church that is hungry, eager, and ready to move.
  - C. But today, I pray we do not waste a single spark of that zeal trying to build a ladder to You.
  - D. I pray that we drop the illusion that our fervor for you earns us a higher rung. You rode that donkey to Jerusalem and then to the Cross, and then to the Empty Grave... to hand us a finished, unearned victory.
  - E. You gave us the foundation for a bigger faith in a grace that is exceedingly abundantly above all we could ask or think.
  - F. I pray that from this exact second forward, the massive energy in this room is no longer fueled by our religious performance, but exploded by Your unmerited Grace. Let every person here leave their ladder in the dirt, walk out those doors as resurrected sons and daughters, and set this city on fire with the exact same grace that rescued us.
  - G. In Jesus' name, Amen.