



# BelPres Church

## **A Kingdom Bigger Than Mine**

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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Good to see all of you here. Thank you for being here. Those of you who maybe had to make it through snow and ice, and those of you who can't get through the snow and ice, thank you for joining us online. Great to have you here.

Some friends of mine had a three-year-old son, and one day his mom asked him to do something, and the three-year-old son said no, in only a way a three-year-old can, right? So she used love and logic to explain to him why he needed to do what she'd asked him to do, and he looked at her again and said, no. So then she resorted to the org chart and said, look, I'm the captain of this house, and you need to do what I say. And then he said, well, what's daddy? And she said, well, he's also the captain of this house. We both are. And then he said, well, what am I captain of? And he looked at his pacifier, which he called his binky, and said, I'm captain of the binky, which I thought had a nice ring to it, right? Like, Captain Binky. It could be a Marvel movie. Not as cool as Captain America, but, you know, sort of second in place.

What that kind of shows is we are all, we are, whether we think we are or not, we are captain of something. Or to use more biblical language, we are all trying to build some kind of kingdom. Now, often, if I'm honest with myself, that's the kingdom of me, my kingdom, my school, my job, my friends, my reputation, my family, my enjoyment of life. And those can be really good things. But when they don't happen the way that we want them to happen, we get anxious and angry because our kingdom is threatened. Plus, the kingdom of me is so much smaller than Jesus' kingdom. We mess around with money and status and popularity and reputation and success and all of that stuff.

But the good news of Jesus is he replaces our small kingdoms so that we can be part of his bigger kingdom, what he called the kingdom of God, which is basically whenever and wherever things are happening the way God wants them to happen, where we are in relationship with the living God. Justice to the poor and to the oppressed, reconciliation of broken relationships. His kingdom is nothing short than healing this world. Could there be a bigger mission than that?

So if you have a Bible, turn to Matthew chapter 21. Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. If you ever forget your Bibles, there's some in the front here on these tables, there's some in the back, or you can follow along on the screens. And this is the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Which may seem weird to you to read this text two weeks before the actual Palm Sunday, but there's a lot we can say about it, so it's okay to preach twice about it in one month. It's fine, I went to seminary, I know these things. So, Matthew chapter 21.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. Say to Daughter Zion, See, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey, and a colt the full of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, sort of like red carpet Oscars style stuff. While others cut branches from trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest heaven.

So there are a couple of kingdoms that Jesus is replacing here. First, Jesus replaces our political kingdoms. When the crowd says, Hosanna to the son of David, that is a political statement. Hosanna means save us. David was Israel's greatest king. In the Gospel of Mark's version of this story, the crowd also says, blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. That is a political statement. And for most people in the crowd that day, that political statement was the most important thing to them. Most important thing in their lives was that political statement because they were occupied by the Roman Empire that was robbing them and oppressing them.

And their desire, they were looking for a political conqueror who would defeat the Romans and reestablish the kingdom of Israel to what it had been under King David. That was the kingdom they wanted. But the fact that Jesus riding a donkey, not on a horse or in a chariot, the way any military conqueror would have done back in that day, it shows that he's different. He's coming not to conquer, but he's coming humbly with a very different kind of kingdom where people enter into an eternal relationship with God through Jesus, and then through the power of the Holy Spirit, build his kingdom where what's wrong is made right, where what's broken gets mended, which is so much bigger than our personal kingdoms.

Because Jesus' kingdom is never about any one nation. Not ever, no never, not ever is Jesus' kingdom about any one nation. It is always about all the nations. And the Roman Empire, like all empires, eventually collapsed because what politics can do one day, it can undo the next. But Jesus' kingdom lasts forever, so much bigger than their kingdom of just kicking out the Romans. And that is so easy for us to see from our historical vantage point. But can we see it in our own day, right here and right now?

And it is true. Over the centuries, sometimes people calling themselves Christians have done some horrible things. But not people who are serious about the Jesus way of life. Folks who are serious about the Jesus way of life have done a lot of healing in the world over the centuries. Caring for plague victims, caring for orphans, building hospitals, abolishing slavery, to name just a few.

And in this story, when Jesus didn't turn out to be the political savior that they wanted, many of the same people who were cheering him on Palm Sunday were shouting, saying, crucify him, just five days later, because when folks don't get what they want politically, they get real mean, real fast. Don't they?

Second kingdom, Jesus replaces, is our personal kingdoms. I am sure the disciples on that day were pretty excited because they had some personal agendas going on. They're thinking, all right, man, we've been with this guy for three years, so when he kicks out the Romans, we are in for some sweet benefits, some vice messiahships, maybe some government cabinet positions. This is going to be awesome.

But Jesus invites us out of our small agendas into his much bigger kingdom. Jesus says to his disciples, you know, go get the donkey and her colt. And if someone asks you, say this, the Lord needs them. The Lord needs them. That is an interesting statement. Jesus is God in human form. He doesn't need

anything. But God chooses to accomplish his purposes through you and me. And that is amazing.

Now, had I been God's consultant on this, I would have said, bad idea, God, you know, inefficient, could go wrong in a million ways. But he didn't ask me. God chooses to accomplish his purposes through you and me. And that is amazing.

When my son was nine, I took him camping, and my daughters didn't really want to go. And the part my son liked best about camping was setting up and tearing down the tent, because I didn't just do it. I involved him in it. I gave him some tasks to do, and he really liked setting up and tearing down the tent. And that was the only thing he liked about camping. And I liked involving him, because it was something that we could do together that built our relationship. Plus, I loved the look on his face when I gave him the dignity of responsibility. That his dad trusted him enough to give him something to do, to help set up the tent. He trusted him with the task, which made him feel valued, and that he had something to offer, because he did.

God gives us the dignity of responsibility, critical roles in his mission to heal this world, which helps us get closer to him, because we do it with him. We don't do this on our own. The Holy Spirit helps us. Jesus calls all of us, not just some of us. Jesus calls all of us to heal the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we take the name Christian, that is his call on our life. So much bigger, so much bigger than my personal agendas.

Now, I need to say, and this is important, I need to say, sometimes when we hear something like that, we start to think, oh, God's gonna use me in some huge, big way. Start a non-profit or preach to thousands of people, God's gonna use me in this big, grand way. Maybe, maybe, sometimes Jesus does that, and I've told you stories about that. Or maybe, as he does in this text, he may just ask you for your donkey. Like, this is not some huge ask, right? He's just, Jesus is just like, hey, can I borrow your donkey for an afternoon? Right, we might even call it small, except there are no small missions in the kingdom of God.

Years ago, when I was brand new here, an older man invited me to lunch, and I didn't know him. And back then, I had had multiple lunches with men who were older than me, and often they came with an agenda to tell me about all the ways I was screwing it up and all the ways I needed to do better. So, you know, I didn't know this guy, and I thought, oh, here comes another one. And sometimes, I should say, sometimes those lunches were helpful, and other times they weren't. But I'm thinking, okay, well, here's another one.

But as we talked, it became clear he didn't have an agenda. And I asked him what he did, and he said, oh, I work in business. I said, oh, okay, well, what's your job? He said, I'm in management. And I said, well, like, what kind of management? And he said, oh, I'm CEO. Like, I had to pry it out of him. And he goes, I'm CEO. And I said, oh, oh, what company? And he told me, and I was like, that's a big company. That's an international company.

And then I was scared, because I'm like, oh, no. Here comes the lecture of all the ways I'm not leading right, except it never came. He never came. Instead, he just said, I just want to know how I can help you, because I believe in you. Wow. Being brand new here, and at the time, pretty young, that was huge for me.

And he became one of the best life mentors and one of the best leadership coaches I've ever had, partly because he didn't give me principles, he didn't give me a lot of advice. Mostly, he just told stories, sometimes stories of ways he'd screwed it up as a leader, I think mostly to help me feel better about my own leadership, but also help me avoid mistakes that he had made.

He's helped me and others solve some really difficult issues in this church over the years, which has made us a better church. One time we were doing a capital campaign, and we had a big dinner in this room for people to be able to donate. I went into the kitchen, and there this man was, CEO, washing dishes. And I said, you're supposed to be out there. And he said, I know, I'm going to give generously, but this is where I want to be.

I want to be here, washing the dishes. He was so humble. It was so behind the scenes. Nobody saw.

And compared to CEOing, washing dishes, and helping a new pastor, kind of maybe seems small, and yet it is not an exaggeration to say that because of how he mentored, not just me, but a lot of people in this church, thousands of people got closer to Jesus because of him. He helped some folks get out of poverty. He helped folks heal some difficult relationships stuff. And for him, those things are way more rewarding than CEOing ever was. He's got all these people who point to him and say, he changed my life, and I'm one of them. But it was all behind the scenes, and nobody saw.

Sometimes it is easier to do some big public service for Jesus because it reflects well on us, right? And we get kind of kudos for that. It can be more challenging to give Jesus a few minutes of our day to help someone in need, or maybe to be a greeter or a Sunday school teacher on Sunday. Or here's one, if

you don't have kids on Easter, you're all going to the 8 o'clock service, right? Uh-huh. And you're all going to park at Bellevue Christian, right?

No matter what service you go to, you're going to park at Bellevue Christian, so there's room for visitors to come and hear about Jesus, because every year people drive away because there's no parking, and they don't know where Bellevue Christian is, but you do, right? That's a lost opportunity for God's kingdom. We're not asking you to go around the world and preach about Jesus, just asking you to park two blocks away and take the shuttle. It's a small ask, right? But if you do that, somebody might meet Jesus, and their whole life might be changed.

Jesus calls us out of our own little agendas into something so much bigger, his agenda of healing the world, and that heals us as well, because when our life gets bigger, our anxieties get smaller in comparison. When our life gets bigger, our anxieties get smaller in comparison.

And in order to experience that, we have to be interruptible. The guy who gave up his donkey was interruptible, right? He surrendered whatever plans he had for the donkey that day to let Jesus borrow the donkey. So if we're going to experience the power of Jesus' kingdom coming through us, we have to let Jesus interrupt our schedules, interrupt our plans, interrupt our reputations, interrupt our careers, interrupt our finances.

Now you might think, what can I do? I don't have anything to offer, right? I'm too young. I'm too old. I'm not enough this. I'm not a CEO. I'm not rich. What do I have to offer? We all have some kind of donkey, all of us.

We all have time. I mean, I know, I know, you're busy. Everyone is. But it's not like you only have 10 hours a day and the rest of us get 24. We all have 24 hours a day, except on time change Sunday, when we lose an hour, or sitting through a French film that lasts forever, right? But in general, right?

We all have words that we can use to build people up or to tear them down. We all have schools or jobs or neighborhoods or senior living places where we can build our own kingdom about my wants and my desires, or we can build Jesus' kingdom. And here's the thing, there are no small donkeys in the kingdom of God.

They all matter in this text, in this story. No donkey, no Palm Sunday. Look at verse 4. This took place, to get the donkey, this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. Say to daughter Zion, see your king comes to you

gentle and riding on a donkey. That is a 400-year-old prophecy from the prophet Zechariah about how the Messiah would come when he came. It's been prophesied. So it had to be a donkey he rode on. It couldn't be a horse. It couldn't be a camel. It couldn't be a Mercedes Benz. Had to be a donkey because it was prophesied. No donkey, no Palm Sunday.

Your donkeys are not irrelevant. They are all mission critical. When you see something unjust in your school or work or neighborhood and you work to correct it. When you tell someone about Jesus so they know that there's a God who loved them so much he died for them. When you talk to an immigrant to make them feel valued and loved, you are part of God's mission to heal the world.

Many of you have heard me tell the story of how the reason I am a Christian is because decades ago a co-worker of mine bought me a band-aid and that sent me on a journey that eventually led me to Jesus. She bought a band-aid, right? There are no irrelevant donkeys in the kingdom of God. They are all mission critical.

And sometimes we get to see the results of our efforts and other times we don't. But even when we don't, my experience is just doing what Jesus asked me to do is fulfilling in and of itself. Obedience is its own reward. And one of the things that has always fascinated me about this story is who was the owner of this donkey? Like, we don't know. We never get a name. We never find out, right?

But how cool to provide the donkey that fulfills a 400 year old prophecy about God himself coming in human form. And I always imagine the scene, like, the crowds are cheering, Jesus is riding in, the crowds are shouting, hey, hey, Hosanna, Hosanna. And that guy's like going, see that? That's my donkey. My donkey. My donkey. Looks pretty good with the son of God on his back, don't you think? People have been talking about that donkey for 2000 years. If you're a donkey, that's as good as it gets.

So action steps for this week. First, looking at where you spend your money, your energy, and your time, what kingdoms are you trying to build? That's a good question. I ask it myself. What kingdoms are you trying to build?

Second, do this week's exercises in the journal. Journal's on our app. It's on our website. This week, think of some times when Jesus replaced your kingdom with his. And then in a couple of sentences, fill in the blanks, I wanted blank for

myself, but Jesus helped me choose blank instead. And if you don't have any examples, ask him to give you one this week.

And then third, tell someone your story, and or invite them to church or a church event. The whole purpose of this sermon series and the journal is to remember how Jesus has been good news in our lives, so that we can share that good news with others. And one of the ways to do that is just invite them to church or a church event, right? Easter, a family Easter party, or invite them to Alpha, which is a class for people who don't know Jesus, and it is excellent. So invite them and go with them, so they can know Jesus too.

One of my happy places is the gym. I am always happy in a gym. And whenever I'm there, I usually have just enough time to do my workout, which for me isn't just about physical health, it's also how I kind of manage stress. So if I'm in the gym, and someone talks to me, I'll talk to them for a few minutes, but then I get on with it, because I usually have just enough time.

Well, back in September, I was in the gym, and there was a guy waiting for the equipment that I was using at the time. So I said, oh, we can share it, you can work in, we'll just alternate. So he did, and he did one set, and then he said, poof, that's enough for me, man. Been a long week. And there was something in the way that he said it that kind of caught my attention.

Now, I need to say, in moments like that, we are not called to step into every moment like that. The need isn't always the call. Sometimes it is, but we're not called to step into every moment like that. Even Jesus didn't do that. But in that moment, I just felt Jesus nudge me, ask him about his week. And to be honest, there are times when Jesus nudges me to do something, and I nudge Jesus right back. Nope, not gonna, not enough time. Not proud about that. I'm just keeping it real, okay?

But this time, Jesus just kept nudging, and I just kind of heard him say, as I hesitated, in my brain, seriously, you don't have a few minutes. Ask him about his week. So, I said to the guy, wow, sounds like there's a there there. What made you weak so long? And out, it all came.

That week, his long time girlfriend, who he had been living with, found another man, and she left him for that other guy. And he was really hurting. He thought she was the one. He thought they were forever. And I said, I am so sorry. That's gotta hurt. And he said, man, you have no idea.

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So we talked for a while about his pain, talked for a while about his grief. And after a few minutes of talking with him, I said, well, you know, my first wife left me for another man as well. And his eyes got big. And he said, so you know what I'm talking about? And I said, mm-hmm, been there, done that.

And then he said, well, how'd you get through it? That's what I call the T-ball of evangelism. It's right there on a stand that a toddler can hit it out of the park. So I said, well, Jesus, Jesus got me through it. I felt him with me. I knew I wasn't alone. And over time, I saw how he used it for good to help make me a little more humble, a little more compassionate, and a lot more aware of my own sin.

And now I can honestly say to you, it was the best worst thing that ever happened to me. And I can honestly say to you that in this moment, I'm even a little grateful for it, if for no other reason, then I can have this conversation with you in a way that other people can't.

And we talked for a little while longer, a couple more minutes, we talked, and then I finally said, I'm going to pray for you. And I saw panic across his face, and I said, don't worry, sometimes I pray for people on the spot, because sometimes I do. But then I said, but it looks like you wouldn't like that. He said, no, not at all. So I said, I'll just pray for you on my own. And he said, okay, cool. I'm not religious, but, you know, I'll take it.

But when he left, he had a little bit of a smile on his face. And he said, thank you. I feel a little bit better. We talked for about 20 minutes. And yeah, I didn't get to do everything I normally do in the gym. And so now my muscles are just that much smaller, and I'm just that much less physically impressive. But those are sinful thoughts, so leaving those aside.

Honestly, when I left the gym, I felt very grateful that I had a chance to use the pain I experienced decades ago to help bring comfort to someone who was hurting. I may have been the best person in that gym that day to talk to him because of my own past. What a privilege. Way more satisfying than a completed workout.

You know, and I haven't seen him since. I have prayed for him, but I haven't seen him since. So I don't know the outcome. I don't know the results.

But I do know that in that moment, I let Jesus interrupt me, and he built his kingdom through me right there in LA fitness to help mend a broken heart, to help give hope to someone who is hopeless, and point to Jesus, which is a seed

I got to plant in his brain that someday may lead him to know Jesus as well. So much bigger than my little kingdom agenda of doing my workout.

And I know that can sound like a small thing, and I could have told you stories that people go do huge, giant things. I have those stories. But how we do little things is how we do everything. And if I can't give Jesus 20 minutes out of my workout, how on earth am I going to give him my whole life?

So what donkeys do you have? And will you give them to Jesus so that you can be part of his bigger plans?

And right now, as we always do, I'm going to close this sermon by praying, and I'm going to pray that Jesus wrecks your plans. And that is a dangerous prayer. So you don't have to pray it with me. You can say, no, Lord, don't do that. But if you agree with that, and if you want that, then just eat in your head or even silently out loud as I'm praying, just say, yes, Lord, make it so.

Make me interruptible wherever I live, work, play, or learn, or happen to work out so that I get the joy of your kingdom coming through me right here on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus, thank you for the dignity of responsibility that you give us. You don't need us, but you choose to work through us, and we get the joy of getting to be part of that. So Jesus, wreck our plans. Wreck my plans. Screw up my schedule. Nudge me when I'm not paying attention. Show all of us opportunities we have to be part of what you're doing, wherever we are throughout this week. Show us, and then show us those opportunities, the ones you want us to take, the ones that have our name on it, Lord. Help us to see it. Help us to know it. Nudge us. Talk louder if we're not getting the point.

To step into the opportunity we have to partner with you in the redemption of this world, so that the whole world will know that there's a God who loves them enough to die for them, and his name is Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures)

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

**Talk:**

- Where have you been most focused on building your own world (comfort, image, control, success), and how did Jesus redirect that part of your life?
- What shifted when you said yes to Him (peace, purpose, generosity, belonging)?
- This week, where might Jesus invite you to use that same energy for His kingdom, and who near you could experience His welcome through you?

**Action Plan:**

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- Choose one Kingdom practice that connects with your journal story:
  - Generosity (give without recognition or return)
  - Advocacy (speak up for someone overlooked)
  - Reconciliation (repair a relationship)
  - Welcome (include someone new)
  - Service (meet a need quietly)
  - Hospitality (open your home or calendar)

This is not about doing more. It's about doing something aligned with Jesus' reign instead of your own.

**Closing Group Prayer:**

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.