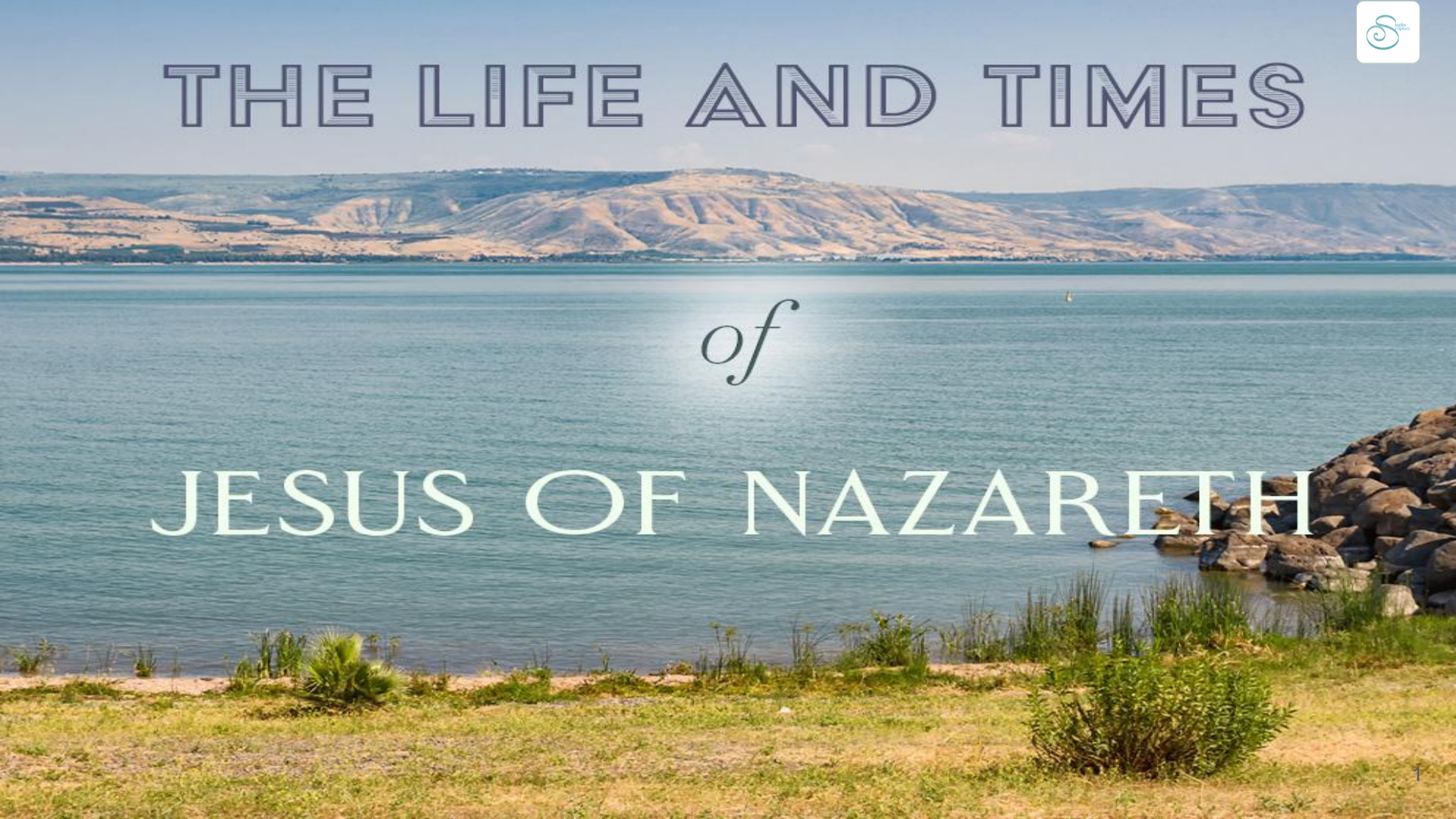
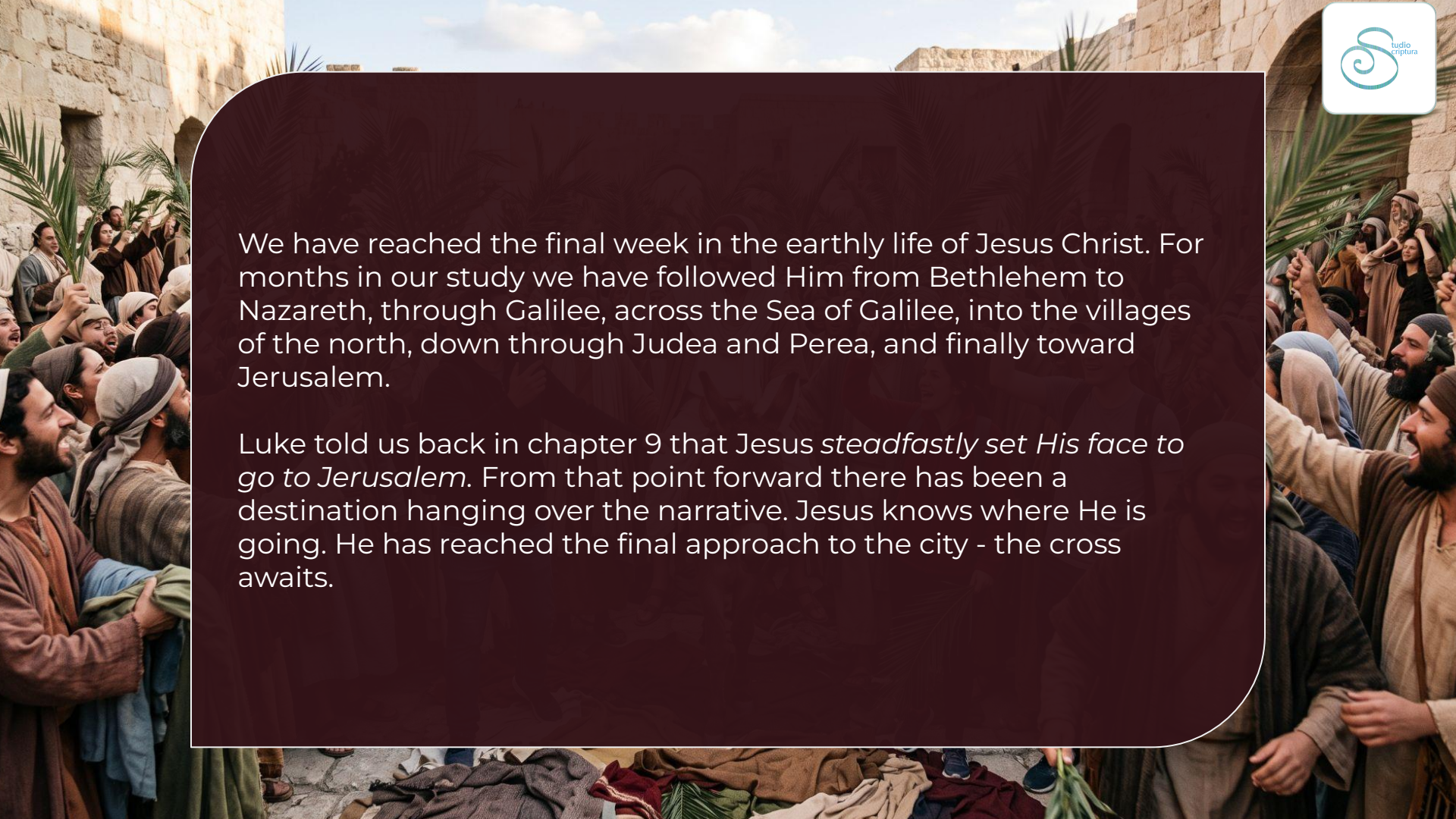

THE LIFE AND TIMES
of
JESUS OF NAZARETH



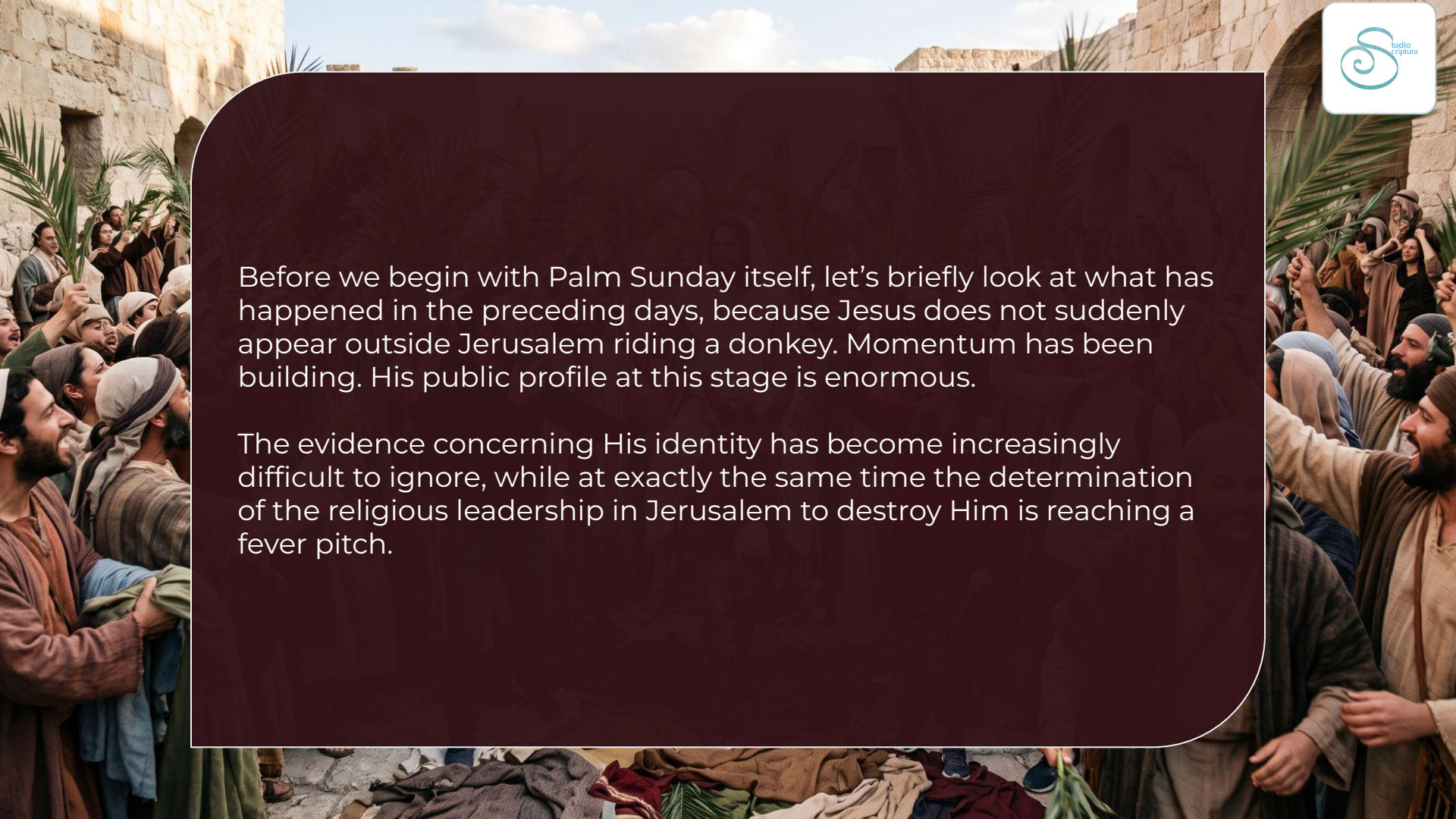
Prophecy & Palm Branches
The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1–11 / Mark 11:1–11
Luke 19:29–44 / John 12:12–19



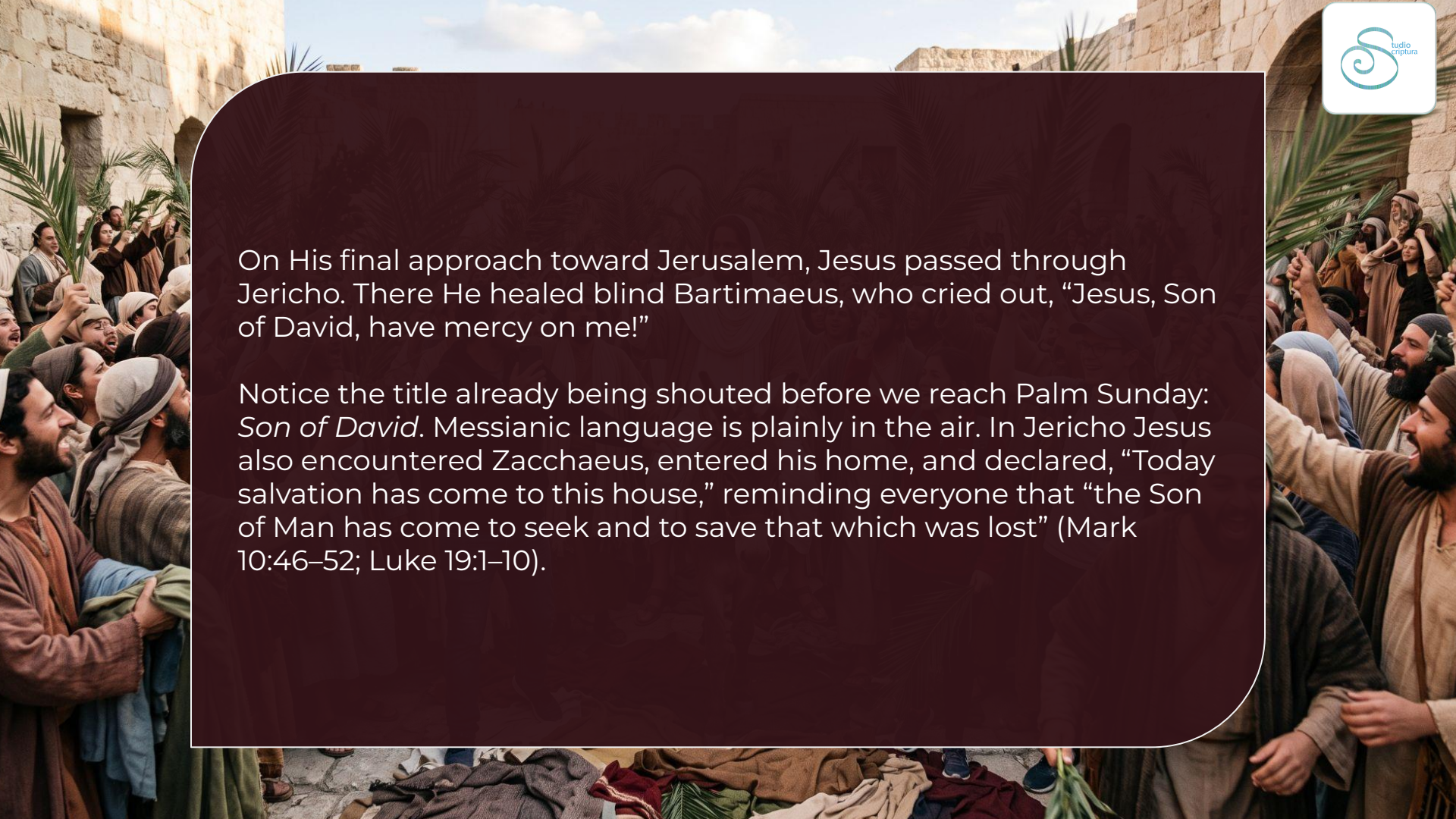
We have reached the final week in the earthly life of Jesus Christ. For months in our study we have followed Him from Bethlehem to Nazareth, through Galilee, across the Sea of Galilee, into the villages of the north, down through Judea and Perea, and finally toward Jerusalem.

Luke told us back in chapter 9 that Jesus *steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*. From that point forward there has been a destination hanging over the narrative. Jesus knows where He is going. He has reached the final approach to the city - the cross awaits.



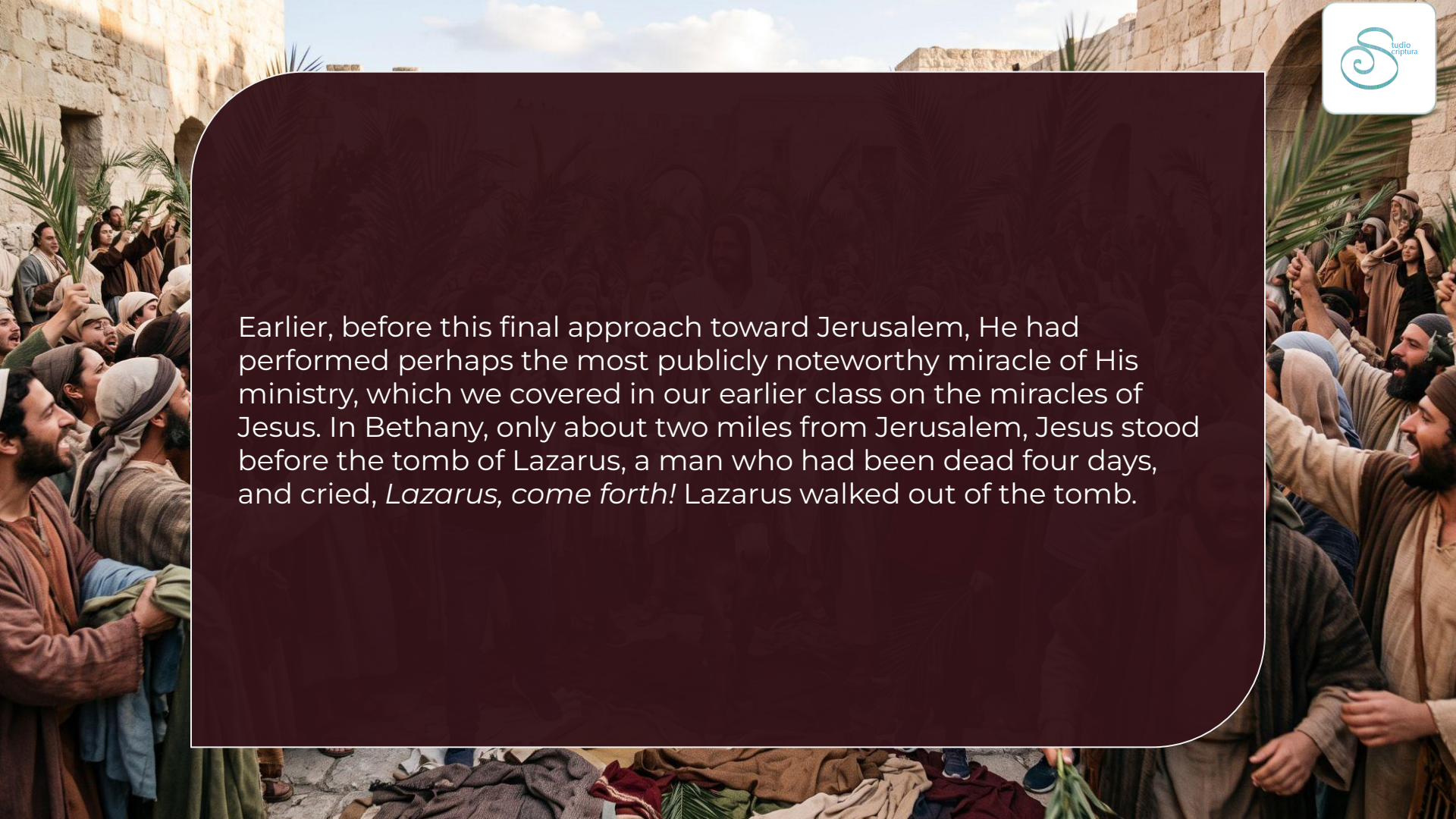
Before we begin with Palm Sunday itself, let’s briefly look at what has happened in the preceding days, because Jesus does not suddenly appear outside Jerusalem riding a donkey. Momentum has been building. His public profile at this stage is enormous.

The evidence concerning His identity has become increasingly difficult to ignore, while at exactly the same time the determination of the religious leadership in Jerusalem to destroy Him is reaching a fever pitch.

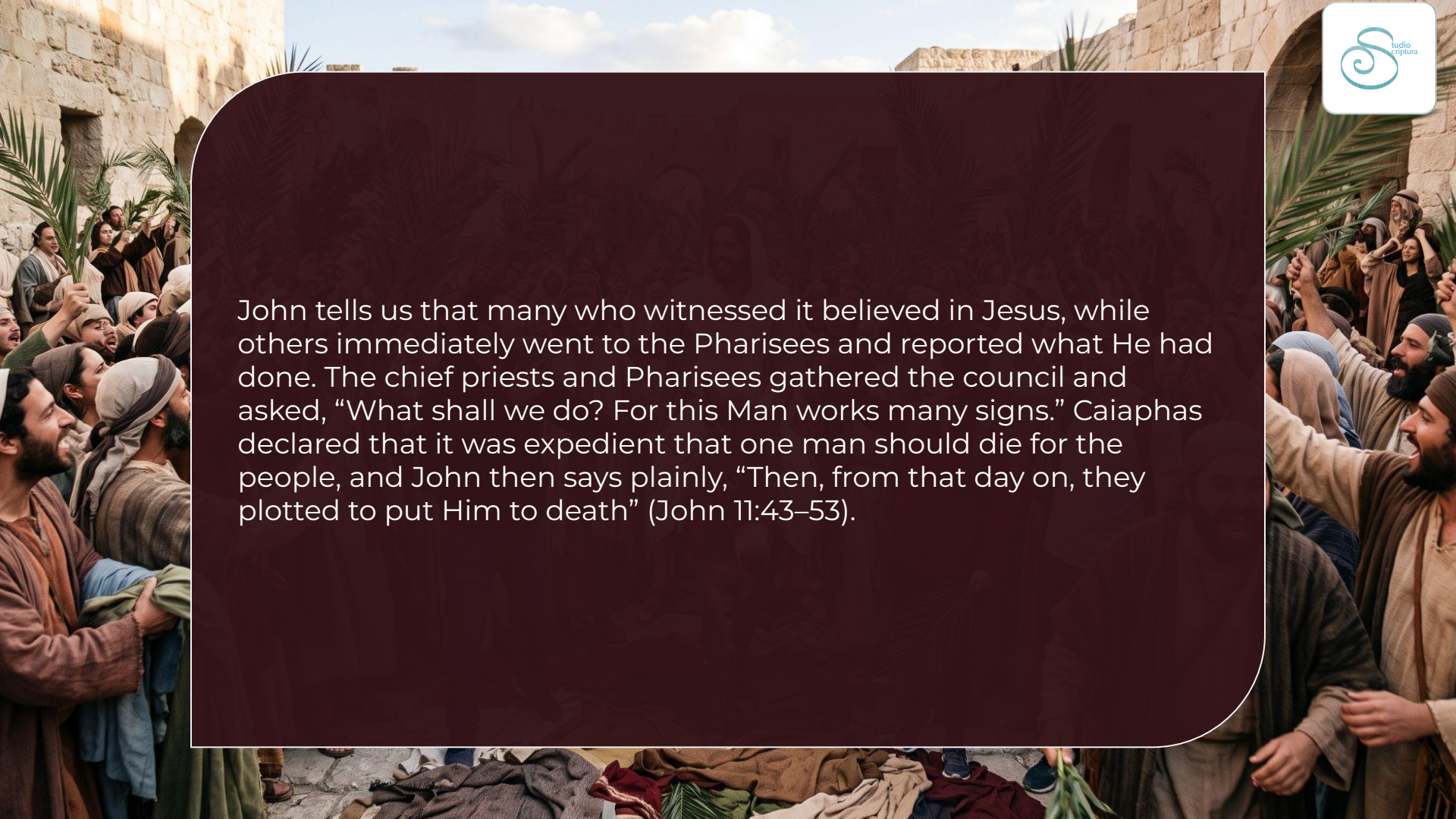


On His final approach toward Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Jericho. There He healed blind Bartimaeus, who cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

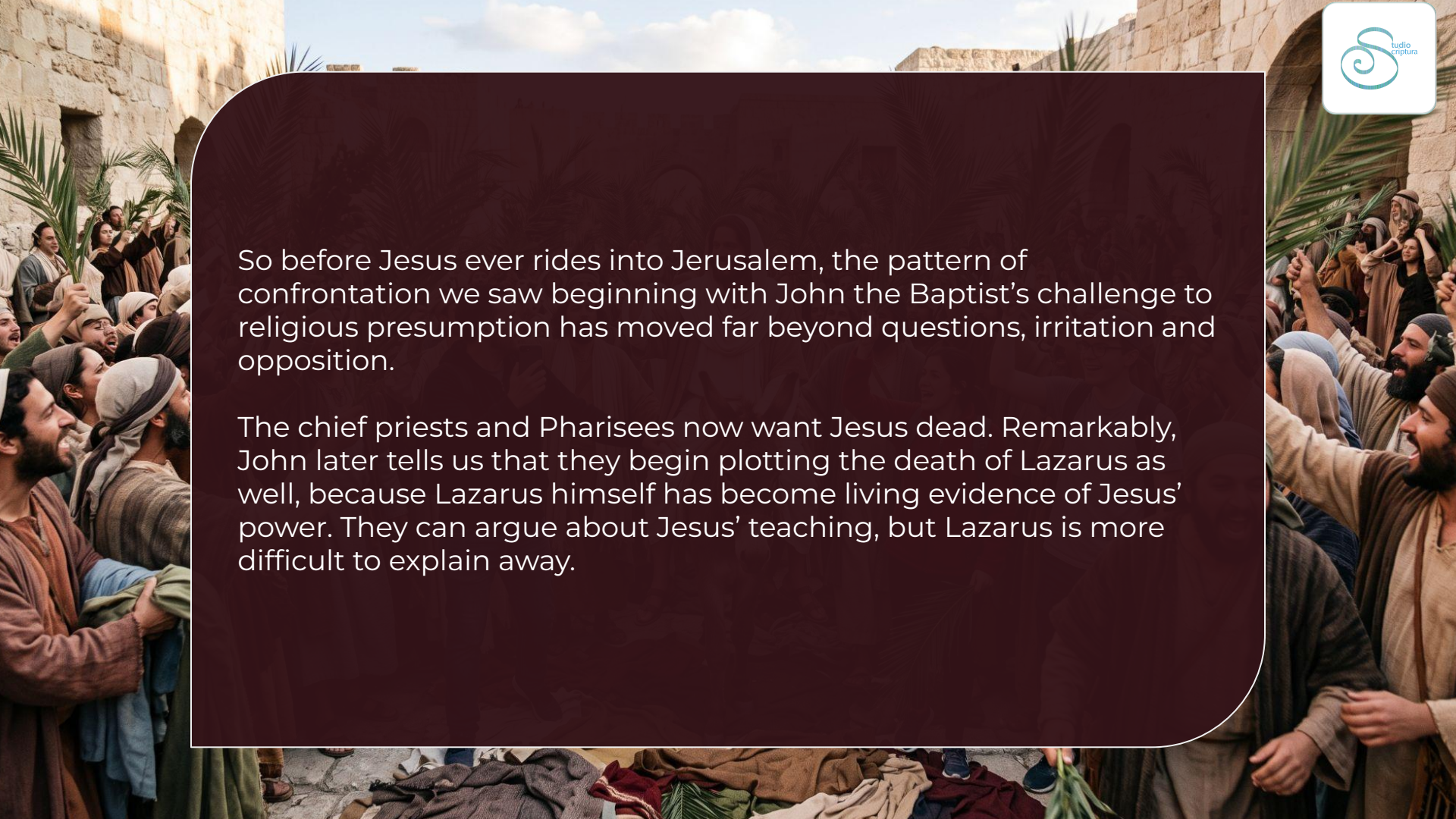
Notice the title already being shouted before we reach Palm Sunday: *Son of David*. Messianic language is plainly in the air. In Jericho Jesus also encountered Zacchaeus, entered his home, and declared, “Today salvation has come to this house,” reminding everyone that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Mark 10:46–52; Luke 19:1–10).



Earlier, before this final approach toward Jerusalem, He had performed perhaps the most publicly noteworthy miracle of His ministry, which we covered in our earlier class on the miracles of Jesus. In Bethany, only about two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus, a man who had been dead four days, and cried, *Lazarus, come forth!* Lazarus walked out of the tomb.

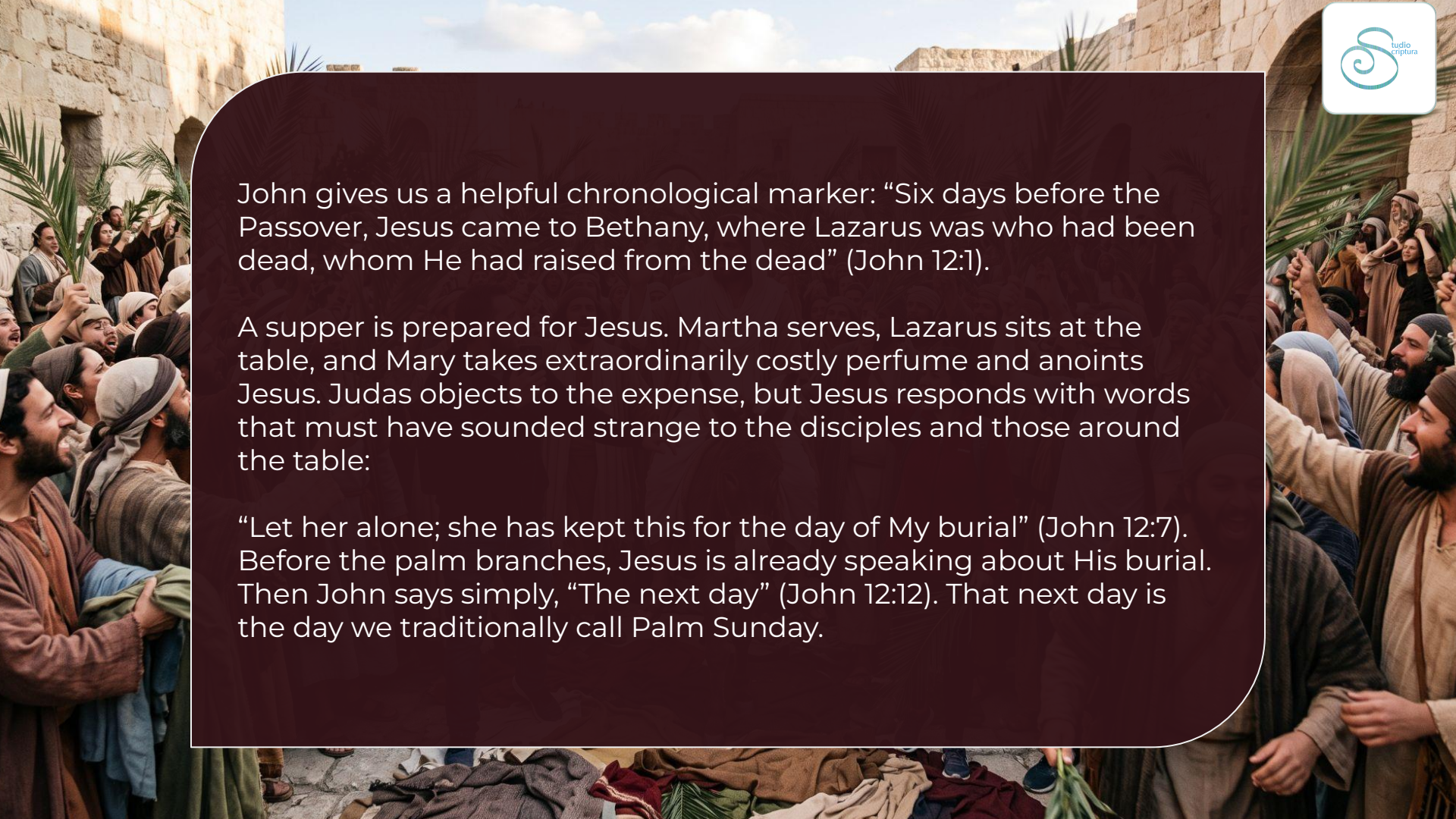


John tells us that many who witnessed it believed in Jesus, while others immediately went to the Pharisees and reported what He had done. The chief priests and Pharisees gathered the council and asked, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.” Caiaphas declared that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, and John then says plainly, “Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death” (John 11:43–53).



So before Jesus ever rides into Jerusalem, the pattern of confrontation we saw beginning with John the Baptist's challenge to religious presumption has moved far beyond questions, irritation and opposition.

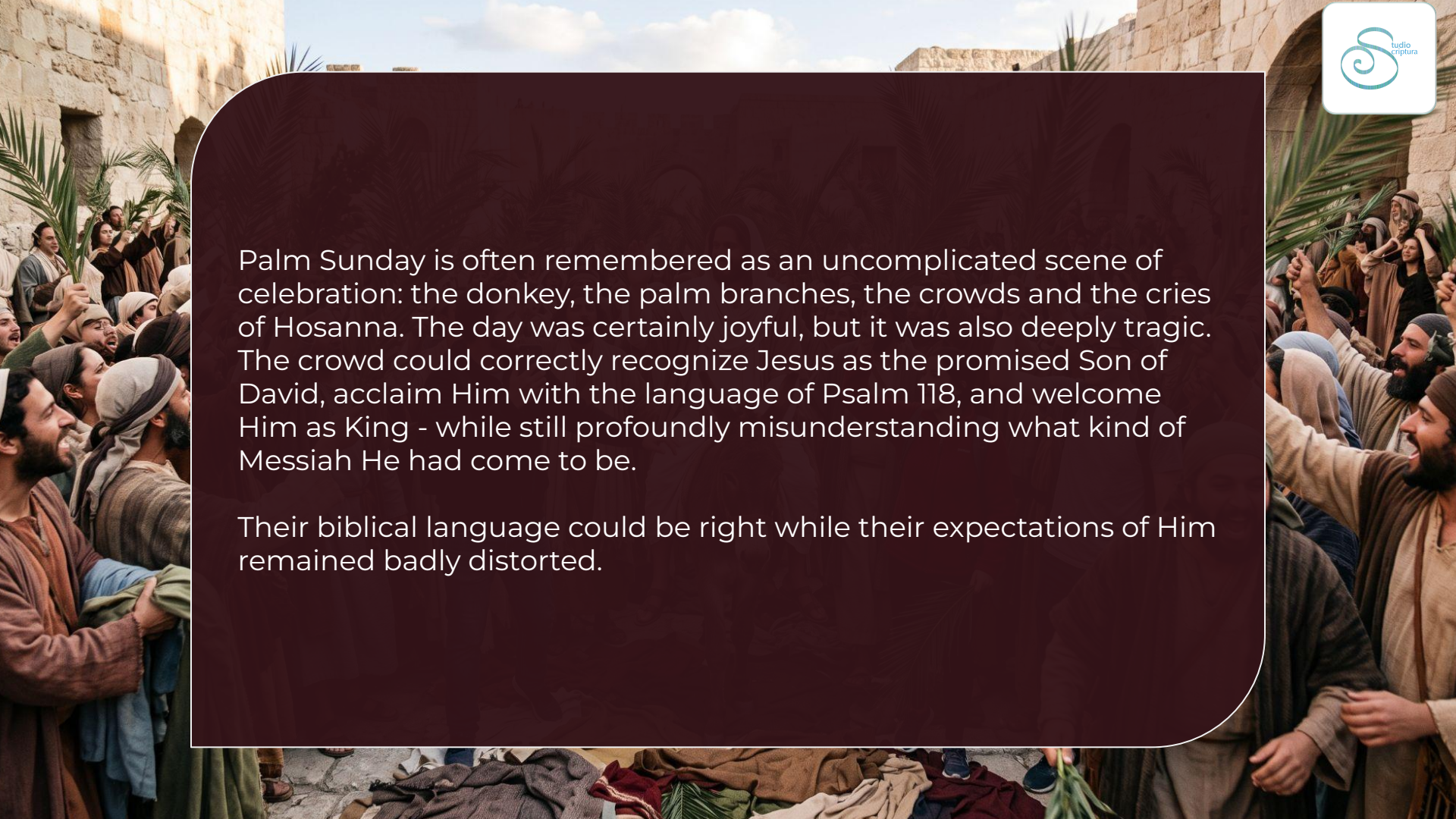
The chief priests and Pharisees now want Jesus dead. Remarkably, John later tells us that they begin plotting the death of Lazarus as well, because Lazarus himself has become living evidence of Jesus' power. They can argue about Jesus' teaching, but Lazarus is more difficult to explain away.



John gives us a helpful chronological marker: “Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead” (John 12:1).

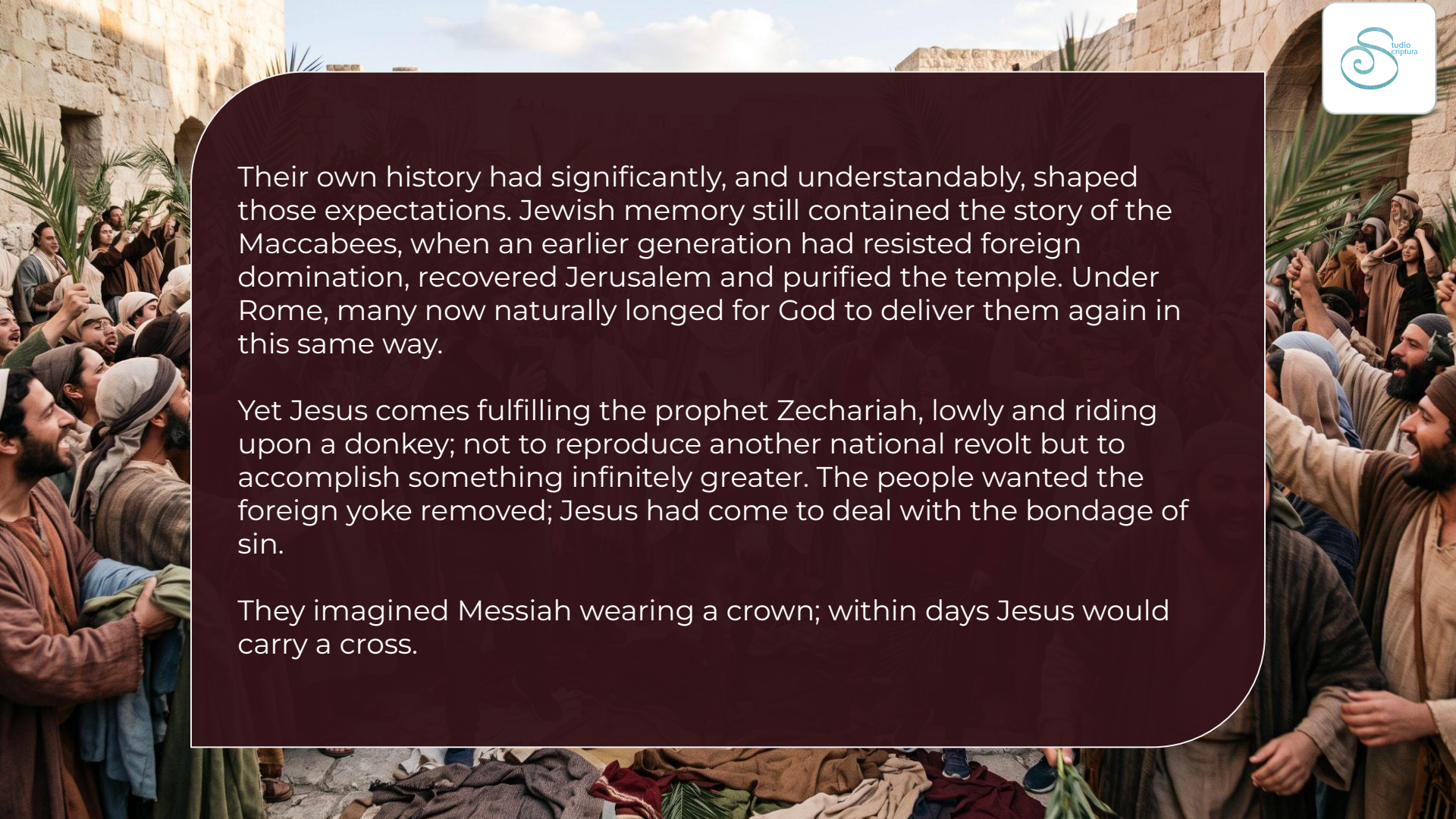
A supper is prepared for Jesus. Martha serves, Lazarus sits at the table, and Mary takes extraordinarily costly perfume and anoints Jesus. Judas objects to the expense, but Jesus responds with words that must have sounded strange to the disciples and those around the table:

“Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial” (John 12:7). Before the palm branches, Jesus is already speaking about His burial. Then John says simply, “The next day” (John 12:12). That next day is the day we traditionally call Palm Sunday.



Palm Sunday is often remembered as an uncomplicated scene of celebration: the donkey, the palm branches, the crowds and the cries of Hosanna. The day was certainly joyful, but it was also deeply tragic. The crowd could correctly recognize Jesus as the promised Son of David, acclaim Him with the language of Psalm 118, and welcome Him as King - while still profoundly misunderstanding what kind of Messiah He had come to be.

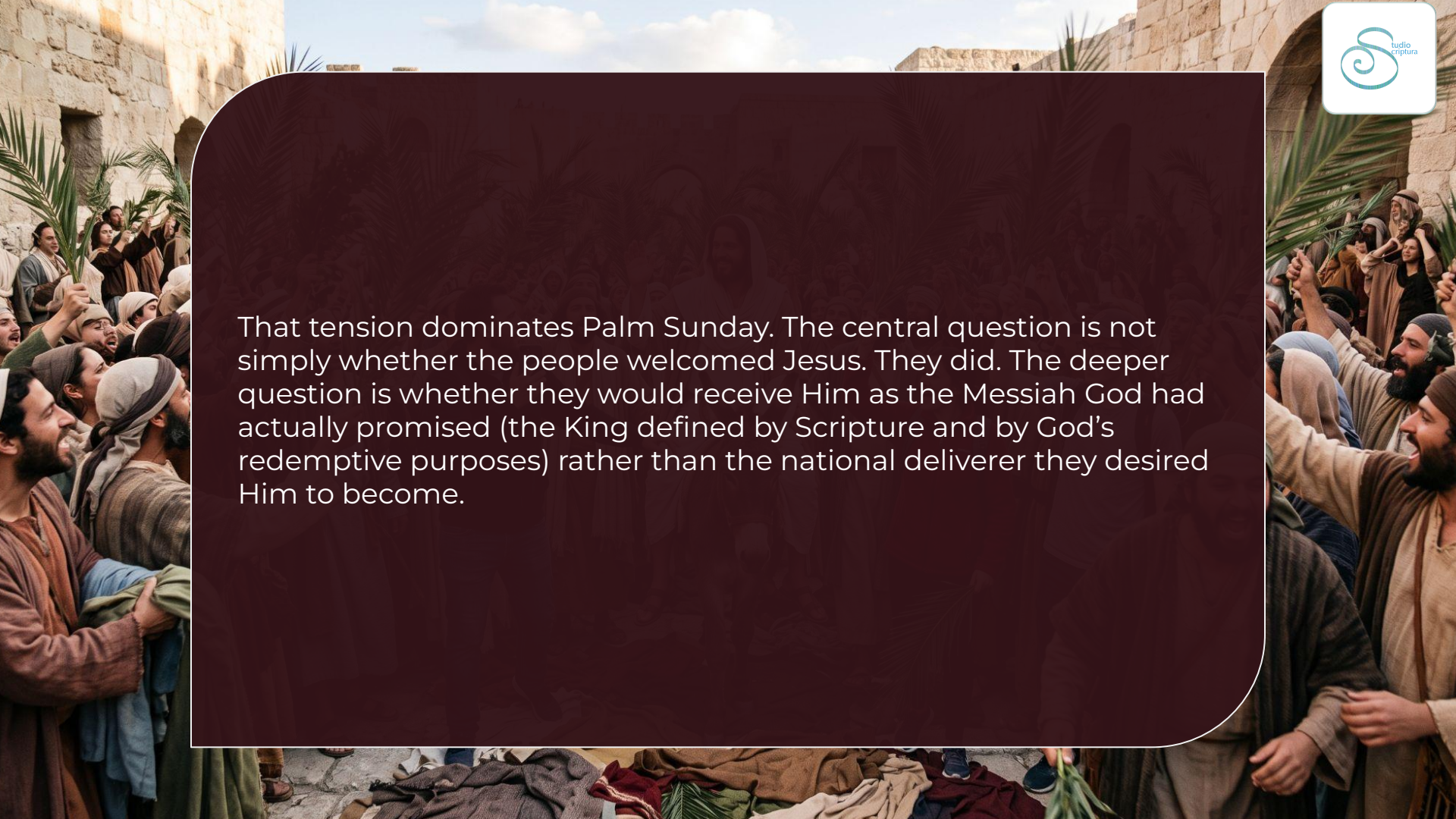
Their biblical language could be right while their expectations of Him remained badly distorted.



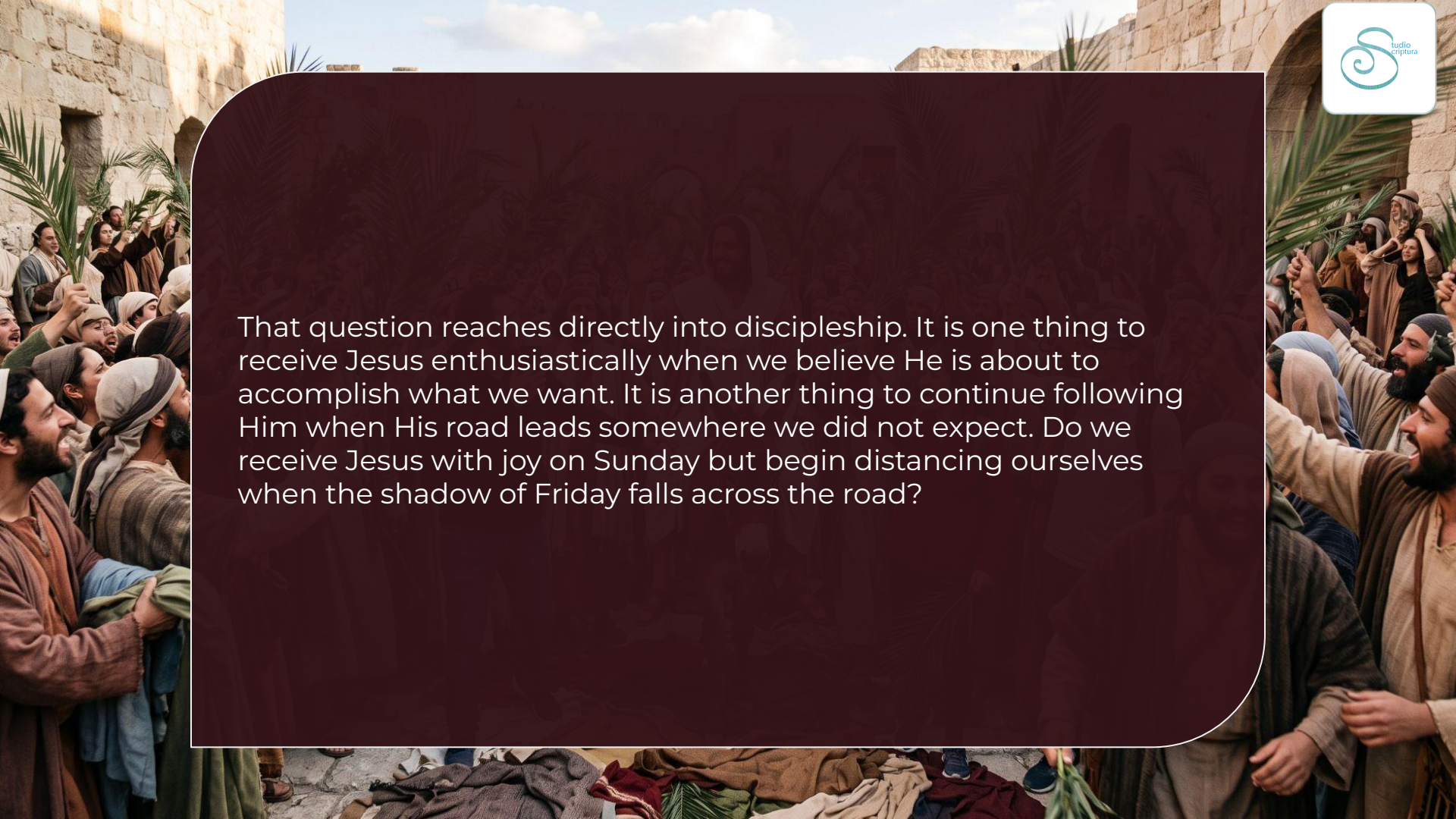
Their own history had significantly, and understandably, shaped those expectations. Jewish memory still contained the story of the Maccabees, when an earlier generation had resisted foreign domination, recovered Jerusalem and purified the temple. Under Rome, many now naturally longed for God to deliver them again in this same way.

Yet Jesus comes fulfilling the prophet Zechariah, lowly and riding upon a donkey; not to reproduce another national revolt but to accomplish something infinitely greater. The people wanted the foreign yoke removed; Jesus had come to deal with the bondage of sin.

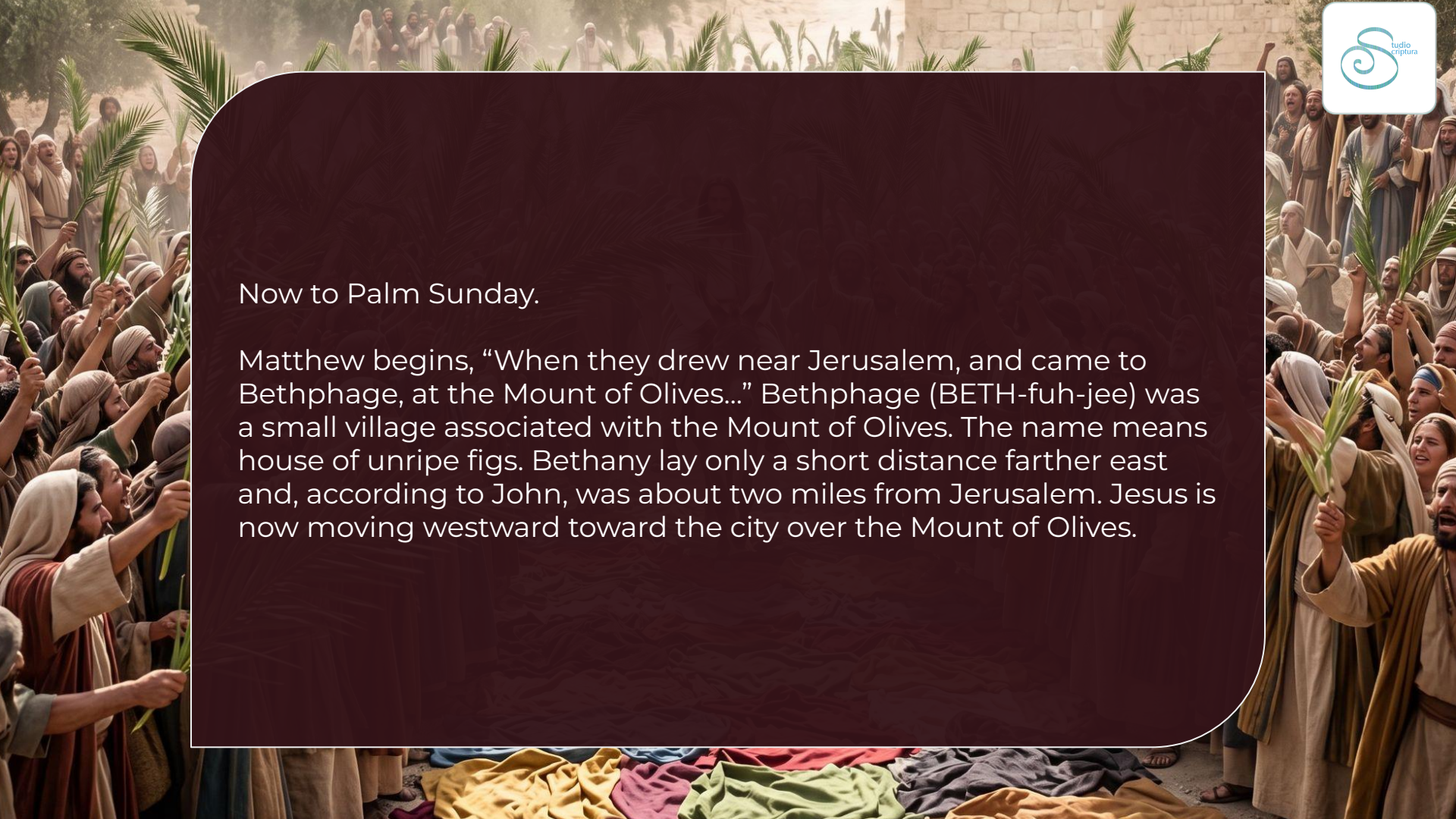
They imagined Messiah wearing a crown; within days Jesus would carry a cross.



That tension dominates Palm Sunday. The central question is not simply whether the people welcomed Jesus. They did. The deeper question is whether they would receive Him as the Messiah God had actually promised (the King defined by Scripture and by God’s redemptive purposes) rather than the national deliverer they desired Him to become.

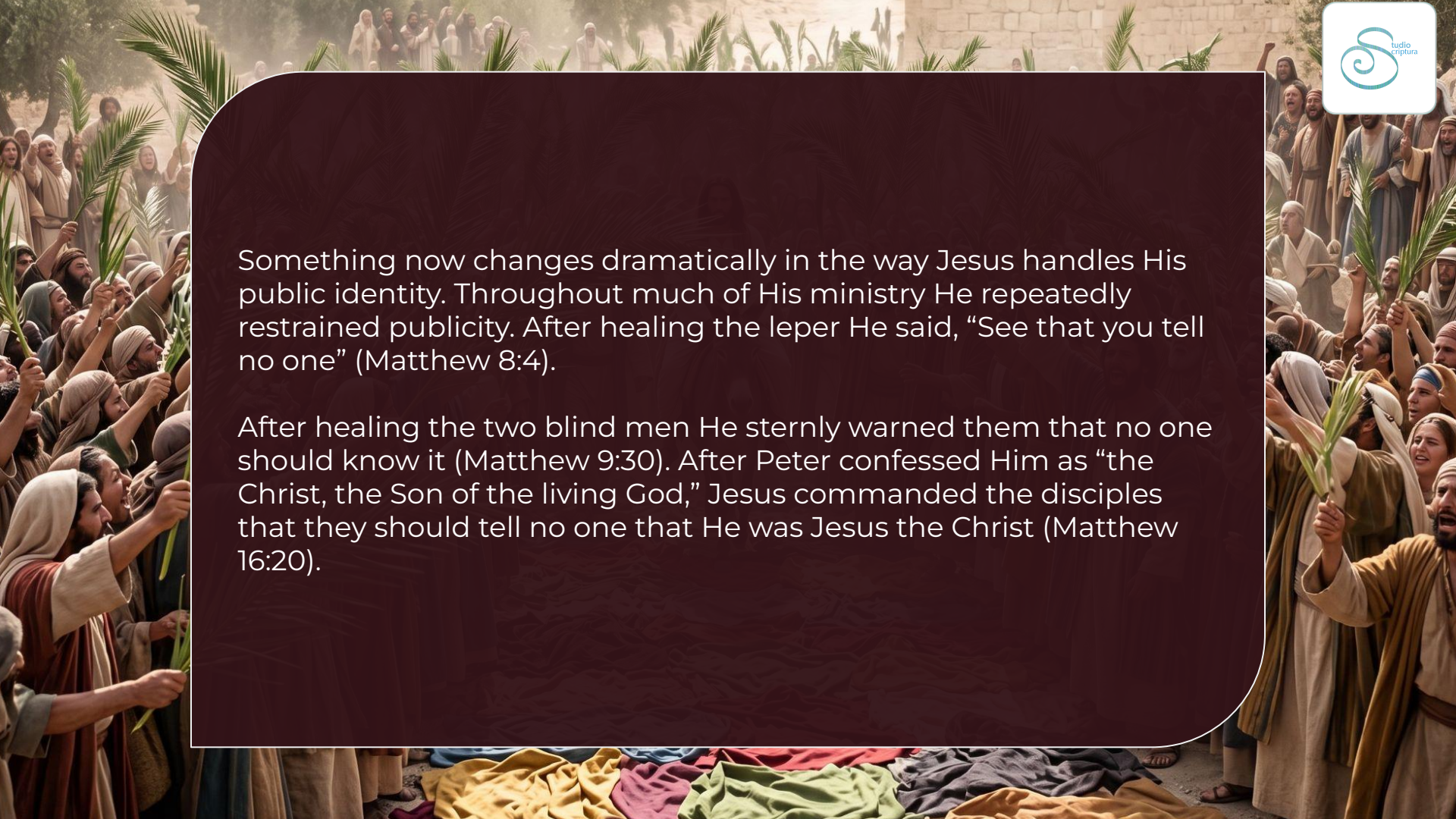


That question reaches directly into discipleship. It is one thing to receive Jesus enthusiastically when we believe He is about to accomplish what we want. It is another thing to continue following Him when His road leads somewhere we did not expect. Do we receive Jesus with joy on Sunday but begin distancing ourselves when the shadow of Friday falls across the road?



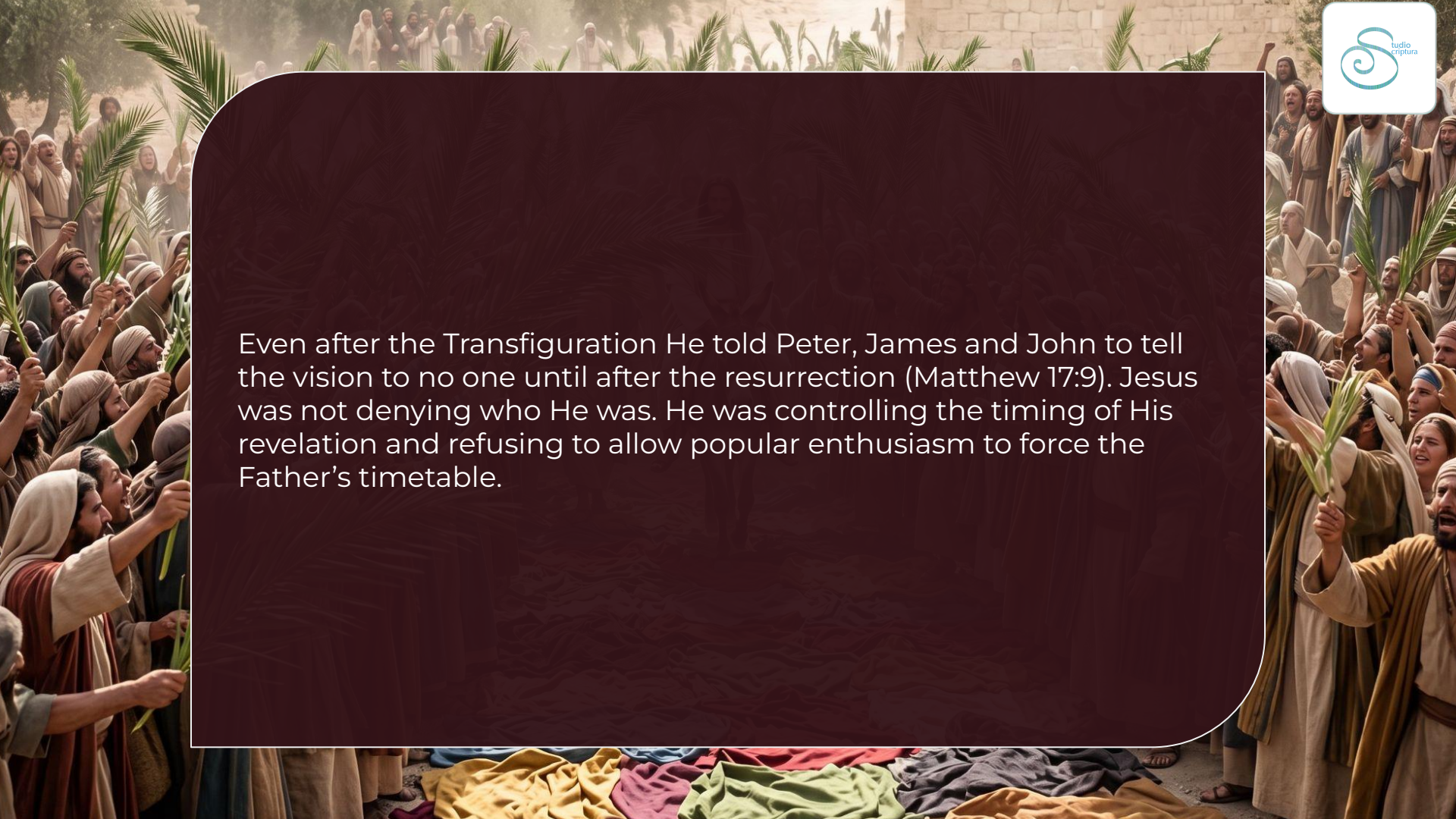
Now to Palm Sunday.

Matthew begins, “When they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives…” Bethphage (BETH-fuh-jee) was a small village associated with the Mount of Olives. The name means house of unripe figs. Bethany lay only a short distance farther east and, according to John, was about two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus is now moving westward toward the city over the Mount of Olives.



Something now changes dramatically in the way Jesus handles His public identity. Throughout much of His ministry He repeatedly restrained publicity. After healing the leper He said, “See that you tell no one” (Matthew 8:4).

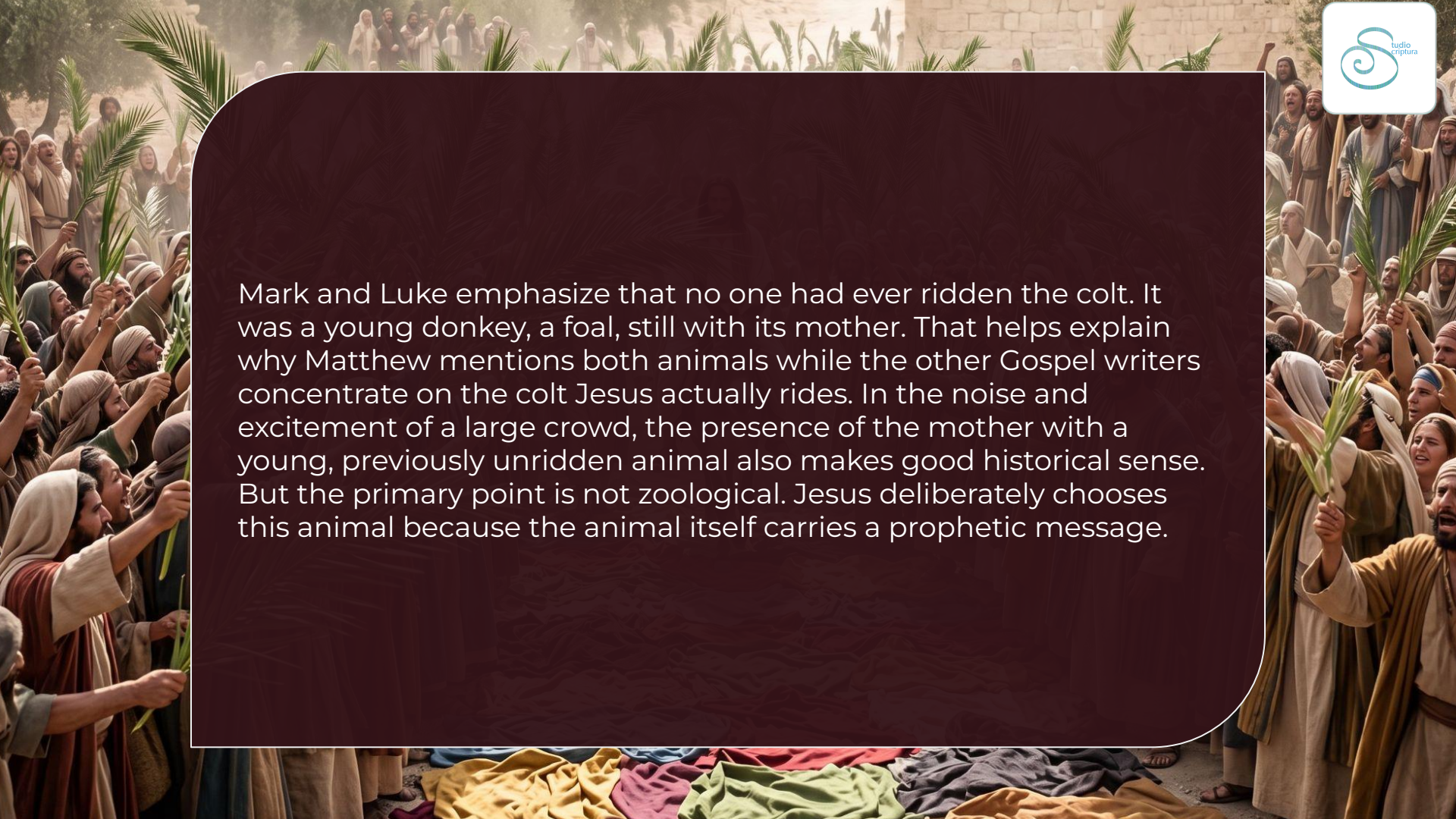
After healing the two blind men He sternly warned them that no one should know it (Matthew 9:30). After Peter confessed Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ (Matthew 16:20).



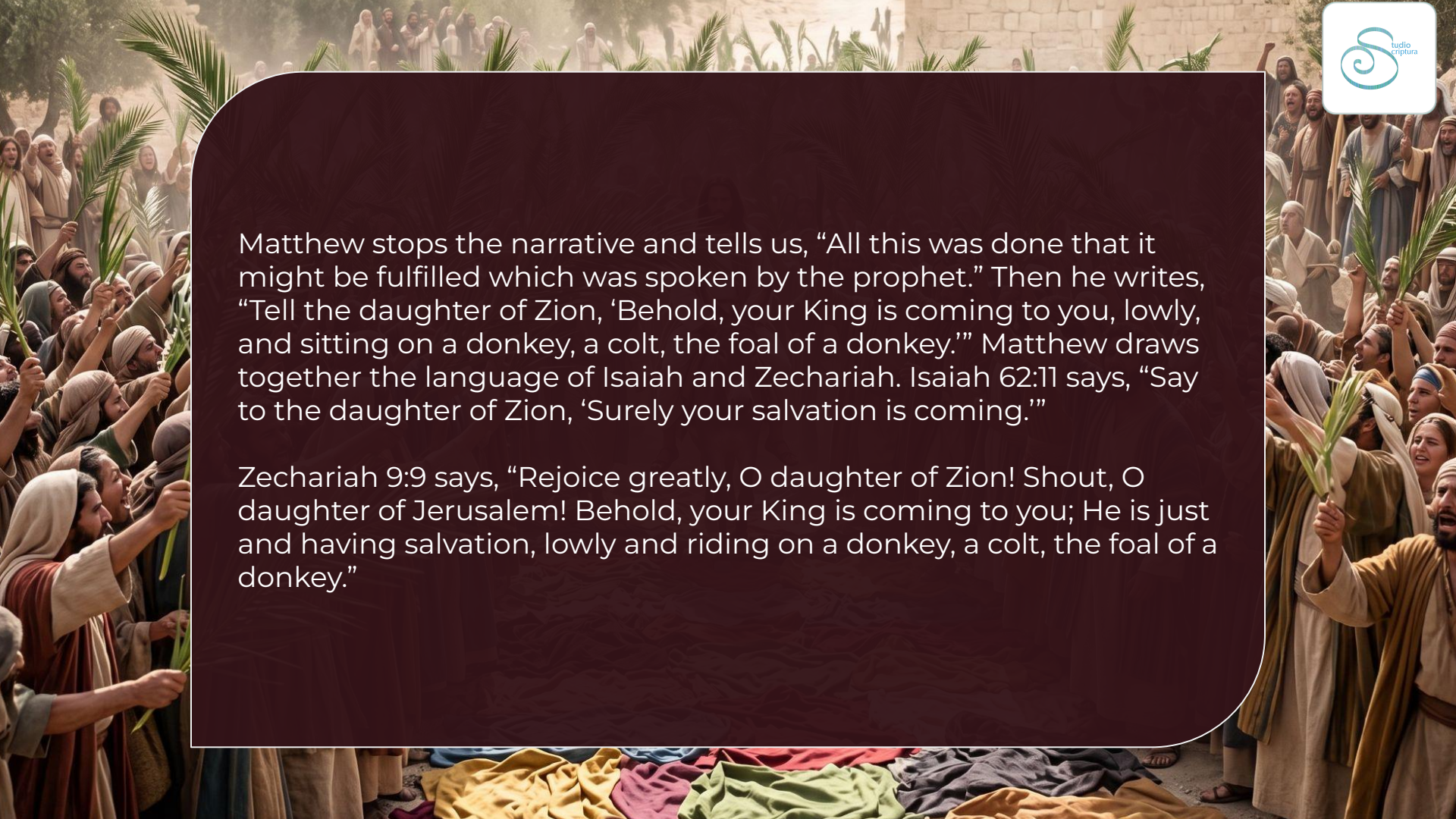
Even after the Transfiguration He told Peter, James and John to tell the vision to no one until after the resurrection (Matthew 17:9). Jesus was not denying who He was. He was controlling the timing of His revelation and refusing to allow popular enthusiasm to force the Father’s timetable.



Palm Sunday is now different. Jesus deliberately permits, indeed arranges, a public entrance into Jerusalem. He sends two disciples ahead, tells them they will find a donkey tied with her colt, and instructs them to bring the animals to Him. The period of restraint is giving way to open presentation. Jesus is publicly presenting Himself to Jerusalem.



Mark and Luke emphasize that no one had ever ridden the colt. It was a young donkey, a foal, still with its mother. That helps explain why Matthew mentions both animals while the other Gospel writers concentrate on the colt Jesus actually rides. In the noise and excitement of a large crowd, the presence of the mother with a young, previously unridden animal also makes good historical sense. But the primary point is not zoological. Jesus deliberately chooses this animal because the animal itself carries a prophetic message.



Matthew stops the narrative and tells us, “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet.” Then he writes, “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” Matthew draws together the language of Isaiah and Zechariah. Isaiah 62:11 says, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming.’”

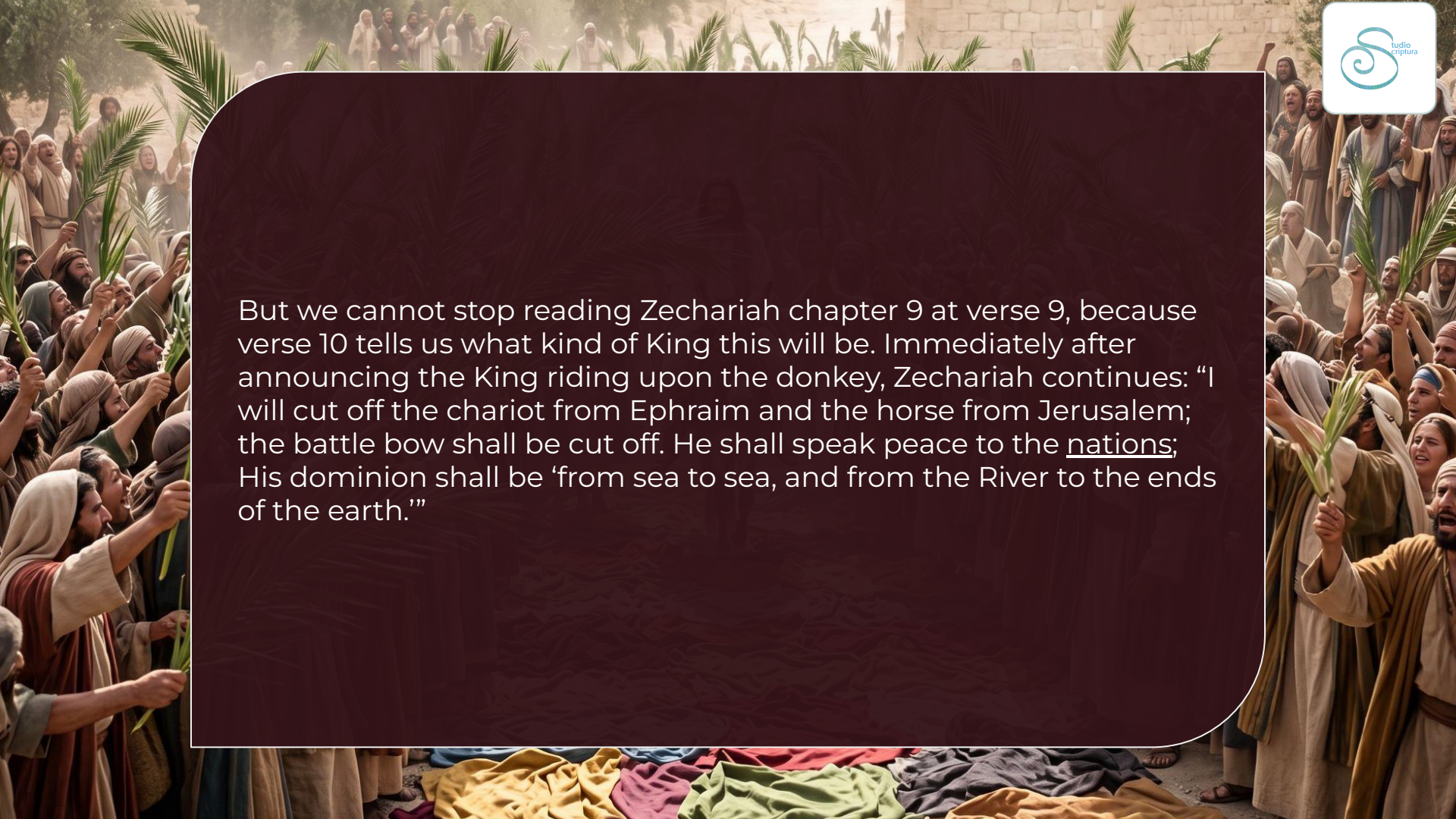
Zechariah 9:9 says, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”



The prophetic message is clear. Isaiah announces that Zion's salvation is coming; Zechariah announces that Zion's King is coming. Matthew looks at Jesus approaching Jerusalem and says, in effect, *Here He is!*

The "daughter of Zion" is prophetic language for Jerusalem and her people, the city of David, the city of the temple, the city at the heart of Israel's covenant life.

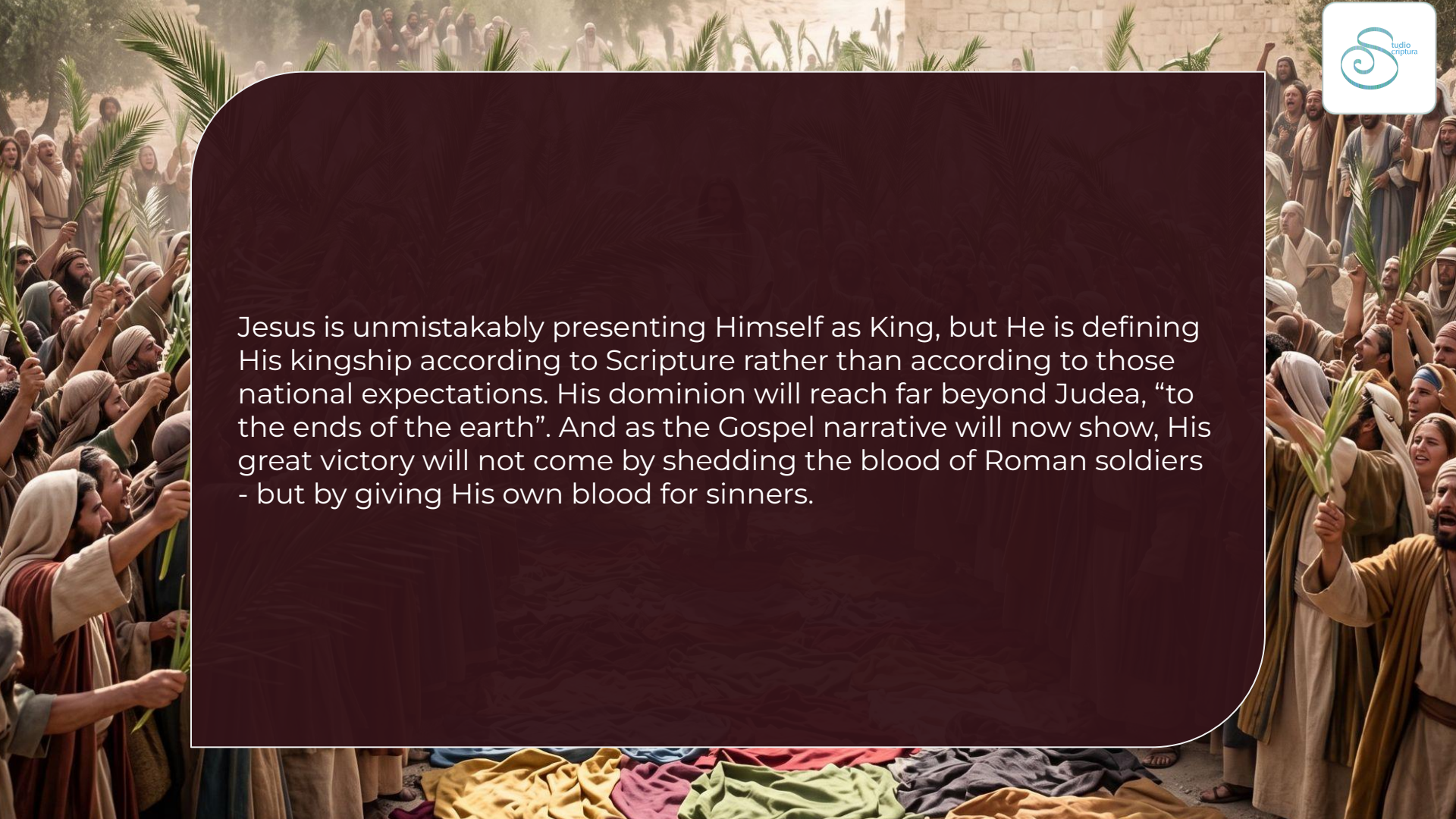
When Matthew says, "Behold, your King is coming to you," he is announcing that the King promised in Israel's Scriptures has arrived at His city.



But we cannot stop reading Zechariah chapter 9 at verse 9, because verse 10 tells us what kind of King this will be. Immediately after announcing the King riding upon the donkey, Zechariah continues: “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.’”



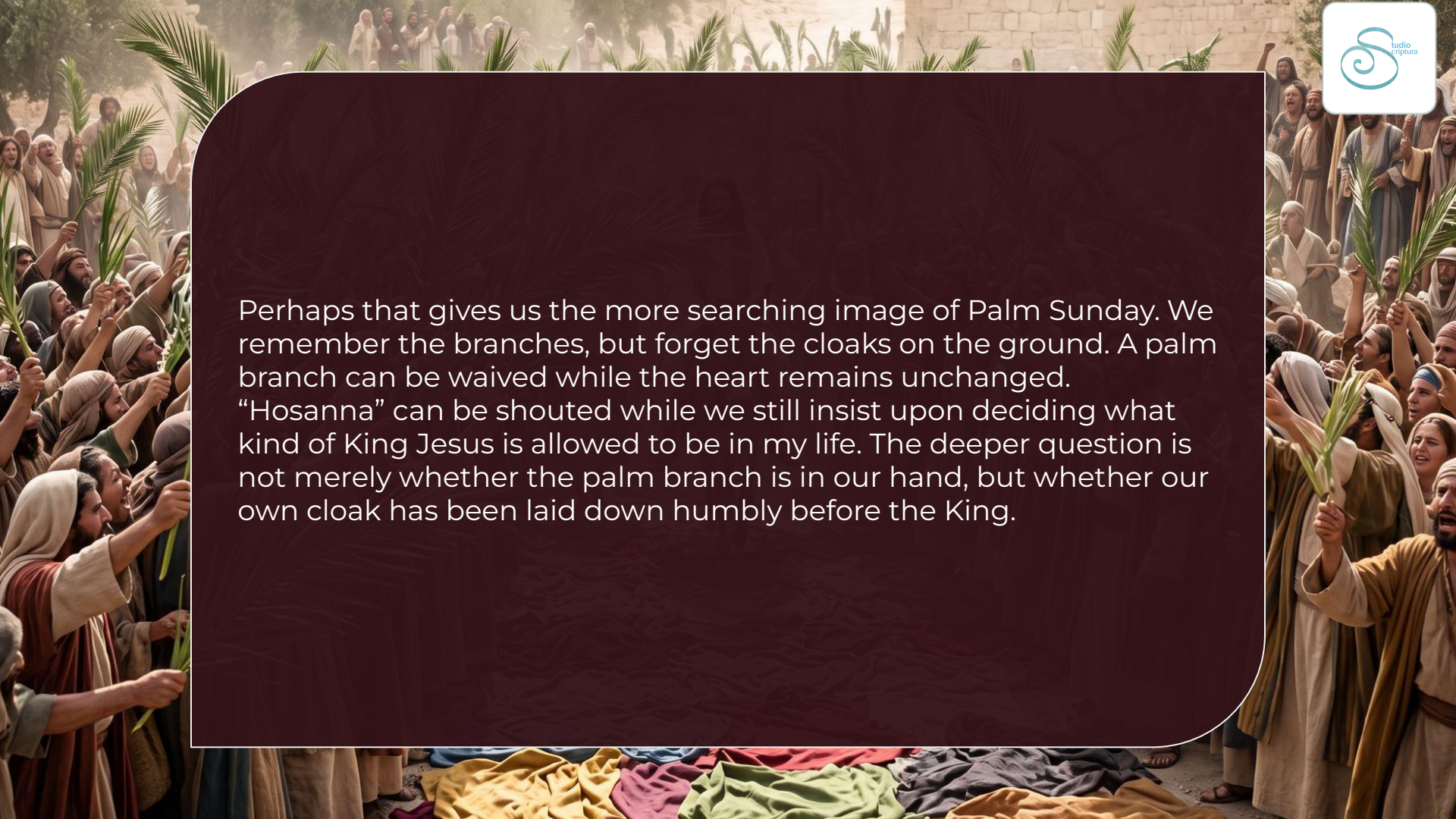
Verse 10 is critical. The donkey is not merely a picture of humility. The character of this kingdom is revealed in His first coming; the full consummation of that peace and universal rule still awaits His return. Zechariah deliberately contrasts this King with the instruments of warfare: the chariot, the warhorse and the battle bow disappear, while the King “speaks peace to the nations.” Many in Israel longed for a ruler who could militarily cast off Rome’s yoke and restore Jewish national independence.



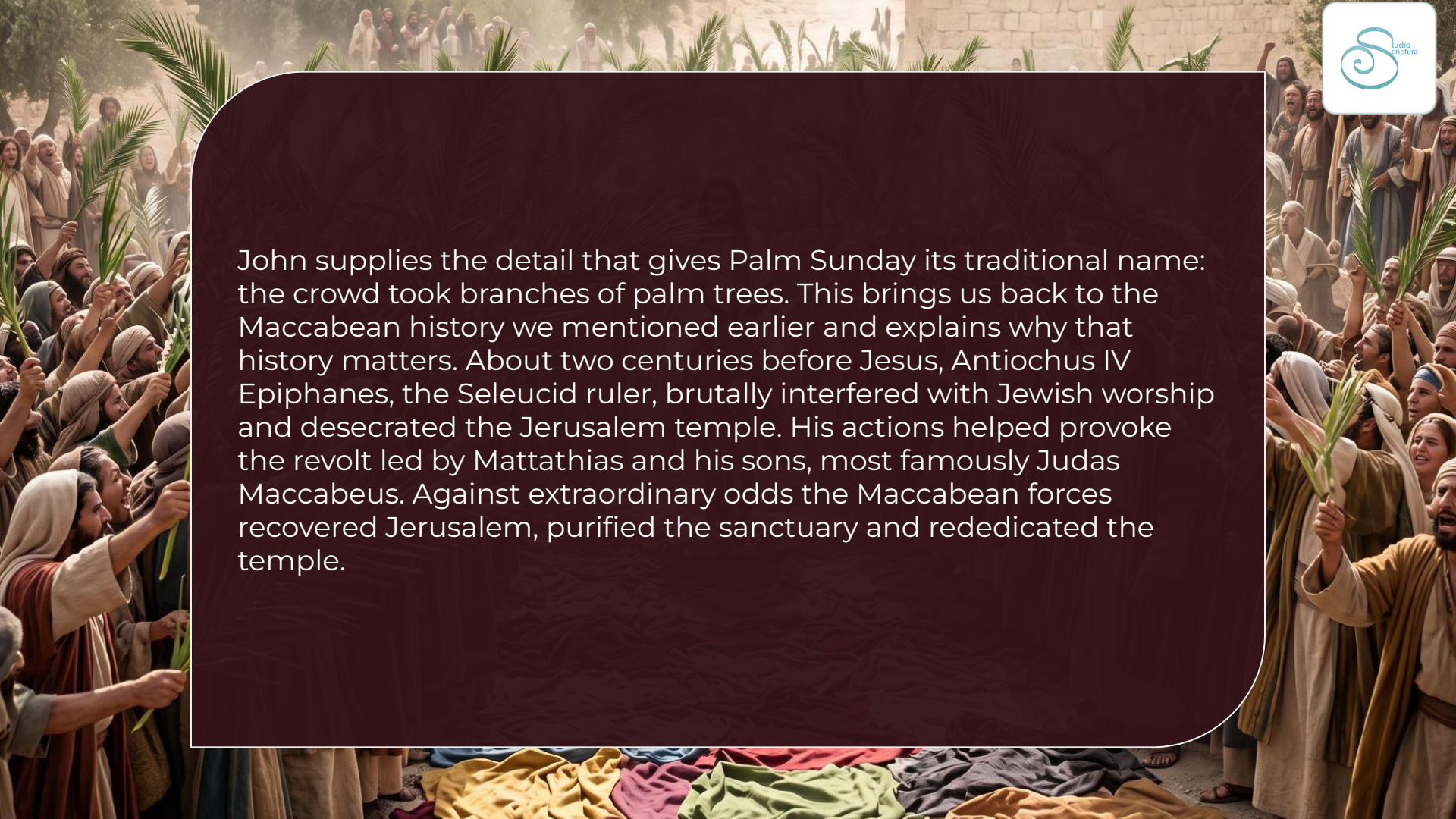
Jesus is unmistakably presenting Himself as King, but He is defining His kingship according to Scripture rather than according to those national expectations. His dominion will reach far beyond Judea, “to the ends of the earth”. And as the Gospel narrative will now show, His great victory will not come by shedding the blood of Roman soldiers - but by giving His own blood for sinners.



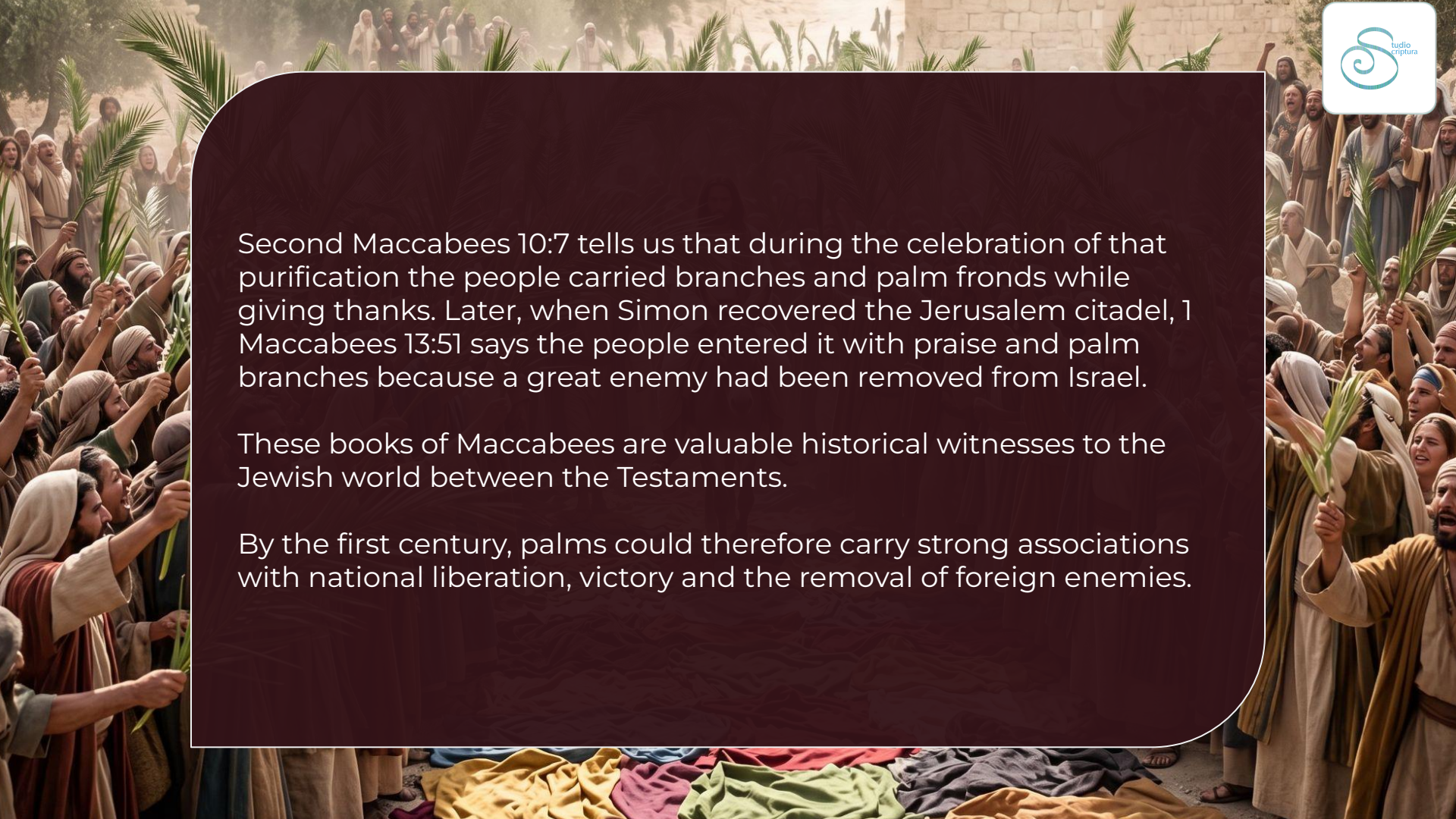
They place their clothing upon the animals, and Matthew tells us that a very great multitude spreads garments along the road. That gesture also has biblical precedent. In 2 Kings 9:13, when Jehu is proclaimed king, the men around him immediately take their garments and place them beneath him, blow the trumpet and shout, “Jehu is king!” The act is one of royal homage. An outer garment was valuable. To place it beneath the king was a visible declaration of honor and submission.



Perhaps that gives us the more searching image of Palm Sunday. We remember the branches, but forget the cloaks on the ground. A palm branch can be waived while the heart remains unchanged. “Hosanna” can be shouted while we still insist upon deciding what kind of King Jesus is allowed to be in my life. The deeper question is not merely whether the palm branch is in our hand, but whether our own cloak has been laid down humbly before the King.



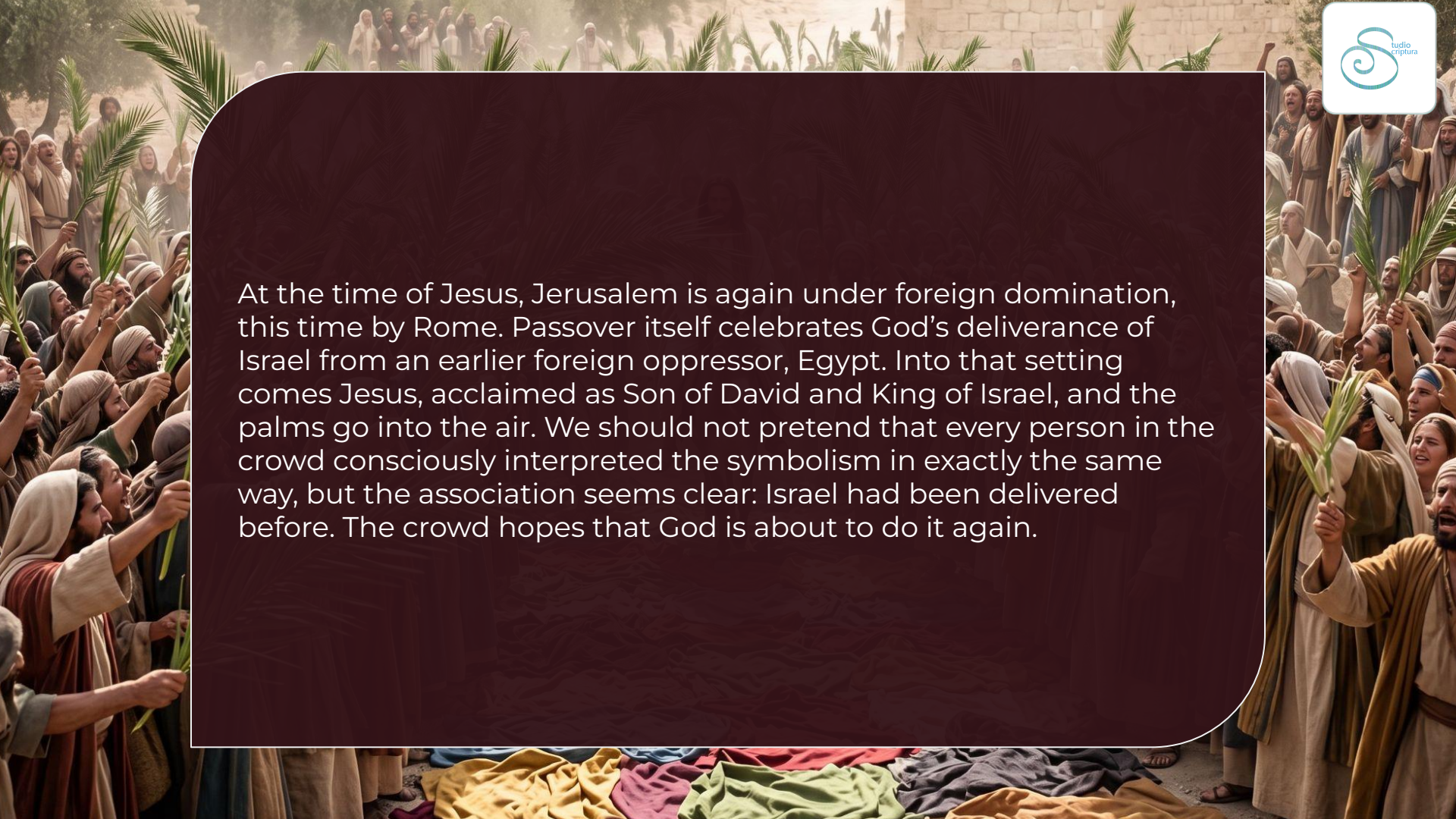
John supplies the detail that gives Palm Sunday its traditional name: the crowd took branches of palm trees. This brings us back to the Maccabean history we mentioned earlier and explains why that history matters. About two centuries before Jesus, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler, brutally interfered with Jewish worship and desecrated the Jerusalem temple. His actions helped provoke the revolt led by Mattathias and his sons, most famously Judas Maccabeus. Against extraordinary odds the Maccabean forces recovered Jerusalem, purified the sanctuary and rededicated the temple.



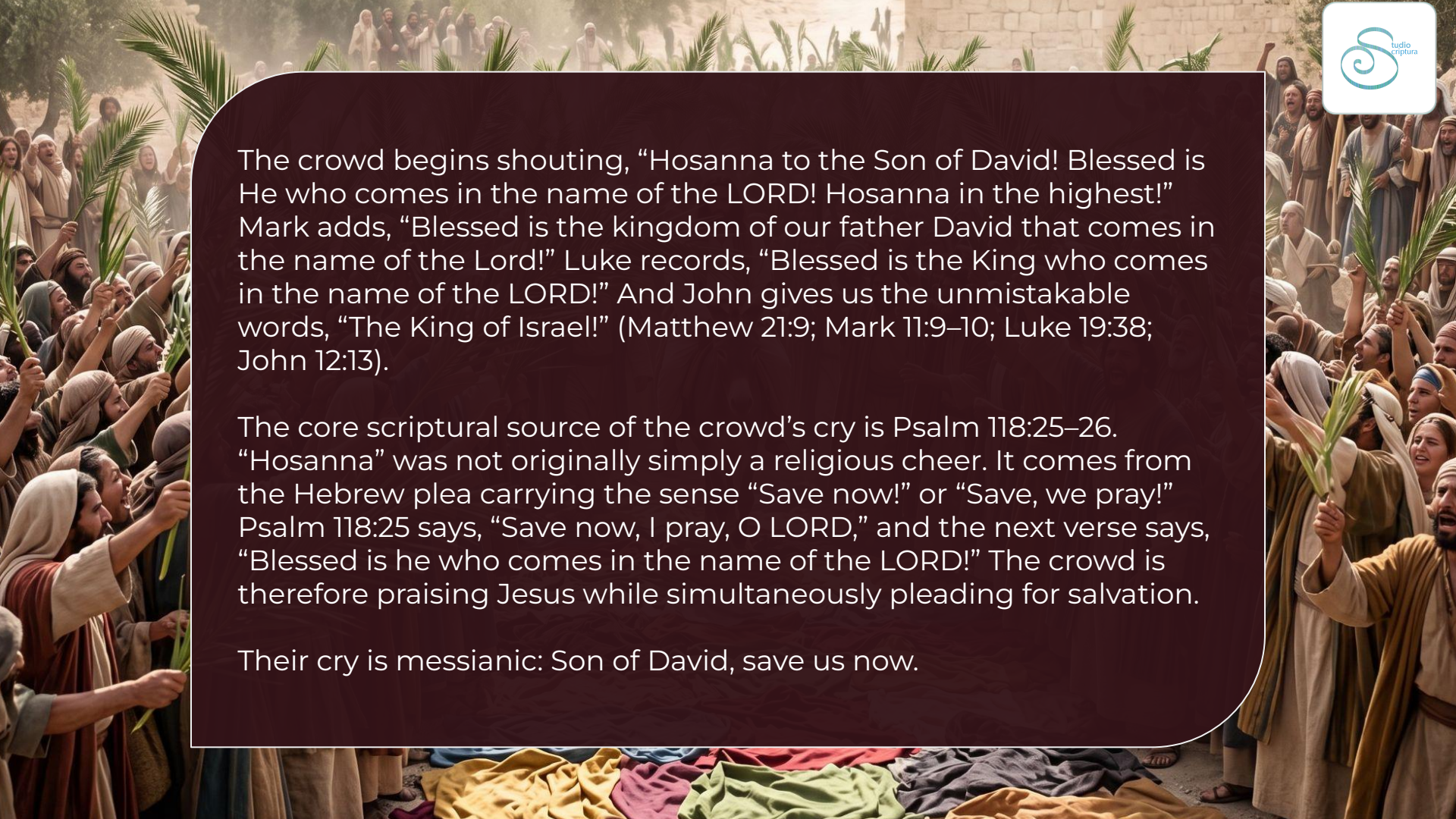
Second Maccabees 10:7 tells us that during the celebration of that purification the people carried branches and palm fronds while giving thanks. Later, when Simon recovered the Jerusalem citadel, 1 Maccabees 13:51 says the people entered it with praise and palm branches because a great enemy had been removed from Israel.

These books of Maccabees are valuable historical witnesses to the Jewish world between the Testaments.

By the first century, palms could therefore carry strong associations with national liberation, victory and the removal of foreign enemies.



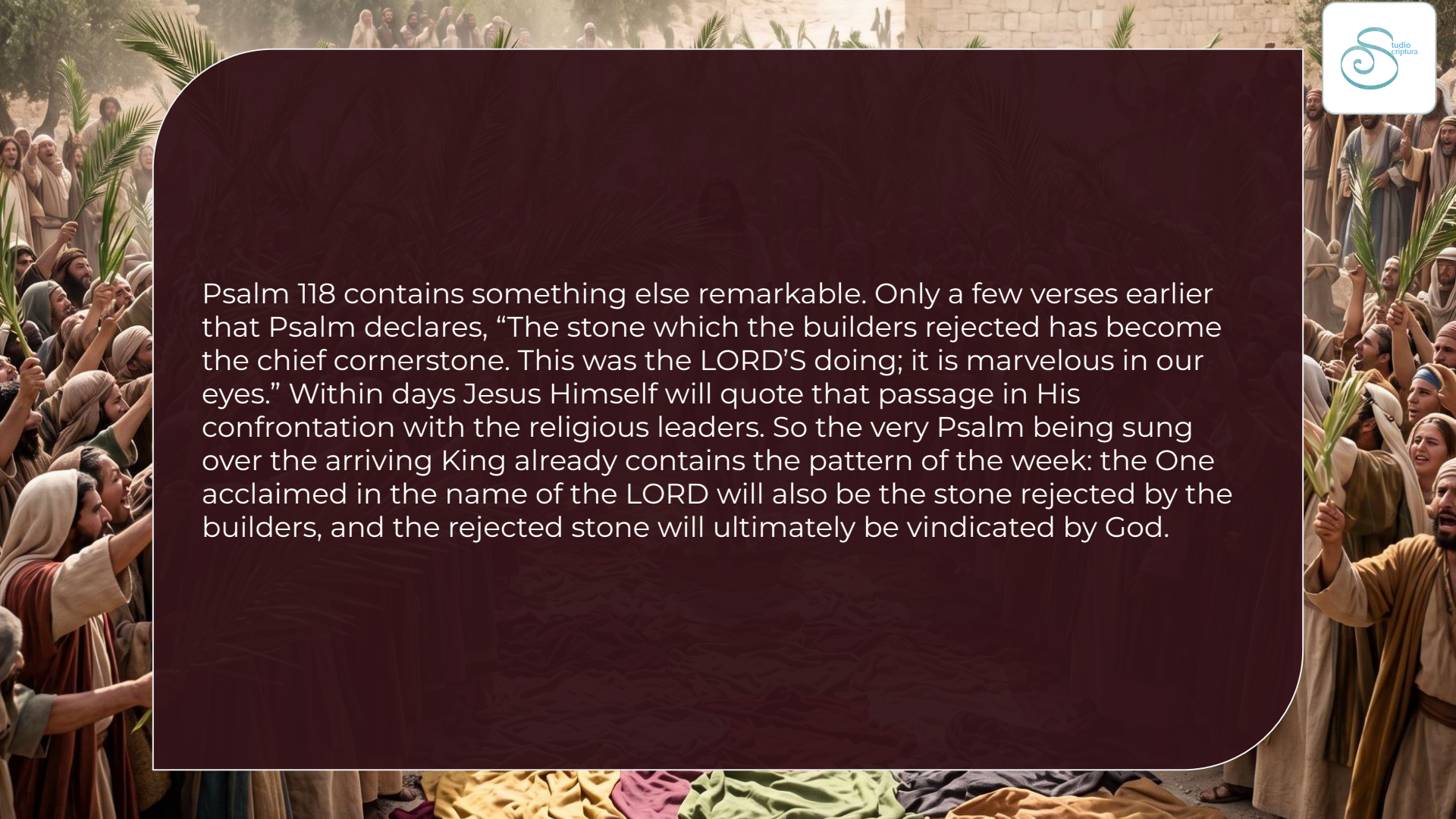
At the time of Jesus, Jerusalem is again under foreign domination, this time by Rome. Passover itself celebrates God's deliverance of Israel from an earlier foreign oppressor, Egypt. Into that setting comes Jesus, acclaimed as Son of David and King of Israel, and the palms go into the air. We should not pretend that every person in the crowd consciously interpreted the symbolism in exactly the same way, but the association seems clear: Israel had been delivered before. The crowd hopes that God is about to do it again.



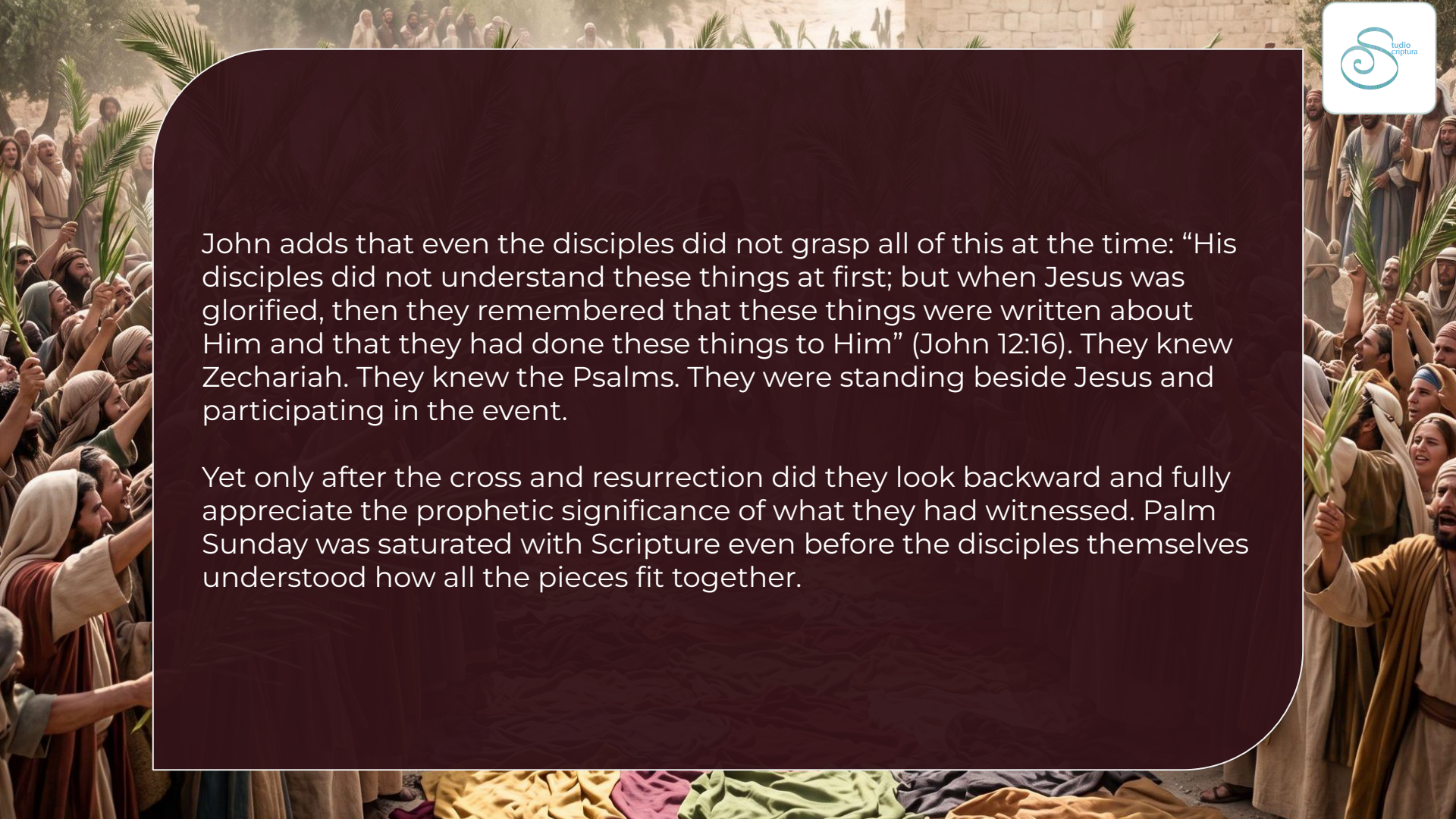
The crowd begins shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!” Mark adds, “Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!” Luke records, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!” And John gives us the unmistakable words, “The King of Israel!” (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9–10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13).

The core scriptural source of the crowd’s cry is Psalm 118:25–26. “Hosanna” was not originally simply a religious cheer. It comes from the Hebrew plea carrying the sense “Save now!” or “Save, we pray!” Psalm 118:25 says, “Save now, I pray, O LORD,” and the next verse says, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” The crowd is therefore praising Jesus while simultaneously pleading for salvation.

Their cry is messianic: Son of David, save us now.

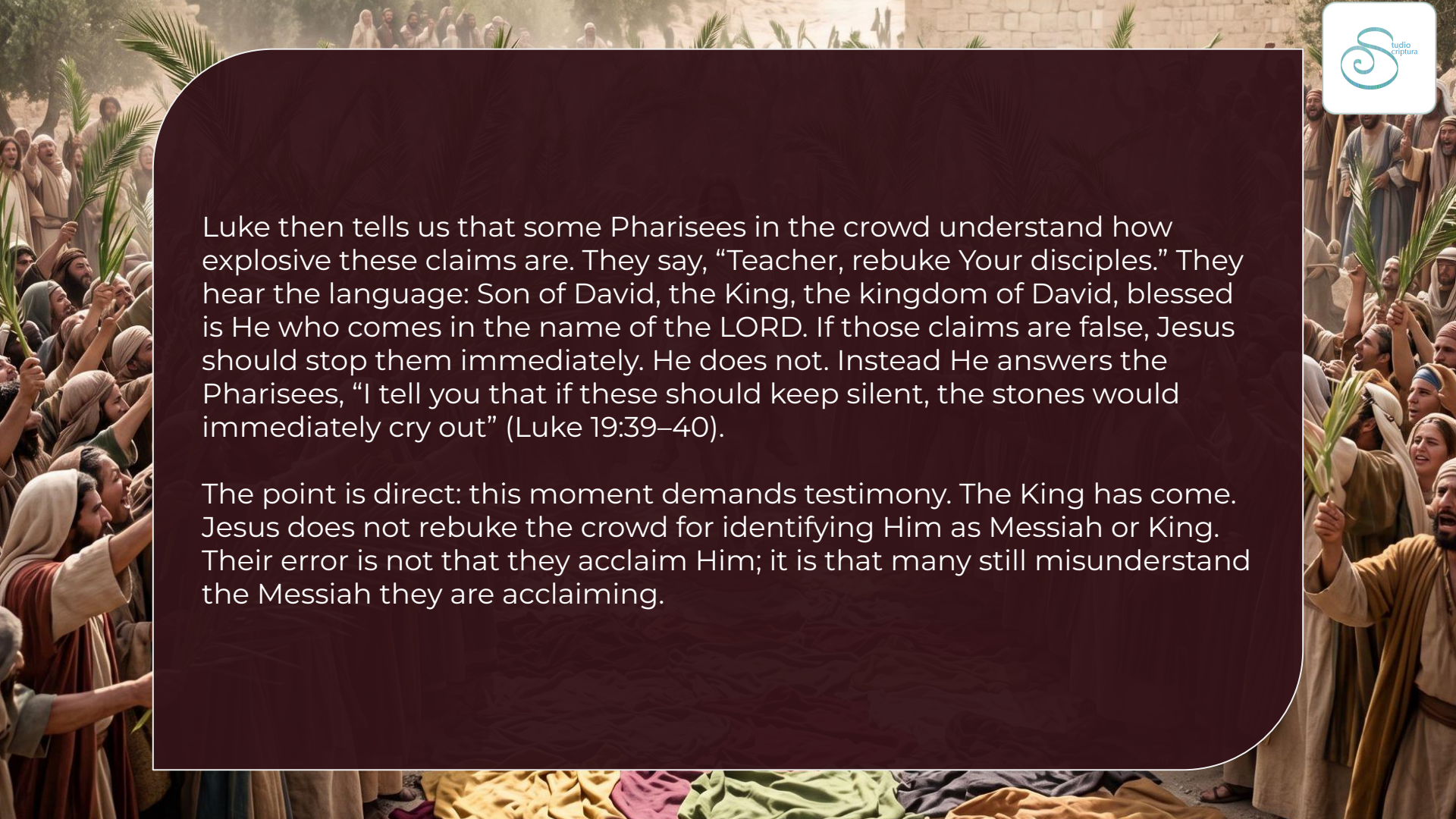


Psalm 118 contains something else remarkable. Only a few verses earlier that Psalm declares, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” Within days Jesus Himself will quote that passage in His confrontation with the religious leaders. So the very Psalm being sung over the arriving King already contains the pattern of the week: the One acclaimed in the name of the LORD will also be the stone rejected by the builders, and the rejected stone will ultimately be vindicated by God.



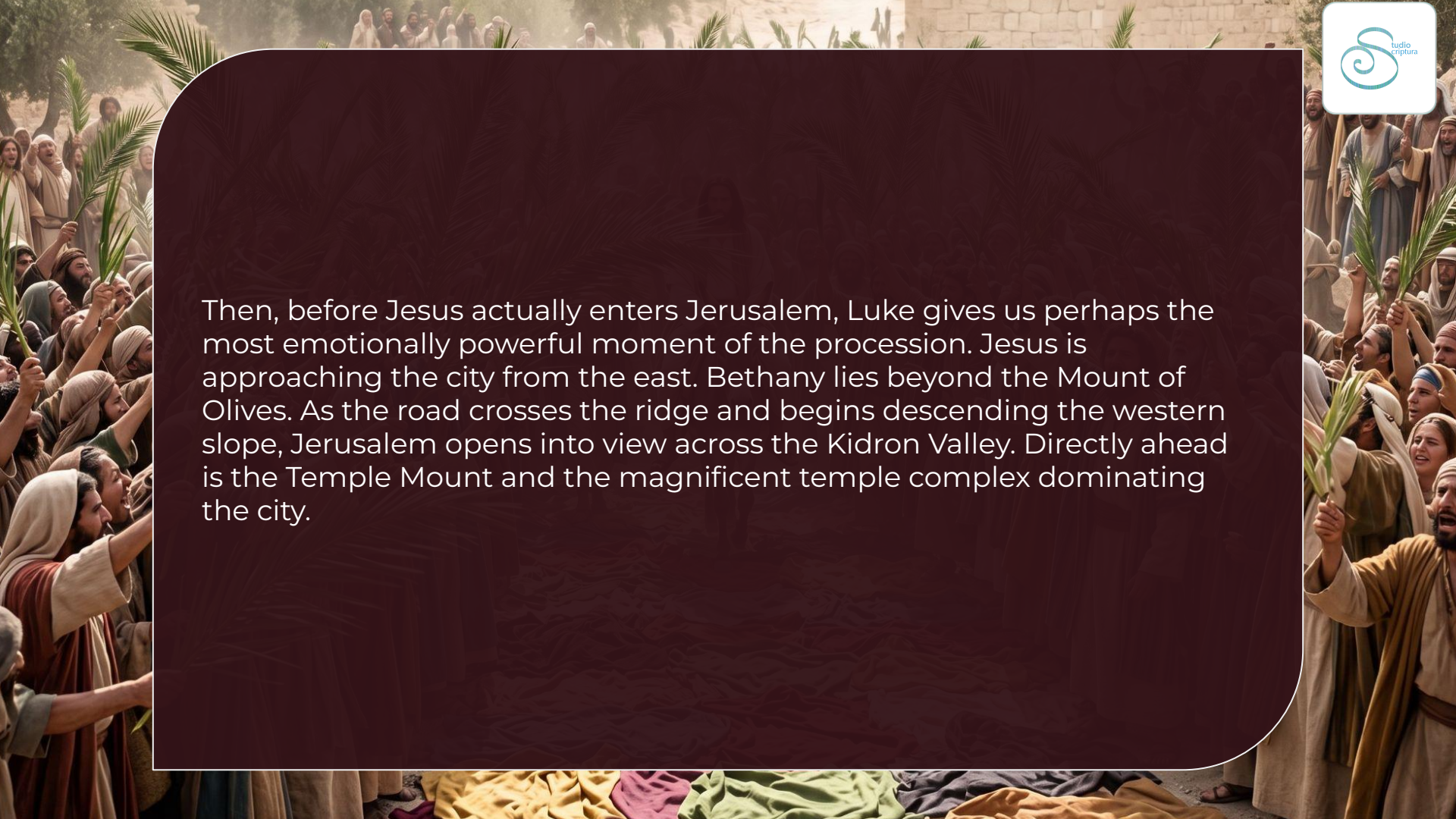
John adds that even the disciples did not grasp all of this at the time: “His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him” (John 12:16). They knew Zechariah. They knew the Psalms. They were standing beside Jesus and participating in the event.

Yet only after the cross and resurrection did they look backward and fully appreciate the prophetic significance of what they had witnessed. Palm Sunday was saturated with Scripture even before the disciples themselves understood how all the pieces fit together.

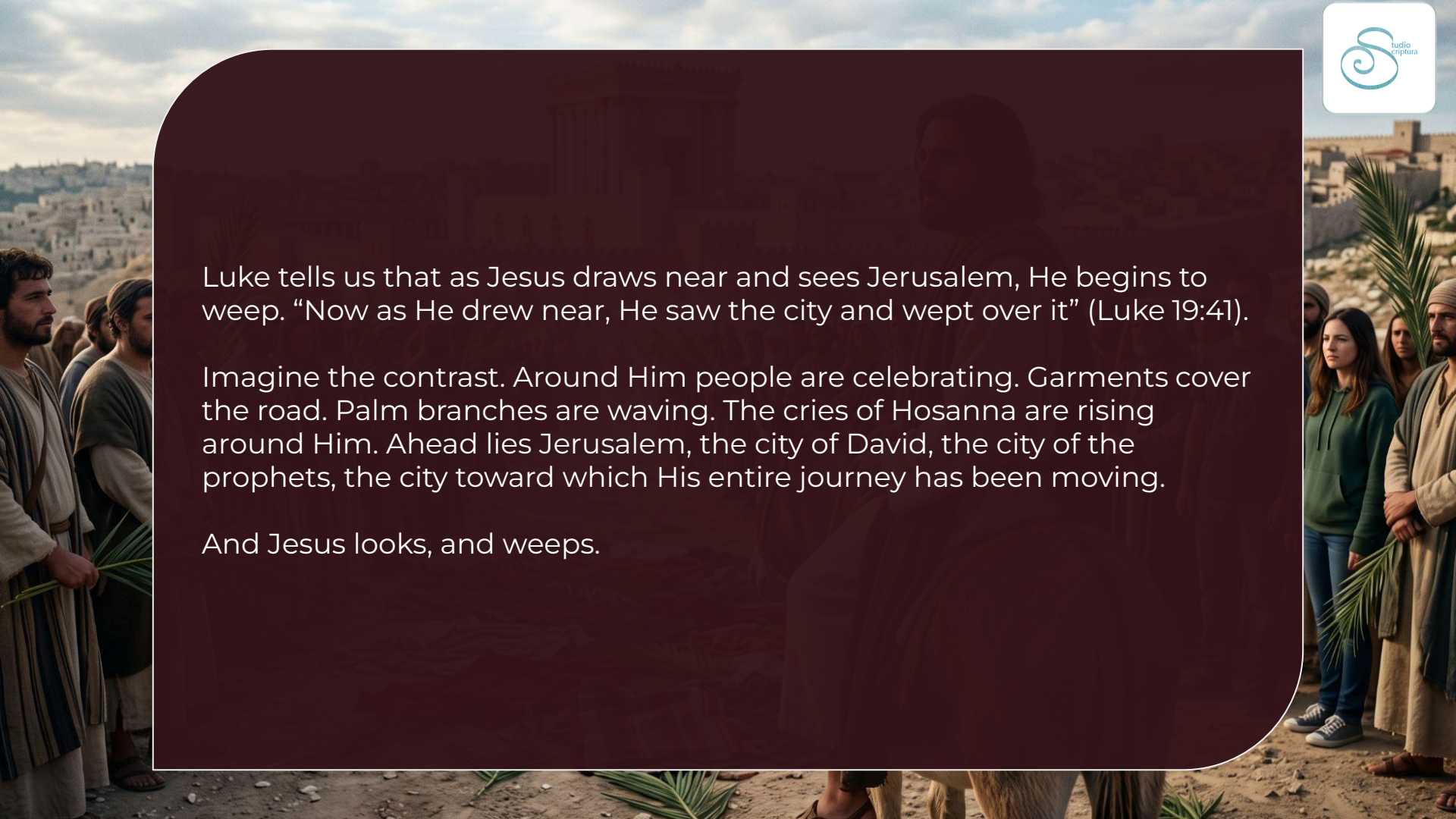


Luke then tells us that some Pharisees in the crowd understand how explosive these claims are. They say, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” They hear the language: Son of David, the King, the kingdom of David, blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD. If those claims are false, Jesus should stop them immediately. He does not. Instead He answers the Pharisees, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:39–40).

The point is direct: this moment demands testimony. The King has come. Jesus does not rebuke the crowd for identifying Him as Messiah or King. Their error is not that they acclaim Him; it is that many still misunderstand the Messiah they are acclaiming.



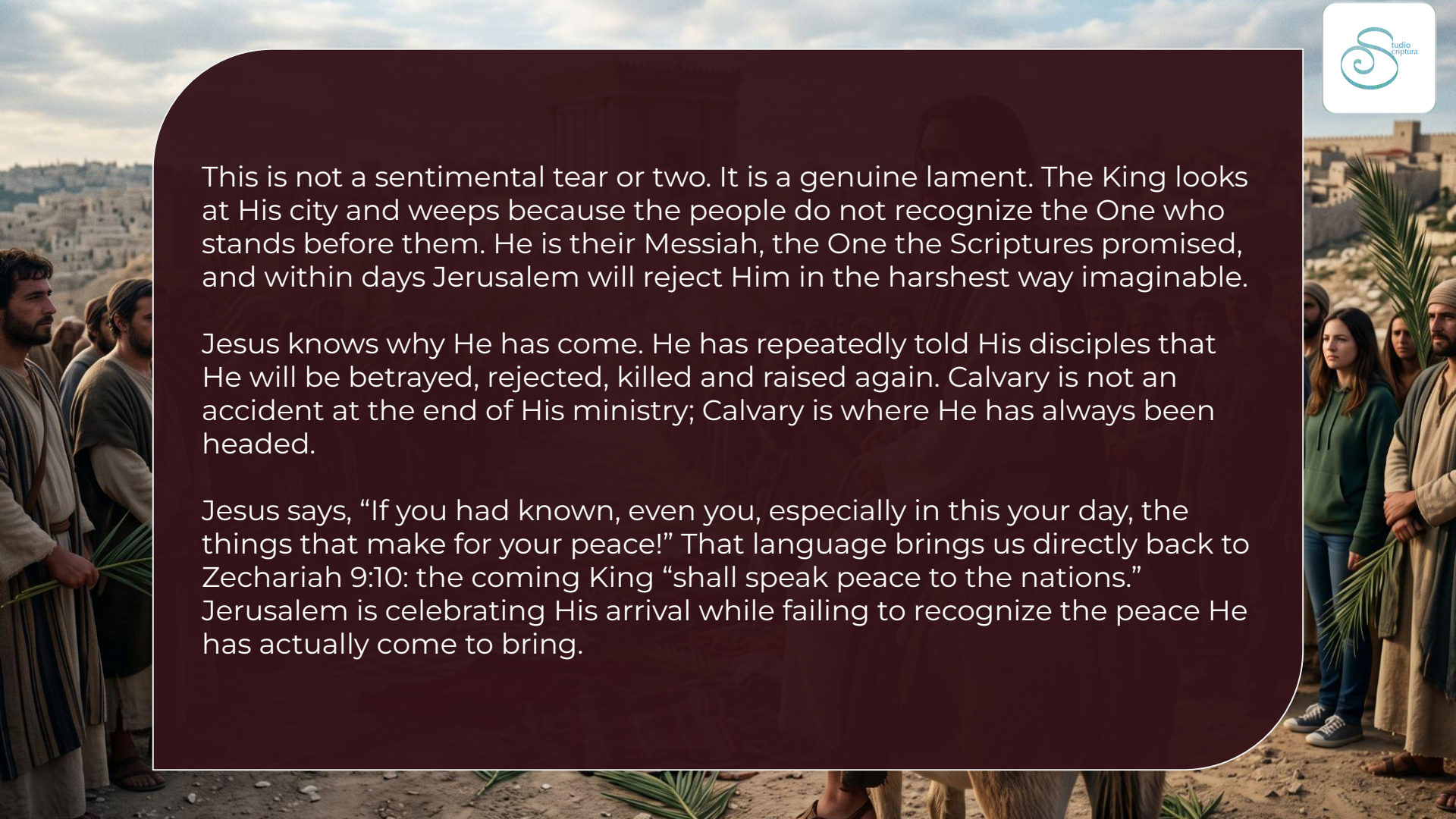
Then, before Jesus actually enters Jerusalem, Luke gives us perhaps the most emotionally powerful moment of the procession. Jesus is approaching the city from the east. Bethany lies beyond the Mount of Olives. As the road crosses the ridge and begins descending the western slope, Jerusalem opens into view across the Kidron Valley. Directly ahead is the Temple Mount and the magnificent temple complex dominating the city.



Luke tells us that as Jesus draws near and sees Jerusalem, He begins to weep. “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it” (Luke 19:41).

Imagine the contrast. Around Him people are celebrating. Garments cover the road. Palm branches are waving. The cries of Hosanna are rising around Him. Ahead lies Jerusalem, the city of David, the city of the prophets, the city toward which His entire journey has been moving.

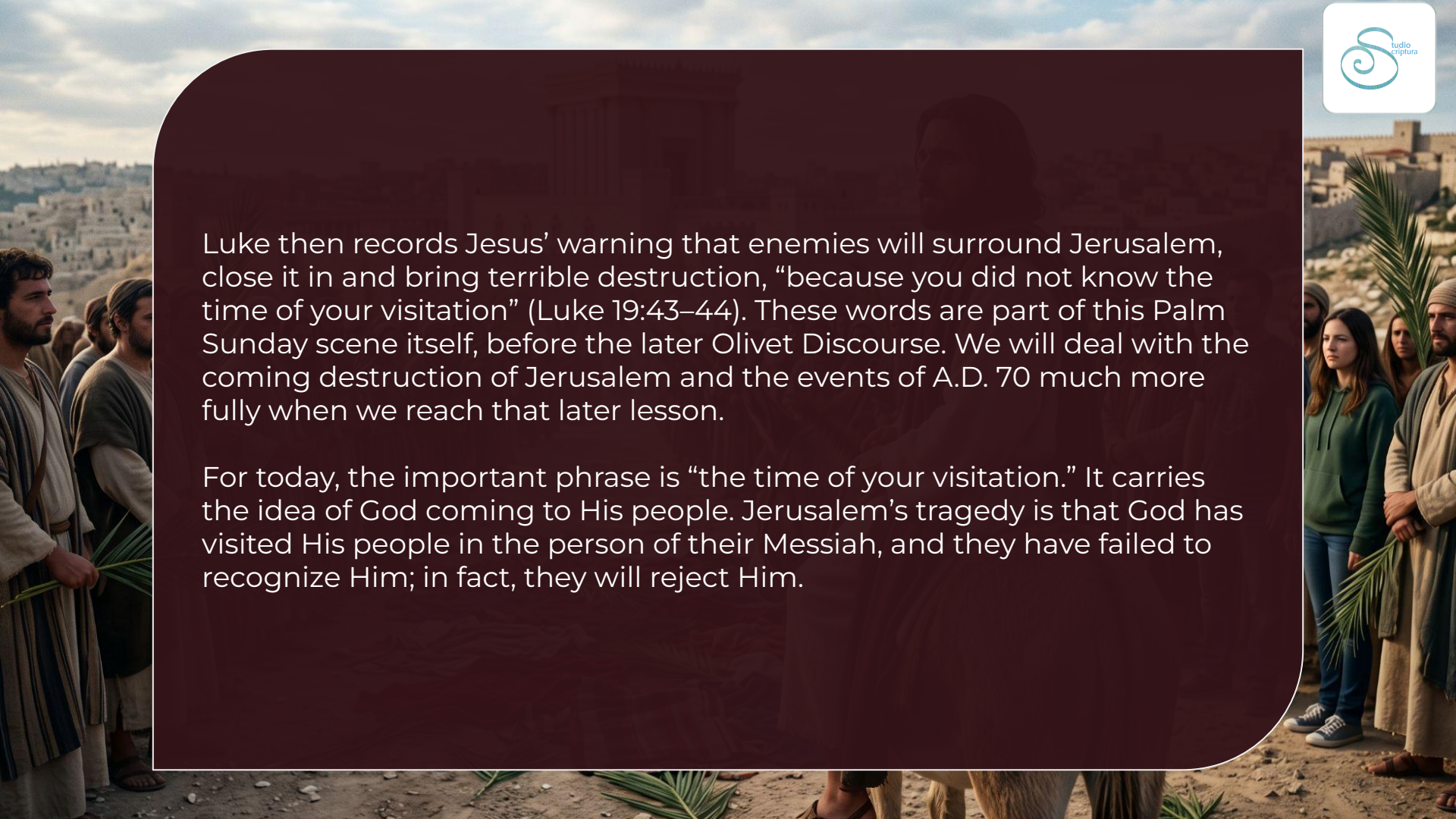
And Jesus looks, and weeps.



This is not a sentimental tear or two. It is a genuine lament. The King looks at His city and weeps because the people do not recognize the One who stands before them. He is their Messiah, the One the Scriptures promised, and within days Jerusalem will reject Him in the harshest way imaginable.

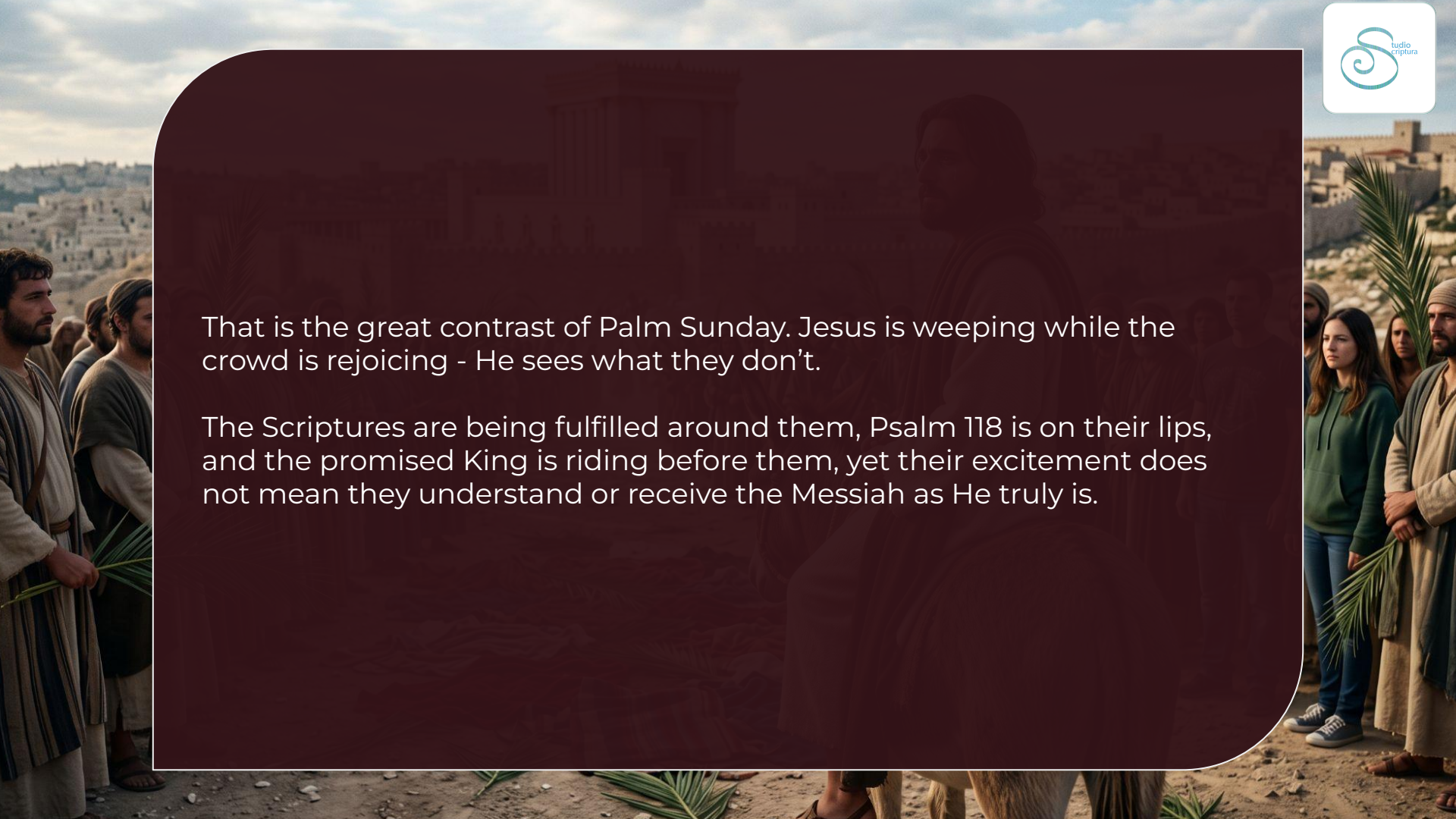
Jesus knows why He has come. He has repeatedly told His disciples that He will be betrayed, rejected, killed and raised again. Calvary is not an accident at the end of His ministry; Calvary is where He has always been headed.

Jesus says, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!” That language brings us directly back to Zechariah 9:10: the coming King “shall speak peace to the nations.” Jerusalem is celebrating His arrival while failing to recognize the peace He has actually come to bring.



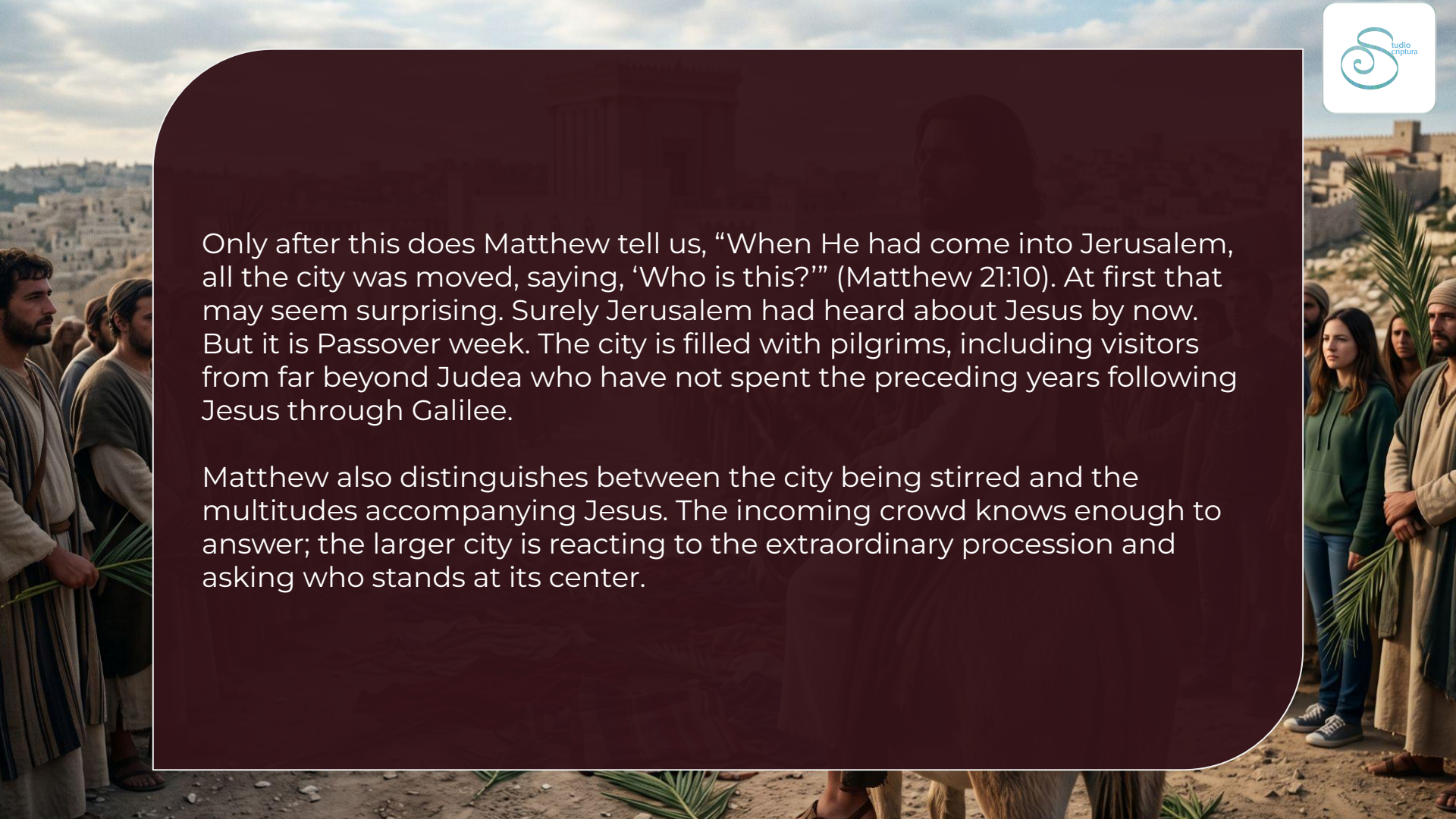
Luke then records Jesus' warning that enemies will surround Jerusalem, close it in and bring terrible destruction, "because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:43–44). These words are part of this Palm Sunday scene itself, before the later Olivet Discourse. We will deal with the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the events of A.D. 70 much more fully when we reach that later lesson.

For today, the important phrase is "the time of your visitation." It carries the idea of God coming to His people. Jerusalem's tragedy is that God has visited His people in the person of their Messiah, and they have failed to recognize Him; in fact, they will reject Him.



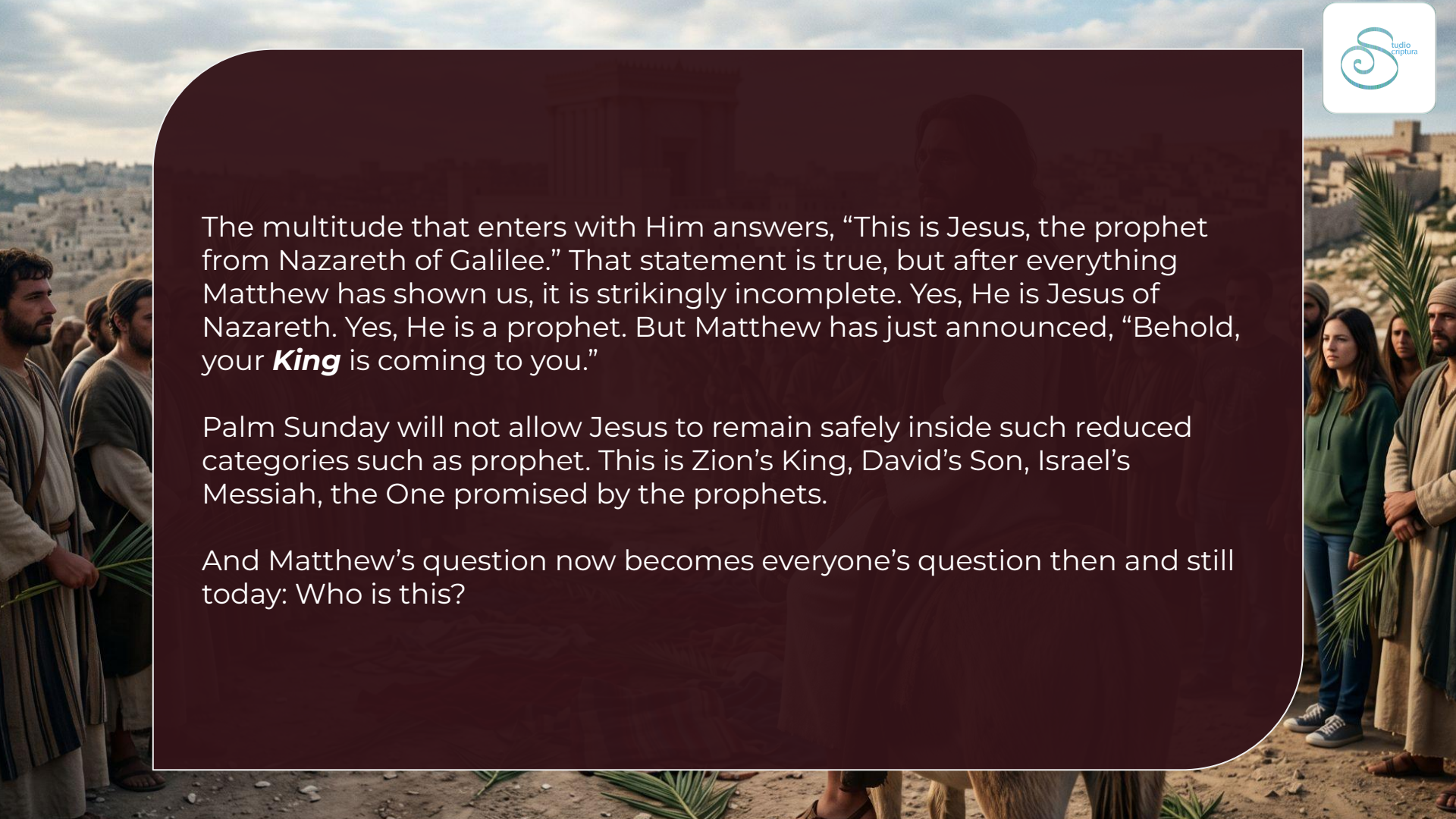
That is the great contrast of Palm Sunday. Jesus is weeping while the crowd is rejoicing - He sees what they don’t.

The Scriptures are being fulfilled around them, Psalm 118 is on their lips, and the promised King is riding before them, yet their excitement does not mean they understand or receive the Messiah as He truly is.



Only after this does Matthew tell us, “When He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, ‘Who is this?’” (Matthew 21:10). At first that may seem surprising. Surely Jerusalem had heard about Jesus by now. But it is Passover week. The city is filled with pilgrims, including visitors from far beyond Judea who have not spent the preceding years following Jesus through Galilee.

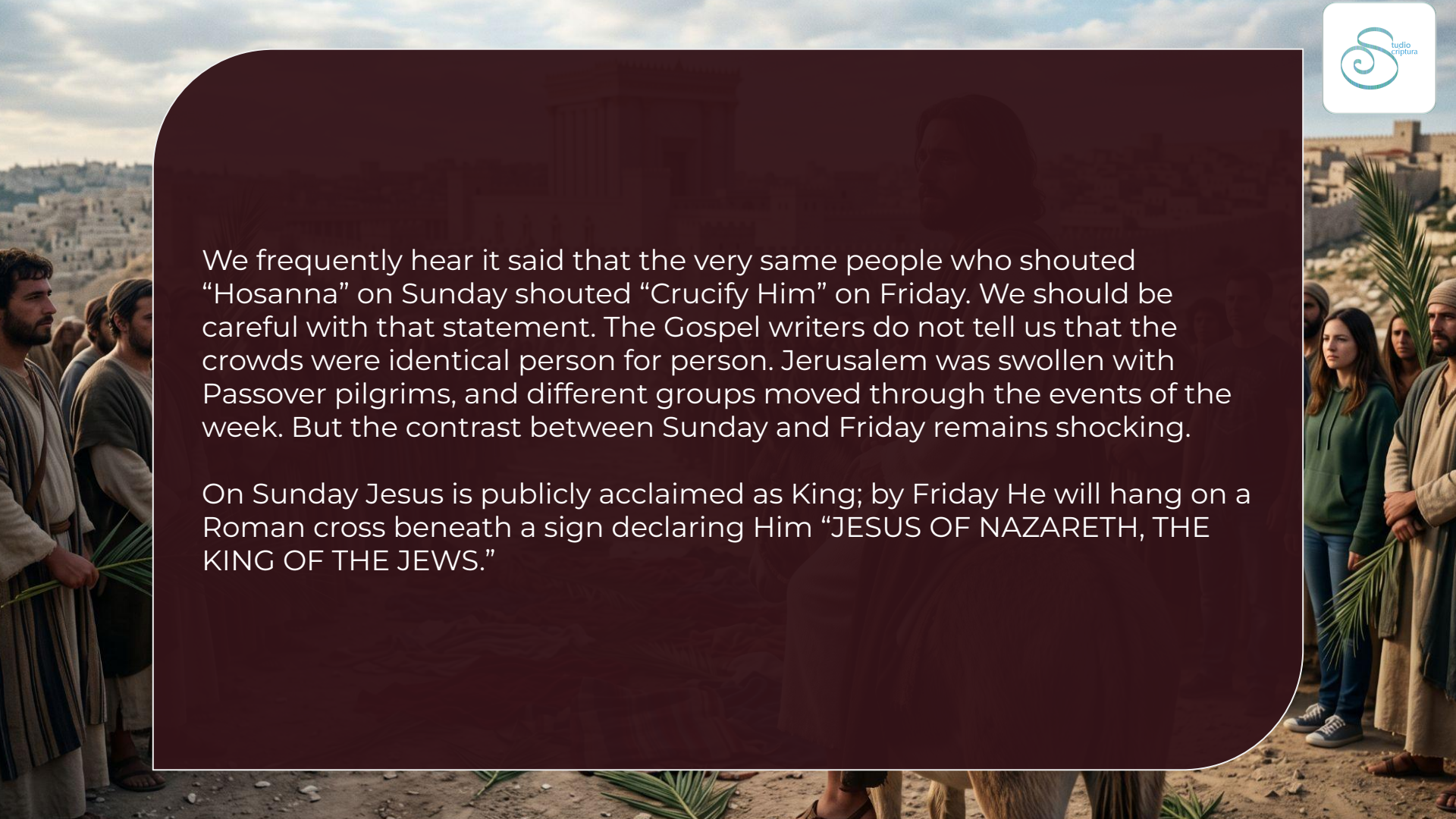
Matthew also distinguishes between the city being stirred and the multitudes accompanying Jesus. The incoming crowd knows enough to answer; the larger city is reacting to the extraordinary procession and asking who stands at its center.



The multitude that enters with Him answers, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.” That statement is true, but after everything Matthew has shown us, it is strikingly incomplete. Yes, He is Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, He is a prophet. But Matthew has just announced, “Behold, your ***King*** is coming to you.”

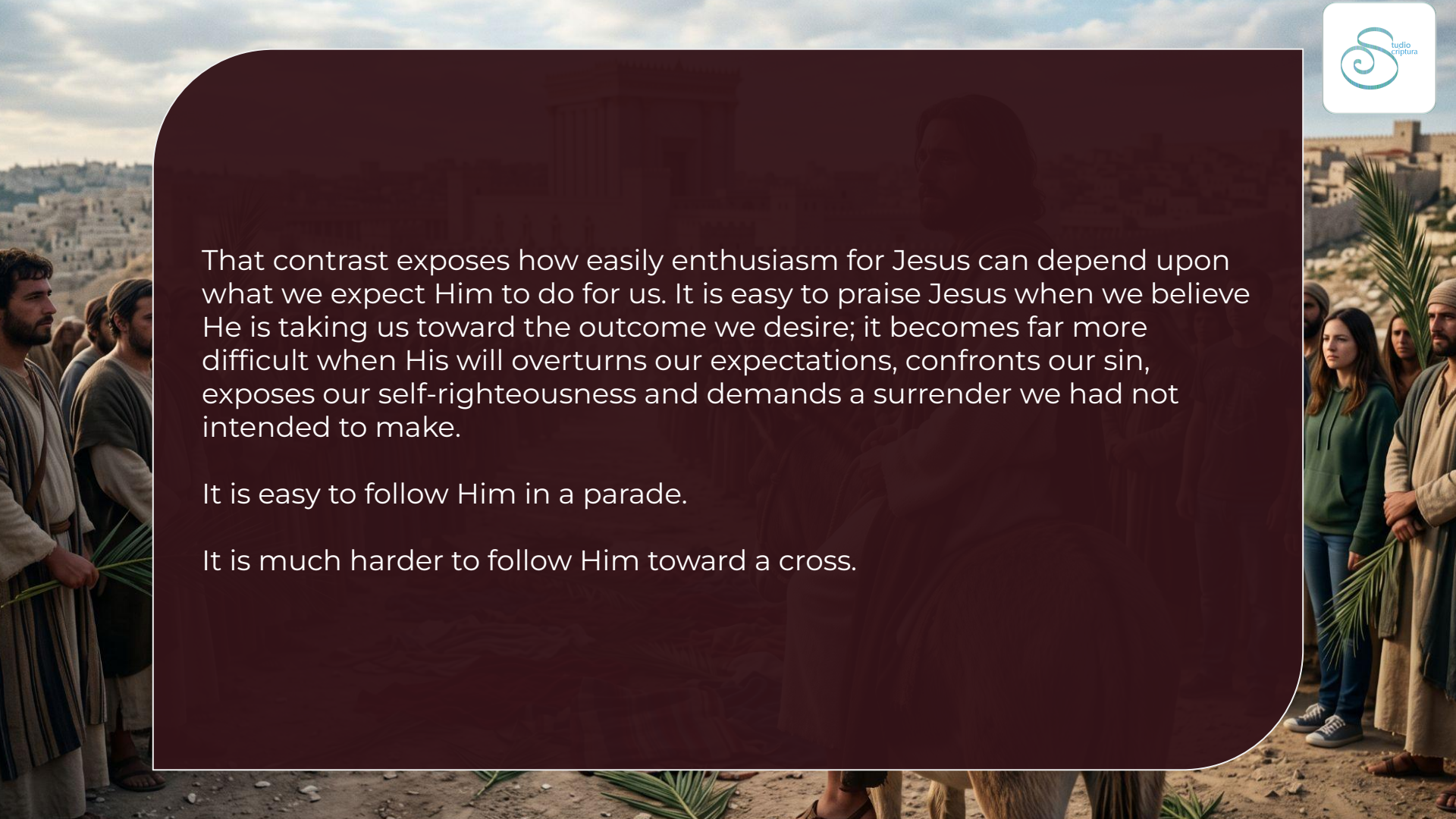
Palm Sunday will not allow Jesus to remain safely inside such reduced categories such as prophet. This is Zion’s King, David’s Son, Israel’s Messiah, the One promised by the prophets.

And Matthew’s question now becomes everyone’s question then and still today: Who is this?



We frequently hear it said that the very same people who shouted “Hosanna” on Sunday shouted “Crucify Him” on Friday. We should be careful with that statement. The Gospel writers do not tell us that the crowds were identical person for person. Jerusalem was swollen with Passover pilgrims, and different groups moved through the events of the week. But the contrast between Sunday and Friday remains shocking.

On Sunday Jesus is publicly acclaimed as King; by Friday He will hang on a Roman cross beneath a sign declaring Him “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”



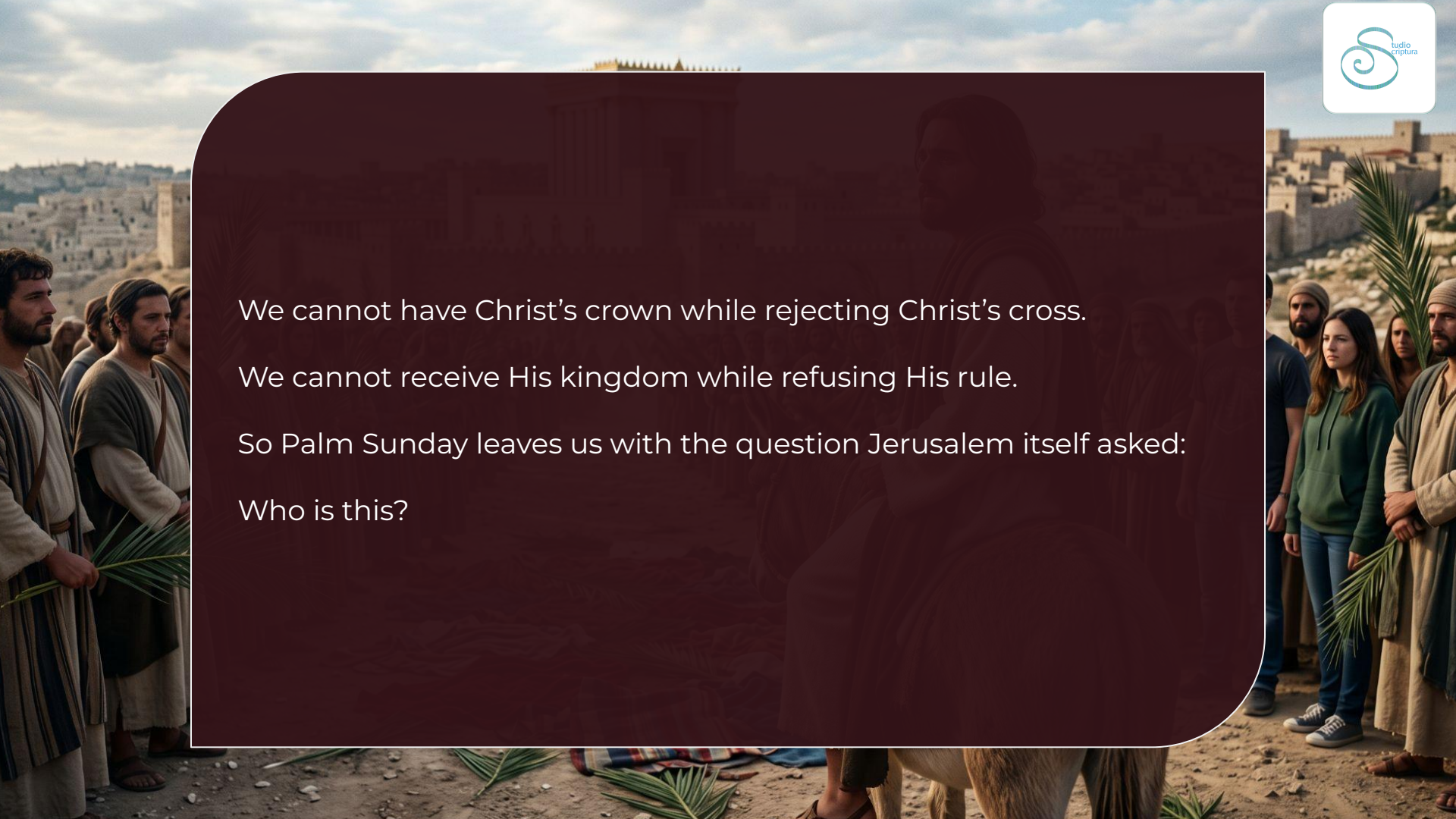
That contrast exposes how easily enthusiasm for Jesus can depend upon what we expect Him to do for us. It is easy to praise Jesus when we believe He is taking us toward the outcome we desire; it becomes far more difficult when His will overturns our expectations, confronts our sin, exposes our self-righteousness and demands a surrender we had not intended to make.

It is easy to follow Him in a parade.

It is much harder to follow Him toward a cross.



We can repeat exactly that mistake today whenever we desire a Jesus who confirms our politics, protects our comfort, guarantees our health, sidelines the people we regard as enemies, and rarely contradicts us. The real Jesus will not become the mascot of our personal or political agenda. He comes as, and in fact is, the Messiah promised in Scripture. He calls sinners to repentance, He goes to the cross and commands our humble allegiance.



We cannot have Christ’s crown while rejecting Christ’s cross.

We cannot receive His kingdom while refusing His rule.

So Palm Sunday leaves us with the question Jerusalem itself asked:

Who is this?

This class was prepared through personal study of Scripture and careful engagement with trusted scholarship on the Gospels. Generative AI tools were used to assist with research, organization, and the drafting of phrasing. All final interpretations, judgments, and content reflect the author’s convictions.