

Palm Sunday: Jesus the King

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

(Matthew 20:18-19 ESV)

⁴ *This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” (Matthew 21: 4-5 ESV)*

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?”¹¹ And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” (Matthew 21: 10-11 ESV)

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Matthew 21:1-16

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 21:1. Today we are going to take a break from our Apostles Creed series as we celebrate Palm Sunday: Our Lord’s final entry into Jerusalem.

Now as you are finding the passage in your Bibles, I want to briefly set the stage for Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem. Remember this is the beginning of his last week before his crucifixion. 3 years of ministry have been leading up to this pivotal moment. Jesus had just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead! The locals all saw that Lazarus had been sick, that he was dead and buried, and that Jesus approached the tomb and with a loud voice called:

“Lazarus, come out.”⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:43-44 ESV)

This awesome miracle happened in the town of Bethany only two miles away from Jerusalem. Then along the way to the city he with only a word restored two blind men’s sight. And all of this was AFTER his three years of itinerant ministry in which he preached, healed, cast out demons, fed the four and five thousand and clashed with the religious leaders as he proclaimed to be no mere teacher or prophet. What does that mean? That means that there was a lot of excitement

around Jesus' return to the city to celebrate the Passover. The city was stirred up as knowing JESUS was coming to town.

But like we are going to see today as we dive into the text, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was NOTHING like what Israel expected or wanted. They *wanted* a political powerhouse. They *needed* a spiritual champion. They *wanted* freedom from the Romans. They *needed* freedom from their sin.

And Jesus is the King you and I need today. The whole *world* needs Jesus the true King. On Palm Sunday, we are reminded not only that Jesus is the King of Kings, He is more and better than we could ever have of imagined.

And don't we all need to see this more and more? Don't we need to catch a glimpse again of the glory of our Saviour? I know I do.

With these things in mind hear now from the Holy Word of God:

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" (Matthew 21:1-16 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now what is abundantly clear from Jesus' deliberate actions is that his entrance into Jerusalem was supposed to make a statement. It was supposed to garner a lot of attention!

As R.T France states:

Among this crowd, and with their vocal support, Jesus' arrival is a **deliberately staged 'demonstration'**, a sequence of symbolic actions designed to have an unmistakable impact on the already suspicious Jerusalem authorities.¹

In short, Jesus knew what he was doing. His actions in this scene are actually PREACHING a SERMON! The Pharisees heard that sermon loud and clear, and they rejected him. The crowd heard that sermon but misunderstood the implications. Therefore, as we turn our attention back to this scene, I want to make sure that we are hearing and understanding and LOVING the sermon that Jesus is preaching here with his actions. In this object lesson, Jesus is making four bold proclamations. Let's consider them now.

Four Bold Proclamations

First, we see that Jesus was proclaiming:

1. I am the long-awaited King

This is found in verse 4-5. Matthew writes:

⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your **king** is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" (Matthew 21:4-5 ESV)

It was no accident that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Just like any king or queen paying a special visit to another city or country, Jesus transportation was all planned out. And this mode of transportation was what God had ordained for The King to enter Jerusalem with. Jesus' was acting out Zechariah 9:

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9 ESV)

¹ R.T France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: Intervarsity Press, 1985) (Digital).

Zechariah saw a King who would bring restoration and peace to the people of Israel. And this wasn't just *a* king, but the Messiah King. And Jesus was boldly proclaiming that he was the one that Zechariah was talking about. I am the King that God has been promising Israel. The King that will rule justly, righteously, that will lead Israel into glory again. Here was the 'son of David' that was promised. And the crowds at some level understood what Jesus was saying because they blessed him and spread their cloaks and branches on the ground shouting:

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9 ESV)

Leon Morris helpfully comments on these verses:

The crowd shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David”; this must be understood as an expression of exultation and honor. Matthew has just told his readers that two blind men used the title “Son of David,” and we must see the same messianic significance here. The crowds were exultant that Jesus was symbolically declaring his messiahship.²

Can you imagine being a Jew at that moment in Jerusalem? You have heard whispers and rumblings about this man and the miracles he had performed... And now HERE HE IS! And he's riding in on a donkey with his head held high, and you can hear Zechariah's prophecy ringing out in your head and in your heart. The King has come! We're finally free!

Now even though the crowds were misguided, they read through Jesus' symbolic actions enough to know that he was not entering Jerusalem as an ordinary man. He was proclaiming to be *the long awaited King*. But was he the king they anticipated? No he wasn't. And that brings us to the second proclamation Jesus was making. He was saying loud and clear:

2. I am waging a different war

The crowds understood that Jesus was proclaiming he was the king, but they didn't understand that he was there to wage a different war than they were wanting. Jesus' riding in on a donkey sent a much different signal than if he had come in on a horse. As we said earlier, kings and queens make provisions long before they enter a new city. They prepare to enter a new place with *glory*. Glory, pomp and power for all to see. One commentator notes the typical entry by a king in Jesus' day:

² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1992) (Digital)

In antiquity a king would not normally enter his capital riding on a donkey. He would ride in proudly, on a war-horse, or perhaps he would march in at the head of his troops.³

But this wasn't what Jesus did was it? He was the King that no one was looking for although he was foretold back in Zechariah. He saw the Messiah King who would bring *peace*:

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10 ESV)

Isn't that an amazing picture? Rather than a proud, arrogant, and battle hungry king, God's people would have a King who would ride into town on a humble donkey. A King who came in peace. A King who would rule from sea to sea yet do it by making peace. He would do it by cutting off the chariots of war, cutting off the war horse, the battle bow. This King would put them away once and for all. That's what Jesus came to do as the Messiah King.

But in order to do this, in order to bring peace to the nations, he would need to tackle a far greater enemy than mere kings and queens. Jesus would have to wage war with THE ENEMY. It was the war to squash Satan. It was the war to squash the power of sin. To destroy the power of death. He came to fulfill Genesis 3:15:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

THAT is the war he was waging! He was not after mere lands and homes but for our very souls! And THAT is the victory he won. He made peace again between God and *us*. Paul tells us:

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1 ESV)

That is the war which Jesus came to fight.

And let's just pause here, isn't God's patience astounding? Here is Jesus, Israel's true King, Lord of all creation, and he has seen his people (often by their own doing and sin) trampled on by the

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992) (Digital).

nations. Ruled over and longing for freedom. But what does he do? He continues to fight the war that is ULTIMATE. He defers the meeting of temporal needs for the promise of eternal *bliss*.

Do you hear that, Christian? Jesus is the King who is more devoted to your eternal happiness than he is your present happiness. It's important that we never lose sight of that. Sometimes, instead of perfecting our circumstances, he keeps us in those circumstances so as to perfect US. When our prayers aren't answered the way that we want them to be, we need to remember that our King is GOOD and WISE and that he is playing the long game.

So in *love*, Jesus continues on his mission to save the world. He enters Jerusalem one last time as a King who will die as a criminal for the sins of the world. THAT is our King. The King who was fighting the ULTIMATE WAR. But Jesus also proclaims that:

3. I am establishing a different kind of kingdom

Jesus was not coming to Jerusalem in order to bring about a physical kingdom. He wasn't eager to have Pilate's headquarters. If Jesus was fighting for THAT where would he have gone? Maybe to speak with the Jewish leaders? To call them and the people to arms? Then rush against the Romans right? Jesus doesn't do that. If Jesus was merely seeking to establish a political kingdom, that's where he would have gone. But he wasn't establishing a political kingdom. So that's not where he went. Instead, Matthew tells us:

¹² And Jesus entered the **temple** and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, **My house** shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers.'" (Matthew 21:12-13 ESV)

Jesus didn't go to the politicians. He didn't go to the barracks. He went to the temple. Matthew Henry notes:

When Christ came into Jerusalem, he did not go up to the court or the palace, though he came in as a King, but into the temple; for his kingdom is spiritual, and not of this world; it is in holy things that he rules, in the temple of God that he exercises authority.⁴

⁴Matthew Henry, *An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Book of Matthew*, *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary*, (Public Domain), (Digital).

Jesus did not come to set the Romans in their place. He did not come to restore Israel's political autonomy. He came to PURIFY HIS PEOPLE. He came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God! So rather than opposing corrupt laws or corrupt leaders, Jesus came and he opposed our corrupt WORSHIP. He marched straight into the temple and he purified *his* house.

Jesus is indeed a King and as a King he goes to where he sits to rule. The Temple. *His house*. He goes to the very heart and centre of the people of Israel. Leon Morris helps us here:

It is the sequel to and culmination of the deliberately symbolic entry to the city; we see now how the Messiah stakes his claim in the **central** shrine of his people.⁵

Do you see that? Jesus was building a very different kingdom than what the people of Israel wanted or expected.

I think this is a vitally important point for us to hear today. At a time when EVERYTHING seems to be political. When we can be accused of being cowardly for not speaking up before we are ready, or being called an extremist for *having* an opinion. It is a time when latching onto theories or leaders and putting ALL of our trust in them would be really easy wouldn't it? When there is more than enough reason to fight and be divided, we need to follow the example of our King. Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world and neither is ours.

Does that mean we turn inwards and neglect the common grace of government or schools? Do we reject helping and praying for our politicians? No of course not. One of my favourite authors is GK Chesterton and I love how he wrote as a *Christian* in the secular newspaper. He was a Christian voice fighting for 'Christian' values in the public sphere. But he understood that ultimately THIS WORLD is not our home. This is not our kingdom.

Friends, Jesus' main priority here reveals what should be *our* main priority. It is furthering Jesus' glory amongst the nations. There's nothing wrong with writing a letter to your MP, but before you make time for that, make sure that you are making time for family devotions. Put first things first. Starting with our homes, neighbours and friends, our city, country and world! It is about building *his kingdom*. And his kingdom is not of this world.

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992) (Digital).

Have you found yourself forgetting this recently? Have you found yourself losing sight of what Jesus came to do for us? Of what he has called you to do now as one his sheep?

Friends, let's remember that Jesus' triumphal entry shocked the Jews. And it should shock *us* afresh as we see how different and AWESOME Jesus and his kingdom are!

And lastly, Jesus in his triumphal entry boldly proclaimed:

4. I am worthy to receive all praise

This is seen throughout our text this morning. Let's look at some of these moments:

⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8-9 ESV)

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" (Matthew 21:14-16 ESV)

Now just think for a moment about what we have seen so far: Jesus has self-proclaimed that he is the Messiah King Zechariah was talking about, a peaceful King who would restore Israel. He has boldly cleared out the temple, calling it *my house*. And throughout the story he WELCOMES the praise of the crowds! This is no quiet entry into Jerusalem is it?

We condemn the response of the religious leaders in this story – and rightfully so – but to their credit, they seem to be the only ones in this scene who understand the message that Jesus is conveying. They understand the claim he's making – and they hate it. They heard the praise of the people and said YOU HAVE TO STOP THIS! DO YOU KNOW WHAT ACCEPTING THIS PRAISE MEANS?!?!?

Well Jesus did didn't he? He responds by saying he would accept nothing else!

"Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" (Matthew 21:16b ESV)

These words from Psalm 8 were ascribed to *God* and here Jesus accepts this praise for himself!

Friends, Jesus was not subtle at all about proclaiming who he truly was! Not only did he set up a

sign act to demonstrate who he thought he was, riding in on a donkey, clearing the temple, now he was accepting praise!

In his acceptance of worship he was planting his flag one more time as the divine Son of God. There could be no dancing around who Jesus *thought* he was. He was claiming to be God himself. He was not only stating but demonstrating this as he healed the blind and lame in the freshly cleared out Temple. Now for many of us this is not new. This is Christianity 101. But that doesn't mean it should ever bore us.

We should never tire to speak of and *delight* in Jesus Christ the God-Man. The *divine* King. He was the one who proclaimed:

Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, *I am*. (John 8:58 ESV)

He received the worship of the blind man who he healed:

“Lord I believe,” and he **worshipped** him (Jesus).” (John 9:38 ESV)

He was the one who forgave the sins of the paralytic, fed the four and five thousand, stopped a funeral dead in its tracks, and proclaimed to be one with the Father making himself *God*. Jesus was proclaiming that he deserved all praise. Do you see that?

He was not a mere king who would lead a revolt against Rome but THE KING who would lead them to ultimate freedom through his righteous life, vicarious death, and glorious resurrection! He was the King who was nothing like what we expected but BETTER than we could ever imagine.

A Warning and an Invitation

Now as we conclude, there is both a warning and an invitation here.

First, the warning:

1. Don't let your expectations keep you from the King who has come

Oh how many people have rejected Jesus because he didn't fit the picture of what they thought he should. People will say:

He was too audacious in his claims. Or he wasn't audacious *enough*.

He was too political. Or he wasn't political *enough*.

If only I could pretend Jesus was just another teacher.

If only Jesus would affirm and accept my sin.

If only Jesus could be more inclusive of other world religions.

If only he would contort to fit my expectations.

But Jesus will not let us have any of this. He proclaimed that 'I AM THE KING.' Whatever expectation you had that Jesus knocks down, it needs to be put aside in order to embrace all of who Jesus is.

See his bold entry into Jerusalem as the long-awaited king.

See the AWESOME war he waged with sin, death and satan.

See his bold entry into His Temple.

And see him welcoming the worship saved only for God Himself.

THAT'S the King who rode in triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

And finally, the invitation:

2. Come and bow to the King who has come

Now that you have seen Jesus, will you come and proclaim him as YOUR KING? The crowds saw Jesus and they welcomed him with adoration and praise. The blind and lame went to him in the temple to be healed and consoled. The children ran to him to be in his presence. But unlike these three groups YOU have seen him dead, crucified, buried, and raised to life! You have seen the whole plan of salvation!

So will you bow to the King?

And if you won't, why? Why won't you bow to him?

Friends, Jesus the King knew all that would befall him during holy week. And yet, he set his gaze upon Jerusalem and with all his might carried out his mission so that you and I could be brought near to God. That our sins could be forgiven and we could have peace with God. So I ask, will you bow down to the King of Kings?

Let's pray.