

Palm Sunday – King Jesus

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Please open your Bibles with me to Matthew 21. This morning, we find ourselves in a well-known, and much-loved Bible story. We love it, in part, because it means we get to see a bunch of cute kids come up to the front, wave palm branches, and sing songs. And while that is certainly a reason to love this story, it pales in comparison to the love we should have for the beautiful truths that this story reveals about Jesus.

When Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the people were compelled to ask the question, “Who is this?”. And that is the exact question I want us to be asking this morning. Jesus was one of thousands of people entering into Jerusalem during the lead up to the Passover. But his entrance was not like the rest of the pilgrims. His entrance was highly symbolic, and he was proclaiming something about himself that we cannot afford to miss. So, as we now turn our attention to God’s Word, I want you to be listening for the answer to the question: Who is this?

Listen now to the reading of Matthew 21:1-11.

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

“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.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!” And when he entered Jerusalem,

the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

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

Having just read the story, let me repeat the question that was asked. Who is this? Who is this man who comes riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, amidst shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David."

The answer that the crowd gives is: "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Were the people wrong for identifying Jesus in this way? No. Jesus certainly was a prophet, and he was from Nazareth of Galilee. But he was also much more than that. Every aspect of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was intentionally chosen to proclaim one singular truth. And that truth is that:

JESUS IS KING!

When Jesus rode in on the back of a donkey, he was proclaiming His Kingship.

Matthew tells us that he did this in order to fulfill the words of 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)*

When the crowds spread their cloaks and palm branches before him, they were providing him with a welcome fit only for a king. We see a similar action being done upon the anointing of King Jehu in 2 Kings 9:13.

"Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, 'Jehu is king.'"

And lest any bystander fail to see the royal symbolism of the the cloaks being laid before Jesus, the crowds also verbally affirm his Kingship with their shouts of "*Hosanna to the **Son of David!** Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*"

So yes, Jesus was a prophet, but he was no regular prophet. He was the prophet like Moses, the Son of David, the King returned to Jerusalem! Here was the One that all of Israel had long been

waiting for! Here was the One who would deliver them from their enemies and restore them to their former fortunes.

And while the crowds welcomed this King with great enthusiasm, they would soon learn that he was a King unlike any of their expectations. And this is where I want us to spend our time for the remainder of this morning. Having identified Jesus as the King, I want us to consider what type of King he is.

WHAT KIND OF KING IS JESUS?

The first thing we must say is that:

1. He is the King of Peace

If you have ever listened to a single Palm Sunday sermon before, you have heard mention that it is significant that Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and not on a war horse. We hear this every Palm Sunday because it is significant for a couple of reasons.

First, as already mentioned, it fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 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)*

It is clear from this verse that Jesus' deliberate choice of a donkey was meant to convey something about his character. He wanted to be revealed as a humble king. He didn't require a spectacular chariot that would draw awe from the crowd, for he knew who he was, and by nature of being the Son of God he was far more supreme than any earthly king.

Now this is not to say that a king riding a donkey would have been a ridiculous notion. But just as it conveyed something about his humility, it also conveyed something about the king's intention.

As R.T. France writes:

"A donkey is a suitable mount for a king, but only for a king in time of peace."¹

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 774.

Jesus' deliberate choice of a donkey was not just a display of humility, but ultimately it was a display of peace. In Matthew's narrative he only quotes verse 9 of Zechariah's prophecy, but if we go back to its original context and include verse 10, we will read these words:

"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 9:10)

Zechariah's prophecy was a promise that a day was coming when God's people would dwell in the land in peace. Interestingly, this peace would be established not by political might and conquest, but by means of a humble King, mounted on a donkey. By all accounts, this would have caught Zechariah's original hearers by surprise. This was not the type of King the people were looking for. After years of defeat and exile, the people anticipated a King like David who would repay the nations by crushing them under hoof and chariot.

And even though Zechariah made this prophecy about a peaceful King some 500 years before Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, not a lot had changed concerning the expectation of the Jews. Many Jews in Jesus day were still seeking the warrior King who would crush their Roman oppressors by strength of arms.

But once again, as R.T. France notes:

*"But in deliberately presenting himself before Jerusalem as its messianic king, Jesus has chosen an OT model which subverts any popular militaristic idea of kingship. The meek, peaceful donkey-rider of Zech 9:9 is not a potential leader of an anti-Roman insurrection. In 20:25-28 Jesus has spoken of a type of leadership which is completely opposed to the world's notions of kingship and authority, and now he models it in the 'meekness' of his royal procession to the city."*²

Church, I believe this is one of the most important truths we need to see this morning.

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was consistent with the pattern of Jesus' earthly ministry. He led his people not by might and privilege but by love and service. In our worldly thinking we may be

² R.T France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 775.

tempted to think that service is incompatible with authority, but Jesus proves otherwise. And can I just say that I think we need to be extra intentional about maintaining this balance today?

On one hand, I see too many Christians today who speak about Jesus as nothing but a servant. They have emphasized the humility of Jesus to such a point that he would never dare speak a word that would make anyone uncomfortable. He accepts us as we are and makes no demands on our life. This is certainly not the Jesus we read about in Scripture.

On the other hand, too many Christians speak about Jesus as a King who eagerly waits to bring the sword down on his enemies. He is filled with nothing but hate towards sinners and wants nothing more than to crush them under his feet. This version of Jesus captures something about the heinousness of sin, but it fails to convey the loving nature of a Christ who condescended into our darkness in order to wipe away tears, embrace the lost, and give strength to the weary.

Somewhere between these two ditches is the Biblical version of Christ. The Christ we see in this morning's passage is marked by humility and peace, and yet he was still willing to make a bold statement concerning his Lordship, and as we will shortly see, was willing to take decisive action to bring about justice where it was lacking.

Let us strive to keep this King of Peace at the forefront of our minds this Easter season. And let us seek to model our own conduct after his. Let us not be ashamed to boldly confront the powers of darkness in this world, but let us also be prepared to love and serve the lost.

Now there is another reason that Jesus did not enter into Jerusalem on a warhorse in order to crush the armies of Rome, and that is because Jesus sought to show himself to be not only the King of the Jews, but also the King of All Nations.

That is the second thing I want us to see this morning.

2. He is the King of All Nations

We see this truth very plainly in Zechariah 9:10. Let me remind you what it says:

*"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 9:10)*

What word will Jesus speak to the nations? Peace.

Where will Jesus establish his rule? From sea to sea, to the ends of the earth.

Jesus is the King of all people, at all times, and in all places.

The return of the Davidic King to Jerusalem was not just good news for the Jews, it was good news for the world.

Indeed, the truth of this statement begins to play out immediately upon Jesus' arrival in the city. Do you remember the first thing that he did in Jerusalem? He cleansed the temple. This is remarkably important, so let's read that story together. We're going to read the account in Mark's gospel, because he makes the point even more explicit.

*“And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, ‘Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer **for all the nations**? But you have made it a den of robbers.’” And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.” (Mark 11:15-18)*

When Jesus entered into the temple, he found that the Court of the Gentiles was filled not with Gentiles seeking the Lord, but with the hustle and bustle of trade being done. Trade itself was not a bad thing. Pilgrims would need to acquire sacrificial animals in order to participate in the temple worship, but it certainly had no place within the Court of the Gentiles. The very presence of money-changers within the Gentile courts reveal the level of disdain the temple authorities had for outsiders.

D.A. Carson comments:

“The temple was meant to be a house of prayer, but they had made it ‘a nationalist stronghold’... The temple was not fulfilling its God-ordained role as witness to the nations but had become, like

the first temple, the premier symbol of superstitious belief that God would protect and rally his people irrespective of their conformity to his will.”³

It is little wonder then that Jesus not only cleansed the temple but foretold its complete destruction (Matt. 24:1-2).

That Jesus was a King who cared not only for Israel, but for all nations would be a lasting point of offense for the Jews. Do you remember how often we saw this play out in our Acts series? Again, and again the Jews were skeptical that the Gentiles could really belong to the people of God, and most of their violent outbursts were sparked by this truth being proclaimed. And yet, the early church was never willing to compromise on this point. They kept the Great Commission at the forefront of their minds.

*“Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)*

As a predominantly Gentile audience, I am sure we are all thankful that the early church did not lose sight of this. And I am thankful that it is something we are still preaching and upholding today.

I don't know about you, but I have been quite impressed how our church has hit the ground running in regards to world missions this New Year. It feels like every few weeks we are receiving reports about teams serving in South Africa, Dominican Republic, and elsewhere. This is a wonderful thing! It means that we have understood this truth that Jesus is King of All Nations and that we have acted on that truth accordingly.

I want to encourage you this morning to continue to do so. Continue to pray for our mission partners around the world. Pray for the pastors being trained in South Africa. Pray for the churches being established throughout Newfoundland. Pray for the gospel presentations happening in Dominican Republic and pray for those pioneer missionaries scattered throughout the rural regions of India.

But know that praying isn't the only thing you can do. Maybe you could write a letter of encouragement to one of our missionaries? Maybe you could give a financial gift that would be a

³ D.A. Carson, Matthew, EBCNT 8, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 442.

blessing to their work? Maybe God is even calling you to consider giving your life and GOING to make disciples of all nations.

All of these are appropriate responses to the King of All Nations, so please do consider which of them God might be calling you to.

Now before we leave this point, I also want to speak a word of warning. It is easy to be excited about the Word going forth to all people out there, but are we also prepared to welcome all people in here? Are there any people groups or individuals that you would be less than excited to see show up here on a Sunday morning? Are there people you have withheld the gospel from because you believe them to be too far gone?

I've seen this play out in youth ministry a time or two. A new face will walk through the door and suddenly a few kids will start whispering. "What is HE doing here? Ryan, that kid is crazy! He is one of the worst kids in our school and he swears like a sailor. I never thought I would see him in church!"

Rather than rushing to the door to welcome this newcomer, students stood in disbelief at the spectacle before their eyes. Their apprehension to greet the "outsider" only confirms to the individual that is what they are, an "outsider."

Let's make sure that doesn't happen here. Let's go out of our way to talk about Jesus to those in our community who think, act, and look different than us. Let's be intentional in our every action to declare the truth that Jesus is King of All Nations and let us welcome ALL PEOPLE a home under his Lordship.

This is the proper response to the news that Jesus is the King of All Nations!

Now as we move on, there is one final category of Jesus' Kingship that we cannot afford to miss. It is a category that caught all his contemporaries by surprise, including those who laid down their cloaks before him.

Yes, many were surprised that Jesus was the King of Peace. Others were not prepared for him to be the King of All Nations, but absolutely NO ONE was prepared for him to be The Crucified King.

3. He is the Crucified King

Now perhaps you might be thinking I am jumping the gun a little bit by bringing the crucifixion into a Palm Sunday sermon. After all, we will be talking about the death of Christ five short days from now on Good Friday.

But when we read about the crowds shouting out:

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

How can we not talk about the death of Christ?

Do you know what Hosanna means? This isn't just another name for Jesus, it is a cry for deliverance that has its root in Psalm 118. It is a cry for salvation!

D.A. Carson writes:

“‘Hosanna’ transliterates the Hebrew expression that was originally a cry for help: ‘Save!’ (cf. 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26). In time it became an invocation of blessing and even an acclamation...”⁴

As the crowds called out “Hosanna!” they were not only praising Jesus as the Davidic King, but the words they were using were originally calls for salvation! Now we have already seen that this salvation was not accomplished through military might, but it WAS accomplished.

It was accomplished by Christ's death on the cross!

As the Apostle Paul would later write:

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” (Colossians 2:13-15)

⁴ D.A. Carson, Matthew, EBCNT 8, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 439.

The Jews of Jesus' day thought they needed salvation from Rome, but what they needed far more than that was a spiritual salvation. They needed their sins forgiven, their debts cancelled, and their spiritual oppressors defeated.

Thanks be to God that Jesus accomplished all of these things in his life, death, and resurrection. He lived the perfect life that we failed to. He died the death that we deserved. And he rose again defeating the powers of sin and death.

To all those who repent of their sins and submit to His Lordship he offers the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a relationship with God.

This is true salvation.

And it is salvation that is offered us by our Crucified King.

So then, having seen that Jesus is the King of Peace, the King of All Nations, and the Crucified King, how should we respond to him this Palm Sunday morning?

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Allow me to propose two things:

First,

1) Follow Him

We have spent considerable time this morning talking about how Jesus defied the expectations of the Jews. He was the King they needed, but he was not the King they were looking for. No one was prepared for the Davidic King to be so humble, peaceful, and sacrificial. Nevertheless, this is who Jesus is, and if YOU call him your King, then you too should seek to be imitators of him.

Shortly before his triumphal entry, in Matthew 20, we read the story of a mother asking Jesus to allow her two sons to sit at his right and left hand in the kingdom. As she saw Jesus' nearing Jerusalem, she wanted to make sure that her sons were in a place of power and privilege, but do you remember what Jesus said regarding authority in his kingdom?

"But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you

must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28)

This is what life looks like as a servant of King Jesus. It looks like a life of sacrifice, where you put the needs of others before your own. It means not seeking power for the sole purpose of having authority, but using whatever power God gives you to help others flourish.

Just as Jesus’ spent his life being other oriented, so to must we.

When we stray from this design, when we become proud and selfish, we do an injustice to our King, and we convey to the world something false about his reign.

Secondly, and finally, we ought to:

2) Worship Him

Certainly, the whole theme of Palm Sunday is one of celebration and worship!

The King has arrived, and his servants rejoice!

As we conclude in just a few moments with song, I would encourage you to sing loud and proud. Remember who Jesus is and be thankful for all that he has done.

Do not let anything hold back your song. Don’t be silenced by fear of how others perceive your voice, or distracted by your plans for after church. Now is the time to give all of your focus, and all of your worship to Christ.

Two thousand years ago when Jesus made his entrance into Jerusalem there were men who sought to silence his worshipers. Do you remember how Jesus responded?

“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” (Luke 19:40)

As incredible as that would be to behold, do not allow the stones to do that which you were created for.

King Jesus is worthy of our worship, and it is our privilege to offer that to him now.

Let us pray, and then let us sing!