

The King has Come

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, the royal family have been mentioned quite a fair bit in the news these past couple of weeks, and it actually reminded me of my own brush with royalty, and I thought you might like to hear what happened.

I was once invited to the Royal Garden Party at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, along with some other ministers, and we were told that we would meet Prince Charles at the Garden Party. And because he is the future king, then we were also told there were certain protocol that we had to follow if we were to meet him. So a group of us were instructed to be in the garden at a certain place at a certain time, and then Prince Charles would come and meet us and speak to us.

And it all happened exactly as we've been told, with military precision. I stood in the right place at the right time, Prince Charles came by, and we spoke together.

I'm sure he remembers well my scintillating conversation. I could never forget it. But we would never have met had I not followed the protocol.

[1 : 08] We would never have been able to speak to him if we hadn't done it in the way that we'd been told. And I know this because a woman tried to butt in on her conversation, and she was quickly intercepted by a big bodyguard who just took her out of the way and she disappeared.

And so the point is, we had to relate to the future king in the right way. Because of who he was, is, because he's the future king, then it matters how we relate to him.

And so in the Bible reading today, Jesus is proclaimed as the king. And so it also matters how we, as people, relate to him. If he is the king of kings, not just the future king, but the king overall, then how you and I relate to him really, really matters.

And that's what we see in Matthew chapter 21. Jesus is revealed as king. We see it in this triumphal entry into Jerusalem. People put their palm branches on the road, their coats on the road, and they shout, Hosanna, which means save.

Because they're expecting that the king will come and he'll save them. Now this begins the very last week of the life of Jesus on earth, as he journeys towards the cross and his death.

[2 : 28] Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and people were saying, save, save. They were looking to Jesus to save them. But they were also asking, who is this?

Chapter 21, verse 10. Who is this? And it's a crucial question, not just for people back then, but it's a crucial question for us today, for you and for me.

Who is Jesus? Because we need to know who Jesus is. We need to understand him as he's revealed to us, if we are ever going to relate to him in the way that we should.

Because if the claim of Christianity is that Jesus is king, and he is king of the world, then we must recognize him as such, and we must submit to his rule.

You know, we live in a world where we're really crying out for good leaders. Good leaders who will rule us well. Good leaders who will use and not abuse their authority.

[3 : 30] Leaders who can exercise just control. Leaders who have a clear mission and purpose. Leaders who can sort out our problems. Leaders who are able to help us through the mess of our world.

Leaders who seek to bring peace. Leaders who can give us hope. Leaders who can ultimately save us. Isn't that what we want? Well, the message of Palm Sunday is that Jesus is the one and only leader, because he's the king, who can save us from the mess we're in.

And whether it is the mess of our own lives, or the mess of our world, we need King Jesus to come and save us. To help us. To lead us. And to guide us.

So Jesus is not just a figure in history. We're not just reading here about an ancient relic. Jesus is this modern world's best hope. And so he's the hope for our lives as well.

So let's look at the kind of king Jesus is to see who he is and why he is worthy of our submission. And the three simple points are there. First of all, the king's control.

[4 : 35] Verse 1 to 3. Second, the king's commission. Verse 4 to 9. And third, the king's confrontation. Verse 10 to 17. So first of all, let's look at the king's control.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die. But notice he was in complete control of everything that was happening to him. In verse 1, we see this as they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage 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 coat 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. So it's clear that Jesus is in charge.

He is working to his timetable, and every move he makes, every step he takes is deliberate. Even the geography is significant in this passage.

[5 : 35] So, for example, the Mount of Olives is mentioned, and the Mount of Olives gave a view over Jerusalem and over the temple. And so just listen to what Zechariah's prophecy says about the Lord coming to save his people.

We read in Zechariah 14, And here, here is Jesus, his feet standing on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, about to ride in and to save his people.

And so Jesus is arranging his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where he would die. He's about to publicly proclaim himself as God's chosen king, as the Messiah.

He's entering into Jerusalem at a certain time, at the Passover time, because that was one of the great Jewish pilgrim festivals. And so Jerusalem would be full of people.

One scholar says that Jerusalem would normally have about 40,000 people, but it would swell to about six times that amount during Passover. And so the arrival of Jesus would focus attention on him.

[6 : 47] And this is all deliberate by Jesus. It wouldn't just focus attention on him as he rode in on a donkey, proclaiming himself to be king, but it would also force the religious leaders in how they should deal with him.

So Jesus is orchestrating everything. And that's why he sends out two of his disciples to go and get a donkey in her coat. And if they were questioned, they were to say the Lord needs them.

And so all the secrecy surrounding Jesus and his identity is being lifted. Now, it was normal in those days for a king to ride in triumphantly.

To be cheered by crowds. But Jesus deliberately departs from the script here. Jesus wasn't going to ride in in a war horse or a stallion like a king normally would.

No, he chose a colt, a young donkey for his ride. And it does look like a bit of a PR disaster because Jesus was behaving like royalty, but he wasn't really looking like royalty.

[7 : 52] So what kind of message, what kind of signal was this sending out? Well, can you imagine Harry and Meghan driving around LA in a Nissan Micra?

Three-door Nissan Micra. Nothing against Nissan Micras. I did used to have one, but they're shocking cars. But imagine Harry and Meghan driving in a Nissan Micra instead of driving in the Range Rover that was £170,000 worth.

Driving around that, around their home that they were spotted in last week. Doesn't exactly ooze the Micra with power and majesty, does it? And yet here is Jesus, the true king, and he's riding on a donkey.

Well, why? What is this saying? Well, it's saying something about what Jesus came to do. And we'll explore this in a moment. But the first thing we need to get in the first point, the king's control, is that we need to be absolutely clear that the king is in control, even as he moves towards his death.

And so if you're new to the Christian faith or to Christian things or the story of Jesus, please don't think that Jesus was somehow some tragic victim who tragically died.

[9 : 06] No, Jesus' death was deliberate. Here, Jesus is on his way to be arrested and crucified. So Jesus is forcing the issue of his death.

He's moving towards it. And so we need to consider why. And the answer is the king's commission, which is our second point. So first of all, we see the king's control. Secondly, we see the king's commission.

Verse 4 to 9. So there's a juxtaposition of King Jesus riding on a donkey. And it's paradoxical. So why is that the case?

Well, it's not because they were out of war horses at the stables. No, it was to fulfill the prophecy that Jesus was God's chosen king. And so Matthew explains this, verse 4 and 5.

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, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

[10:07] So Jesus is making it known here that he is the one spoken about by the prophet. And it's the prophet Zechariah who says these things. So this riding on a donkey was the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures.

And so the action of Jesus here is explicitly declaring that he is God's chosen king. He is the Messiah. And the prophecy speaks of daughter of Zion.

So that's meaning the inhabitants of Jerusalem. So mostly Jews. And yet when you go back to Zechariah and you read the context of Zechariah chapter 9, it goes wider than just Jerusalem because it speaks of the king's rule extending to the ends of the earth as he brings peace.

And that's the king's commission. Jesus came to rule. He came to save. And he came to bring peace to the world. That's why we need him. And so the prophet says, See, your king comes to you.

Jesus was coming to his people. And Jesus was coming for his people. And that's why there's great excitement here. In verse 6 to 9, the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

[11:24] 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 while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowd 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 Matthew mentions a donkey and a colt. The colt had probably never been broken in. So possibly his mother was there as well. And as Jesus rode it, people laid their cloaks and laid their branches on the road.

And all of this was an acknowledgement of the kingship of Jesus. And so the people were full of hope as they welcomed Jesus with all of these shouts of praise, hailing him as God's chosen king, the Messiah, by shouting these words, Hosanna, Hosanna to the son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven. And the word Hosanna, the footnote tells us, it comes from the Hebrew and it means save, save us.

[12:32] So the crowd were exalting Jesus as king and crying out to Jesus for him to save them, crying out for help. And what is striking here is that Jesus doesn't stop them.

He accepts all the adulation and all the praise. He's willing to accept it because this is part of the revelation and the declaration that Jesus is God's chosen king.

He's the Messiah. And so Jesus welcomes it as if to say, yes, that's me. I am your king. I am the one who has come to save you and to help you.

And yet Jesus isn't the kind of king that the crowd were expecting. The same way that Jesus isn't the kind of king that people think he is today. So the people then were waiting for a great conquering military leader who would arrive with power and might.

Somebody who would kick out the Romans and get rid of all the oppression and the injustice. And yet instead, they get one riding on a donkey with gentleness and with humility.

[13:43] And so Jesus wasn't entering Jerusalem to take power and kill his enemies. No, Jesus was coming to give up power. He was coming to die at the hands of his enemies.

And so Jesus rode in humility because he was going to suffer and die in great humiliation and shame. He came in apparent weakness because he was on his way to be slaughtered by being executed on the cross.

So Jesus was coming to take his throne and yet his reign would begin from the cross. So Jesus chose to come gentle and riding on a donkey.

He was deliberately playing into the hands of the Jewish religious authorities. He would submit himself to being arrested, to being put on trial. He would remain silent. He would accept the injustice and he would willingly suffer and die.

And that was the king's commission because it was through his death that we can be saved. So while Jesus was on the cross, they mocked him.

[14:53] This is from Matthew 27. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. He's the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him.

So while he was hailed as king on Palm Sunday, on Good Friday, on the cross, he was mocked as king. He did wear a crown, but it was a crown of thorns.

And while Jesus could have come down from the cross because he's the king, he deliberately stayed on the cross so that people could be saved. And that was the king's commission to save and give his life through his death.

But God didn't abandon his chosen king to the grave. God raised Jesus from death to be king and lord over all. And so while the people cried out to be saved, Jesus would accomplish a salvation that was far better than they could ever have hoped for.

Because through Jesus's death, he would save his people from their sins. And through his resurrection, he would bring about his everlasting kingdom where everything will be perfect.

[16:02] And so the gospel is that the king came in humility to serve us by laying down his life in order to save us. Which means we have no hope of saving ourselves if Jesus needed to come and die on a cross.

So every other attempt that we make to save ourselves will fail. It is a self-salvation project that will never be completed because we don't have power in ourselves to save ourselves.

And I guess this past year of COVID and lockdown and death and suffering and illness has taught us that we are not in control of our lives. No matter how much we like to think that we are.

So even if we think we wear the crown, that we are the king or we are the queen and we have the power, then we've learned the hard way that we don't really.

That isn't true. Because we have got a bigger problem than our human frailty and weakness. And our bigger problem is that if we reject God's loving rule over our lives then we deserve sin and death.

[17:17] And yet the fantastic news of Christianity is that the king has come to take our place to save us from sin and death and hell.

And so until we realise and until we recognise that we need also to cry out save us then we haven't really grasped the danger we're in.

Jesus willingly took what we deserve, the punishment for our sin so that we could get what we don't deserve which is an inheritance in God's everlasting kingdom secured for us by Jesus' death and resurrection.

So do we get that? We deserve to be ruled by sin and death. And yet Jesus came to break the power of sin and death to save us. So that's the king's commission.

First of all the king's control, second the king's commission and then thirdly the king's confrontation in verse 10 to 17. So here Jesus confronts the people with his identity.

[18:18] Verse 10 and 11 When Jesus entered Jerusalem the whole city was stirred and asked who is this? The crowds answered this is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth and Galilee.

So they're asking who is this? But Jesus didn't just confront the crowd with his identity. Jesus also confronts the religious leaders of the temple with his identity.

Because notice that when Jesus entered Jerusalem where did he go first of all? He went straight to the temple. Did you notice that? Verse 12 and 13 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. It is written he said to them my house will be called the house of prayer but you're making it a den of robbers.

So why does that matter? Well the temple was the very heart and soul of the religious life of Israel of the Jews. It was for the worship of God and yet there's no worship taking place at the temple.

[19:24] That's why Jesus stormed the temple courts and threw out all the traders and he quotes Isaiah and then he quotes Jeremiah to say that it should be a house of prayer but they've turned it into a den of robbers.

Do you know the one place in the temple where those people from other nations outside of Israel could go the one place in the temple area they could go to was the court on the outskirts of the temple it's called the court of Gentiles.

But the very place that the Gentiles could go to draw near to God to meet with God had been turned into a marketplace. And so Jesus cleanses and thereby judges the temple because its false worship

and its corrupt practices wasn't helping people come near to God it was pushing people away from God.

And did you see that Jesus called it my house? So the temple he's claiming as his own. Now the temple was reserved for God and worship of God but here is Jesus claiming authority over the temple to judge it.

Now just imagine somebody came into your house and they turned over all your furniture and they shifted everything turned upside down how would you feel? Well I guess you'd feel good if it was a spring clean and they were cleaning it all and they put it back but no you'd feel angry if they came in and wrecked your house because as the owner of the house you're the only one who has got the right to move the furniture around.

[20 : 58] And so what Jesus is doing here is in claiming authority over the temple and saying my house he's saying he has got the right to judge. He's the only one who can shift things around because it all belongs to him.

And so this is a public declaration by Jesus before the religious leaders to say to them that he is God's chosen king he is the Messiah and so he is confronting the religious leaders with his identity. Look again at verse 14 to 16 the blind and the lame came to him at the temple and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts Hosanna to the son of David they were indignant.

Do you hear what these children are saying they asked him. Yes replied Jesus have you never read from the lips of children and infants you Lord have called forth your praise.

So Jesus angers the religious leaders but he's confronting them with his kingship and it's further revealing who he is and again this revelation of Jesus identity is revealed in what he does with the blind and the lame.

[22 : 15] Did you see that in verse 14 he heals them and then Jesus accepts the shouts of the children who are shouting Hosanna to the son of David. And so the religious leaders were indignant not just because the children were singing in the temple and it was noisy but because Jesus was accepting all their praise.

He welcomed it and then Jesus quotes from Psalm 8 which we sang earlier from the lips of children and infants you Lord have called forth your praise. So the religious leaders knew this psalm and they knew that this psalm of praise applied to God and yet here is Jesus taking that praise for himself.

Again he is confronting the leaders with his identity because he's forcing them to respond to him. They can either crown him as king or they can kill him.

They would soon kill him but Jesus here is pushing them. They either have to accept him as king which means they have to submit to his authority or they have to reject him and kill him.

And Jesus doesn't leave them with any other option. In J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings there's a chapter in The Return of the King the final book called The Houses of Healing and in it one of the wise women recalls a legend of Gondor that said the hands of the king are the hands of a healer and so shall the rightful king be known.

[23 : 50] And then Aragorn arrives at the Houses of Healing and he starts to heal people. He uses his hands to help those who are wounded by the enemy and in doing so he reveals himself as the king.

And so Jesus in entering Jerusalem and in visiting the temple and in healing people and in accepting praise he is revealing himself as the true and rightful king.

The king of our lives and the king of our world. The hands of the king are the hands of a healer and so shall the rightful king be known.

So Jesus is known not through a display of power and might not by smashing his enemies but through healing the broken and giving up his power to die on a cross.

Jesus is the king who has come to us and he continues to confront us today. And that's what Palm Sunday is all about. So his control, his commission, his confrontation demand that you and I respond to him.

[24 : 59] Will we crown him or kill him? Will we crown him as king of our lives or will we try and get rid of him? Jesus is going to have to be our king over all or else he won't be our king at all.

It is always all or nothing with Jesus. He must be the supreme ruler over my life and your life or else he's nothing to us.

As the rightful king, he doesn't give us any other options. You can't relate to Jesus on your terms. you've got to relate to Jesus on the basis of who he is.

You don't get to set the terms any more than you would if you were to meet a member of the royal family. You don't decide on the protocol. And yet with Jesus there is no protocol.

And yet he confronts us with his identity and with his work. And he wants us to respond to him.

Jesus is either our king and we surrender to him.

[26 : 05] Or we decide to rule our lives ourself. He doesn't give us any other option. And so as we close, the message of Palm Sunday is that the king has come.

And the king is coming again. And the king reigns forever. And he invites us right now to bow the knee in humble submission to him.

Or else we are guilty of high treason. And we deserve condemnation. And Jesus confronts us because he loves us. If he has come to save us through giving up his life, then there can be no doubt of his love for us.

And if he rose from death, then there can be no doubt that he will renew this broken and messed up world. Jesus healing the blind and the lame at the temple is just a small tiny window onto even more wonderful things to come.

His reign will bring about ultimate healing, ultimate peace, ultimate justice. And his death and resurrection assure us of this. So Jesus is the leader that our world and our lives cry out for.

[27 : 15] Jesus is the king that we need. Even if we don't think we do, he is. Jesus is this world's only hope. So presidents and politicians and policies and protests will never solve our biggest problems or meet our greatest needs or fulfill our deepest desires.

Only King Jesus can. So just think for yourself, if you were in this crowd, are you amongst those who are shouting out in praise?

Or are you still in protest against him? And your protest doesn't even need to be loud. you can be a silent protester against Jesus.

But the fact is that Jesus is the true king. He is the rightful king and he will reign forever. And so it is the height of stupidity to live life by refusing to submit to this loving king's rule.

He came to save. He is establishing a kingdom that will be perfect and will last forever. So he is the king we need. And so have you received him as your king?

[28 : 32] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.