

The Unexpected King

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[0 : 00] Well, streets are crowded with people. They're all marching together. They're all cheering with one voice, chanting, crying out passionately for their cause. Some are carrying banners, others are waving flags. Why are they there? They're there to protest or alternatively, they're there to praise. Don't you find that we're so used to seeing large crowds lining our city streets these days? Most weekends, there is a march for something or other, and people get together to champion their cause. And it may be orange walks around the 12th of July in Glasgow. It may be a celebration of pride. It may be in protest of the US Supreme Court ruling on abortion. It may be in praise of Celtic for winning the league or Rangers for winning the cup.

Or it may be in protest at the arrival of a certain figure, as happened with the former US President Donald Trump when he arrived in Glasgow a few years ago. You see, as people, we are passionate.

And when we're passionate about something, we will either protest or we will praise. Because when we feel strongly about an issue or a cause or a person, we will want to express how we feel in some kind of way.

And more and more, in recent times, the way to express how you're feeling, to show your passion, is to get out on the streets, march, wave banners or flags or whatever. To come together as a crowd, to show collective strength for your cause, to nail your colours to the mast, as it were. Well, in our Bible reading this afternoon from Mark chapter 11, we read about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, where the streets were crowded with people. And they were all chanting with one voice, but not in protest at his arrival. No, they were shouting in praise and with great expectation for what Jesus would do. That's why the Bible reading that we had is often called the triumphal entry, because it's the event that begins the final week of Jesus' life on, sorry, Jesus' death on earth.

[2 : 28] And so it starts this new section in the Gospel of Mark from chapter 11 onwards, where it takes us through to the end of the Gospel and to the death of Jesus and then the resurrection of Jesus.

And so as Jesus enters Jerusalem to the jubilation of crowds, he is treated as king. But it becomes clear that he is not the king that people expected. He is the unexpected king, because while this looks like a triumphal entry, it actually turns out to be a non-triumphal entry. Because at the end, it's clear that Jesus isn't recognised as king. Because the king arrives in Jerusalem and nothing happens.

All the praise and all the promise simply peters out at the end of the day. And yet, it doesn't change the fact that Jesus is king. God's king. God's king come to judge and to save.

Not the kind of king that people expected back then, but nor is he the kind of king that people expect today. And yet his coming forces people, forces us, to make up our minds about him. We must decide, if Jesus will be our king. In the same way that we must decide who will rule over our country.

We must decide, if Jesus will be king, whether we will be amongst those who shout out in praise of him, or will we defiantly protest against him?

[4 : 11] So let's see how Jesus, coming as king, forces us to decide on him. Whether we're for him, and live under his authority, and treat him as king, or whether we will commit treason, and reject his rule over us. So three things. First, there's the king's control, verse 1 to 6. Secondly, the king's commission, verse 7 to 10. And then third, the king's concentration, verse 11. So first of all, the king's control. As Jesus makes his way towards Jerusalem, Mark makes it clear that Jesus is in complete control of everything that is happening.

Jesus is working to his timetable, where every move that Jesus makes is planned and deliberate. Even the geography is significant. So we read in verse 1, So Jerusalem was the destination. That's where Jesus would die. And that's where the temple was. And so in the reading, there is mentioned the Mount of Olives. And it is east of Jerusalem. And because it's a mountain, it gave a vantage point where you could look down over the city of Jerusalem and see the temple. But there's more because in Zechariah chapter 14, we're told about the Lord coming to judge and to save. So Zechariah chapter 14, verse 4 says this, On that day, his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.

And so it's all happening. And so it's all recorded for us in such a way to tell us that Jesus is deliberately behaving as God's Messiah King predicted in the Old Testament. In a sense, he is staging his arrival into Jerusalem. And he's well aware that his entrance would culminate in his death on a cross.

And yet it's all the outworking of God's plan for this world, our world. And so Jesus, the King, is in control, and he is fulfilling his destiny. He's indicating that he is the Messiah, he is God's chosen King, and he's ready to ride into Jerusalem. And yet despite his actions and the crowd's response, it doesn't mean that the crowd fully understood what was going on here. Because Jesus wasn't the kind of King the people expected. And it was normal in those days for a King to ride, triumphantly, and to be cheered by the crowd as he entered into a place. And yet what Jesus does here is he deliberately departs from the script. Because he doesn't ride on a war horse like a King would.

[7 : 39] No, Jesus chose a colt, a young donkey, for his ride. And he commanded his disciples to get it, and he predicted what would happen when they did. Now this might seem like a bit of a PR disaster, because if Jesus was coming to Jerusalem as King, why ride on a colt, a young baby donkey, instead of a powerful war horse? Wasn't this sending out the wrong kind of signal? Just imagine Her Majesty the Queen for an important event, ditching her plated Bentley State limousine, and instead going down the road in a three-door Vauxhall Corsa. Nothing against Vauxhall Corsas, if you're a Vauxhall Corsal owner. They're awful cars, and I know that. I used to have one. But they don't exactly exude power and majesty and authority, do they? Not for somebody who is the Queen of our land.

And yet here is Jesus, the King, and he is riding on a young donkey. Well, why? Well, again, Jesus is fulfilling Old Testament prophecy by his actions. So listen to what Zechariah again says about the promised Messiah King who would come. And this is Zechariah 9, verse 9.

Here is Zechariah prophesying a gentle king would come, and he would come riding on a donkey, and he would bring God's salvation. And so as Jesus came to Jerusalem, he was demonstrating that he is king, but not the kind of king people expected. Not one that fits with the world's categories of kingship. Because when we think of kingship, we think of authority and of power. And yet Jesus did what the Messiah was expected to do, right down to the very last details, and come in humility on a donkey.

And so God's people were waiting for the king God had promised. And Jesus, by his actions, is saying, I'm that king. I've arrived. His authority and his majesty, as well as his humility, shine through in all he does.

And so the point being made here is that Jesus is in control of everything because he is the king. He's king, even though those around him don't fully recognize him. And so that's why we should never think that somehow the death of Jesus was a tragic event and he was a helpless victim who couldn't avoid it.

[10 : 46] No. Jesus wasn't caught up in circumstances beyond his control. As if he was unable to stop his arrest and his crucifixion. No, he is the king, but he's the king who came riding on a donkey. Riding on a donkey to march towards his death. And that leads to our second point. So first of all, there's the king's control of everything that's happening. Secondly, there's the king's commission. So just as Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about God's king, the Messiah, by what he did, now the Old Testament prophecies about God's king, the Messiah, are fulfilled by what the people do and what the people shout. So verse 7, we read, So who are these people shouting?

Well, I don't think it's those in Jerusalem because Jesus hadn't entered Jerusalem yet. He enters in verse 11. And so the crowd doing the shouting are likely the people who traveled along the way with Jesus. Like the crowd in Mark 10, 46, who left Jericho for Jerusalem with Jesus.

And so the people crying Hosanna are those who've traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem. And we can't be sure how much they really understood about Jesus or what they were saying.

And yet they're full of expectation about what Jesus had come to do. They thought he'd come to do something. And so as Jesus rode on the donkey, throwing their cloaks on the road, spreading their branches was an acknowledgement of his kingship. And these days we might roll out the red carpet in the way they do at a movie premiere.

In Top Gun 2, they roll out the red carpet and William and Kate walk on top. But here, spreading of cloaks on the road was a sign of submission. And the spreading of branches was a sign of victory. And that's why they shouted, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[13:21] Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest. Their praise echoes the words of Psalm 118, which is a royal song of thanksgiving for military victory. And it was sung at the Jewish Passover, which is why the crowds are heading to Jerusalem in this reading. And so Psalm 118 thanks God for his rescue in the past, like his deliverance of his people in the Exodus, but it also anticipates a future rescue of God's people. And so Hosanna is a Hebrew expression that means save now. So it's a cry for help. And so as the crowd exalt Jesus, what they're doing is they're crying out to be saved. They need help. They need a ruler, a leader, a king who will rescue them. And Jesus made no attempt to stop them in their singing and shouting. And that's because the psalm that they were shouting finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. Because Jesus is God's chosen king. He is the Messiah. And so while God's people were anticipating the messianic kingdom of David, they know it will come, Jesus is not the Messiah they expected. Because while they proclaimed him as Messiah, the Messiah they were waiting for was a conquering Messiah. One who'd come with power and with might. And yet that wasn't this king's commission.

Because as Jesus made his way towards Jerusalem, he wasn't going to take power and kill his enemies. No, instead he would give up power and die for his enemies. Because his mission was to give up his life. And that's why Isaiah's servant songs, which David took us through these past four weeks, they've been telling us the king came to serve, to give up his life and to die. And so Jesus rode into Jerusalem in deep humility because he came to suffer and die for sin. And so there's a stark contrast here, really an odd juxtaposition, because there's majesty and meekness. There's power and weakness as Jesus enters Jerusalem. For his triumph wouldn't be a political one through power and might. No, his victory would come through the weakness of his death. Emily Bronte, novelist and poet, said this. She said, if I could, I would always work in silence and obscurity and let my efforts be known by their results.

And isn't that the very opposite of our culture today? We live in a culture that thirsts for recognition, for fame, for acknowledgement, where people want to be seen, want to be noticed, want to be liked, acknowledged, praised, rewarded. Some can even live their lives desperate for the attention and the adulation of other people. And social media would encourage us, wouldn't it? It even encourages us to promote ourselves, to perform to others, where the recognition and the reward comes through the number of likes you get or the number of people who follow you. And yet how different is this to Jesus? He is the king, and yet his life is one of relative obscurity. And even as he makes his way to the cross to accomplish his mission, the reason why he came, well, yes, there's this triumphal entry, but he still isn't recognized as the true king who came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And so it should remind us just how easy it is to misunderstand Jesus, to fail to recognize who he is and fail to understand what he came to do. And perhaps you're here this afternoon and you're fairly new to church, you're new to

Christianity, and you're still trying to figure out about Jesus, who he is, why did he come? Why should I bother with him? Well, it's clear for us when we see who he is and we understand why he came, then we need to respond in some way. Now, of course, back then people fail to see who he really was and is, and it's still the same today. Jesus can so easily be overlooked in our world. And yet now the king has come, it should make a difference to your life and to mine. And so like the crowd who shouted out in praise, we may be able to say the right things when it comes to Jesus, but do we recognize him as king? And indeed, do we crown him as our king? Do we submit to his rule? Do we recognize that as the king, he came to save sinners like you and me? So the king's commission is explained by looking back at the prophecies and the Old Testament scriptures, and they're all pointing to Jesus to say to us today, the king has come. Do you really recognize who he is? Do you see what he came to do for you? So that's the king's commission. First, the king's control. Second, the king's commission. And third, the king's concentration. Just look what happened after the triumphal entry. Verse 11, Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple

courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the 12th. Sounds like a bit of an anticlimax, doesn't it? The triumphal entry of the king actually leads to nothing. Jesus checks out the temple and he leaves Jerusalem. He goes back to Bethany for the night. After such great expectations, it seems much more like much ado about nothing. Because the triumphal entry into Jerusalem with

Jesus hailed as king didn't lead to a triumphal entry at the temple. There's a stark contrast between the attention Jesus received during the day from the crowd with the lack of attention he received in the evening as he entered the temple courts. And it's poignant because of what is coming next. The king's concentration is on the temple in anticipation of the events in the coming days. Because Jesus would return to the temple the next day, which we'll look at next time, and he would judge it for the empty worship that he found there. And so this isn't an anticlimax. This is a chilling intro to what Jesus would do when he returned.

[20 : 58] And so Mark's account is striking for what's not said here. Because Jesus visits the temple, not as a pilgrim like everybody else who was going into Jerusalem, rather he comes to the temple as God's king, as the Messiah. Again, he's fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, this time in Malachi chapter 3 verse 1, where it says, Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. So Jesus visits the temple to see whether it's fit for purpose. Does it function as the place where people like you and me meet with God, as it was supposed to? Because the temple in Jerusalem, you see, was at the very heart of Israel's faith. In fact, it's impossible to underestimate just how vital the temple was in their religion, how crucial it was for God's people. It was the center of worship. And that's why we're introduced to the temple here, because the temple becomes the focus of all the action in chapters 11 to 13. So we see the temple come up in chapter 11 verse 11, which we've just read. Then again in chapter 11 verse 15, and then 11, 27, and then 11, sorry, 12, 35, and then 12, 41. And then in chapter 13 verse 1, we read, as Jesus was leaving the temple. It's temple, temple, temple, temple, temple, temple, temple. Everything Jesus does is centered around the temple. But why? Because the temple in Jerusalem isn't merely the geographical center of Jesus' final week on this earth. It is also the theological center because of what Jesus came to do. And so the emphasis is on the temple because Jesus would soon supersede it. The temple was the visible meeting place between God and human beings. So the temple had this curtain that was drawn and symbolized how sinful human beings like you and me could not access a holy and perfect God. The curtain was like a huge no-entry sign. And yet when Jesus died, Mark tells us later on that the temple of the curtain was ripped from top to bottom. And it was a visible sign to say that Jesus opened up the way back to God. Through his death, sinful people like me and you have access to God. And so on the cross, as Jesus died, he died for our sin, taking our punishment so that we need no longer be separated from God. And so the temple would soon become obsolete because Jesus would fulfill the purpose of the temple in himself as the true and better temple, making it possible for sinful people to meet a holy God. The king's control, the king's commission, and the king's concentration.

And so that's why when we recognize who the king is and what he did when he came, we are forced to make up our minds about him. Because if he is the king who came to bring judgment and salvation, we can't possibly ignore him. When Jesus came to claim his throne, his reign began on a cross.

But his kingdom will endure forever. And it has arrived now already. And one day it will come in all its fullness. And so that's why presidents and politicians and protests can never actually achieve anything.

They can never meet our greatest needs, fulfill our deepest desires, or solve our greatest problems as human beings. Because only Jesus can. I read a great story in a book this week. It's called Palm Monday. Let me read it to you. It goes like this. The little donkey awoke with a smile on his face. He'd been dreaming of the previous day. He stretched and then happily walked out into the street. But the many passers-by simply ignored him. Confused, he went over to the crowd in market area. [25 : 45] With his ears held high, with pride, he strutted right down the middle of it. Here I am, people, he said to himself. But they stared in confusion. And some angrily struck him to drive him away. What do you think you're doing, you ask, walking into the marketplace like this?

Throw your garments down, he said crossly. Don't you know who I am? And they just looked at him in amazement. Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother. I don't understand, he said to her. Yesterday they waved palm branches at me. They shouted, Hosanna and hallelujah.

Today they treat me like I'm a nobody. Foolish child, she said gently. Don't you realize that without him you can do nothing? You see, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem reveals him to us. If only we will see him. Because life is not about you. You are not the center of the universe. It is about the king who is at the center and who rules over all. And so this leaves us with the question, how have you and I responded to this king? What have we done with Jesus Christ? Are we among those who can shout out in praise because he has come to save and we know he has saved me? Or are you still protesting against him? And you don't even need to shout out to protest. You can be a silent protester by simply ignoring him. Making life all about you instead of him. But now the true king has come and his perfected is coming, perfected kingdom is coming in the future, then it would be foolish to ignore him. It is high treason to reject his rule. His enemies will not stand when he comes to judge in the same way the temple did not stand when he judged it. And yet he has already defeated our greatest enemy, the enemy of death itself through his death and his resurrection. And so he wants us to join him on his victory march. He invites us to share in his victory by being part of his kingdom. But if you can't bring yourself to submit to his kingship and to shout out in praise for the king, it will be because you have not yet really understood him. Because it is in Jesus Christ alone that we find our deepest joy in life. And it is in [28 : 39] Jesus Christ alone that we discover our world's only hope. And so let's make sure we don't protest against him. Let's live our lives giving him our praise.