

The King has come

(Palm Sunday)

Pastor Tim Melton

Have you ever been in a situation where you really needed some help? A situation just got out of hand. It was too difficult, too painful, you were trapped and there was nothing you could do about it. You really needed someone who could come into your situation and make things right. That had often been the situation with the Jews of the Old Testament. Whether in bondage to the Egyptians, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, or even their own corrupt leaders, they found themselves many times in a situation of oppression that they could do nothing about. They needed a Deliverer.

Centuries before God had promised a Deliverer, but He seemed to never come. In the Old Testament there are various prophecies concerning a Savior, a Messiah, a Promised One, who would come to deliver the Jews. These prophecies were imbedded in the hearts of the Jewish people. Throughout the centuries the hope of a Messiah was their strength in times of suffering, defeat and exile.

In the days of Jesus, the people were under the brutal rule of the Roman Empire. This caused them to desire even more for their Messiah, their Deliverer, their King. Different men during this time in history would rise up and gain a group of followers. People would begin to hope that each of these men were the Promised One, but then he would either be killed or discredited, and the people would return to what seemed to be endless waiting. Life was unbearable under the Romans, but what other option did they have? In the days following Jesus' birth, they had no idea that in the city of Nazareth the promised Messiah had already arrived.

As we read the story of Jesus Christ, we see how He began His public ministry at the age of 30. His ministry was confirmed by the authority by which He taught and the working of signs and miracles. The blind received sight, the lame walked, those who had leprosy were cured, the deaf heard, the dead were raised, and the good news was preached. All of this was in preparation for what would occur this last week of Jesus' life.

In Luke 19:28-40, we see a remarkable event. It was Jesus' triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. This story is recorded in all four of the gospels. Up until this point Jesus had usually drawn back from public notice. He did not seek large crowds, even though they at times sought Him. He did not aim to perform for public approval.

In Matthew 16, Jesus commanded His disciples that they should *"tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ."* In Mark 5, when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, it says that *"He straightly charged them that no man should know of it."* In John 6, after feeding the 5,000, John records that *"When Jesus perceived that they (the multitude) would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone."* Even while descending from the mount of transfiguration, Jesus ordered His disciples that *"they should tell no man what things they had seen till the Son of man was risen from the dead"* (Mark 9:9). Much of Jesus' ministry had been away from Jerusalem, in the areas around the Sea of Galilee, but here, in the triumphal entry, Jesus was finally making a very public proclamation as He entered Jerusalem. His time had now come and He very intentionally turned their attention towards Himself. King Jesus had come.

It was the time of year to celebrate the Jewish Passover. Thousands upon thousands of Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world had gathered in Jerusalem. From census information of Jerusalem at this time, we know that over 250,000 lambs were slain each year during the Passover celebration. The law regarding the Passover lamb said that there had to be a minimum of ten people per lamb, which would bring the possible number of people in and around Jerusalem at Passover time to over 2.5 million.

In the midst of this religious celebration Jesus presented them with a picture, where His claims of being the Christ (Messiah) would be unmistakable.

Luke 19:28-40 is a story of Jesus entering Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives:

²⁸ And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

From our perspective, this seems to be a simple story of crowds of people cheering the arrival of Jesus. That is the basic truth of the story, but there is so much more when one looks more closely.

Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives to enter Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives was just east of the city of Jerusalem. It was a place with sacred importance. In the book of Ezekiel, God had given the prophet a vision of God and His glory leaving and one day returning to Jerusalem from the east of Jerusalem. The crowds that day likely took note of the significance of the direction from which Jesus' triumphal entry was coming.

Leading up to this story, crowds of people had gathered around Jesus in the town of Bethany. They had recently witnessed or heard of the resurrection of Lazarus. Now a mass of people walked with Jesus towards Jerusalem. As this crowd descended to Jerusalem with Jesus, another crowd was coming up out of the eastern gate of the city of Jerusalem. John 12:12-13 tells us, ***"The large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him."*** When the crowd coming down into Jerusalem with Jesus combined with the crowd coming out of Jerusalem, the mass of people was so large and so loud in their praise of Him that the Pharisees who were watching said, ***"Behold, the world has gone after Him"*** (John 12:19).

We must also take note of the animal. It had never been ridden before. It was being set apart for a holy purpose. Unused animals were often used for sacred purposes (Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3; 1 Samuel 6:7). The Passover Christ riding on an unused colt was another message to the people about the sacredness and importance of who Christ was.

A third detail to take note of was the type of animal on which Jesus was riding. A conquering king would enter a city riding a horse. A king coming in peace would ride a donkey (Matthew 21:2; 1 Kings 1:33-34). Jesus had not come to be an earthly, military king, who would free the Jews from Rome. He came as an eternal king, who would free many from the condemnation and slavery of sin and reconcile us to God. He came as the true Passover Lamb, who had come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 that had been written 500 years before:

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Do not be mistaken. Do not think of Jesus as weak. In Revelation 19, we see that Jesus will one day return riding on a white horse as a conquering King of kings and Lord of lords. He will bring eternal and complete victory on that day, but on this day, as He rode into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey, He was coming with righteousness and salvation. He came as the true Passover Lamb, gentle and riding on a donkey, but not in the way that they expected.

Verses 35-36 tells of how the crowds spread their cloaks or outer robes on the road in front of the donkey that Jesus was riding. This was another way that kings were treated. In 2 Kings 9:12-13, a prophet of God proclaimed a man named Jehu as king, and this is what is said of the people's response: ***"They hurried and took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!"*** This was another clear message in the story that Jesus was not coming as just a good teacher or a good man. He was claiming to be the promised King of kings who would sit on the throne of David forever.

In John 12:13, this same story of Jesus Triumphant entry is told and it tells how the people waved palm branches. Palm branches were another way to prepare the way of the “King”. In ancient history, palm branches often symbolized goodness and victory. Some Jewish coins from the first century had palm leaf engravings with the accompanying inscription, “the redemption of Zion.”¹

We also find Palm Branches as part of the worship that is described in Revelation 7:9-10:

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

In this triumphal entry, the Sovereign God had brought all of these indicators together in this one place, at this one time, to declare Christ as Messiah and King. In response to all of these signs the people began to praise Jesus, quoting from Psalm 118:26, a verse with clear references to the coming Messiah that had been written in centuries before. ***“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”***

The donkey, the location, the cloaks on the road, the palm branches, and the praises of the people all declared Jesus as the promised Messiah and King. It was a dangerous statement to be making at that time in history, since the Romans were in power, but that is who Jesus was and why he had come.

In the midst of the cheers there were Pharisees, some of the most religious Jews, who were watching the event take place. They rejected the claims of Christ’s being the Messiah and called for him to rebuke the praises of the people. They told Jesus to rebuke his disciples, but He responded with these words, ***“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”***

Jesus was stating the truth that the praises of God in Jesus Christ cannot be silenced. Christ’s followers were giving glory to Jesus because He was the Promised One from God, but the Pharisees refused to give Him glory.

Our world is familiar with the concept of glory. We give glory and praise to athletes, actors, musicians, authors, scientists, political officials, and many others. Glory is an idea of greatness that we give much too easily these days. It is a distinction that one is better than the rest because of their ability, their achievements, or because of who they are. It is the idea of unequalled greatness.

But we must remember that even the greatest football players of the world were created by God. Musicians perform well, but God created music. The politicians lead nations, but in the end people from every nation, tribe and tongue will bow to Jesus Christ. Even scientists in their greatest discovery have only found what God had already put in place when the world began.

If we choose not to give God glory, ***the creation will give testimony!*** We find this same truth in Romans 1:19-20. The attributes of God have been visible, ***“Ever since the creation of the world, in the things***

¹Origin of Motif: Ancient coin from 69 C.E., http://judaism.about.com/library/1_culture/bl_coins.htm

that have been made.” In Colossians 1:16, we read that *“by Him (Christ) all things were created.”* The names that our world exalts will be forgotten and fade into the past, but the name of Jesus will resound forever. The praise of God cannot be silenced and the Sovereignty of God will not be denied. If we do not give Him glory, nature itself will testify to His greatness.

The praises to God cannot be silenced by governments, by sword, by threats, or by fear. The people of God proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ will continue, unstoppable, until Christ returns... and that will only be the beginning. In heaven all other glories will be silenced, and Jesus Christ will be exalted.

Persecution cannot silence it. Not in Northern Nigeria, not in Iran, not in China, not in Northern Korea, or anywhere else violence and intimidation is brought against the followers of Jesus Christ. God’s Word proclaims and history confirms that the worship of God will continue forever.

Even apathy will not stop the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of God. One can see this throughout church history. When the churches begin to drift away from God and His Word, God calls out to those who “have ears to hear” and uses them to carry the name of Christ to its desired goal. We see this in Martin Luther and the Reformation, German Pietism, the Moravians, the Mennonite brethren, and the Methodists. Even Baptists came about as a group of believers who clung to God’s Word when the church-at-large had turned away from it. God will continue to raise up a people who will give Him praise above all others. Our confidence is in the sovereignty of our God. As scripture proclaims:

“Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). *“Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all the deeps”* (Psalm 135:6). *“(He) works all things after the counsel of His will”* (Ephesians 1:11). *“From Him and through Him and to Him are all things”* (Romans 11:36). *“For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him”* (1 Corinthians 8:6).

This sovereignty of God is also at work in every area of our lives. He ordered the details of Jesus’ triumphal entry centuries before it ever happened. He is moving our world towards its conclusion and Christ’s return. **Even in the midst of our struggles and failures, God has promised that, those who have put their faith in Him, will be made like Christ** (Romans 8:28). God will finish what He has begun.

As the story continues Luke ends it with these words (Luke 19:41-44):

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Most of the Jews of Jesus’ day missed the fact that a Messiah had come who would deliver them from what plagued them most. Jesus knew that the direction of a man’s life depends on the condition of the man’s heart. Jesus knew that we were condemned because of our sin. Jesus knew that He was here to seek and to save the lost.

In Hebrews 9:22, we are told that *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin”*. That was the reason for the Passover lamb. In Exodus 12, we see that in one final plague all the firstborn sons of Egypt were going to die. The only way those in the congregation of Israel could avoid this plague was if they took an unblemished lamb, killed it and wiped its blood over the doorpost of their house. For centuries, thousands upon thousands of Passover lambs were killed in remembrance of that first Passover lamb that saved the firstborn sons from death. But their real purpose was not to look back to that first Passover lamb, but to look forward to the true Passover Lamb. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were rituals that pointed to the true sacrifice that was still to come in Christ.

They were temporary in effect and had to be repeated over and over again. They were never sufficient. Sin against an infinite and holy God demanded an infinite and holy sacrifice. When Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, died, the full wrath of God was satisfied. Jesus Christ was truly the eternal *“Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world”* (John 1:29). Similar to the lamb’s blood at Passover, it was the shed blood of Christ that covered the guilt of man and protects man from the judgment of God. No other sacrifice will ever be required.

As we look back through this story from scripture there are multiple lessons that we can learn from the perspectives of the different characters of the story.

From the disciples, we see that when we obey Christ, we will find ourselves in the center of what God is doing, maybe even unknowingly. John 12:16 even tells how *“His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him.”* At times we must simply trust and obey, even when we don’t quite understand or want to obey. As we trust, God will lead us into all truth and into the center of His will (forgiveness, generosity, step of faith, surrender, etc.).

From the Pharisees in this story, we see that it is possible to be religious without having a relationship with God. The promised Messiah was right in front of them, but they were totally blind to His presence, because of their hardness of hear and refusal to believe.

From the crowd, we see that when we seek Christ for our own agenda, and define Him as we want, in the end we miss Him all together. There were some who sang His praises, but missed His salvation, because they were seeking a Savior who would serve them and not one whom they could serve.

“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” From Jesus’ words, we are reminded once again that there is nothing or no one that will ever silence the glory of Christ and the advancement of His Kingdom.

From the triumphal entry, we see a humble King, who left the safety of heaven and came to be our Passover Lamb, giving His life that we might be saved. *“But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12).

With which of these perspectives do we best relate?

I would like to finish this sermon with a story I read about recently from The Daily Article, from Dr. Jim Denison, April 13, 2019:

Perhaps you know the story of Joseph Damien. He was a minister from Belgium who was sent in 1873 to minister to a leper colony on the island of Hawaii. As soon as he arrived on Molokai, he did his best to build relationship with the lepers who lived there, but they rejected him. He built a small chapel and held worship services on a regular basis, but hardly anyone ever came.

After twelve difficult years, Father Damien gave up. While standing on the pier about to board the ship that would take him home to Belgium, he looked down at his hands. The white spots he saw there could mean only one thing: he had contracted leprosy. So, instead of going home, he returned to his work in the leper colony.

News of the missionary's disease spread quickly through the community, and soon hundreds of lepers rushed to his hut. They understood his pain and despair. The following Sunday, when Father Damien arrived at the chapel, the building was filled to overflowing. Thus began a long and fruitful ministry.

What made the difference? The lepers knew that their minister understood their condition. They knew that he cared about them, that he could identify with them, that he was one of them. He had left the safety of Belgium and had become one of them, and that made all the difference.

That is what Christ has done for us. Today may we put our trust in Him and believe.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you read Luke 19:28-44, what do you find most interesting? Explain.
2. Some of the people in this story did not understand who Christ was and why He had come. In your opinion, how do people misunderstand Jesus today?
3. Have you ever had a time in life when you praised God with your mouth but not with your life? Explain.
4. In your own words, what does it mean when it is said that Jesus Christ is the last Passover Lamb?
5. Which of the characters of this story do you best relate with? Explain.
6. What do you think God wants you to remember from this biblical story?
7. How do you think God wants you to apply this to your life?