

Putting King Jesus First in our Lives

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everybody. So we were talking a little bit earlier about King Charles and his coronation.

And the passage today has a similar grand entrance as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. But the scene is very different because it was set 2,000 years ago.

This wasn't arranged by the authorities, but it certainly was an anticipated event. And it has all the hallmarks of celebration.

Crowds gathered shouting and adulation, a carpet of coats, robes and palm branches. And it's also similar because it marks the arrival of a king to a capital city.

Although we're going to go on and find out that not everybody is going to acknowledge him as king. And the passage shows us at the start of the week, the people hail Jesus as king and yell, come save us.

[1 : 04] And yet by Thursday of that same week, they're going to reject him and crucify him. For us too, it's possible to acknowledge God with our lips.

But that knowledge doesn't necessarily transfer down to practical choices in the way that we live our lives daily. So as we look at this passage, let's invite the Holy Spirit to shine his light on us.

And so that you and I can ask that question. Are we living for the king in his kingdom daily? So we're a week away from Easter and the biggest day of celebration in the Christian calendar.

Many of you will have heard this story time and time again, maybe in Sunday school or kids' church, and heard it preached every year at Easter. But let's look at that familiar story again and ask that question.

How are we demonstrating daily that Jesus is first and king in our lives? Today, people often ask us as Christians where God is when there's wars, when there's suffering, when there's people starving, viruses are spreading, and people are being so cruel to each other.

[2 : 16] Where is God in all of that? To be honest, they're really hard questions, but I believe that this passage will help to at least give us part of the answer to that question.

As we've read through the Gospels about Jesus' life, we see that he taught publicly and performed miracles everywhere. But he never seemed to look for the limelight or the attention. And most of the time when he's done miracles, he says to people, don't tell anyone about this.

So this passage is quite different. For the first time, I think, Jesus, the servant king, prepares to enter the city of Jerusalem as a king, offering himself to the millions of Jews that have gathered there for the Passover as a king of Israel.

He's organised a parade, a big public event, and he's entering Jerusalem in a way that kings would enter a city, and declaring to the masses that he is the king.

And though these people initially greet him with great fanfare and adulation, it will only be a few days, as it was prophesied in the Old Testament, that Jesus will find himself rejected by his own people.

[3 : 30] Jesus came to this city in that time and offered himself to humanity as their king, and they rejected him. God came to earth in the person of Jesus, not wanting to give upon humanity.

And yet even today, people say, we don't want him, we're not interested. We're quite happy being in charge of our own lives, doing our own things, thanks a lot. Before we were even born, God loved us.

God had a rescue plan for us. God came to earth, he was born a baby, lived a perfect life, and he chose to die in our place, so that our sin, the pollution that pollutes our lives, could remove from us.

And yet even today, people say, no thanks. People often today blame God for viruses, or acts of God in earthquake and tsunamis. They blame God for the violence or the selfishness in this world.

And yet I think, if you trace it all back to its source, our suffering isn't caused by God, but it's caused much more by the individual and corporate sinfulness of us all as a people.

[4 : 42] It's when people say, we don't need Jesus, we reject him as king. We want to do our own thing. We want to do our own thing on our relationships. Keep out of my relationships.

We want to run our businesses how we like. We're not interested in what God thinks about that. It's how we treat people at work, what we do at work. Keep him out of my career. And when we tell little white lies, or we gossip behind people's back, or we undermine people to make ourselves feel better.

And when we say, you know what, I don't need Jesus to die for me, because I'm such a good and perfect person. This is when sin enters the world and suffering follows. So I think that the problem is not God.

I think it's humanity. All the way through Matthew's gospel, Matthew keeps presenting Jesus and reminding him that he's king.

And in this chapter in Matthew's story, he presents Jesus as a king who's rejected by the masses. So approximately two million Jews were in the town to celebrate the Jewish celebration, the Passover, where the Hebrews in Egypt had put a cross shape around their doorposts with the blood of a perfect lamb, and the angel of death passed over that household and did not kill the firstborn.

[6 : 02] And so in this, we see Jesus as the Passover lamb. He's just finished a bit of a retreat with his disciples, and now he's heading back into the city to what he knows is going to be his certain death.

He knows that's what he's got to do. And I really don't think the disciples, they'd spent all that time with him, but they still didn't really get it. The masses are there, and Jesus gets all set to ride into the city and present himself as their king.

And from this day onwards, there would be nobody in Israel that could say that they didn't know that Jesus had said who he was. So this was a triumphal entry, and it was also a proclamation.

And it was bringing true that promise from Zechariah, which says, this took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet, say to daughter Zion, see your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the foal of a donkey.

So I wonder what the Roman soldiers that were watching this would have been thinking to see him coming in riding on a donkey. They would have been used to seeing kings coming in on their stallions and their chariots with thousands of soldiers marching beside them.

[7 : 14] And here's Jesus riding humbly in on a donkey with no army beside him, the servant king. Would it have even made sense to them? I think they might have seen him as being really pathetic, a bit of a joke, a bit of a comical scene.

And on this occasion, Jesus enters the city as the suffering king. But do you know what?

There's a day coming when Jesus will return to earth on a large white horse, and he's going to be coming as a conquering king with millions of Christians coming with him, and nobody's going to be in any doubt who he is.

But this first time he came, as the prophet Zechariah declared, humbly and riding on a donkey. So the disciples left him and went on their mission to do what Jesus had told them to do, and they brought the donkey and its colt, and they laid some clothes on the backs.

And then Jesus got on. Many people spread clothes in the road, while others put down some palm branches, which they'd cut from trees. Some people walked ahead of him, some people followed him, and they were all shouting, Hosanna for the son of David!

[8 : 30] God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! The word Hosanna means save now. Literally, they were calling, Jesus, save us now. But save us from what?

Well, they wanted Jesus to save them economically, politically, and militarily. They wanted Jesus to be that great military leader that was going to destroy the Romans with a death blow, and set up a new kingdom free from Roman oppression.

Save us now. We're so sick and tired of these Romans and their taxes and their cruelty and their false religion. Jesus, Hosanna, save us now. And so it's no wonder, really, that as the week progressed, and it became apparent that he's not going to pull out his giant sword and raise up a mighty army, that Jesus was not going to just save them now from the Romans.

It helps us understand why at the beginning of the week they hail him king, and by the end of the week they totally reject him and crucify him. And how often have you and I seen this happen in the

lives of people around us?

Or if we're honest, maybe our own lives. We pray, we expect, we need, we feel that we know exactly what God needs to do for us.

[9 : 52] But God doesn't answer our prayers when or how we expect it, and we get fed up. Our minds are so small, our perceptions so limited, that often we don't see how God is at work.

And it looks like he's not answering our prayers, and people get disillusioned, and some people walk away from him. When Jesus came to Jerusalem, everyone in the city was excited and asked, who can this be?

And the crowd answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. And on that day, people had an incorrect expectation of what he was going to do.

On that day, people acknowledged him as king, but they were going to reject him. And I wonder, when people look at you and I, do they see just kind-hearted, nice people doing nice things?

Or do they really see radical children of the king? Is Jesus really king and first in our lives? Or is it more of a head thing? Something that we believe, but it doesn't really impact our daily choices.

[11 : 01] How does it affect how we treat people? How does it affect our relationships with our friends, our neighbours, our wider family, our kids and our other halves? How does it affect how we behave at work?

Do our colleagues even know we're Christians? How does it affect us when we see social injustice going on? When the gap between rich and the weak and vulnerable in this country grows daily? How does it affect what we do with our time? Do we make time to read our Bibles and pray daily to help us to get closer to God? Or do we get distracted by other things? And do we look for opportunities to pray with people that are physical and emotional pain?

How do we spend our money? Do we give what we should to church to support the mission and evangelism of our town so that this church can really be a Christian presence here?

And then we know that there's those people that we need to forgive, but we just don't want to.

Recently, I was watching an interview with that great evangelist, J. John, and he explained it as having Jesus in the car of your life, and I think it's really helpful.

[12 : 11] And he says, to be a follower of Jesus means that you've got Jesus in the car, and so if Jesus is not in the car of your life, you need to invite him in.

But I think with a lot of us, Jesus is in the car, but the question is, where is he in the car? I like this bit. Is he in the boot?

Do we drive our car to church, unlock the boot, and get Jesus out of the boot for religious happy hour? Or for some people, he's in the driving seat, but we're backseat drivers.

The thing for all of us is to make sure that we've got Jesus in the driving seat, and that we're not dictating to him where we're going.

So finally, what would you do if you truly have Jesus as your king when disaster strikes, when things don't go how you want it to go, and it makes no sense to you?

[13 : 08] I suggest that this is when we have to be honest with God. We make our request to God, specifically, but we trust that God is at work for our good in some way.

Even though at the time we may not see it, it may be years later that we can see how God was working. And this week, as we approach Easter, we need to remember that Jesus paid a great price for our sin and for our salvation.

that we are all children of God and we are citizens of heaven here on this earth to serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And we all should not be conformed to the patterns of thinking and behaviour of this world, but we must let his word and his Holy Spirit transform the way that we think and we behave.

So this week, a challenge for us all. Seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Let's try and acknowledge Jesus as our King in everything that we do.

Amen.