

Blessed is the king

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[0 : 00] Reading from Luke chapter 19 from verse 28 to 48.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, why are you untying it, say, the Lord needs it. Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.

As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, why are you untying the colt? They replied, the Lord needs it. They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and put Jesus on it.

As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

[1 : 24] Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke your disciples.

I tell you, he replied, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.

The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls.

They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling.

It is written, he said to them, My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers. Every day he was teaching at the temple, but the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the leaders among them were trying to kill him.

[3 : 00] Yet they could not find a way to do it because all the people hung on his words. Amen. Okay, Luke 19 from verse 28.

I wonder for you what your picture is of Jesus. Maybe for you the kind of defining picture of Jesus, Jesus the baby in the manger, the cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying.

He makes the idealized baby who just stays there in the manger. Or some people like Jesus, the preacher of love and kindness, the philosopher who taught humanity to be better to one another, to show love where people were turning to hate.

Some people, of course, prefer Jesus the activist, railing against the establishment, a figurehead for whichever social movement you choose to align behind Jesus the activist.

Or maybe it's Jesus hanging on the cross, forever in agony, suffering an unjust sentence. Maybe you think of him victorious, triumphant, crushing Satan beneath his heel, defeating the powers of darkness, Jesus the warrior king.

[4 : 28] Most of these different pictures have truth to them, don't they? But most of them are a little bit distorted as well, aren't they? At least if that is the only picture that you see in your mind's eye.

Jesus, I think, defies this kind of neat categorization into one picture of who he is. Jesus isn't up for sitting conveniently in your little box, is he?

Just like every human being who's ever lived, Jesus is more than one thing. Jesus is multifaceted, even more so than you or I. And in these verses that we're considering today, Jesus shows us just how much that's true.

In these 21 verses, we see a number of different aspects of Jesus' character on display, don't we? Now, these things that we see in these verses, possibly they're not the most crucial, most fundamental things about him.

But if we want to understand Jesus more, if we want to follow in Jesus' footsteps more closely, if we want to appreciate the extent of what he's done for us, then we'll want to know everything we can about him.

[5 : 36] We'll want to see his character in all of its dimensions, in all of its multifaceted glory. And so this morning in these verses, we encounter in quick succession, Jesus, the humble king, and then the weeping Jesus, and then the angry Jesus.

Quick succession from one to the next. So let's examine these different pictures together, and hopefully that will enrich our idea of who Jesus is.

So first up, Jesus, the humble king. Remember, his journey's coming to an end. For 11 chapters, Luke's taken us on this journey towards Jerusalem.

And as he knowingly heads towards the cross, even here at the journey's end, Jesus doesn't shy away from what's coming.

Jesus, in fact, says verse 28, went on ahead, not hanging back, striding on, counting it a price worth paying.

[6 : 42] In the final stages of his journey, Jesus shows something of his identity. Jesus shows us that he is the humble king.

Humble king, possibly not. Two words that typically go together, are they? But here is Jesus, the humble king. Jesus sets up deliberately what happens at the start of this narrative.

Jesus orchestrates events to achieve the effect that he intends to produce. Now we know, don't we? We know that Jesus, through his lifetime, Jesus fulfilled a number of different prophecies, right through from the circumstances of his birth, foretold by the angels.

Jesus born in Bethlehem, just as the prophecies said he would. And most of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled as he went along, most of them, I don't think he had a huge amount of influence over how he fulfilled it.

I mean, certainly he had no control over the circumstances of his birth. He didn't decide to fulfill that prophecy. But here, here there does seem to be deliberate fulfillment.

[8 : 02] Because Jesus surely knows the prophecy of Zechariah 9, verse 9. Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion. Shout, daughter Jerusalem.

See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Jesus, in these verses, orchestrates these events to show himself to be the promised king over whom Jerusalem ought rightly to rejoice.

Jesus designs events to show both his victory, his kingly power, and his lowliness. He is the humble king.

So Jesus tells the disciples where to go. He tells them how to find this young donkey. He tells them what to say to secure its release. And it's an interesting narrative, isn't it?

Some commentators looking at these verses, some are really confident that Jesus has made these arrangements in advance. Okay, he knows people in these villages, in Bethany and Bethphage, wherever we are, that he knows people who live here.

[9 : 12] He's made arrangements in advance for the colt to be there. He set up this password for the disciples to go and say, and then they will be able to take the donkey away. Some commentators are very confident it's a prior arrangement.

On the other hand, some are equally certain that far from prearrangement, this is an obvious example of Jesus' divine foreknowledge, that Jesus, as God, knows exactly what will take place, and therefore he knows the words that the disciples can happen to say that will convince these particular people.

He knows where the donkey will be. Why? Because he's God. He knows everything. And J.C. Ryle, he points out that this kind of perfect knowledge that Jesus has, if not on display here, certainly that he shows in other contexts, that that perfect knowledge of Jesus should be, at one and the same time, a warning to sinners, that Jesus knows your sin, and at the same time, a comfort to true Christians, that Jesus knows the circumstances that you are in.

So which of these two is it? Is it a setup, or is it foreknowledge? Well, I think I'm inclined to agree with Dale Ralph Davis.

He says Luke is deliberately ambiguous. Luke doesn't make it clear one way or the other. Luke wants to leave us wondering what's happening here.

[10 : 42] Sometimes the gospel writers do this, don't they? Rather than kind of spelling everything out and tying it up with a neat little bow on top that tells us exactly this is the thing, sometimes they leave it a little bit uncertain.

They leave us questioning, wondering, asking, what is going on here? Who is this Jesus? Now, I think the language of just as he had told them in verse 32, and the repetition of Jesus' words in verse 34, I think Luke's hinting us towards this supernatural understanding, that this is Jesus' divine knowledge, that this is Jesus in his kingly divine power doing this.

But I think it is also ambiguous to ask us to look deeper, to look inside what's going on, to ponder and to think. In any case, whether he's set it up in advance, or whether it's just because, as God, he knows the situation, it is certainly clear that these events are unfolding the way that Jesus wants them to unfold, isn't it?

It's not an accident that for the last few miles of his journey, suddenly he decides walking isn't good enough anymore. He's walked however many hundreds of miles from Galilee down to just outside Jerusalem on this hill, but suddenly he decides, no, no, no, I need a donkey to ride on.

It's clearly deliberate, isn't it? He shows in choosing to ride in on this donkey, he kind of echoes the footsteps of Solomon, who rode on David's mule in 1 Kings chapter 1.

[12 : 24] Solomon thereby showed that he had kind of the legitimate claim to be David's successor. Well, David, Jesus, deliberately parallels that action.

Again, Jesus is the true Davidic king, the one who comes in the footsteps of David. Similarly, he's the one who doesn't usurp power, but like Solomon, waits for the orderly succession.

He has these genuine, authentic royal credentials, but he chooses not to grasp hold of it, but to wait for it to be handed to him.

He comes in humility, not just the true king, but the humble king. I mean, it's not unheard of for kings to ride on donkeys.

There are other historical accounts of it taking place. Indeed, I just told you about Solomon doing it, but it's still not commonplace. It would hardly be the way that the king arrives in triumph in his capital.

[13 : 26] You know, this is a grand moment in many respects, isn't it? You expect the king to come riding in on the white stallion, the impressive war horse. That's what you expect in this context, and instead we have him on this ordinary donkey.

And the people of Jerusalem, the people of these surrounding villages, just like Jesus was familiar with Zechariah's prophecy, well, the people would be familiar with it too.

And so they know what this means. They know what it means when somebody comes riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. They know Zechariah chapter 9. It's the fulfillment of this prophecy.

This is the humble king coming into his kingdom. And he comes as king and he comes as Messiah. He comes refusing to countenance, coming to power through some kind of violent coup.

And yet the disciples proclaim those words from Psalm 118. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

[14 : 32] Again, it's both kind of what you expect, and it's unusual and extraordinary. Psalm 118. Psalm 118 was often sung in the final stages of the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem.

That much at least is commonplace. Those coming to Jerusalem for the Passover, just as Jesus is coming in time for the Passover, they come singing these words. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

They're coming in the name of the Lord as pilgrims to Jerusalem. And yet here it takes on this added significance. Because Psalm 118 only says, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And you apply that to the pilgrims. But when you look at the phrasing, the overall structure of Psalm 118, Psalm 118 is about the king.

And so the disciples rightly interpret it and say, blessed is the king. Who comes in the name of the Lord. Psalm 118 is about the king. And Jesus comes as king.

[15 : 37] Jesus is the king coming into his kingdom. And so the only proper response is to praise and to glorify him. They take off their coats to provide a saddle. They line the road for the coming king.

They declare the significance of his coming. This is the time when there is peace in heaven. God is reconciled to man. Sins are washed away in the coming of the Messiah king.

Glory in the highest. Well, no wonder the Pharisees are horrified. What's all this commotion?

What is Jesus allowing to be claimed of him? How dare he permit this? Never mind the political unrest. If a messianic pretender arrives in the capital.

The reprisals that they expect from the Roman authorities. Never mind that. What about the religious significance of this claim to be the Messiah? To be the king? And already it's got away from them.

[16 : 37] They can't control the situation themselves. Their only hope is that Jesus will go and will calm his followers. That Jesus will put an end to this excess. But no. No, says Jesus.

This is only appropriate. This dramatic display. The cloaks strewn on the floor. The waving branches. The shouts of Hosanna.

Glory in the highest. All of this. All of this. And much more besides. Is what Jesus deserves. Is what is right and proper to be said and done for him.

This is certainly not more than he deserves. And so as the disciples mark this moment. This moment of destiny.

This moment of fulfillment. This moment of the messianic king coming into his kingdom. If their marking of this moment were to be silenced. Then the rocks, the stones themselves.

[17 : 37] The ground would cry out. There must be rejoicing at this moment. So if the people aren't going to do it. Something else will have to. There cannot but be rejoicing.

As the king arrives at this long prophesied. Longed for moment of fulfillment. It is a glorious moment, isn't it? Jesus.

And yet. As the rejoicing of the crowd rings around him. With shouts of Hosanna in his ears. Verse 41. What do we find?

We find the weeping Jesus. The humble king who comes into Jerusalem. Weeping. He approached Jerusalem and saw the city. He wept over it.

And said if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace. But now it's hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you.

[18 : 35] And your enemies will build an embankment around you. And encircle you. And hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground. You and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another. Because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.

What a contrast to the preceding verses. What a contrast to some of those pictures of Jesus. I mean some maybe hear the declaration of coming judgment.

It's been expressed in previous passages, hasn't it? Not least last week. Verse 27. Those who opposed the king. Killed in front of him. Judgment on display.

And some hear those kinds of declarations of coming judgment. And picture Jesus as vindictive. Gloating over the opportunity for vengeance on people he dislikes. Some picture him as the dictator.

Eliminating those who pose some kind of a threat to him. Or who he just doesn't like. Anyone who stands in his way. Get rid of them. You could perhaps picture that sort of Jesus.

[19 : 41] In the context of some of these other passages of judgment. But come to these verses and suddenly you have a radically different portrait to that, don't you? There's no possible vindictiveness here.

No, there is deep distress. Here in these verses we see the depth of Jesus' pain. Pain over those who are headed for destruction.

Jesus doesn't hide from the fact that destruction is coming. It's not that he's unwilling to admit that. No, yes, the immediate instrument of Jerusalem's destruction.

It's going to be this invading army. And history reflects that. But the reason for this destruction isn't just the greed of an aggressor nation, is it? No, the destruction comes, says Jesus, because they have not known what would bring peace.

The whole city is named for peace. Jerusalem, Salem, the Hebrew, shalom. Peace, well-being, wholeness.

[20 : 48] And yet this city does not know peace. They don't know what would bring them peace. Why? Verse 44. This brutal destruction is coming because they didn't recognize the time of God's coming to them.

David wept at the death of his enemy Saul, didn't he? And Jesus weeps at the coming destruction, even the destruction of those who stand opposed to him.

The destruction of those who are refusing to accept who he is. Refusing to accept the authority that he has. He knows the agony he will suffer at their hands.

He knows what is coming as he comes into the city of Jerusalem. And his response is not to run away. His response is not to rail against the authorities. His response is not to weep tears of self-pity.

His response is to weep over his enemies and the consequences for them. In these verses he visits the city offering peace if they will only see what is before them.

[22 : 01] And warning that the day will come when God will visit that city again. And this time will come with destruction to the extent that one stone will not be left atop another. The people, the children will be dashed to the ground.

Jesus weeps over the city. Amen. And what do we do? When you stand on top of Loudoun Hill and you see the valley spread out before you.

When you think about the nation that we live in. Where is our weeping? Where is our mourning for the lost?

Where is our seeking in prayer the prosperity of the valley? Where is our urgent pleading with the Lord that he might move in power? That he might send revival here in this place?

Does it bother you? Does it bother you to know that the people you live next door to. The people you go to school with.

[23 : 04] The people you work alongside. The people you call your friends. People in your families. People watching online. People in this room even. Does it bother you to think that people face a lost eternity?

That people are sleepwalking their way to death? Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. If you do not weep.

Then pray that he will soften your heart so that you will. And similarly.

If you don't know him yourself. If you. Like the people of Jerusalem. Haven't understood what would truly bring you peace. If you haven't asked him for forgiveness.

If you haven't come in repentance. Well see here Jesus' attitude to you. See that Jesus' response to that rejection. Isn't only anger and judgment.

[24 : 05] Those things will come if you continue your present course. They will. We cannot deny that. But today. Jesus weeps. Jesus weeps that you do not see.

Weeps when you will not turn to him. So don't think he won't have you. Don't think it's too late for you. If you can hear me speaking to you now. Whether you're listening as I say it.

Or you're listening in 20 years time. If you can hear what I'm saying. Then it is not too late. But one day it will be. The humble king.

The weeping Jesus. Finally. What about the angry Jesus? Verse 45 onwards. Jesus comes into the temple. And he starts to drive out those who are selling. In the temple courts.

He's angry at the corruption. That has infected this place. That should be the center of the Jewish faith. The place where people should come to meet with God. Has instead become a place of commerce.

[25 : 11] A place even of robbery. Instead of the sound of voices raised in prayer. The air is filled with the sounds of the bazaar. The cries of the hawkers.

And Jesus' response to that is unmistakably violent. Isn't it? He doesn't go around to each trader in turn. Say oh excuse me. Would you mind terribly choosing somewhere else to set up?

He doesn't go to the temple authorities and say. Do you think maybe you ought to change your policies just a little bit. To reduce the number of people down ever so slightly. He doesn't appeal to a committee to start a process.

To consider dealing with it. No he goes and he drives out those who were selling. In other gospels we hear about him turning over the tables. It's a violent response isn't it?

It's an angry response. There are situations to which anger is the right response. Even anger that's expressed in physical action. Now folks.

[26 : 17] We want to be careful with this don't we? We want to be very careful about suggesting that our anger could ever be as pure and righteous as Jesus' anger is. We want to be very careful about that.

Because often our anger is far from righteous. Far from just. But. But if it does not make you angry.

When violent criminals get away with it. I don't think I understand you. When children are abused.

Neglected. Trafficked from their homes into a life of slavery. Shouldn't we be angry about that? Jesus is. Even these verses seem to suggest we're right to be angry.

When proper worship of God is profaned. Because that's Jesus' issue here isn't it? The proper use of the temple is to be a house of prayer. And it's become anything but. There's a real selfishness to the behavior of these sellers isn't there?

[27 : 27] And to the authorities who've permitted it. Because historians are agreed. This marketplace is set up in the outer court. The court of the Gentiles. I mean on one level that's fair enough.

You don't want to go into the holier places to set up your court. But on the other hand what that means is. It's only a problem for other people. It's only a problem for the Gentiles.

Only a problem for the people coming from the nations. The people who aren't allowed in any closer. No problem for me.

The pious Jew. He can proceed into the inner courtyard. Get on with his prayers. It's a problem for the Gentiles. It's a problem for everyone else. Never mind the financial profits.

I presume the temple authorities are. Skimming off a certain percentage of the profits from these stalls. It's real selfishness at play. But there's even more fundamental than the selfishness.

[28 : 25] There is a neglect of God isn't there? There's a failure to afford him the worship that he desires and he deserves. Isaiah 56 that Jesus is quoting here.

God says his house will be a house of prayer for all peoples. How can it be? How can it be a house of prayer? Amidst the clamor and the noise of the marketplace.

Set up in the one place that the nations can come to. And so in response Jesus restores on at least a symbolic level. Restores his father's house to its proper use.

No longer a place of commerce. It becomes a place where Jesus sets up to teach, doesn't he? Verse 47. Every day he was teaching at the temple. Back to what it should be.

The people hang on his words. Even as the authorities try to kill him. And both the teaching and the plotting. Those will be elaborated in the coming verses of Luke's gospel.

[29 : 25] But as I say we're going to pause here. We follow Jesus on this journey down from Galilee. And Luke like the other gospel writers. He slows down for this last week of Jesus' life.

He takes it moment by moment. Working through those crucial days. So we'll leave those for another time. For today.

For today which of these facets of Jesus' character is it. That we have lost sight of. Which of these is new to you this morning.

Or which needs to be discovered. Rediscovered. Maybe you've lost sight of Jesus as king. Maybe the idea of Jesus with authority. Jesus who is rightly to be praised.

Jesus to whom is ascribed glory in the highest. The one who if the disciples hadn't rejoiced. The rocks would have cried out. Jesus the glorious king. Or maybe.

[30 : 26] Maybe you've got too much of that sense of authority. Maybe you forget that Jesus comes as a humble king. Not to institute an earthly kingdom. But to call men and women to find hope and new life in his name.

The one who comes humbly. Riding on a donkey. Maybe you don't tend to think of Jesus weeping. Jesus weeping to mourn his friend.

Jesus here weeping over the fate of a lost city. Maybe it's hard to imagine that Jesus would weep. Over you. Maybe your attitude to others is one of condemnation.

When you should be joining Jesus weeping. Or maybe. Your idea of Jesus. Yes he weeps. But he's impotent to do anything about it.

The idea of a Jesus who's angry about sin. Angry with those who deny access to God. Angry with those who aren't interested in worshipping the almighty God.

[31 : 31] Maybe that Jesus is a foreign picture to you. Whichever facet it is. I hope that your mental picture of your saviour.

Has been enriched by these verses today. Let's pray. Lord Jesus thank you that your word reveals who you are.

Thank you that you show yourself to us. In the pages of these gospels. That we see. These many different aspects of your character. We are sorry for the things that we have forgotten.

And neglected. And treated as unimportant. We are sorry when we have not enjoyed all of who you are. Help us to delight in you today again.

To rejoice. In the humble king. Who comes into his kingdom. Weeping. And yet angry with sin.

[32 : 38] Amen. Amen. Amen.