

Kingdom Come

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[0 : 00] And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem, when he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount that is called Olivet.

He sent two of the disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, Why are you untying it? You shall say this, The Lord has need of it.

So those who were sent went away and found it, just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, Why are you untying the colt?

And they said, The Lord has need of it. And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

[1 : 02] And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near, already on the way down to 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, saying, Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Well, thank you so much for inviting me to be with you this morning. It's my first foray to Grace Church Dulwich. I've never been here before, but it's a church that I've been glad for for many years.

I think ever since Nat Charles first made his way over here years and years ago, he's moved on to other places now. But I've been very thankful for Grace Church Dulwich. And it's amazing to look around and to see so many people that I know more even than I was sure that I would.

So thanks very much for letting me come. Now, the other day, I emailed Andy and Ben to straighten out a couple of things about this morning and the outline of my talk, timings and directions, that sort of thing.

[2 : 25] I thought I should just check what the dress code is for Grace Church Dulwich. And so I popped it in an email and quick as a flash, within minutes, I had a reply from Ben saying, yes, actually we have a theme each week.

This week is pirates. I was reflecting on that and I thought, no, that can't be right. That can't be right. Even as I went to go and fetch my eyepatch, I thought, surely this week it must be it's all about the donkey.

Because we're in a great passage, aren't we? The world over, people love the donkey. I have a memory from going to church as a teenager and the vicar of my church actually arranged to bring a donkey in to our meeting on Palm Sunday.

I certainly remember the white robes being strewn across the floor and the great big palm branches. And every Sunday, every Palm Sunday that I grew up, we used to have the little palm crosses when we were celebrating Palm Sunday.

The world over this morning, donkeys will have their day in the sun. Churches together in Kettering and in Fermanagh and in Wokingham all have donkeys lined up for this morning.

[3 : 33] In fact, there was a little crisis, it turned out, at Peter and the Cathedral because as late as the end of February, they hadn't sourced their donkey for the Palm Sunday celebrations. And it does grip the imagination, doesn't it?

So all four Gospels, we've read already from John, we've read from Luke. If we looked at Matthew and Mark, we'd find the same things. They all include it. 2,000 years ago, the week before Easter Sunday, the Lord Jesus really did enter into Jerusalem.

He did it in public with great crowds and he sat on a donkey. It's iconic. If you were going to make a film of the Gospels, you'd have to include this moment.

But I guess the question that we want to ask is, well, what did it mean? And why did Jesus choose to enter Jerusalem in that sort of a way? What did he want to show about himself?

And why did Luke think that we needed to know that it happened? Well, we're in Luke's Gospel this morning and the scene before us is an important one.

[4 : 40] Over the last 10 chapters, Luke has been following the twists and the turns of Jesus' slow march towards Jerusalem. And Luke 19.28, I mean, it's great that we've come to it this morning on Palm Sunday.

I think it's probably deliberate, that's my guess. But it is also the start of a new section. So the section that has been leading up to this moment sort of ended last week.

And Luke 19.28 begins the final part of Luke's Gospel, which is all about the coming, the double coming of the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem, first in public and then a couple of chapters later in secret to do the thing that he needs to do.

And this opening scene as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem is very important in Luke's Gospel, because it's the moment when Jesus publicly unveils exactly who he is as he makes his way into the city. In fact, he does it so publicly that Luke takes it as a trailer for the end of the world. But if you want to know what it's going to be like when the Lord Jesus comes back, well, Luke says maybe you could do worse than to look at what happened on the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem, sat on a donkey.

[5 : 56] And he wants us to know exactly who he is. I've got three points this morning. The firstly is that Luke wants us to understand, the Lord Jesus wants us to understand, that he is the master in supreme command.

Let's pick it up from verse 28 again. When Jesus had said these things, he went on ahead going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount that's called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples 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. If anyone asks you, why are you untying it? You shall say this, the Lord has need of it. So those who were sent away went and found it just as he told them.

And as they were untying the colt, its owner said to them, Why are you untying the colt? And they said, the Lord has need of it. And they brought it to Jesus.

Now it's instantly obvious, isn't it, that Jesus is calling the shots here. I mean, he's the one, verse 28, who is leading the way. He's going ahead of his disciples. Verse 29, he's the one who's giving the commands.

[7 : 10] He sends the disciples with this mission. And then most striking is what he says, verse 30, 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. If anyone says, why are you untying it? You shall say, the Lord, the master, has need of it. To begin with, there's his, I guess, God-like knowledge of the way that things are going to go.

I mean, even if Jesus knows what's going to happen because he's reconnoitered the village, and these are his friends, it's still striking that he's taking total control, isn't it? But, I don't know what you, it seems to me there's an unmistakable sense that Jesus just knows what is going to happen.

He just knows that there's a donkey there. He just knows what will happen if somebody challenges him. He sees. He disposes. He's in control.

And it's an astonishingly forthright plan, isn't it? I mean, let's get this clear. Jesus is sending his two disciples, so far as we know, without any prior arrangement, to commandeer, to requisition this donkey.

[8 : 24] Not to ask for the donkey, but to untie it and take it. And if they're challenged, if somebody runs out and says, Oi, that's my donkey. His answer is not, well, you should ask for permission, or ask for forgiveness, or flash your ID.

He says, just say, the Lord has need of it. Jesus is the boss. And that is the end of the conversation. And of course, he really is the boss.

He is the Lord. Because when someone does come out and challenge them, and they say those words, everything goes exactly the way that Jesus said it would. But whatever else is happening on

this first Palm Sunday, it's clear, isn't it, that Jesus is in control. He's calling the shots. It's total and unapologetic authority. What should you see when you look at the donkey? It's a reminder that Jesus is the master in supreme command. And it is a good reminder, isn't it? We sometimes imagine that Jesus was a little bit of an accidental king, like kind of Brian in the life of Brian. It's a staple of hostile liberal scholarship, actually. [9 : 34] Jesus would have been appalled if he'd known what we were going to make of him over the next 2,000 years. A few years ago, I was asked to read the book by Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*.

And basically, he takes that idea and turns it into a story. Jesus was just a good man, you know, brave, walking around saying socially progressive sorts of things. And the Christ, well, Christ was Jesus' Machiavellian, scheming, treacherous little brother, who manipulated his legacy and turned into something that Jesus would never have wanted. Jesus never meant to be understood as anything more than a nice guy. And his little brother, the Christ, kind of created this fiction out of nowhere. It's a parable. The Christ is, I guess, the Jesus of the church, in Philip Pullman's mind. And it's possible to imagine that something a little bit like that might be happening here on Palm Sunday. Here is Jesus, quietly going about his business. Maybe he gets a bit tired. Somebody lends him a donkey.

[10 : 39] And suddenly, this deranged mob sweeps in. And they drive him into Jerusalem. And they cut palm branches and start shouting crazy things. And all the while, Jesus is dying inside.

Too polite to tell people that they've got the wrong guy. A kind of quintessential Englishman. If there's any fulfillment of prophecy, well, it's all accidental. And if this looks like the return of the king, it's completely unintentional.

But that won't do, will it? It won't do. Luke won't have it. Jesus won't have it. And he chose to make this entrance. He was in complete control.

The crowd thronged about Jesus that day because that's what Jesus wanted them to do. Jesus is the master in supreme command. Of course, that raises the question, why make this entrance? And why the donkey? What was it that he wanted them to see? Secondly, Jesus is the king, bringing peace and salvation. Verse 35.

[11 : 44] 35. And they brought this donkey to Jesus and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they sat Jesus upon it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road 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, saying, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And just on the face of it, it's clear, isn't it, that Jesus is arriving in Jerusalem as a king.

The disciples do their part. They spread their cloaks on the path in front of the donkey, an act of submission, of homage, recognizing that he is the king. Even his donkey needs a carpet. They reinforce it as they proceed with him, this royal retinue accompanying the king into his capital. Even the donkey fits in. It turns out that it was on a donkey that King Solomon, probably Israel's greatest ever king, at least in terms of his pomp and his power, and King Solomon claimed the crown.

[12 : 53] And of course, the shout of the crowds confirms it, doesn't it? Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Transparently, without any further reflection, this is a political procession.

This is a royal retinue. This is the arrival of the king. Not just any king, though, because Jesus, again, we sometimes forget this, but on this occasion, Jesus is quite intentionally fulfilling one of the great prophecies from the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah.

Keep a finger in Luke and turn back to Zechariah 9, which is about that far back in my Bible. Zechariah 9, and I'll pick it up from verse 9.

I'm afraid I don't have quite the same page numbers, I think. And Zechariah, appearing into the future, to the day when the great king would come, says, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous, and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

[14:08] I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations. His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pits. Now here's Zechariah, he's peering forwards to the coming of the great king, and the king of kings.

And he comes on a donkey, as a new Solomon, great David's greatest son. And he comes as the prince of peace, cutting off the bow and the chariot, speaking peace to the nations, with a global reign, not just from sea to sea, but from the sea, from the river to the ends of the earth, setting the prisoners free, verse 11, bringing a new covenant.

Zechariah peered into the future, and he said, well one day, a king like that will come. And on Palm Sunday, entirely intentionally, Jesus orchestrated his arrival into Jerusalem to show that that is exactly who he is.

The king, the global king, the great king, who will bring universal peace. And the crowd understood it. Back in Luke chapter 19, at least the disciples did.

[15:35] Verse 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, saying, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. When we see the donkey, what should we think? What should we see? Well, Jesus the master, in complete command, and Jesus the king, bringing peace and salvation.

When you pause to think about it, it's a bit surprising, isn't it? We tend to think of the donkey as the moment of great humility. From a very down-to-earth moment, when Jesus was one of us, you know, call me Jesus.

It's why it's so iconic, I think, isn't it? It's such a great contrast to the pomp and the ceremony of empires. And it is a great truth, isn't it?

[16:44] Jesus did, in fact, enter Jerusalem as the servant king, as we reminded this morning from John's gospel. That's definitely true. Jesus entered as the servant king. If he entered Jerusalem, it's true, so that he might suffer and die to bring salvation.

We'll think about that over the coming days. And when Matthew and John write up the triumphal entry, I think that is the point they want to emphasize. This is the arrival of a humble king, of the servant king.

But I'm not sure that that's quite what Luke wants us to sort of notice as we read it. In fact, if anything, the opposite. The donkey is a prompt.

Forget about warhorses. Forget about chariots. Forget about golden carriages. Forget about all of your puny notions of grandeur.

Imagine a king who could release the captives, rule the world, break the armies, broker peace. Imagine a king who could make all things new.

[17:47] When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he wanted us to see it. Look, he says, that is me, Jesus the king, who brings peace and salvation.

And actually, even that is an understatement. Who is the Lord Jesus? Well, Jesus is the Lord who will receive the praise of all creation. Verse 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, saying, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Now, you may already have noticed that there's a bit of a crescendo as you go through the passage. It starts with homage as they lay their cloaks on the road and that gives way to a great shout and then to a blessing on the king.

And then you see that that's more than just a king. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest, they say. It's a great line actually in Luke's Gospel.

[19:09] It might sound familiar to you if you were around at Christmas. It's a counterpart to Luke chapter 2. And back in Luke chapter 2, we had the angels. Do you remember that world of the

angels and their choirs and the heavenly glory and songs about the reunion of heaven and earth? And the angels said, didn't they, do you remember what they say? Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace. and to those on whom his favour rests. Well now, it's completed, the other half of the sandwich.

Glory to God on the highest and on earth, peace to those on whom his favour rests, peace in heaven and glory to God in the highest. It's a major clue. Jesus is not just Solomon, a great king who will bring peace to an old empire.

He is a king who is going to bring peace to the whole of creation, reuniting heaven and earth more than a king. It's no surprise that the Pharisees think that's a bit much and they say, verse 39, teacher, rebuke your disciples.

Look, Jesus, you're letting the crowd get carried away. You have a responsibility to calm things down. Someone might get hurt. And if we're still thinking of Jesus as an Englishman for whom the merest hint of a compliment is enough to plunge him into throes of existential doubt, we'll find what happens next incomprehensible.

[20 : 38] Because look at verse 40, Jesus says, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out. Turns out that this great crescendo of praise is actually rather underwhelming.

it's minimal. If they weren't singing, Jesus says, the stones would cry out. My wife pointed out to me that the stones are actually quite a big theme in Luke chapters 19 and 20.

First of all, they come up here. And if these disciples didn't praise Jesus, the stones would cry out instead. Just as John the Baptist said at the beginning of Luke's gospel that God could raise up children for Abraham from the stones.

And then in the next paragraph that we're not reading, we find out that the stones of the city that refused her saviour would one day be thrown down. Not one stone left on top of another.

Acclimatically, in the next chapter, we're told that the stone that the builders has rejected has become the cornerstone. And the cornerstone of a whole new temple at the focal point of a new city where living stones will learn to praise their gods.

[21 : 57] Even before that, the religious leaders, these Pharisees, are afraid that the stones will turn against them, that they'll be picked up by the mob and used as a weapon against them, that they'll be stoned.

And in one sense, they could hardly be more wrong. It's Jesus who is going to be murdered by the mob and not the Pharisees. But in another sense, they are absolutely right.

Because the stones and the whole created order are not on their side. When Jesus comes back, the stones will not be complicit in their stubborn rebellion against him.

When the king comes back, creation itself will burst into song. The mountains and the hills will lift up their voice. The trees will clap their hands.

Heaven and earth will rejoice together. And in fact, they would have done it there and then, on that Palm Sunday, 2,000 years ago, if Jesus hadn't arranged to have a human choir instead.

[23 : 08] Verse 40, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out. And again, it's completely unapologetic, isn't it? Entirely deliberate.

Jesus wants us to be clear. He wants us to see who he is. He orchestrates a trailer for the end of the world. Who is going to come back?

What are we praying for? We pray your kingdom come. And who is he? Well, what we're waiting for is the master in total command and the king who brings peace and salvation.

And Jesus wants us to understand that he is the lord of creation enthroned on praise. It's not about the donkey. It's about the coming king.

And do you know, it is so kind of the lord Jesus to give us this picture, isn't it? When I was a student in school and between my GCSE and my A-level, I remember being set Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as a piece of reading.

[24 : 12] Some of you have read it. It's a discussion, if you haven't read it, it's a discussion between two characters and Vladimir and Estragon as they wait for a third chap, Godot, to turn up.

I'm sorry, this is a bit of a spoiler, but nothing happens as it's a profoundly dull piece of theatre. Nothing happens. And throughout the play, Godot, he's this vague, amorphous character, not really a person, more of a kind of concept, actually not really a concept, doesn't have that clarity, just a kind of a name.

You don't really know what you're waiting for. It's not just that Godot never shows up, that it's not clear whether he's ever going to come. It's that even if he did come, you get the sense that neither Vladimir nor Estragon have any sense what that might mean.

Now, I have no idea whether Samuel Beckett was taking a pop at Christianity or not. There are as many theories for what Godot might represent as there are literary critics, and Samuel Beckett liked it that way, and he always refused to answer the question, although I suspect he did in fact represent God.

If Godot is meant to be God, well, you might just think that Samuel Beckett has a point. That's where the whole pie in the sky when you die, jive, bites, isn't it?

[25 : 27] What are we waiting for? Something vague and amorphous and indefinite. It's the barb of any number of Doctor Who episodes. Christians are awaiting people with no real idea of what it is that they are waiting for or whether it will come.

The Lord Jesus is much kinder than that, and he doesn't want to leave us in any doubt. He made it completely clear who he was and completely clear what it is that we're waiting for as we wait for his next coming to his people.

We can be sure that he's coming because he already has, and we can understand his coming because he's given us the trailer. We're waiting not for God, oh, but for Jesus, the Master and Commander who rules the future down to the smallest detail.

Jesus, the King, who brings peace and liberty. Jesus, the Lord, who will be enthroned on the praise of all creation.

That's who he is. That's what the church around the world should be celebrating this morning. And I think it's a good reminder to us, isn't it, as we head into Easter and this week, I hope that we will be immersed in reflecting upon the death of the Lord Jesus.

[26 : 52] We're about to sing about his death now, and I've got some talks to write over the coming days, the next weekend, which will be all about his death. We're going to be thinking about the work of the humble servant, the significance of Jesus his death for us.

But we mustn't lose sight of the fact that the man on the cross is our King, our Lord, our Master, and our God. Before he went to the cross, he wanted us to be clear on this.

And that's what the donkey is all about. And we should sing, because if we don't, well, the very stones will cry out.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we want to praise you so much for the Lord Jesus, and we thank you for this clear revelation of who he is.

And we praise you for his sovereignty, that as he went into Jerusalem, even as he went into Jerusalem to die, he went in complete control, in command, as sovereign Lord.

[28 : 03] And we praise you so much that he went into Jerusalem, even as he went to die, as the King who brings peace and salvation, a whole new world. And we praise you that he came and that he will come again as our Lord and God, enthroned on the praise of all creation.

and we pray that you would help us to see him really clearly, and we pray that as we see him clearly, we would trust him and praise you for your faithfulness in him.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.