

One King

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[0 : 0 0] I'm reading from Luke 19, 28 to 44, from the NIV version. It has a subheading, Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at a 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 to 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 : 2 9] 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, he saw the city, and 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 recognise the time of God's coming to you.

This is the word of the Lord. So, Palm Sunday, and we are continuing to look at Jesus' journey to the cross. And as Peter has just read, Jesus is now entering Jerusalem for the last time.

[2 : 5 6] And the theme of today is one king. Now, I normally like to have three preaching points, and I've only come up with one. I think the main point today is Jesus is king.

Jesus is king as he is revealed in this passage of scripture. In Old Testament prophecy, Jesus is king in our lives, and Jesus is king over the communities we live in, king over London, king over the world.

Some churches I hear have a real donkey this morning. Quite thankful that we don't have one of those, but I'm going to start with donkeys. I had a favourite story when I was a child, and it was called The Useless Donkeys.

The two donkeys live with four children and their parents on a farm in Australia. The dad thinks the donkeys are useless and threatens to sell them, but the children love them.

One day there is a storm. The farm is flooded, and the donkeys are stranded on a hill. The family try and rescue them using their dinghy, but the donkeys are frightened, and they won't get in the boat.

[4 : 11] But the father decides the waters have peaked, and it's safe to leave them on the hill until the following morning. That night, the children can hear the braying of the frightened donkeys keeping them awake.

They decide to take their sleeping bags and the boat, and they row over to the donkeys. And as they can't get them off the hill, they spend the night comforting them.

The next morning, the water has receded. The donkeys and the children are safe, but the father is furious. And in the end, the mother has to intervene to save the donkeys.

She was charmed by the tall, almost talkative ears, their shaggy coats, and the crosses that donkeys have worn on their back since the first Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode a donkey through the gates of Jerusalem.

So there is, of course, a donkey in this story, the cult. And it's intentional, isn't it? Because Jesus sends the disciples with this plan and kind of prophetic moment when they go and get the young donkey that he needs.

[5 : 22] And we think of donkeys, I think, as humble, gentle creatures. We think of the donkey, and it does symbolize humility and peace. But I think it's easy for us to just look at the donkey with today's cultural reference and to just see those things.

And I'm going to take a little bit of issue with the video because I think also for the Israelites, the donkey denotes kingship. And I think for the people watching, they would have got that.

They would have got the kingship, and the kingship is important. We might find the idea of an important person riding on a donkey contradictory, but I don't think it was contradictory to those watching.

It was common in Jesus's contemporary culture and in Israel's history also for important people to ride donkeys as well as for ordinary people to ride them. In 1 Kings 1, David, who often rode donkeys, gives Solomon his own donkey to ride on the day he is to be ignited as the heir and future king.

In the book of Judges and the book of Samuel have references to leaders riding donkeys in times of peace. And there is also a prophetic symbolism to the donkeys.

[6 : 43] In Genesis 49, we see a cult mentioned as part of Jacob's blessing on Judah. And Jesus, of course, is in the line of Judah. In verse 11 of Genesis 49, it says, he will tether his donkey to a vine, his cult to the choicest branch.

He will wash his garments in wine. And the key reference here is Zechariah 9 verse 9, which is actually directly quoted in Matthew and John's account of the triumphal entry.

The prophecy of Zion's coming king. See, your king comes to you righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on the cult, the foal of a donkey.

So yes, Jesus comes in gentleness and peace, but those were qualities that were considered part of kingship. It was expected that the king would bring gentleness and peace to Israel, and they sit underneath the kingship.

The Israelites are waiting and looking for a king like David to come. And I think the main point here isn't that Jesus is a different kind of king, but he is a greater king.

[7 : 59] David was a great king, but a greater king is coming. And it is in the prophecies of Isaiah that we see the idea of a saviour, the Messiah, linked to the prophecy of this coming king.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

That's Isaiah 9 verse 7. So Jesus is saviour, and he is also the king. And I think the crowd get this. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, they cry, referencing Psalm 118.

And I think the Pharisees definitely get it because they're really angry. They ask Jesus to rebuke his disciples for saying this, which they wouldn't do if Jesus is simply signalling peace and humility.

The donkey is symbolic of the coming king and the kingdom. And if we miss that, we're in danger of missing Jesus's authority. I think this point is also evidence in the context of the passage.

[9 : 07] And Richard reminded us a couple of weeks ago how important it is to look at what happens before and what happens afterwards. You might have noticed when Peter read the passage that it starts off with after Jesus had said this.

A reminder that those subheadings are a later addition. And Luke wrote this as a continuous account. So what had Jesus just said before he tells us about the entry into Jerusalem?

It's the parable of the ten minus. And it's similar to the parable of the talents in that the servants are given various amounts of money to look after.

But I don't think it's meant to be the same story. It occurs at a different point in Jesus's ministry. And in this parable, which Jesus tells just before he enters Jerusalem, he puts particular emphasis on kingship.

The king to be, the master, is going away. But his subjects are revolting against him. And when he returns as king, he executes those who have rebelled.

[10 : 13] But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and kill them in front of me. This is what Jesus says just before he goes in to the city.

And towards the end of our passage, Jesus mourns for Jerusalem. He wept over it. People can't accept the peaceful solution. And the alternative is war and destruction.

And after saying that, Jesus goes to the temple where he will drive out the money changers. We have a more detailed account in Matthew's gospel. I'm not saying that Jesus isn't coming in peace.

He is. He declares that he will. And he fulfills the prophecies that say that he will. He is also coming as a king who is greater than David, the Messiah.

And that means he is coming to bring peace and also to bring justice, to bring salvation and also to bring authority. There are no buts with Jesus.

[11 : 14] Jesus is not coming as a king but with humility. I always think that but allows the humility to diminish the kingship. And it is not so with Jesus.

Jesus is an and. As Paul more eloquently puts it in Colossians, in his teaching on the supremacy of Christ, he says, in him all things hold together.

So how do we respond to this king Jesus? Well, we had a coronation last year, didn't we? It seems a long time ago after everything that's happened recently to the royal family.

But as a monarchist and all other views are welcome, I was very excited about it. There were carriages and costumes and scepters and stones of destiny and gloves of serenity, maybe I'd made that up.

And I loved all of it. But about a week before the ceremony, the Order of Service was published. And in it was an oath of allegiance. Does anyone remember the oath?

[12 : 20] There was a bit of a feroe around the oath because it was suggested that as the subjects of King Charles III, we might join in with it at the appropriate moment.

And I think we had a little bit of a national wobble at that moment. There was a lot of talk in the newspaper and the social media about famous people who weren't going to take the oath. I had a bit of a wobble too.

It felt a bit Henry VIII. And I wondered for a bit if it was because actually I only want to give my allegiance to Jesus. But if I'm honest with myself, I don't like to give my allegiance to anyone else.

So we like to be in control. And particularly in 21st century Britain, we expect perhaps to serve no one's needs above our own.

And this desire to serve ourselves first is a problem in our Christian lives because Jesus is a king and demands our allegiance. The first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.

[13 : 24] We are created to be subject to a king. That king is not King Charles. He is King Jesus. It's a difficult mindset and instead I sometimes try and fit Jesus into a mold that I have created.

I might take aspects of his ministry and certain of his characteristics and I can try and replicate them. So maybe I'm kind because Jesus was kind. I'm hospitable because Jesus was hospitable.

And it's not a bad thing in itself. After all, Paul says to clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. But what's wrong with it?

Well, I think it only works if you first put Jesus at the centre. As Paul says, set your minds on things above. Focus on the throne of Jesus seated at God's right hand.

Just focusing on the external characteristics of being Christians can lead to some positive outcomes. But the danger is that really all I'm doing is creating a better version of myself without sacrificing any of my own comfort.

[14 : 37] And let's not kid ourselves that that is the same as putting Jesus first because he is king and I am his servant. I don't know if you noticed that this is Palm Sunday.

There were palm leaves in the video but no palm leaves at all in the reading. In Luke's account we don't have any palm leaves. Instead he mentions cloaks in verse 35 talking about the donkey it says they bought 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. Now there's no branch of Primark in first century Jerusalem and so I imagine that most people would own one cloak.

It was a universal garment worn by rich and poor men and women. It was practical it kept you warm and dry. It kept the sun off your back. It might have usefully doubled as a blanket or a cushion or a pillow if you're away from home.

And therefore to take your one coat and throw it under the hooves of an approaching donkey feels to me to be more than a symbolic act. It is a sacrifice of your own comfort.

[15 : 57] And the people welcoming Jesus do it because what is your own comfort and protection if you can gain the protection of a king. Reminds me a bit of the words of Christian missionary and martyr Jim Elliot.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. One of the books that has most influenced me in my Christian life is Shane Claiborne's book Irresistible Revolution.

It came out in the noughties when I was in my mid-twenties. And in this book Claiborne says that if you own two coats then one of them belongs to the poor.

Rob is downstairs but I'm sure he would testify later that I own more than two coats. So it's very much a work in progress. But this book hugely challenged me about wealth, belongings, about our entitlement as Western Christians to material things that give us comfort and our unwillingness sometimes to live the life of service demonstrated by Jesus.

That is what I love about the story of the useless donkeys. The children are willing to give up their warm beds and their comfort. They are prepared to incur the wrath of their father for something that they love.

[17 : 22] What do we put on the throne in our lives that should be occupied by Jesus? What does God really want us to give up so we can focus more on him?

I wonder what happens to the crowd between this scene on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. I've heard one interpretation that Jesus who comes in peace doesn't live up to the expectations of the crowd but I can't find evidence for this in any of the Gospels.

There's plotting by the Jewish leaders, there's Judas' betrayal but no evidence of why the crowd turns. We do know that Peter denies Jesus out of fear.

He doesn't do it because Jesus' kingship is a disappointment but that Jesus asks more of him than he can give at that moment and few are willing to follow Jesus to the foot of the cross.

And Jesus has some very challenging words for us at the end of this passage. Destruction will befall the city because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you.

[18 : 37] Jesus says uncomfortable things and sometimes it's easiest for us to ignore them. I love C.S. Lewis' teaching on this.

It's sometimes called the trilemma. You have to choose whether Jesus is mad, bad or God. Have you heard that argument? Because many of my friends see Jesus as a great moral teacher.

They're respectful of my faith and appreciative of the impact it has on my life. But beyond that Jesus really holds no challenge for them. We can't just have Jesus as a compassionate and gentle teacher without Jesus as the king.

If he is a humble teacher what is he doing parading into Jerusalem as a king? What is he doing when he claims before Pontius Pilate to be the son of man seated at the right hand of God?

I don't think it makes sense under that interpretation. We must acknowledge the kingship of Jesus and the authority of him over our lives.

[19 : 45] Actually I think the best theological point here is made by Mr Beaver in the book The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe. Mr Beaver is telling the children of the arrival in Narnia of Aslan the true king and when Lucy finds out that he is in fact a lion she says then isn't he safe?

To which Beaver says safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe but he's good he's the king I tell you.

Jesus makes demands of us and we have to choose whether to follow him wholeheartedly. The parable of the ten minuses is about being trustworthy stewards of the kingdom and the word that comes to mind when I look at it is integrity.

The bible definition of the word integrity is really brilliant it's a state of being whole and undivided because you can't serve two masters.

Jesus is one king holy king let's be holy devoted to him. The visual image I have for this bear with me is like a stick of brightened rock it will say brightened rock on the wrapping but if you take the wrapping off if you cut it at any point it will say brightened rock brightened rock brightened rock right the way through.

[21 : 17] Let's stick with Jesus let's not be like the crowd who turn away let's not be fair weathered Christians but let's be run through with that message Jesus is king.

So what would it look like if we bowed the knee to king Jesus in our lives? what would it look like if we sacrificed anything that stands in the way of Jesus taking his throne?

What would it look like if we bowed the knee to Jesus in our family environment? What would it look like if we bowed the knee to Jesus in the way we spent our time or spent our money?

What would it look like if we bowed the knee to Jesus in our neighbourhoods and communities? And what would it look like if we bowed the knee to Jesus here in Hernhill Baptist Church?

It starts with bowing the knee and pledging allegiance to Jesus as our king. And maybe if Jesus was able to take his rightful place on the throne in our lives then people wouldn't just look at our lives and see the wise words of a long dead teacher.

[22 : 34] Maybe they would look at our lives and see a king. Thank you.