

Palm Sunday

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Date: 20 March 2016

[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It would be hard to imagine more striking differences between the two gospel passages that we just read this morning.

! So we have the gospel reading designated for the liturgy of the poems that describes the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

Then we have the passion narrative. Look at the difference. The triumphal entry is triumphal. Jesus is riding in a sort of wave of expectation.

His disciples are throwing their cloaks before Him. They are celebrating. Shouting to God.

Identifying Jesus as their King. Their Messiah. The one who would restore Israel.

And they were right. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the King. But He wasn't exactly the kind of King that they were expecting Him to be.

[1:21] That's clear when we look at the passion narrative. The procession to the cross was anything but obviously triumphal.

That wave of expectation seems to have disappeared. The disciples who had thrown their cloaks before Jesus.

Some of them were gone, having run away out of fear of being associated with Jesus. The one whom they had rightly identified as their King so shortly before.

The shouts of joy are gone. This festive, hopeful tone is also gone. Now in the passion narrative, the shouts of joy aren't just gone.

They're replaced. Replaced by cries of crucify Him. Demands that He be crucified. There were crowds at His procession into Jerusalem.

[2:22] There were crowds of His disciples. Crowds that were certain that salvation was at hand. So there was a crowd, a multitude, following His procession to the cross.

But this crowd was different. This crowd was full of those who were mourning. Those who were lamenting for Jesus.

It's clear that what the crowd that accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem had been expecting isn't what ultimately came to pass.

At least not in the way that they expected it to. Now it's clear that they were expecting a King. But it's equally clear that they weren't expecting a crucified King.

They said, blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And this King going to a violent and shameful death isn't what they had in mind.

[3:34] Now they had expected that Jesus would be the King that restored Israel to greatness. And certainly they needed that. The people were in anything but a great situation.

They were occupied by the Romans, who would eventually go on to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. The temple priesthood was essentially corrupt. They were hoping for a spiritual and political renewal.

Which would naturally have included driving the Romans out. Now Jesus, not only did He not drive the Romans out after He went into Jerusalem.

He ended up being crucified by them. What happened? Well, Jesus wasn't exactly the kind of King that they expected Him to be.

Wasn't the kind of King that they expected Him to be. But, He was more than the kind of King that they expected Him to be. He would do something greater than saving His people from the Roman occupation.

[4:51] Saving them from corrupt tax collectors. He would save His people from sin and death. He would do more than purify the temple. His death would tear the temple veil in two.

Now if you will look with me at the Passion narrative. We can see what kind of Savior, what kind of King He is in the account of His crucifixion.

Now starting in verse 3. When they came to the place that is called the skull, they crucified Him. And the criminals, one on His right and one on His left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they cast lots to divide His garments. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

That was our Lord's prayer to the Father as He was being crucified. So what do we see? Here we see Jesus on the cross as He's being crucified.

[6:01] Pleading for sinners. Pleading His precious blood as it is being shed. Father, forgive them. We see here that Jesus is a mediator for sinners.

Is an advocate for sinners. On the cross, He is going before the Father on behalf of sinners. So that they might be forgiven.

Shedding His blood for sinners. Dying the kind of death that we as sinners deserve. Hebrews 9, we read that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

That's why Hebrews 9 also tells us that He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He has saved us from the guilt and power of sin by His sacrifice as our mediator.

We see that in His words on the cross. Father, forgive them. They know not what they are doing.

That's the kind of King that He is.

[7:18] Now, He's also a King that is victorious over death. Can save us from death. And this is obvious even on the cross. Now, look at His interaction with the thief who repented in verses 42 and 43.

He said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus says to him, truly I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise.

Isn't that striking? Isn't that striking? Even on the cross, even as He is dying, the Lord Jesus gives the assurance of eternal life.

How? How can He do that? Because He is a King who is victorious over death. As John 1 tells us, in Him was life and the life was the light of men.

He is life itself. On the cross, He was defeating death. Even though it looked as though death was defeating Him.

[8:22] That victory would become all the more apparent when He rose from the dead three days later. So, as we can see from Jesus' interaction with the thief who repented, He isn't just a King who can save His people from hardship or from political oppression.

He is a King who can save His people from death itself. He is a King who can save His people from life. He is a King who can save His people from life.

He is a King who can save His people from life. He can restore His people to a right relationship with the Father. We saw that when He pleaded with the Father, saying, Father, forgive them.

That's what we saw when He dealt mercifully with the thief who repented, assuring Him that He would be with Him in paradise. Jesus can reconcile man to God.

As He is both man and God. Now, if there's any doubt, look at verses 44 to 46 in our Passion narrative, right before Jesus dies on the cross.

[9:33] It's now about the sixth hour. And there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Curtain of the temple was torn in two. What is the significance of that? What does that mean? Well, talking about the curtain, the veil that set aside the Holy of Holies in the temple, the place in the temple that most represented God's presence and God's dwelling place, it was torn in half as Jesus died.

What does it mean? Well, it means, brothers and sisters, that the separation that had existed between God and human beings ever since sin came into the world, ever since Adam and Eve sinned and then hid themselves in fear and shame because they were afraid, because they had sinned.

Temple veil torn in two signifies that that separation between God and man was gone and gone forever for all who have faith in Christ.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. And the torn temple veil is a vivid illustration of that reality.

[11:03] So Jesus didn't turn out to be quite the king that His disciples had imagined Him to be at His triumphal entry. He ended up being more than they expected Him to be.

He didn't provide the kind of political salvation that they were expecting. He provided more than that. He didn't just purify the temple. He did more than that by tearing down the separation between God and man forever.

He was and is a Savior King, able to save from sin and death all who come to Him in repentance and faith. So we have to ask, do we see Him rightly?

As the kind of king that He is? Or do we see Him as the kind of king that we think that we want?

Now, we live in a culture that still has a strong measure of belief in God of some sort.

Even a strong measure of some sort of belief in Jesus. But what kind of Jesus is it that the culture believes in? Is He the kind of God, the kind of king, who generally just stays out of our way until we need something?

[12:33] That's honestly one really common way of looking at God. And it's present even in American churches. It's as though God has been reduced to this cosmic vending machine.

In that view, He's there to step in and help if we have a problem. Otherwise, He goes about His business and we go about ours.

But does that accurately represent Him as Lord? Or, give a different example, is He the kind of king that has saved us from the fate of not being nice?

That's another kind of false picture of what Jesus is like as king. That He is nice and just wants us to be nice too. Of course, Jesus really is loving and compassionate.

So much so that He died for us out of love for us. So much so that He wept at the grave of His friend Lazarus. But the kind of compassion that Jesus displayed is costly compassion.

[13:50] Nice isn't necessarily grounded in the truth. Isn't even necessarily genuine. Nice doesn't demand anything of anyone and doesn't go beneath the surface.

But compassion? Compassion is costly. Compassion is genuine. Compassion is real. Jesus is a compassionate king.

Not the nice caricature that we often have of Him. And there is a difference. Now as we're challenged by Holy Week in the days ahead, I want us to have this question in mind.

Do I see and do I worship Jesus as the king that He really is? We might find as we often do that we're thinking about Jesus as the kind of king that we would like or expect.

Like those of the triumphal entry. Instead of seeing Him as the king that He is. But brothers and sisters, the kind of king that He is is the kind of king that we need.

[15:09] We are sinners who need a Savior. We are dying and we are in need of the one who is light and life itself. That's the kind of king that we need and that is the kind of king that we have in Jesus.

Praise God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.