

Your King is Coming

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 13th of February 2000. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, Your King is Coming, and is from John chapter 12, verses 12 to 26. Almighty God, we pray that you'll speak to us through your word this morning, that we may live lives for your glory. Amen.

You may like to have opened the passage from John's Gospel, chapter 12, page 875. And we've been preaching through John's Gospel since Christmas, and we've reached its turning point in many respects.

No doubt you've all seen, like me at different times, pictures of liberating armies arriving in a city. Whether it's pictures of the Allies entering Paris or Auschwitz, or Australian troops arriving in Dili, or some other group at some other time. We've all seen pictures of heroes returning home in triumph.

[1 : 16] Maybe less so in Australia in recent years, but usually sporting heroes, but in other countries, military heroes as well. And no doubt we've all seen, if not been in, a crowd seeing a king or a queen in procession.

Whether it's the queen visiting Australia at various times in recent years, or in other places. A few years ago I was in Jordan, and noticed that in virtually every shop and house, there were pictures of King Hussein of Jordan.

And I made a comment to somebody once, and they assured me that they were all voluntarily put there. It wasn't a public or governmental decree. People in that country loved their king.

And a few months before I was in Jordan, King Hussein had spent several weeks in England recuperating from surgery for the cancer that eventually did take his life last year.

And when he returned to Jordan, a third of the population of the country turned out along the road from the airport to the city centre, 35 kilometres of road, to cheer his arrival back in the country.

[2 : 30] A third of the population, which is an extraordinary thing. Some of you may know the story of Kaiser Wilhelm, who at the very end of the 19th century wanted to arrive in pomp and splendour in Jerusalem.

I guess so egocentric was he that he demanded that the top of the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem be dismantled so that he could ride in on his horse and not have any risk of his head hitting the top of the gate as he arrived in the city.

And to this day, you cannot really walk around the walls of Jerusalem in total because Jaffa Gate doesn't have anything that goes across it. Well, that's the sort of scene that is supposed to be happening here in John 12.

It's the Sunday before Passover. Jerusalem is crowded with people. Josephus, a Roman historian, reckoned that in the first century of Jesus' day there could be up to 2.7 million people crowding into Jerusalem for the main feasts.

And even allowing for Josephus being traditionally an exaggerator of numbers, there would have been many, many people crowded in and around the city of Jerusalem and are waving their palm branches, a sign of nationalistic fervour.

[3 : 51] They didn't have, of course, national flags in those days. For this crowd, or these crowds, reckoned that the long-expected Messiah could well turn up at a feast, and this was after all the week of Passover, and that probably, based on Old Testament prophecy, if he arrived, would come from the Mount of Olives.

Now, it happened that just before this, Jesus has raised a man from the dead. And he did it at a place called Bethany, which just happens to be just over the brow of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem, about two kilometres from the city.

And word had got around that Jesus was now on his way to the feast. Now, throughout the last few months leading up to this, there has been a growing expectation that this Jesus could well be the Messiah.

Up in Galilee, after feeding 5,000 people, they wanted to crown him as king, but Jesus eluded them. But now, he's coming to the feast, having just performed perhaps the most extraordinary of his signs, raising somebody from the dead.

He's coming over the Mount of Olives, and he's not resisting the acclamations and adulation of these crowds. They're shouting, Hosanna, a word that, in its origins at least, had some sense of, God save us now, or something to that effect, but may have just been diluted in people's minds or meaning at this point, to be a sort of formal hooray, in effect.

[5 : 36] And the crowds are also saying, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Words that are from Psalm 118.

There's a particular point to that quote. At the times of the feasts, a group of psalms would be said or sung, either by the pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem, or by those in Jerusalem, welcoming the pilgrims in.

They're called the Hallel Psalms, and Psalms 113 onwards, including 118, are the ones that they would use. So it's part of their practice to use this psalm, and now they see perhaps the person who fulfills those words.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The King of Israel, they say. Words that aren't in the psalm, but they added on.

They reckon that this Jesus is the King of Israel. They reckon that he must be descended from David in saying that. That he is the one the Old Testament anticipates.

[6 : 50] And especially in Jesus' day, those expectations were very heightened by the fact that the Romans governed Judea. Since the Romans had been in charge of Judea from about 6 AD, there had been a sequence of people who were pretenders to be the Messiah.

And that had helped build the fervor that the Messiah would come and overthrow the Romans and liberate the city and free the Jews from their oppressive and pagan rule.

The one who'd refused to be crowned king in chapter 6 now enters with the adulation, the acclamation of the crowds. Imagine the euphoria of being there and thinking, yes, I think at last this is the person.

Imagine the excitement of hearing that he's just raised somebody from the dead and here he is on the Mount of Olives coming in towards the city. But something's odd.

It seems that he's walking along and the crowds are shouting, screaming, and he stops and he gets on a donkey.

[8 : 03] We're told that the donkey is brought to him in the other Gospels. But it's not what you'd expect of a conquering hero. Imagine going to see the Queen in a procession in Melbourne or on the way to Westminster Abbey.

And instead of her royal ornate carriage, she's in a Toyota Corolla Seeker. You'd be a bit puzzled, I imagine.

You'd be waiting for her to get out and jump up and say, oh, what a feeling, perhaps. But he's Jesus on a donkey. Where's the hero's horse?

In those days, the one about whom the procession would be, the victorious conquering hero, would probably be on a horse. These days, they would enter a liberated city in tanks or something like that.

Such a lowly animal does not seem to befit a Messiah, one who could raise somebody from the dead. And the disciples do not understand what is going on.

[9 : 15] They don't understand why he's on a donkey. We're told that in verse 16. They didn't understand this at first. Well, John, who wrote this Gospel, directs us to the meaning.

In verse 15, he refers to and quotes loosely from the first reading we had today from the prophet Zechariah, chapter 9. Do not be afraid.

He prefaces the quote with, Daughter of Zion, look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt. Zechariah was an Old Testament prophet who prophesied in about 520 BC.

At that time, some of the people of Israel had returned to the land from Babylon in exile. But they had yet to build the temple. And Zechariah, along with his contemporary Haggai, were prophets urging the people to rebuild the temple.

If that were done, then, it seems, that God would bring about final victory for his people, liberate them from Persian rule, establish them and Jerusalem as the center of the world in glory.

[10:30] He would rescue his people for good. That's the expectation associated with the prophecy of Zechariah. Remember what he said.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you. Triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

But Jesus isn't just getting on a donkey to fulfill that verse. He's not just getting on a donkey because Zechariah said somebody would be on a donkey. Often when an Old Testament verse is quoted in the New Testament, the context of the verse carries over in its implication.

So when Jesus does this act, he's not just getting on a donkey. That's a pretty meaningless act. He's implying that all the things of the verses in Zechariah 9 will be fulfilled in him.

Zechariah goes on to say he will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem. That is, he will take away all the military might of God's people and he shall command peace to the nations.

[11:47] Not just to God's people but for the world. His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. That is, it will be a universal reign.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. You see the things that Jesus getting on the donkey is implying.

He's implying that God will rescue his people and keep his promise 550 years before. He'll do it.

Secondly, he's saying that God will defeat God's enemies and the enemies of God's people.

He will do it. Thirdly, he's saying that he is a humble king. The nature of his kingship is not what the people and crowds are expecting, somebody to overthrow the Romans perhaps, but a king of humility and lowliness.

Fourthly, Jesus will bring peace. His will be a universal reign, not just the king of Israel, as the people have said, but rather one who will reign the world.

[13:00] And lastly, he will be one who will set prisoners free because of the covenant blood. Now the disciples, we're told in verse 16, only understood this after Jesus was glorified.

And that means after the crucifixion. For whenever it talks about Jesus being glorified in John's gospel, it is referring forward to the time when he will die.

Now what is the connection between Jesus' death and glorification and these words of prophecy? It is because the things will be fulfilled through his death.

You see, they're not fulfilled by him getting on a donkey, but they are fulfilled by where that donkey is leading Jesus to in the end, to his death on a cross.

It's the inexorable, inevitable destination. And that's what Jesus is pointing towards. Not just to arrival, but to destination, to his death on the cross.

[14:12] You see, God will rescue his people through the death of Jesus. God will defeat his enemies through the death of Jesus.

Humility will be seen for this king, not just because he's on a donkey, but because he will humbly hang on a cross to die. Peace will come to the nations through the death of Jesus.

Peace with God and peace with other people. And Jesus' death will be for the sins of the whole world. He is indeed the one who will reign over the world through his death.

And there will be freedom, through the blood of the new covenant, that is Jesus' death. Freedom, as Jesus has already said in this gospel, not from a literal prison, but freedom from slavery to sin.

We cannot expect the disciples at this point in chapter 12 to understand all that. Jesus has yet to die. But when he died, they remembered and they understood.

[15:27] you see, what this is saying in effect is that the cross or the death of Jesus is the key to understanding who Jesus is and what he's on about.

Everything he says and does finds its meaning, its rationale, its significance through his death. That's the primary thing and that's what this passage is directing us towards.

The words of Jesus, the acts of Jesus, focus and climax in his death on the cross. Well, meanwhile, the crowds are excited.

There are two crowds it seems. There is a crowd that has been at Bethany and seen Jesus call Lazarus out of the tomb and raise him from the dead. And they are the crowd in verse 17 that's been with him and they continued to testify.

They continued to tell each other and to everyone else who would listen, this Jesus has just raised somebody from the dead. We saw it with our own eyes. We saw that Lazarus was dead and now a few days later he's alive.

[16:39] And the other crowd in verse 18 is the crowd that's come from Jerusalem who've heard that Jesus has done this. They've heard that he's on his way. They've come out to see him and to meet with him to find out who this person is and what he's done.

The only people who aren't excited are the Pharisees. They're frustrated. Their plans are thwarted. At the last verse of the preceding chapter, chapter 11, they gave orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know so that they might arrest him.

They know now where he is. He's in the middle of a crowd of perhaps a couple of million. They're hardly likely to arrest him when the crowds are acclaiming him as the king of Israel, the Messiah to come.

They're stuck. Their plans are thwarted. And ignorant of the irony of what they say, they say in verse 19, you see, you can do nothing.

Look, the world has gone after him. It's ironic because in just a few verses the world will have actually turned away from him in unbelief and sent him to the cross.

[18:02] It's ironic because Jesus has actually come for the world to die in love for them. And it's also ironic because of the very next incident that happens.

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. That is, they're non-Jews by race. They're Gentiles.

It seems that they had some sympathy with Judaism because they've gone to the festival to worship. They may have been in a sense circumcised Jews, people who've been proselytes and become Jews though not born as such.

Or it may be that they're what we call God-fearers, people who acknowledge that there is some appeal or attraction or truth even in Judaism but maybe they're not fully-fledged Jews.

When they come to the festival they're not allowed right up into the temple precincts. They could only go to the court of Gentiles some steps lower down the temple mount platform. But this is the world that the Pharisees ironically talked about.

[19:09] The world has gone after him they said and now the very next verse some Greeks have come. They want to see Jesus. They come to Philip who's one of the disciples who's from Bethsaida in Galilee they said to him sir we wish to see Jesus.

And Philip maybe didn't know what to do maybe there's a pecking order he went and told Andrew and then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. We don't know if this request was ever granted. Jesus' words that follow are the words to Philip and Andrew not to the Greeks.

It may be that he spoke with them but I suspect not. Their request sir we wish to see Jesus is not because he's their hero and it's like those teeny bopper girls outside a cinema recently in America where Leonardo DiCaprio arrived for the premiere of his latest film and they're all going berserk I've seen him I've seen him that's not what they're wanting.

Their request to see Jesus is more like when we might say I want to see the manager. That is I don't actually want to see him see what he looks like. I want to see the manager because I want to talk with him about something.

That's what these Greeks are wanting these seeking Greeks. They want to talk with or interview Jesus. Jesus' answer to Philip and Andrew directs those Greeks indirectly to where they should be looking.

[20:38] Any parent knows the dread of a long car trip with kids. You just turn out of your street. Are we there?

Is it time? And at the first traffic light the same. And the whole long day's journey is punctuated by the refrain, is it time?

Are we there yet? Now John's gospel is not unlike that. From chapter 2 up until today's passage in chapter 12 there have been little punctuated refrains that say it's not yet time.

In John's gospel the expression is the hour has not yet come. But now for the first time in this gospel comes the statement in verse 23 the hour has come.

Every time up to this the hour has not yet come meaning Jesus' time to die. But now we're told the hour has come for the Son of Man, that's Jesus, to be glorified, that is to die.

[21 : 56] It may be that these Greeks coming to Jesus was the trigger for the hour to come. As though somehow Jesus was waiting until some Gentiles would come to him and then that would signal the time to come.

It may not be insignificant. But it may just be that Jesus had been biding his time until he'd done what he wanted to do by way of miracles and said what he wanted to do by way of teaching his disciples and the crowds.

Other times when it was clear that he could be killed he evaded those who would kill him. Now it's the time. It's a festival in Jerusalem and he's come there to die.

Why is it that his death is called glorification? The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. We might think that that should refer to the resurrection or to the ascension.

Jesus seated at the right hand of God in heaven. But no, it refers to his death primarily. glory. Why is that? Because in the death of Jesus we see most fully the glory of God.

[23 : 19] There are those who go out to the bush and say here we see the glory of God in the sunset and the trees and the river and there is some truth in that. And sometimes people like the things that Jesus said.

His profound and wise teaching. And say yes there's the glory of God in that and there's some truth in that. And there are the miracles that Jesus performed.

The water into wine. Feeding a five thousand and healings and raising Lazarus from the dead. And there is some truth in the statement that there is glory of God in those events too.

But above anything else it is in the death of Jesus on the cross that God's glory is most clearly revealed. Why?

Because there to the full we see the love of God poured out for a sinful world. Love to the extreme. But at the same time we see the holiness of God poured out or revealed to its full.

[24 : 29] For sin is punished by one Saviour's death. In the cross we see the mercy of God to the extreme but also the wrath of God fully realized in the punishment of sin.

In the death of Jesus on the cross God opens his heart to the world exposing his deep love for each one of us and yet his commitment to justice and holiness that means our sins must be paid for fully and properly.

In the death of Jesus on the cross the anguish of a loving heavenly father is most clearly seen. His love expressed by his son's death so that we can live.

Sir we wish to see Jesus the Greeks asked. Jesus is saying if you wish to see Jesus direct those Greeks to the cross there they'll see him lifted up for the world to see hanging on a cross dying and yet revealing there the very glory of God.

Jesus goes on to explain how his death can actually serve any function at all. He says in verse 24 very truly I tell you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain but if it dies it bears much fruit.

[26 : 15] he's not just giving a trite agricultural lesson he's talking about himself and his death. He's saying that unless he dies no one else will live.

Unless he dies we when we die will die in sinful stop the end no more. But he died for us drawing out death sting so that we might live.

He died as our substitute in our place so that we can live. This is the good shepherd who's laying down his life for the sheep so that his sheep may have life to the full.

Yes the crowds are shouting the king is coming. They're waving their palms. They're excited. They're anticipating great things.

But he comes in lowly pomp and he comes deliberately to die. His throne is a cross.

[27 : 36] His crown is mere thorns. No regal robes. his body is bare. He's lifted up but in mocking shame amid the jeers and scorn.

And yet it's true this is glory not loss. Sir we want to see Jesus. Come then and see the cross.

Christianity cannot be crossed out so to speak and remain Christianity. Jesus can only be understood in the cross and its solemn shadow falls over everything he says and does.

Christianity is not a political movement at heart. heart. It's not about feeling good. It's not about self fulfilment. It's not about liturgy and nice services at heart.

It's not even about morality values and doing good at heart. It is about the cross and that's what gives meaning to everything else.

[28 : 59] Let every race and every language tell of him who saves our souls from death and hell. Lord once lifted on the tree of pain draw all the world to seek you once again.

Lift high the cross the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adores your sacred name. But Jesus doesn't stop there.

to those who want to see him, to the crowds waving their palms and singing Hosannas, to those who want to follow him in a regal procession of triumph and victory into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus' final words here are jolting.

Those who love their life must lose it. And those who hate their life in this world will keep it. for eternal life.

We jar at the expressions of love and hate as though we should be hating our life but the Hebrew idiom is really about preference or a comparative. those who love their life lose it.

[30 : 23] Those who don't love their life as their first priority don't put it at the top of their ratings, they will keep it for eternal life.

What does it mean not to put your own life top, to hate your life, to use that idiom? what do you put it under? The next verse explains that.

Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me the father will honor.

You see the two options. Love your life here on earth or serve Jesus and love his life. life. This is a call to radical discipleship of Jesus.

Not just to follow in a grand procession of victory but to follow Jesus where he's going. To the cross. To die.

[31 : 26] For many of us sometimes following Jesus is an accessory to our life. That where it's convenient and doesn't do us too much harm or cause us too much trouble then we're prepared to follow Jesus.

But as soon as it gets difficult well it's an accessory that we just put to one side for a while. Most of us in making our decisions about life think about ourselves sometimes our family.

What is best for me and them. So we accumulate our wealth and our comfort. When it's convenient we remember Jesus. But that's not what discipleship and following Jesus is about.

Following Jesus is hard because we follow him to the cross to die. You see his death on the cross though unique and for my salvation is also the model of how we live our Christian lives.

That is we sacrifice our own life here on earth for the sake of Jesus who died for me. We give up our rights to our own life as number one and put him first in everything.

[32 : 41] And that will mean that absolutely every area of our life will be infiltrated by putting Jesus first. Our attitude to our money, to our leisure time, our attitude to other people, our ability to forgive them and love them and serve them and deny ourselves, our attitude to sexual morality, our attitude to church attendance, our attitude to supporting the gospel, our attitude to be willing to go wherever Jesus sends us in this world for the sake of the gospel and other people.

All of those things will be changed by putting Jesus first. And that's what this call to discipleship is saying. And this of course is not the only place in the Bible, it is riddled with places that call us to the same sort of radical discipleship.

Sometimes our Christian service of Jesus is all too comfortable. We're happy to serve him so long as it doesn't really encroach on the other aspects of our life.

But this is limitless discipleship. It is a call to yield our whole life in every aspect for the one who died for us.

O cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to flee from thee. I lay in dust life's glory dead.

[34 : 18] And from the ground there blossoms red, life that shall endless be. Amen. And from to Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.