

The Glorious Saviour King

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[0 : 00] Have you ever been hesitant to get on board with something new? I'm sure you have been. This hesitation is often called wisdom.

But have you ever strongly resisted either necessary or unavoidable change? Stuck in your ways, scared of leaving your comfort zone or perhaps like me, just plain stubborn.

Towards the end of my high school years, last century, mobile phones were becoming increasingly popular. They didn't look like that, but I thought that was a funny picture.

Around 98 and 99, a handful of my friends joined what I called the mobile phone elite. Having grown up without a mobile phone, doing things like arranging a time to meet my friends and then using my impressive searching skills to find them in a crowded place, even speaking to a real person to find directions if needed, I just didn't see the point for anyone, let alone a teenager, to carry a phone with them, other than, of course, to make an I'm cooler than you statement.

On top of this, I was very stubborn. And so I would often tell my friends with phones that they were yuppie snobs, sometimes very aggressively for some unknown reason.

[1 : 21] My little brain just couldn't comprehend the point of mobile phones. And so I was like a conscientious objector, proudly standing against the times.

I've never needed one before. Now, whether or not my friends who got on board early were right to do so, I don't know. But at the time, I had decided that they were wrong.

And so I grumpily made them know about it. Why am I telling you this? Well, in tonight's passage, we're going to see something similar. Two groups of people responding to change very differently. Some on board and some absolutely not. In this passage, we find Jesus and his crew approaching the Jewish Passover together for the last time.

The context of this passage and the surrounding is the seventh sign that Jesus has performed in John. That is Lazarus being raised from the dead. The clue for this broader context in our passage is at the very start.

[2 : 28] The next day.

The Pharisees had also heard about what Jesus had done and they were not happy. Their opposition to Jesus had been obvious all through John, but now they've had enough.

And so they're spreading the word. Anyone with info on the whereabouts of Jesus, you should report to us so that we can arrest him. And so this is where our passage begins.

In verse 12, we see Jesus, the king coming to Jerusalem. Take a look. The next day, the crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Here is Jesus enters Jerusalem.

[3 : 51] The great crowd who'd seen Jesus, what he'd done with Lazarus. They received him with praises as their king. And what I think is particularly interesting in this scene is how Jesus responds to their declaration.

In other parts of John, when we see people respond to Jesus in this way, either calling him king or seeking to make him king. We see Jesus saying, says something like not trusting himself to them or just leaving the scene because his time for glory hadn't come.

But here, Jesus doesn't do that. And the reason for this is found in a few verses after our passage down in 22. We hear Jesus tell his disciples the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified.

And so here, in response to the crowd's praise and declaration that the king has come, Jesus fulfills scripture and does what Zechariah prophesied that the promised king would do.

Have a look at verse 14. Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it as it is written. Don't be afraid, door to Zion. See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.

[5 : 09] The crowd say, here is our king. And in this action, Jesus also says, yes, here is your king. In this moment, in their eyes, Jesus doing exactly what was prophesied that the king whom God would send to save his people would do. Jesus enters Jerusalem sitting on a donkey. It sort of reminds me of an old Disney movie based on the King Arthur story called The Sword in the Stone. Has anybody seen this? It's older than me.

It's not my vintage. Basically, there's a sword in a stone. And whoever takes it out will be king. But no one can get it out.

And then one day, spoiler alert, this kid comes along looking for a sword so his brother can have a fight. And when he easily pulls the sword out of the stone, he unknowingly becomes the new king of England.

[6 : 12] This is a little bit like what's happening here in this passage. Here, Jesus declares himself to be king by coming to Jerusalem on a donkey according to prophecy.

He obviously also has the power of God to raise the dead. And so, because of this royal donkey statement, as well as what they've seen him do with Lazarus, it's appropriate that they receive him in the way they do.

And that is with praise and proclamation. Point two. Have a look at verse 17. Now, the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.

Many people, because they had heard that he performed this sign, went out to meet him. The crowd who have been with Jesus, seeing all that he's been doing in the recent days, and who have come to meet him at the festival, are totally stoked because of what he's done and that he's finally come.

They welcome him to Jerusalem. And not only with shouts of praise, but it says continuing to testify about what he'd done. The response from the crowd is an appropriate response to what Jesus has done and who Jesus is.

[7 : 44] And we'll continue to think about this next week at Easter as we reflect on why Jesus did what he did in the presence of his disciples. In this response, there's a challenge, I think, for people today.

That we respond to what has clearly been made known about who Jesus is and what he can do. Like the crowd, when they see that Jesus is the one who has come from God, with God's power to save God's people from their enemy, the right response is to acknowledge Jesus as the king and saviour, to continually spread the word about who he is.

And this is the picture of reception that we see in the passage, isn't it? Twice we're told the crowd wanted to go and see him, excited about what they'd seen. And so what they do is they give him a first century version of a ticker tape parade, don't they?

They palm branches down on the ground, which are a sign of kingship and victory, shouting praises as he trots down Main Street, and then continuing to spread the word about what he's done.

There's a real chance here for our own reflection about Jesus, in our response to Jesus, isn't there? To what has been made plain to us in the scriptures about who Jesus is and about what he's done.

[9 : 11] The king who saves. As we prepare again for Easter, to remember our king who came to save us, are you as pumped, as excited as this crowd, eager to meet him, enthusiastically shouting praises to his name, and continually telling about what he'd done?

The crowd respond to Jesus positively. They recognise him as king and praise and proclaim his name. The other response to Jesus is in stark contrast to the crowd.

The Pharisees see what is happening with Jesus and the crowd, and they jealously complain. Have a look at verse 19. After seeing the response of the crowd, the Pharisees said to one another, See, this is getting us nowhere.

Look how a whole world has gone after him. In verse 19, the Pharisees are playing their role to a T, aren't they? The Pharisees have never been on board with Jesus' ministry, even before it began. When John the Baptist was still on the scene, even then they resisted and opposed. But before I rubbish the Pharisees, I think that an argument could be made from context that the Pharisees were genuinely worried about the good of their nation and their place of stability under Roman rule.

[10 : 49] Back after they first hear about Jesus raising Lazarus and how it's impacting the people, they meet together and in 1147, they say, What are we accomplishing?

Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.

To be honest, I'm not really sure about the link between Jesus' popularity and the Jews losing their temple and nation. And while it's possible that the Pharisees really were worried about the good of their nation, their only conclusion for dealing with Jesus in light of this is that he must die.

And after they express this extreme measure, they reveal their true feelings in 12:11 and here in 19. In both these verses, they're plainly jealous that everyone is going over to him, believing in him. It feels to me like an immature schoolyard attitude. Oh, the new kid is getting all the popularity. I better go break their legs. Unnecessary. An unnecessary solution.

[12:01] It's plain that they were jealous and wanted Jesus out of the way. I wasn't speaking from experience. It was just an analogy. This is the other response that we see to Jesus in the passage.

Jealousy and opposition. Behind their complaining in verse 19 is their plan to have people report on his whereabouts that we looked at before. But when they see how the crowd are responding, the way they do, they say this is getting us nowhere.

It reminds me of when I keep making the same mistake over and over. You might know that feeling. A video game or fixing something. You throw the tools away dramatically. I might as well just give up.

The Pharisees are the leaders of the people. They were the ones who should have recognized the coming king. They should have been the ones lining the streets on board with everyone else.

But this couldn't be further from the truth. They're filled with jealousy because of his popularity and they want to get things back to normal. And what's normal?

[13:12] Well, I think in their minds, it's people listening to them. I think it's people following them. Them being the center of attention.

And that's definitely the wrong response to Jesus, isn't it? I don't like you getting all the attention. I want the followers you have. I need to make you disappear.

Like before, I wonder if there's a challenge here for us. A chance to reflect on our own response to Jesus. It may be a bit strong for me to suggest that some of us here would be eager to see Jesus or anyone killed when they're taking our spotlight.

But I would be willing to suggest, at least for myself, that I've desired to have for me the popularity and following of Jesus.

I think this is particularly challenging to those of us who are leaders because we're in positions of power where people look to us and listen to us. Speaking personally, it can be tempting to use that position which God has given to gain my own following, to become puffed up by those who look up to me, mistaking God's glory for mine.

[14:34] And maybe we can even stretch this challenge beyond only leaders, but even to all people to whom God has given a special place in his family, Christians.

Is there a temptation to use this special place for our own popularity, for our own glory, for our own ends, whatever they might be?

This is the wrong response to the king. The response of, stop looking at him, start looking at me.

The Pharisees, despite their position, were not on board with Jesus.

A few years ago, I was chatting to my nan. She was about 90 at the time. And I thought, I'm going to ask her a question about her life.

Nan, what's the most interesting or incredible technological advancement during your life? Most significant? Most impressive? So she had a bit of a think for a bit.

[15:41] I wondered what she was going to say. TV, internet, fidget spinners. She turned to me and said, I think the technology which has more significantly changed the world from my point of view is the mobile phone.

At that moment, I didn't immediately recall my own aggressive resistance to the emergence of mobiles. But I have many times since. The Pharisees were mistaken in their response to Jesus.

The change that God's people were promised had come and the Pharisees were not on board.

They aggressively resisted the arrival of the king. They responded wrongly.

But the crowd, having seen the signs, believed him. They received Jesus as their king and rightly praised him as their saviour. So is this how we should respond to this passage?

Like the crowd, not like the Pharisees? Well, yes, but no. Clearly the Pharisees' response to Jesus is wrong.

[16:57] They wanted him dead, flat out not okay. But why did they want him dead? Was it simply because he was taking all the popularity? Well, no, it's because they didn't believe that he was who he claimed to be.

That is the Christ, the son of God. And I wonder if despite the positive response from the crowd, they also didn't understand who Jesus was.

Yes, they called him king. Yes, they called him saviour. That's what Hosanna means. But did they really understand the true nature of Jesus' kingship?

While they recognised the image of the prophecy, king on a donkey, did they truly understand that this meant Jesus was about to die in order to save them?

Well, I don't think so. In the very next passage, Jesus predicts his death and the crowd who were there hear it and respond saying, the Messiah will remain forever. However, how can he die?

[18:02] And so while they do understand that the king has come, they don't understand what the king's role is. And so while they praise and proclaim him rightly, it's misguided.

And when I think about this response from the crowd, I'm reminded of another movie, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Has anyone seen this? This is the more recent one. I'm particularly reminded of the responses of the animals and the children when Aslan sends the witch away with Edmund the traitor seemingly free from her clutches.

Do you remember that scene? Everyone is happy and rejoicing. Edmund is free. But little do they know that the true price of this freedom is yet to be paid.

No spoilers. Just come to church on Friday. Their celebration is good, but it's misguided. They misunderstand the true pathway to Edmund's freedom, just like the crowd misunderstanding the true pathway to their own freedom.

Freedom from their true enemy, not from Rome, but from sin. And so what's the right response?

Well, actually, there's a third response in the passage, but you can't be blamed for missing it because it really is no response at all.

[19:31] In verse 16, after Jesus gets on the donkey, we read, at first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and these things had been done to him.

And this non-response is funny because surely the disciples knew best. Jesus had certainly spoken more plainly and frankly to them than anyone else. But when Jesus says verse 15, likely in their hearing, John helpfully explains that the disciples, himself included, didn't understand.

The disciples weren't dancing for joy and proclaiming the wonders of the king. They were doing the classic disciple thing which was not understanding. Only one better than the other classic response which was saying something stupid.

So what is this non-response? Well, we see it in what they understood about this scene after. Jesus was glorified. The disciples' response at this time was nothing.

They neither jumped on the bandwagon nor resisted until they had all the information. And John isn't simply saying that it took them a long time to figure out what the crowd already knew.

[20:45] No. He's saying that after Jesus was glorified, meaning after his death, resurrection and ascension, after he had destroyed sin and death, the true enemy of the people, and as Zechariah had promised, brought peace to the nations.

Then the disciples understood the true nature of Jesus' kingship. in the word that the Lord didn't not about it.

And just words, you can't size up Yes, even before the cross, Jesus was impressive, wasn't he? A powerful leader who changed the lives of many. That's why the crowd responded in the way they did.

But only on the cross do we see Jesus as the true glorious saviour king. So as Easter rolls around again this year, let's be challenged to consider again our response to Jesus, our king.

Not a king whose job was to save us from earthly masters like Rome or the daily grind or a government that we don't like. But a far greater and glorious king whose job was to save us from a far more powerful, far more deadly master, sin and death itself.

[22:18] How would I give thanks to God for this king? Our father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus, the king and saviour who entered Jerusalem on a donkey, lowly and humble on his way to the cross.

To die so that we could be saved. I pray, Father, that today, this week, this Easter, all times, we will understand the true nature of Jesus' kingship in light of the cross.
Amen.