

Bitter-sweet Symphony

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[0 : 00] As Gillian said, keep your Bibles open to Luke 19. That'd be great. There's an outline. I'm going to refer to that. It's in your handout. Many of you will know that I'm a bit of a fan of fried chicken.

I'm sure lots of you are too. When I first started working here, I was amazed at God's kindness because there was a KFC only a few hundred meters behind my office.

What a blessing. I could even smell it from my desk. But I'm a pretty responsible guy. I didn't eat it every day, you know, just from time to time.

But then I heard about this app, the KFC app. Not only was there this whole separate menu, but you could order online so that it was ready when you arrived.

Oh, the times. But like many things of this world, KFC's chicken, it began to lack substance.

[1 : 13] And the more I ate, well, the more times I regretted it. I wonder if you felt that. It smells so good, doesn't it? It promises so much. But it's so lacking.

In today's passage, just like Sandra said a moment ago, Jesus is welcomed as a king. But there is something amiss.

Something is wrong with this fanfare. Since the end of chapter 9 in Luke, Jesus has been purposefully walking toward Jerusalem.

In chapter 9, verse 51, there's a verse on the slide. Jesus says, As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Jesus knew what was ahead of him all this time. As our passage begins, it's almost like he's eager to arrive. Look at it in verse 28. He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

[2 : 19] Jesus willingly approaching his fate, even though it will be a rather gruesome end. He doesn't hesitate. He's resolute, approaching Jerusalem for the last time before his death.

And no, today is not Palm Sunday, and that's okay. We've been doing some similar passages in John, in one of the youth Bible studies, and one of the boys keeps asking, why are we doing this and it's not Easter?

And I keep saying to him, well, because the whole Bible is applicable and valuable all the time. One interesting thing about this Palm Sunday passage, for starters, I wonder if you noticed, is the lack of palms.

But more than that, is the bittersweet tone of Jesus' triumphal entrance to Jerusalem. Let's take a look.

Point one. As Jesus gets close to Jerusalem, he comes to Bethphage and Bethany, two towns near Jerusalem. Verse 29 says he was at the hill called the Mount of Olives, where he prayed just before his arrest.

[3 : 29] Many of you will be familiar with Jesus' triumphal entry. But before we get there, he needs his noble steed. And like everything else, even down to the donkey that carries him, it's prepared for him.

Take a look in your Bibles, if you've got it there. Verse 29. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the 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. Even though Jesus' time in Jerusalem will end with his death, his entrance will be glorious and victorious and kingly.

In fact, one of the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah, spoke of this moment, saying on the slide, rejoice greatly, daughter Zion, shout, daughter Jerusalem, see your king comes to you, righteous

and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.

So in preparation for this prophecy, Jesus sends two disciples for his colt, that is his young donkey. And not just any colt they can find, but one specially prepared.

[4 : 50] He doesn't say if you find or when you might find. He says you will find. He knows exactly what's happening. And more than that, no one has ever ridden this colt before.

It's as though it was raised for this purpose. So the two disciples wander off as instructed, looking for this young donkey.

They find the colt as they were told. And someone says, unsurprisingly, why are you untying that? I wonder if you've ever yelled, oy, when teenagers were loitering.

That's what I think of when I read this. Going somewhere you're not supposed to and trying to play it cool. I wonder if in school, a teacher ever told you to go into or meet them in a common room to collect something from in there.

Doesn't it feel strange going in? The other teachers are looking funny at you. This is where they come to get away from you. What are you doing in here?

[5 : 57] What? Me? I'm just, I'm just, I'm just here to, oh, Mrs. told me to just. The disciples had to rock up to a farm, maybe to steal a colt that had never been ridden before.

Just play it cool. Keep your head down. Don't make eye contact. Everything's perfectly normal. Jesus and Zechariah told us we could do this. We've nearly got it. Oy! Why are you untying the colt?

So close. But it's not quite like that, is it? Jesus isn't stealing. He's on top of things. They deliver his message and everything is fine.

It's for the Lord, they say. It might look strange. It might have felt strange. But this colt was prepared for the Lord for this very moment.

So they bring it to Jesus as instructed. And even though Jesus had said nothing about what it was for, well, they all knew what to do, didn't they?

[7 : 06] Look at verse 35. 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 the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they'd seen.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. A procession like this was common for a victorious leader.

even having them walk on a carpet of some kind, which I think is the reason for the cloaks. The disciples are honoring Jesus as King. And if that wasn't clear from their actions, it certainly is from their shouts of praise.

It's likely as Jews that they recognize Jesus as the King prophesied about in Zechariah, coming to his city and his people.

[8 : 08] What a joyful moment. Of course, they would praise and shout, victory, a turning point, a new day, out with Rome, the enemy.

What a joy. It's like a student who's just finished their last exam. Yes, no more teachers, no more books. Victory.

How sweet is that feeling? I also wonder if it might have been quite loud. I think even more than just the 12 disciples.

Verse 37 tells us, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen. Often Jesus had more than just the 12 following him.

And I suspect that was the case here too. Only a moment ago, you'll remember Jesus healed a blind beggar. And Luke told us he followed Jesus after receiving his sight. And I think it's likely that many were following Jesus here too.

[9 : 13] So he was being welcomed to Jerusalem with a loud chorus, a symphony of praise. Excited because the King has come. Victory must be at hand.

How must that have felt? Though not everyone is happy. Not everyone sings praise, do they? The Pharisees are there to dampen the mood.

What a surprise. Which I find strange because what are they even doing there? It seems like people just love to walk in first century Israel because not only was a large group of disciples following Jesus, but even the antagonistic Pharisees too.

I figure aside from the antagonism, they must be the ancestors of the reeds. Well, other than figuring out first century walking culture, we shouldn't be surprised. They've never been happy with Jesus. So why would they be excited about him now? So they want to quiet things down.

[10:26] Verse 39 says, Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. But Jesus won't have a bar of it.

In fact, he pretty much says there's nothing he can do about it. He says, even if he did quieten them down, the stones would cry out.

I don't know if you've ever heard a stone crying out or what it would sound like. Maybe it's where rock and roll came from.

Whatever it sounds like, there's something special about this procession, isn't there? And this praise. It's as though nothing could stop it. If they close their mouths, creation will shout.

At my arrival. I wonder what you think of that. It's quite a statement, isn't it? I bet there were kings and conquerors who were received to their cities over the ages lots of times, but I wonder how many said that.

[11:36] What a moment. How sweet it must have been, the promised king finally coming to his own. But despite these strikingly confident words, Jesus is not praising.

Jesus is not singing. Jesus is not joyful. What's Jesus doing? Can someone tell me? I didn't hear? That's right. Jesus is weeping. Verse 41 says, as he approached Jerusalem, he saw the city and he wept over it. Everyone else, as they approach the city, with the king praises and shouts, joy and gladness.

The journey's over. Victory, blessing, peace, glory. But Jesus is in tears. A bittersweet entry for Jesus. Because he isn't king?

No. Because he won't be victorious? Absolutely not. Because his people who he's coming to rescue haven't recognised him.

[12:42] Look again in your Bibles from verse 41. As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, 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 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. The day of King Jesus' arrival, Israel is no accident.

Jesus set out, remember, resolutely for Jerusalem because of this day and the days ahead. In fact, he was born for it. The whole Old Testament is an arrow pointing to this moment.

So why the tears? Well, because of that Old Testament arrow. And we heard a bit of it in the Old Testament reading before.

[13:50] When Israel were in exile, God promised, through Jeremiah, healing and health, peace and security. He said he would make them as they were before.

God promised, in those days and at that time, I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line. He will do what is just and right in the land.

In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it or he will be called, the Lord, our righteous Saviour. A descendant of King David would come and he will be the Lord and Saviour.

This is God's promise to his people, Israel. Not only here, but all through the Old Testament, God promises that he will come and rescue his people.

God is coming to save. But now with Jesus here, clearly making himself known as the divine son of God. Remember, they were praising him for the miracles they had seen, the followers and the Pharisees too.

[15:02] But they haven't truly recognized his coming. And now Jesus says, it is hidden from your eyes. What a change in tone.

And that change continues, doesn't it? Not only is there no peace because of their blindness, but complete destruction. Think of Jesus' language. Enemies surrounding, dashing you to the ground, you and your children, not one stone on another, no escape.

Why? Because you did not recognize the time of God's coming. we see here a distinct difference between what the people in Israel thought the Messiah would be, even his supporters, and what Jesus said he was.

They praised him as king, which he was, son of David, heir to the throne, but son of God too. Though that's not what he says, he says, you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. How do you feel about Jesus' words? Yes, the Pharisees have shown their colors, but many are following Jesus and praising him as king.

[16:27] Why such strong words? Why the tears? God promised through the prophets and we heard in Jeremiah, the sound of joy and gladness will be heard once more in the streets of Jerusalem and our restore the fortunes of the land as they were before.

But after Israel returned from exile, this never happened. But it doesn't mean God didn't keep his promise. It means its fulfillment was different than they expected.

They were awaiting a new king, peace, prosperity, and fortune, a new temple, a restored relationship with God. The issue was just what God meant by restoration and how it would come. Yes, they see a king, but not their God. Even the disciples were blind to the truth. Peter did call Jesus God's Messiah, but three times Jesus told them he would be killed and rise again and they didn't understand him because it was hidden from them, much like Jesus says in verse 42.

They didn't understand how God would bring restoration to his people. They didn't understand how God coming to them as God says in Jeremiah would cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all the sin and rebellion against me.

[18:02] It's sad because Jesus is going to die, but that's not why he weeps over Jerusalem. It's because they didn't recognize God's coming.

And when Jesus came claiming to be him, both in word and in deed, they didn't believe. His own people and they are the ones who killed him.

He's not sad that he's going to die even though it's awful. He's sad that his own people don't know him. At the end of 2017, my KFC habit had gotten a little bit out of control.

Too many times it had gone down sideways. If you'd had KFC, you probably know what that means. I think God was trying to tell me something.

So alluring, isn't it? But every time I ate it, I felt like I enjoyed it less. It just was becoming sickening. I felt like something had to change.

[19:16] It was bittersweet to me. Or perhaps like that celebrating student who's excited that exams are finished only to realise that 40 years of work is ahead.

Woohoo! These people are praising their king and the city he's coming to save. But they're missing something.

The crowd of disciples praise the coming of their king but they're blind to the truth. So we must ask, what do we see when we look upon Jesus?

We have slightly different perspective than the Jews because Luke, who wrote this account of Jesus in his words, has carefully investigated everything so we may have certainty about Jesus. That's chapter 1 verse 3 and 4. All through his account Luke has made it plainly obvious that Jesus is born in the city of David from his line called son of the most high.

[20:34] Now you might say I'm not a Jew but the reason God kept his promise of restoration in this way rather than another Israelite conqueror was to include us too to restore us to relationship with God to cleanse us from sin to forgive us from our rebellion against God and all who would recognize God's coming so give thanks that God did come just as was promised to heal and to restore and to save give thanks that God made it so clear to us in his word and that we have it so join with the disciples of King Jesus praise him as king but more than that recognize him as the one who brings peace and healing restoration and salvation not only for Israel but for all who are able to see him excuse me it's so obviously the right thing to do isn't it the right way to look upon

Jesus but we must remember Jesus tears why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem because they didn't recognize what would bring them peace that is God coming to them why should we remember this because they had the scriptures like us and they were blind to it and we have even more than they did we saw that God's promise in Jesus was right the peace he brought through the cross was way more significant than any conqueror would accomplish he rose from the dead and promised new life to all who would recognize or believe in him as Lord have you and do you know that while Jesus came to Jerusalem to heal and cleanse he's coming back again to be seen by all in

Hebrews 9 28 it says Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many and he will appear a second time not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him I think Jesus words about future days are really helpful for those of us who are followers of Jesus because Jesus had lots of followers praising him as king as he walked into the city but none who really understood God and God knows his heart we are lucky God has been gracious to us in giving us his word we have been shown how God saves just make sure Jesus is your God when he comes because his promise about the blind is just as real inescapable judgment so friends don't be complacent recognize God's coming and the peace he has brought through the saving death of Jesus how about I pray that we will do that heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you that you have shown us in it that Jesus is our savior and our Lord and our God we thank you that he has healed us and restored us please father would you help us all to recognize him as king and God and to live with him as king and God so that when he returns we may not be blind but may live with you amen