

# The Humble King!

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] I wonder if there was a time in your life where you felt you were just treated like royalty. I was thinking of a moment where you were just really spoiled, or you remember a time where it was one of your children or a friend or a spouse treated you and spoiled you rotten.
- I remember when I was 19, this wee Lewis boy, I was playing in this Celtic, Gaelic rock band. We were called Sunrise Not Secular.
- It's probably one of the worst names for the man. But that was her name. I didn't name them. I'm just putting that out there. And we were playing at this wee festival in the Starnam, Castle Browns, on the green.
- And normal, gay. And this guy comes up to us at the end. An English fellow, and he had a house over in Luey. He said, oh guys, I like your style of music.
- I'm a big fan of Runrick, big country. That was the kind of feel we were going for. We were trying to be Runrick wannabes, and what you call Stuart Adamson, trying to play all these hits and write all these songs.
- [ 1 : 1 0 ] And he said, I like your music, and I'd like you to play my 60th birthday party. I'm like, sure. It's one of the local venues in town. So I know, actually, I'm thinking of having it in the south of France, in the Loire Valley.
- So, sure. I'd like to get you a nice bus or a nice van. TV screens in the back. I'll put you down.
- We're going to be staying in a big castle. Put you up. You can have all your fares paid and everything. Make sure you get treated really well. Great. No bother. Now, at this point in our illustrious career, we thought we were going up in the world.
- We'd received some funding from the Gallic Arts Organization. We'd won a competition at Eden Court, which then led us on to play at a theatre in Leogarden, in Holland.
- And we came fit in that, in a European thing. We thought we were doing okay. We'd supported Run Rig at the Beat the Drum Festival in the smaller tent. Still calling that support slot. We had a support slot for the saw doctors.
- [ 2 : 1 5 ] And I'd even met, wait for this, Stuart Woody from the Bay City Rollers. Oh, yeah. I'll do that. So, and then we did come back up there, of course.
- But, oh, this is it. We made it. We played this lush birthday party. Who could be there? And so we dragged down Xbox, computers in the bank, movies, and felt like rock stars playing in this big castle.
- There was Harrods teddy bears for each guest. I ate shark steak that weekend. Shark steak. It was really nice, actually. I was this 19-year-old boy with fuzzy hair. My grandpa called me Mary because I had a lot of hair.
- And here I was on the side of France, and we were playing this gig. And it was fine. The gig was fine. And people were lauding us and saying, oh, you guys are really good. I'm sure they had a few of them, and that kind of maybe altered their persuasion.

But we realized as soon as we got the booking, it wasn't going to be an ordinary gig. And it certainly wasn't. The guy must have paid, I don't know, at least 100 grand for his birthday party.

[ 3 : 18 ] So, you know, money was just, he had a fair bit of money. And so for us, in that moment, in worldly terms, we felt like the real deal. We felt like rock stars.

I felt like I could be, for one moment in my life, heat moon. And maybe chuck a TV out of my hotel. But no, I didn't do that. But as people shared us with compliments, and that moon was great.

Soon we would be driving the long journey back up the road to Stornoway. And it would take a long time to drive through France, up, all the way back.

It was a great gig. It was a moment in time. But just like that, the moment passed. And this morning, we're going to be considering for a time, the circumstances surrounding Jesus.

What we call the triumphal entry, what we know as, or many Christians know as Palm Sunday, in the lead up to Holy Week. And this event features in all the four gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

[ 4 : 20 ] And in it, Jesus really does get the royal treatment. It's a messianic entrance of epic proportions, because we've got huge crowds surrounding Jesus. They're attracted to him.

In other ways, though, the entrance is far from grand, as we've just thought. A message there to the kids that comes in on a lowly donkey.

But what's most remarkable about this episode, this part of the story, leaning into Jesus' death and resurrection, is that how the tide will turn so quickly in the space of a week.

The crowds from cheering to jeering, the followers of Jesus from happiness to pain, Jesus himself from acclamation and celebration to being sent to death, the other crowds of hearts.

And so this is a crucial pit stop on that journey to Calvary's cross, where Jesus would reach his penultimate conclusion to die.

[ 5 : 19 ] And if there's anything you and I might take away from this morning, it may be simply this, that as we've just sung Jesus strong and kind, that if we thirst, if we're weak, if we're hurting in one way or another, that the gladness of Jesus' heart for us and his affection toward us is greater than we'll ever, ever know.

So this morning we're going to see through this particular lens, another avenue of the road to Calvary. And maybe we're going to be covering questions such as these.

Is this person Jesus, is he great enough for us to continue to devote our whole lives to the Lord? Is this God-man, Jesus, the one who knows us by name, but also is he the one who is worthy enough to follow?

He calls us by name, but he calls us to follow him. Not to follow a cause merely, but a thing, but a person. A person whom we can enjoy relationship, friendship, and a person we worship as our humble king.

So may we leave here having reflected on the wonder of this journey to the cross on this Palm Sunday. Because looking at this passage, we've got Jesus approaching Jerusalem.

[ 6 : 40 ] Matthew writes, as they approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage. So they're not quite a Jerusalem yet. A Jerusalem known traditionally to be that place of spiritual, religious, and political power.

It's the place where the influential Jewish leaders came from. It's the place where people expected the kingdom of God to be revealed. It's the place known as the city of the great king.

And this would be actually the first time in Matthew's Gospel where he explicitly records Jesus coming to Jerusalem, being in Jerusalem itself. Up until now, he's only spoken in the narrative of people coming toward Jesus from Jerusalem, or that he must go to Jerusalem.

So this is the first time he's explicitly saying Jesus is in Jerusalem itself. But right now we read these opening verses. He's approaching the great city. He's coming towards Bethphage on the Mount of Olives.

And he's given two instructions to his disciples. Go to the village ahead of you. We don't know what that village is. And at once you'll find a donkey tied there with her coat by her.

[ 7 : 45 ] Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he'll send them right away. So Jesus, what are we to think of this?

Maybe on the one hand, he had contacts in that particular village. But I think it's good to say that this particular detail may well be pointing us, as the readers, to notice how Jesus is God.

And he has foreknowledge about everything. He knows the details. He's in the details. And it testifies to his own status as the Son of God. After all, this is the first time that Matthew would use the words, the Lord needs them.

And we can perhaps say that he's referring to Jesus. No one else does he use that phrasing, Matthew, explicitly to Jesus himself. It's as though that Matthew is saying, the arrangement's been made.

The two parties, they've come to the deal. The password has been entered, and the details are here. The Lord has need of it. The Lord God, the one who had come to fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Prophets and the Old Testament, the one who had come to offer his life for us as a sacrificial lamb, he's carrying out the details in accordance with his Father's will.

[ 9 : 00 ] And we might think to ourselves that, how is God in these details? How is God in the details of our lives? Well, Jesus, we can be assured that he's Lord of all, and that he puts everything together.

We read those familiar verses in Psalm 139, that he knit us together when we were in our mother's womb. We were fearfully and wonderfully made. Jesus knows all the details of our lives.

He knows which season of life we find ourselves going through. He knows when we're up, he knows when we're down. He's Jesus, strong and kind. He remains patient, and he remains meek and merciful.

That's the character of his heart. That is Jesus, who is the humble king. And Jesus, as we're hearing the details of this story, Matthew continues on, and we remember that Matthew's gospel, he's writing to a Jewish audience, and he says, this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.

Matthew's the only gospel writer who goes on to directly link. John says something too, that Matthew is the only one, because he's writing to a Jewish audience, he's saying, yes, this directly fulfills what happened in Zechariah 9, verse 9.

[ 10 : 15 ] This is direct fulfillment of what Zechariah had said, but also because Matthew is referring to daughter Zion, it's also Isaiah chapter 62.

There's that link there, that the prophecies of old are coming together. God is in the details, and he's calling his followers to be faithful to him, whatever season of life. And I wonder if that's for us this morning, to know that obedience and faithfulness to the Lord is so important to him.

You read in John 15, Jesus says, you are my disciples if you do what I command you. And we know that that passage is in the context of Jesus calling his followers to follow him as friends, not as servants, but as friends.

And that when we're to look to follow Jesus in obedience, it's not this, well, if I get it wrong, then I'm going to beat myself up, or I'm going to find it hard to come back to Jesus.

But no, it's Jesus who is strong and kind. Jesus who is the greatest example of obedience. Jesus is the one who is the greatest example of faithfulness, and it puts others before himself.

[ 11 : 30 ] In fact, Paul wrote a hymn about it, or perhaps it was a hymn that was already around at that time, in Philippians 2, where he writes there to the church, Jesus, who being in very nature God, didn't consider equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage, as something to be grasped, but rather he made himself nothing.

He did the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and having been found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, a humble king, to becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

These words Paul would write, saying that Jesus is in the details, he knows the plans, for I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans not to harm you, but to give you a future and a hope.

And for us today, we may be going through challenging times, maybe in our lives, we may know times of ill health, our friends, we're going through hard times, and it may be a challenging time to be a Christian in this country, maybe more so than in previous decades and generations.

But as we journey towards the beautiful Friday and Easter Sunday, may we, on this Palm Sunday, be reminded of the details, that Jesus is in the details, he's calling us to be faithful and to be obedient to him, to know his friendship, and that to live with continued faithfulness in these days, and renewed hope to the king who humbled himself for our sake.

[ 12 : 54 ] So that's the first thing we might want to consider, that Jesus is in the details. But as we look on through to verses 7 to 9, the disciples, 6 to 9 rather, the disciples, they respond in obedience.

At once, Jesus said that they would go and find the donkey and the colt, and the disciples went, and they did as Jesus had instructed them. But Jesus, we know that he's not yet in Jerusalem yet, still on the outskirts.

The disciples have been sent to the other village. It's not even in Jerusalem until verse 10. But what we find here, in verses 7 to 9, is that they brought the donkey and the colt, and he placed their colts on them for Jesus to sit on.

A very large crowd spread their colts on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowd then went ahead and shouted these wonderful words, proclaiming Jesus as king.

But these words that we read there, a very large crowd had gathered. So in the previous chapter in Matthew, leading on to this, we've got crowds, and crowds are getting larger. Here we've got a very large crowd.

[ 14 : 05 ] What we've got happening here is that it's the time of Passover, and theologians, historians, they estimate that in Jerusalem, and around Jerusalem, anywhere from between 150,000 to even 2.5 million might be attending.

So we might want to think of a huge sporting event. We might want to think of, well, let's think of actually the King's Convocation next month, and huge crowds that have come to Jerusalem.

In Matthew's Gospel, it's important to say as well that there's often an emphasis on crowds. Matthew speaks about crowds. Jesus looked at the crowds. He had compassion on them. He looked to them as a sheep, as a shepherd without sheep, and he had compassion and mercy on them.

He performed miracles in front of crowds, and they responded quite positively. And then there's times where crowds of people follow Jesus, but they also lack consistent faith in him.

They stumble, and they slip, and they fall. In John's Gospel as well, we see that there's crowds around Jesus, and as he proclaims these hard sayings. That's a hard saying, Jesus.

[ 15 : 14 ] Who on earth can believe it? Many turn away. Many disciples turn away. All of this, the occasions in Matthew's Gospel about crowds, rises up to this particular one here, where people are claiming him as the son of David.

So we're depicted in this huge crowd that are surrounding Jesus. Let's maybe offer some comparisons to the coronations that we've experienced recently.

So in 1953, Queen Elizabeth II, her coronation, an estimated 27 million people in the UK watched it on black and white TV.

11 million people tuned in on the radio. What about King Charles' coronation? It's estimated that there'll be billions of people watching it on mobile devices, TVs, iPads, whatever.

The King's coronation, how many people are going to be at the service? 2,000. That's limited. The Queen's coronation, there was 8,000 dignitaries from 129 nations squeezed into Westminster Abbey.

[ 16 : 23 ] The King, he's going to be crowned with St. Edward's crown. It's made of solid gold, features over 400 gemstones including rubies, garnets, and sapphires, and he'll leave the abbey wearing that imperial, the imperial state crown.

The King Charles, if you've maybe read this, he's breaking from tradition in one or two ways and he's not using the gold state coach, you know, the royal carriage and he's the first guy to do that since well back in the 1800s.

You go back as far as King Victoria, she used that carriage. I think it's the second oldest carriage in Europe and what we see that Jesus, he actually confided all expectations by arriving in.

He arrived in the crowds but he arrives in not on a golden carriage, not as a warrior king with a sword by his side to be this political king who would overthrow the Roman rule but he arrived on a donkey.

This humble symbol of peace and service to his people, the son of man came as a ransom for many. So, Jesus, again, he's in the details of this.

[ 17 : 36 ] That he's, they've got the crowds around him and it's a donkey food for a king. But we might want to pay attention to what Matthew says that he says they brought the donkey and the colt. So a few times you see there's a donkey and a colt and that the cloaks are placed on top of them.

Other Gospels just say the colt. Matthew says the donkey and the colt. I think it's fair to say that Matthew's again right to a Jewish audience in Zechariah 9.9 and says that there's a donkey and a colt.

So he's linking the fulfillment of the prophecy. But I think it's quite practical to know that as a colt has been written in for the first time then his mother would probably be there just to go alongside.

But anyhow, this is the symbol that Jesus uses for his kingship. It's one that is a kingship filled with mercy and compassion not the exploitation of the power that Caesar's rule would be full of.

It's a symbol of humility and servitude. And as we thought about how many people have witnessed Jesus, how many people are claiming him as king, how many people are worshipping him, then we also might want to think that as we lead up to Easter how many people are going to turn on Jesus.

[ 18 : 54 ] These are the same crowds that would turn on him and shout threats and swears and violent atrocities and send him to a cross. And that might be for us a challenge to hear in linking us to today because I'm sure we've got some friends or family members or someone that we know that they once followed the Lord but now they don't follow Jesus anymore.

or we thought at a particular point that they might have had an impact for Jesus over the town, the region and maybe they were sent as missionaries across the world that might have had an impact through nations but now they don't follow Jesus or if they still do, it's in a much quieter sense with very little passion or zeal that they once had.

Now this is where we can be encouraged through this passage that the crowds that went ahead of him shouted and acclaimed him as king, Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest heaven that Jesus is recognised as the Messiah, as one from the royal line of David, as the one who would give people success and that as we said that this word Hosanna that once meant the word save us and now have been turned from that prayer into hooray, success, Jesus is here and he is going to die and rise again and we find that even the highest heaven joins in with the acclamation just like with Jesus' birth where there is joy in the highest heaven and all the heavenly hosts gather to worship Jesus the baby king, the newborn king, and the crowds here shout hurrah and the highest heaven joins in, Hosanna in the highest heaven.

And so for us as we approach us not only Easter Sunday but looking into next month the king's coronation and as we welcomed a new first minister in Scotland then we pray for them and that their time, their time in office would be one full of mercy and compassion, humility and maintenance.

That our nation, Scotland, would be known as one that has impact for Jesus all across the world and that we would return again to following him.

[ 21 : 12 ] that this being the striking feature of Jesus, his character and his kingship, offering the world, offering our nation both mercy and salvation for all who respond to him.

So what does it mean then in our time to truly submit to this Lord, to the lordship of Jesus, the kingship of Jesus? Because Jesus, it's not a time for us to pick our battles or to sit on the fence, but to follow Jesus, not the world, the way of the clouds, but to follow Jesus and to stand apart, to stand in the gap.

So as we now draw that close on our thoughts this morning, if riding on a donkey over the Mount of Olives and up to the temple is Jesus symbol for his kingship, one full of meekness and humility, one that could speak more powerfully than words ever could, for a royal play, then in response to this, the crowds and the cloaks and the palm branches, they are the appropriate response from these crowds and welcome them as the king into the city.

They are a response of worship. This one they are proclaiming is not only human, but it's divine. And we read in verses 10 and 11, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this?

The crowds answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. And we've got people who are stirred by something. Jesus isn't just a hot stirrer, but he's one who stirs heart, he's the stirrer of the human heart, and our hearts are ultimately restless until they find our rest in him.

[ 23 : 02 ] But this stirring that Matthew writes about in Jerusalem, it's got all the connotations of an earthquake, the great city was shoot both mentally and morally. Is this an overthrowing of power, of the rule of Caesar?

And so they're pondering this question, who is this? To which the answer is, this is Jesus, the prophet from the small, over-lit town of Nazareth in Galilee.

And here he is, gentle, riding on a donkey. Here he is, the humble king, who's acclaimed by many, celebrated as king, but who by next Friday will hang on a cross as a curse for sin.

What's important about the fulfilment of this prophecy in Zechariah 9-9, again it's the character of the king that it speaks of. He's gentle, he's meek, he's accessible.

One writer puts it this way, Jesus is not trick or happy. He's not harsh, he's not reactionary, he's not easily exasperated. He's meek, humble, gentle, he's the most understanding person in the whole universe.

[ 24 : 07 ] And the posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger, but open arms. And this is Jesus' testimony to us this morning, to welcome us in. I think in one sense, no wonder the crowd is attracted to him.

Naturally, he's so attracted. You see tension building, arguments between the fantasies and Jesus, but here, as part of God's plan, the king would come in majesty, and that majesty would manifest itself in lowliness and humility.

So I guess we might want to finish by saying, who is Jesus to you and I? Is he Jesus, strong and kind, that we talked about earlier? Is he Jesus, gentle and lowly? Is he Jesus, meek and majestic?

Is he the one that we run to when all else fails? Is he the one that we lean into? He is the humble king who came into the world to serve, not be served.

He's the righteous king who comes to give his life as a ransom for many. He's the sacrificial king who willingly went to the cross for us. He's the victorious king who defeated the grave.

[ 25 : 14 ] He's the one who comes to give us new life, to restore the dark places in our lives, to give us fresh hope, to fill us with fresh power, to send us into the world with fresh zeal, and to grant us the strength to love God and to love one another.

So as the crowds ask, who is this? Do we need to ask ourselves this question today? Who is this Jesus to us? Do we need to know him afresh in our life and take the time this coming week to explore who he is, to read through the gospel accounts that lead toward his death afresh, and to know Jesus' invitation to us as the one who is meek and humbled, now exalted and celebrated as we lead toward the road of his crucifixion, burial and resurrection.

May we take the time of sleep to know the triumph of his grace, through the wonder of his glory, and the humility of his character, through the openness of his heart to us. Amen.