

The Whole World Has Gone After Him

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[0 : 00] You would take your Bibles and open them to John chapter 12 on page 101. It would be great if you would welcome Jim Saladin after the service.

Jim is working a half-time with our evening congregation. Jim is from the Royal Kingly House of Saladin, which doesn't mean a lot in North America, but when he volunteered in the Middle East, in Jerusalem, in an Arab hospital, he was washing floors and doing all sorts of other things, the head nurse discovered that he was from the Royal House of Saladin.

And no more washing of floors for Jim. He was placed on a seat and they brought cups of tea and greeted him. And I think it's pronounced Salahadim, is that right?

We will call him Prince Jim from now on. Well, I wonder what you think of when we use this idea of royalty and kingship.

I think it's usually used today to mean someone who's the unqualified best in their field. The king of rock and roll is... Thank you, Elvis Presley.

[1 : 21] And currently the Elvis Presley Enterprises are having a worldwide competition for impersonators. There are a quarter of a million professional impersonators.

Don't laugh. And an Australian has made it to the final 72. She is a woman.

She's one of three. Has nothing to do with... What are we talking about? Oh, yes. We use this term, king. King. Cash is king. Cash is content.

When I think of king, I think of some corpulent, self-indulgent, medieval monarch, tearing pieces off a roast boar, being entertained, flying into a rage, being vindictive, building his empire on the back of the poor souls who work for him, someone who lives in luxury at the expense of others, who care little about their people until they get rescued.

I think of Louis XIV, the so-called Sun King in France, who is the incarnation of excess, who built around himself a sycophantic court and moved them to Versailles, where he would change the drapes once a month.

[2 : 49] And when he had guests living in the palace, he would have the gardeners change every flower in every garden bed every night. And when coffers ran low, he would raise an army and invade another nation and fill the coffers again.

Or I think of Henry VIII, the proud creator of the Church of England, who had six wives, several he had beheaded, because they would not bear him a male child.

Incidentally, if you have difficulty putting the six in order, there's a little mnemonic that goes like this, divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived.

There you have it. And if you have any doubt about the size of his ego, have a look at his armour, which is in the Tower of London to this day.

He had 72,000 of his loyal subjects executed during his reign. That's Henry VIII. Most cultures have had kings.

[3 : 53] And in many of the cultures, the kings have thought of themselves as gods. Egypt, Rome, Japan, until this recent generation.

And I think the big change for modern monarchy has come about through the media. The media has done something that centuries of history has failed to do.

They've transformed the divine into the benign. And so now we've had to invent a new caste in society whom we can bow down before, the caste of celebrity.

But that's for another sermon. I would say this, that to this day, the English monarch, when they are crowned, in the coronation service, the Archbishop of Canterbury takes holy oil, and anoints the head of the monarch as a demonstration of the divine right of the king or the queen.

I just thought you should know that. And that has nothing to do with the fact that I'm an Australian. Actually, I think the media has done two things. It has promoted the fantasy of the good king, the king who really cares about his people, while at the same time it's demonstrated and exposed the fact that they just don't exist anywhere.

[5 : 10] Next week is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday. And I apologise for coming to this in John 12 a week early. If anyone asks you, just say, well, we're at least a week ahead at St. John's.

There is so much that John has to tell us about Jesus. I wish to come to the key text next week. Palm Sunday is the Sunday five days before Jesus is crucified.

It's the Sunday of the week on Friday where he dies. And in this passage in John 12, verses 12 to 19, he rides into Jerusalem.

He knows he is going toward the terror of the cross. And the crowd comes out to greet him as the answer to all their earthly problems. And for the first time in this gospel, Jesus receives and he accepts their worship.

This is the third time, only the third time that Jesus has been referred to king in the gospel. The first time was Nathaniel in chapter 1, when Nathaniel just wanted to say, you're the best.

[6 : 17] The second time is in chapter 6, when Jesus feeds the 5,000. This is an amazing scene. Just keep your finger in John 12 if you have it open. And turn back to chapter 6, verse 15, on page 93.

This is one of the worst attempted coronations in all of history. Jesus takes five loaves and two fish and through a miracle of creation feeds 5,000 people.

Verse 15, perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. What is the crowd's instant response to Jesus' bread making?

This is the kind of king we need. He is the answer to all our bread needs. He can make bread out of thin air. Imagine what he could do in Jerusalem.

Look down at verse 26. Jesus said, Jesus said, Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

[7 : 22] Don't labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him has God the Father set his seal.

You see, Jesus hasn't come as the divine bread making machine. I have not come to give you calories, he says. My kingship has to do with something entirely different.

It has to do with eternal food. And that food has to do with life, eternal life, and it's going to come through my death. Which is why when we come to his death, the idea of king, Jesus being king, is used no less than ten times.

So, in chapter 6, Jesus rejects the crowd outright, rejects the idea of kingship, but now in chapter 12, if we come back to it, he accepts the idea.

But, but he does something to turn their idea of kingship on its head. In fact, in the reading that we had of the entry into Jerusalem, there are two very different ideas of kingship.

[8 : 26] And I want to look at them both together briefly with you. The first is, it's the crowd's idea. A king for the crowd. We start in verse 12, and John tells us, A great crowd came to the feast, heard Jesus was coming, and they took branches of palm leaves, and went out to meet him, crying, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Now, a great crowd is a bit of an understatement. The only historical report we have is from Josephus, who reckons somewhere close to two and a half million people used to go to Jerusalem.

Even if you reduce that by 90%, that is still a very significant number. And if you've ever been in a crowd that size, which is united and excited, and suddenly a person of hope comes along, there's no telling what's going to happen.

And this is by far the most public action Jesus has taken so far. Some of the crowd have come down from the countryside, where he's done his most wonderful miracles, and they begin to cry out, cry out, cry out, it says, and they take palm branches to greet him.

170 years before, when Simon Maccabeus came into Jerusalem and drove out the Syrian invaders, he became the first Hasmonean prince, he was crowned with palm branches.

[9 : 51] And then 40 years after this, when Rome finally crushed all Jewish opposition and took over Jerusalem, they minted coins as a memorial to their victory.

And do you know what they put on the coins? Palm branches. So what the crowd is doing is they are giving Jesus a kind of a royal ticker tape parade. And as he comes in, they cry out, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, King of Israel.

It's a quote from a psalm. And if you come here regularly, we say these words every second week in the Lord's Supper. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.

I had been an Anglican for many years before I knew what Hosanna meant. I always thought it was some vague praise God thing. It's pretty safe, you know, if you're in church and you don't know what a word means and someone asks you, you say praise God or bless you.

Actually, there are a number of words that we say, I think, that take a good deal of time to understand. This morning, we've talked about dissembling before God.

[10 : 59] It's a wonderful word. I don't think there's any one word modern equivalent to it. However, I digress. Where were we? Hosanna. Hosanna means save us.

Lord, save us. Hosanna. Lord, please act and come and save us. And the crowd improvises and says, even the King of Israel, because they are looking at Jesus and saying, this one, he is the King of Israel.

And the amazing thing is they are saying, you, Jesus, save us. Please come and save us from these wretched Romans.

And while you're at it, if you could give us some more of the bread, that would be fantastic. See, there were people under occupation.

And after buying bread, their number one issue was that they were under a foreign power. They take these branches, which are signs of military victory. Come, save us.

[12 : 00] Get rid of the Romans. Give us the bread. That's what kings are for. That's the crowd's idea of a king. They're men of power. They're men of majesty. They're men who make decisions and act and change things.

They put bread on the table. They drive out the invaders. We want this kind of king. But there is a very different idea. Not just a king for the crowd.

There's a king for the cross here. God's idea. And at the center of this amazing applause and adulation, Jesus does something very, very strange.

If you just look down in verse 14. This is not a career move. He takes a young donkey and he sits on it. It's the only action that Jesus does in this whole story.

And it sends a very powerful signal changing the view of kingship. Now, I don't want to offend any donkey lovers in this congregation.

[13 : 01] Having said that, it's not the beast you'd choose if you want to make a big impression. I'm told they are not well-mannered and not too intelligent. If you read Don Quixote, not even Don Quixote rides a donkey.

It's Sanchez, his suffering poor servant who rides a donkey. When I was in elementary school in Australia, we learnt to sing a sea shanty about a donkey in Quebec.

I don't understand that song. Were you ever in Quebec stowing timber on the deck where there's a king and a golden crown riding on a donkey? Is that taught here?

It's not. Well, we in Australia learned it. Hey-ho, away we go, donkey riding, donkey riding. Hey-ho, away we go, riding on it.

Now, what is that? Can someone tell me what that's about, please? After, not now. My assumption is that if you want to end up in a sea shanty, you ride donkeys.

[14 : 09] And Jesus doesn't even do the dignified thing of choosing an adult donkey. He chooses the child of a donkey, a foal of an ass, a baby donkey. Now, why on earth does he do this?

We're told in verse 16, the disciples are completely mystified. They didn't understand this until after his death and resurrection. But in verse 15, we read that he took the donkey as it is written.

Sometimes in Jesus' life, things happen to him which fulfill the Old Testament. And sometimes Jesus steps forward and deliberately fulfills words about God's king.

And that is what he is doing here. Jesus has in mind Zechariah chapter 9 and I want us to go back and look at it for just a moment.

So if you have your Bible open, keep your hand in John 12, go back to Zechariah 9, it's back about 200 pages on page 837. It's quite amazing really that we are allowed to see what Jesus was thinking as he comes into Jerusalem.

[15 : 26] And Zechariah 9 tells us three things about the coming king, God's king. The first is in verse 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Lo, your king comes to you. Triumphant and victorious is he. Humble, riding on an ass. On the colt, the foal of an ass.

You see, God's king is a gentle king. He is the humble king. He is the prince of peace. And the reason he rides on the donkey, the reason he rides on a colt is a deliberate inversion of human power.

The way of the rule of God is not just going to be a rule of majesty and power, it's going to be a rule of tenderness and meekness and gentleness and lowliness, you see.

The second thing is in verse 10. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem. That's the animal of war. And the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall command peace to the nations.

[16 : 31] His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. The coming of this gentle king will not just be confined to one little nation, Palestine, but it's going to go throughout all the earth and his dominion will be from sea to sea.

It's going to be a worldwide universal sovereignty, which is very important for all of us in the dominion of Canada. And thirdly, in verse 11, It's amazing.

The coming of this gentle king is going to set us free through the blood of God's covenant. He's not going to set up his rule by bulldozing his way with military supremacy.

He's not going to build his kingdom on the backs of his subjects. He's not going to live in luxury while his subjects live in poverty. He's going to choose to give himself over to death.

It is through his blood and through the promise of the covenant that he is going to set his people free from things that bind us eternally, guilt and death, judgment and sin.

[17 : 44] That is what's on Jesus' mind and that is why he takes this young donkey and sits on it. It's like an acted sermon. Crowd wants conquering king.

Jesus comes as gentle king. Crowd wants him to liberate them from the Romans. Jesus knows that if he liberated them from the Romans, then what would they do?

What good would that do? Who's going to liberate them from death? They would still die. And that is why Jesus does not just come for political insurrection, but for death and resurrection.

And here is the thing about Palm Sunday for us. Jesus in himself combines both kingships.

He is the ideal of majesty and glory, as well as the ideal of meekness and tenderness. Both of them combine in him.

[18 : 47] Yes, he is the universal ruler. All power in heaven and earth will be given to him. But the way in which he comes into his kingship is through weakness, through death, through suffering, through sacrifice, by offering himself in our place.

And the crowd wants to co-opt Jesus for one side of that equation and not both. But Jesus keeps insisting that his sovereignty and his rule and his glory can only come about and can only be understood in the light of the cross.

See? It's wonderful. It's a complete reversal of human leadership. I think that is why in Western culture all the best myths about the best kings combine these two things together.

because, you see, they look back to Jesus Christ. I think that's why Aragorn in Lord of the Rings is so attractive. He's fierce. He suffers. He's strong.

He fights. And yet he's gentle, kind, noble. And that's why the mood in John 12 is one of irony.

[19 : 58] Did you notice that? The crowd wants him to be king, but they're actually bringing him to his death. They say, save us. They don't know that means him going to the cross.

The disciples follow along. They don't know what's going on. And in the last verse, verse 19, we have this stunning statement. The Pharisees said to each other, you see, you can do nothing.

Look, the world has gone after him. Now, irony comes about through the gap between what is real and what is ideal.

Between things that are said and between the reality. This week I read this true story. This is an illustration. In June 2005, the state of Virginia Employment Agency, which handles employment compensation, announced that they would lay off 400 employees for lack of work because unemployment was so low in the state.

That's an irony. Understand? Now, you know that most commentators say we are living in the age of irony. And I think, I don't think they mean in the literary sense.

[21 : 12] They mean that there is, in general, a disappointment in our culture. There is a disappointment with leadership. There's a disappointment with institutions. There's a disappointment in ourselves.

And part of it comes from seeing so clearly the credibility gap between what is said and what is real. But part of it also comes, I think, from an inbuilt sense in our hearts that we long for someone to come and lead us.

We long for someone who can combine the majesty and the meekness that Jesus does. Who can be the one who will bring glory but who will also do it in a way which is tender and kind.

And the problem for us is that irony has become a sort of a self-protection. It's a way that we can become detached and cool and intelligent. You see it on the Letterman Show.

You see it on Seinfeld. Nothing's really important. There's nothing really true or real anymore. We're far too hip to take anything seriously. And the new salute in our culture is the shrug.

[22 : 21] And I think as a way of coping with disappointment it's very understandable but there's a terrible danger in this because irony quickly slides into cynicism. And when it becomes cynicism it scorches the possibility of real relationships and real faith.

And the sign that irony has slipped into cynicism is when you stop believing it's possible for God really to love you really to change you it's not possible for me really to find true rest and true life.

And so I'm not going to become enthusiastic or really interested about anything really. Hope is a cruelty. And you know that you've slid or you're sliding towards cynicism when you stop longing for the person who's going to come who will bring the majesty and the meekness together.

And what John is saying to us this morning is that that person rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday so many years ago that there is only one person who is sufficient for our hopes and equal to our longings.

This Jesus God's king and I think that's probably why Lazarus is mentioned again in verse 17. When Jesus in the very last chapter raised Lazarus from the dead it was an act of unimaginable power.

[23 : 49] He just spoke and Lazarus came forward from the dead. But on the way to the grave do you remember what Jesus was doing? He was weeping.

So moved was he by the grief and pain of Martha and Mary so incensed was he that death has taken hold of humanity even though he holds the keys of death and hell even though he is the resurrection and the life he is the gentle king he is God's king.

So you see there is there is no pain there's no suffering there's no sorrow too deep for him. there is no arrogance there is no sin that is too high and hard for him.

And the Pharisees write him off and say the whole world has gone after him and the irony is it's this world that hates Jesus it's this world that nailed him to the cross we nailed him there the world did not know him the world did not recognize him or receive him but Jesus came because God so loved this world and he came to take away the sin of the world and he came as the saviour of the world to give his life for the world to give his flesh for the life of the world and the Pharisees have to put a stop to this and I think the greatest irony of all is the way that they stop it is by putting him up there on the cross they lift him up on his throne and he said when I'll be lifted up I will draw all of you to me brothers and sisters this is the fundamental Christian confession Jesus Christ is Lord and when we say that what we are saying is that Jesus is the king he is my king he is more than adequate for everything that I need or want or desire that he perfectly combines in his own person this majesty and this meekness not a little bit of majesty and a little bit of meekness but infinite scoops of it that he is the perfect expression of God's power and God's gentleness of God's strength and God's weakness of his toughness if you will and his tenderness and in his death which we'll celebrate in two weeks he deals with something that is far more enslaving than any economic or any political or any Roman empire can ever bring he gives himself to death for us and gives to us eternal life he's a great king so let's bow our heads and pray shall we

Lord Jesus Christ we bow before you as we begin our prayers and we acknowledge you to be the lion and the lamb together more than all we could desire or deserve we praise you and offer ourselves to you Amen Amen So