

Luke 19:28-40 (Palm Sunday)

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] 19 verses 28 through 40. That's page 878 and 879 in the Pew Bible. Let me invite you to go ahead and turn there with me.

And before we read this, let me pray for us. Lord, indeed how great you are. Lord, we ask now that as we come before you in your word, that you would display your greatness once again to us.

Jesus, you indeed are the lion and the lamb. We ask that we'd be able to see you and behold you in that perfect glory that is yours alone.

Lord, help us as we draw near to you in this text. Lord, that we would hear these words as not just an ancient and faithful account of events that happened long ago, but as a living word for us today.

We ask this in Christ's name and by your spirit. Amen. Luke 19 verse 28. And when Jesus had said these things, he went on ahead going up to Jerusalem.

[1 : 23] When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of his disciples saying, Go into the village in front of you where on entering you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you why are you untying it, you shall say this, The Lord has need of it. So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them.

And as they were untying the colt, its owner said to them, Why are you untying the colt? And they said, The Lord has need of it. And they brought it to Jesus and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it and as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road.

As he was drawing near, already on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

[2 : 38] So, as we've been saying, today is Palm Sunday. This is the day when we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago.

And as John mentioned at the beginning of our service, this Sunday marks the beginning of what is sometimes called Holy Week. Traditionally, this week is the high point of the year for Christians when we remember Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday and we celebrate his resurrection on Easter Sunday just one week from today.

And the account of the triumphal entry that we just read is from Luke's gospel. In fact, this is one of the handful of events that every single gospel writer mentions.

The triumphal entry. But the way that Luke has structured his gospel here, his account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, comes at the end of a long middle section of his gospel, chapters 9 through 19, where Jesus in that section is concerned above all to teach his disciples what it means to follow him.

In that middle section, discipleship is the primary focus. And as a sidebar, to give a little advertisement, in a couple of weeks, we're going to be studying that section in the gospel of Luke in the evening service.

[3 : 54] So, if you want to get a first-hand look at what following Jesus is really all about, then you can come along to the evening service starting April 3rd and we'll dive into that together. But, here, in our text, at the end of chapter 19, now Luke's emphasis shifts.

No longer is he primarily focusing on discipleship, but now Luke wants to draw our hearts back to the one who is the center of it all. He wants to draw us back to the person and work of Jesus himself.

And he's coming back to some of the core questions that really drove all of the gospel writers, really. Who is this Jesus? What did he come to do?

And how are we supposed to respond? And what we see is that this is a passage filled with all sorts of misunderstanding in relationship to those questions.

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, some people seem to get it right, but maybe not completely right. And some people certainly get it wrong. And everyone, it seems, is caught up in their own expectations and desires and wishes, their own agendas, their own kingdoms.

[5 : 05] And we wonder, reading a passage like this and maybe looking at our own lives today, does anyone really get it? Does anyone understand who this Jesus is and what he's come to do and how we ought to respond?

Now, maybe this isn't your first Palm Sunday. It comes every year, after all. Maybe you've sat through a lot of Palm Sunday services.

Maybe you've even been to a Palm Sunday service where they actually hand out palm branches for you to celebrate with. That's fun. You know, sometimes as Protestants, we can be really sort of hard on those sorts of things.

But you know what's funny? Every youth ministry seminar I go to, this is what they tell you. They say, here's how you reach people in teaching. Try to appeal to more than one of their senses. Don't just hit them in the ears.

Hit them with their hands. Hit them with their nose. Do whatever you can. Show them neat pictures on the overhead. So it seems like the church for many, many ages has sort of gotten really good teaching methods.

[6 : 06] They give you a Palm on Palm Sunday. And there it is. You can taste it. You can look at it. You can touch it. Whatever you want to do with it. Palm Sunday. But you know, could it be after all these years that perhaps you and I are missing something critical about Jesus?

Perhaps we've let our own agendas and our own expectations cloud our thinking. And maybe we've been missing something crucial all these years. Now maybe for you, this is your first Palm Sunday.

Maybe you're not sure if you've ever been to a church service on Palm Sunday before. Maybe Christianity is all quite new to you. And my guess is that you too have some sort of notion about Jesus.

But this morning, along with Luke, let's focus our gaze back on who Jesus is and what he's come to do and how we ought to be responding to him once again.

Let's come back to these basic questions so that we won't settle for vague notions or popular misconceptions. Because as we'll see, by the time we come to the end of this passage, this is no question of sort of mere historical interest.

[7 : 24] The stakes are high and the claim is great. Jesus, in essence, will say that our whole life and our whole being only finds its proper meaning in him.

So let's look at these three questions together then. Who is Jesus? What's he come to do? And how ought we respond? So first, who is this Jesus? As Luke sort of directs his camera right on the person of Christ, he focuses in, in this passage, on something that seems to us maybe sort of insignificant.

What sort of dominates the opening verses of our paragraph? This cult, this animal, right? Right? Verses 29 through 35 seem to be all about this simple animal.

Did you notice that Luke doesn't mention which disciples Jesus sends? He could care less about that. Nor does Luke mention which village they go to. Is it Bethany? Is it Bethphage? We don't really know.

Luke doesn't seem to care. But rather, this unsuspecting cult seems to take center stage. Why is this animal so significant? Well, it's significant for Luke because as we see here, it's very significant for Jesus.

[8 : 35] Jesus commands that it be brought to him. And the disciples, we find in verse 32, found it just as he had told them. And of course, many a reader of the gospel has looked at this and said, perhaps quite rightly, that here we see a glimpse of Jesus' divine knowledge of all things.

Perhaps in his divine nature, Jesus knew that they'd find the cult just as he described, ready to be borrowed. And according to the cultural custom of the day, important dignitaries and even rabbis could often procure use of property for personal reasons.

This would have been a sort of strange request. That's why when the disciples come and say to the owners of this animal, the Lord has need of it, they're glad to let him borrow it. But in fact, surely these owners had heard of Jesus.

So they were more than willing to let him have use of the cult. But you know, whether this instance is a glimpse of Jesus' divine foreknowledge or whether simply Jesus had arranged for the cult ahead of time, you know, this wasn't the first time that Jesus had traveled through Bethany and Bethphage after all.

In either case, the important point to see here, I think, is that Jesus is in complete control of the situation. He is the one directing all the events here.

[9 : 58] Now, why did Jesus take and make such intentional plans for this cult? Did he think that he'd be tired after the long journey toward Jerusalem?

It was a pretty steep hill up the Mount of Olives. Was it a common custom for people to ride into Jerusalem for the Passover festival? No, actually.

In fact, from what we can tell historically, it seems that pilgrims always walked into Jerusalem as a sign of reverence. So what does it mean? Well, for most first century Jews, the meaning would have been shocking but clear.

By riding the cult into Jerusalem, Jesus is intentionally making a public, dramatic demonstration of his identity as the promised Messiah, as the long-awaited king.

You see, nearly all of the Hebrew prophets looked forward to the day of their coming king. And in one particular book, the book of Zechariah, he actually gives a description of what this arrival would look like.

[11 : 08] In Zechariah chapter nine, verse nine, we find this, rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So it's unmistakable. Jesus is taking on himself, Zechariah's prophecy about the coming king. In fact, that's probably why Jesus emphasizes the fact in verse 30 that the colt is one on which no one has ever yet sat, which is to say that it's a young creature.

It's a foal, just like Zechariah had foreseen. So what's going on here is this unmistakable sign act on Jesus' part. By riding the colt, it's as if Jesus is saying, the king that you've been waiting for, I'm the one.

Do you see what an utterly astounding claim that is? Imagine I showed up where you work, wearing a nice suit, maybe driving a nice car, which I borrowed from somebody.

Parked right in, and I drove up and I parked right in the CEO's parking spot, reserved for such and such. I parked right there. And then I confidently marched right into the building, went up the elevator, walked into the corner office, as if I owned the place, as if I ran the place.

[12 : 44] Well, depending on the level of security where you work, that charade is going to last maybe about three seconds, right? No one is going to be convinced. And certainly the people who know me well will be the first ones to say, not a chance.

And yet for Jesus, it's very different. He makes this utterly stunning, bold, public proclamation of his kingship. And those who know him best think it's completely appropriate.

In verse 37, we're told that they praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen. And what were those mighty works? Well, Luke's gospel has been recounting them again and again and again.

Here was the one that they had seen heal the sick and cure the lepers. Here was the one who restored sight to the blind and drove out demons from the oppressed.

Here was the one they had seen take a handful of loaves and a couple of fish and feed thousands in one sitting. Here was the one they had seen speak to a raging storm and immediately it became calm. Here was the one they had seen speak into a dead man's tomb and the man came to life again.

[14 : 00] When the Christ appears some had said will he do more signs than this man has done? Go get the cult Jesus says. The time is now.

And they found it just as he had told them. Friends, I wonder if you're starting to get a glimpse of this king. How utterly in control he is. How fearless.

How unrelenting. How bold. At this point in the story the authorities are already seeking his life. The opposition is already mounting. But, he gets the cult.

He declares his true identity. He rides into Jerusalem. Fearless, powerful, bold. And yet, at one and the same time, in the exact moment that Jesus demonstrates his authority and power, he also displays his humility.

Humble and mounted on a donkey, Zacharias says. Not a war horse, not a chariot, but a cult the foal of a donkey.

[15 : 20] Can you imagine the Roman soldiers who occupied Jerusalem looking out at this band of pilgrims coming down the Mount of Olives like so many groups of pilgrims had come down the Mount of Olives coming towards the city?

And this one's shouting and waving and throwing their cloaks in the road which was a sign of homage. and at the center of this excitement is a man riding on a donkey.

What a ridiculous sight it must have seemed to the Roman authorities. Some king they must have mocked. Which is probably why the Roman authorities didn't march right out there and squelch it to begin with.

What was the threat? A man riding a donkey followed by a band of disciples throwing their clothing in the road? And yet, friends, Jesus is no ordinary king.

I don't need to tell you that many of the rulers of this world are intoxicated with brute power, with control, and with utter subjugation. And yet, here is a king, indeed the true king, with all the authority of God himself because he is God himself and he's exercising that power in humility and in gentleness and in service.

[16 : 49] Here's the one who not only calmed the raging sea but who welcomed children to his side and blessed them as we saw last week. Here's the one who not only called Lazarus forth from the grave with a loud voice but raised Jairus' daughter back to life with gentle words saying, in essence, little girl, it's time to get up.

Here's the one who said, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. But who also said, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. Who else is like this king?

Show me someone who is as fearless and yet as kind, as authoritative and yet as humble, a calmer of storms and yet a friend of sinners.

Friend, you might not think you want a king. You probably don't think you need a king. But don't you want someone like that? Unfathomable glory and perfect humility.

[18 : 09] Infinite justice and infinite grace. You see this unfold. You see his character unfold in the rest of Luke 19. If you just scan your eyes over the rest of the chapter, if you were to read further, then you would see Jesus weep broken hearted over hard hearted Jerusalem, rejecting their king.

And in the next moment, you'd see Christ's zeal as he cleanses the temple. Fury and tears. Lion and lamb.

The king mounted on a donkey. You know, from one angle, you can read the entire story of the Old Testament as a story of waiting for the rightful king to come.

In the book of Judges, a refrain goes up again and again. In those days, there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes and the nation unravels socially, spiritually, morally, politically.

And then when Israel finally gets a king in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, he sort of looks the part. Saul is tall and strong, but ultimately he fails. And then David, with David, Israel gets as close as they ever do to having their ideal king.

[19 : 19] He's a man after God's own heart and even David fails and falls short as we've been seeing in the evening service these many weeks. And Solomon, David's son, likewise, turns out not to be the king that Israel or the world really needs.

After Solomon's death, the narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel sort of functions like a spotlight, just going back and forth again from north to south and back again, seeing whether one of these kings will bring righteousness and stability and hope.

And of course, if you've read those stories, you know that none of them do. But the great prophets foresee a day when God's promise to his people will be fulfilled.

That one day, one of David's offspring will sit on the throne forever and ever. And this king, Isaiah tells us, will be called nothing less than wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. He will sit on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

[20 : 35] And you see, the unrelenting witness of the New Testament is that in Jesus, this king has at last come.

That in Jesus, indeed, God has come to shepherd and to rule his people and to renew all things. So friends, let me ask, if this is who Jesus is, the lion and the lamb, the one with all authority and all humility, the calmer of storms and the friend of sinners, what is it that keeps you from entrusting your life to him?

what is there that you desire in a savior, in a king, in a God that is not in the Lord Jesus Christ?

And maybe you're asking yourself, well, what did it look like? What if I actually took Christ as my king? As crazy as that sounds, what if I were to center my life on him?

What would I expect? What kind of relationship would that be? In the 18th century, a pastor and theologian named Jonathan Edwards put it this way.

[21 : 58] He said, Christ will give himself to you with all those various excellencies that meet, that come together in him to your full and everlasting enjoyment.

He will ever after treat you as his dear friend and you shall ere long be where he is and shall behold his glory and dwell with him in the most free and intimate communion and enjoyment.

Luke is writing his gospel because he wants us to know Christ like that. he wants us to really see who he is and to know him. But it's not just who Christ is that's on display here.

We're actually also shown a glimpse of what he's come to do. And that's the second point I want us to look at. What's Jesus come to do? Now the disciples, again as we mentioned a little early in the service, are most certainly expecting Jesus to do one thing.

Come in and topple the Romans. It is Passover after all at this point. in the year. It's the national festival celebrating Israel's liberation when God extended his mighty right arm and completely unraveled the nation of Egypt with plagues and set the people free.

[23 : 22] And that's what the disciples think Jesus has come to do. Military victory. Political liberation from their Roman overlords. In fact, in the first century waving palm branches, which as it turns out Luke doesn't mention in his account of the triumphal entry but the other gospel writers do, this idea of waving palm branches was actually a symbol of Jewish nationalism and military victory.

It wasn't sort of a cute thing that they did in the synagogues once a year. And as they would have waved those palm branches, they would have been hailing Jesus as king and expecting a great victory over political oppression.

And yet this isn't what Jesus does. If you read Luke's gospel, you'll find that Jerusalem is mentioned a number of times in chapters 9 through 19.

And as that narrative progresses, the momentum builds and builds as Jesus gets closer and closer to the city. But at the beginning of that section in chapter 9, in Luke's account of the transfiguration, we're told there that Moses and Elijah come and speak to Jesus about what?

About his departure that he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. And very interestingly, that word departure there is literally his exodus. That's chapter 9, verse 31.

[24 : 44] So when Luke says in verse 28 in our text here that Jesus went on ahead going up to Jerusalem, finally the story is starting to reach its peak.

Jerusalem, this city that we've been anticipating as we followed Luke's gospel along the way. And it's weighted, it's freighted with all sorts of meaning at this point. In particular, it means that Jesus is now finally going to accomplish his exodus, whatever that means.

A whole new Passover is going to be achieved. But it wouldn't be what anyone expected. But you know, knowing what we know now, can't you almost see it in this scene as the one who tamed the raging seas and rose the dead to life?

God's true king as he comes riding in on a lowly donkey. There he is!

Humble. Almost foolish. Perhaps even to some a scandal. But you see, friends, this greater exodus would be won through an even greater humility and through an even greater scandal.

[26 : 10] The king would enter on a donkey, but the king would win his victory going even lower still. Mounting a cross and being crucified.

Again and again, Jesus told his disciples what will happen when they reach Jerusalem. He'll be handed over to the authorities and crucified, but in three days he will rise. The king is entering Zion to win a great battle, yes, but this even greater exodus, this even greater liberation is going to be won through a cross and through a resurrection.

The people wanted a victor who would eliminate their political enemies, but Jesus comes and does one better. He has a greater enemy in view and he's come to liberate us from our greatest enemy and our greatest fear, the enemy of sin and the fear of death.

And in praising Jesus in this moment, as the disciples sort of take up these verses from this psalm that had been sung so many times, in taking up these words, the disciples speak better than they knew.

What do they say here? Almost unconsciously echoing the angels at Jesus' birth. Peace in heaven! They exclaim. And friends, isn't that exactly what the king has accomplished?

[27 : 39] Peace in heaven. Jesus would be the true Passover lamb dying in the place of his sinful people so that the rightful wrath of God could pass over our sins and we could be saved.

Friend, do you know peace this morning? Not the peace of having a good-paying job, although that is a good thing. Not the peace of having a healthy family, although that is something to be thankful for.

Not the peace of having little or no conflicts with your coworkers and neighbors, although that is good too. I'm talking about the kind of peace that even if all those things were stripped away, your work, your health, your family, your friends, even if all those things were stripped away, you could still wake up in the morning and know joy.

That's the kind of peace Jesus has come to win for you. Peace with God. So you see, when Jesus told his disciples to get the cult, he knew exactly where it was all going to end up.

He would ride into Jerusalem, he would be betrayed, arrested, condemned at the hands of his own friends and his own people, and at the hand of the Romans, the Romans, everyone thought he was coming to overthrow.

[29 : 15] Jesus himself would be overthrown. But three days later, he would rise. So don't you see, his decision to mount the cult was his decision to mount the cross.

And he knew exactly where it all would lead. And in so doing, he would fulfill even more words of the prophets. Like these from Isaiah, he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. There it is again. Peace. Peace. Peace.

Friend, you can know peace this morning. The ultimate peace of having your sins forgiven. You have a victor who humbled himself and conquered sin and death for you.

And that's what Holy Week is all about. That in Jesus' death and resurrection, all who turn and believe in him are liberated from the guilt and penalty of sin, from the curse of the law, from the fear of death and they have peace with God.

[30 : 27] Friend, I wonder if we've forgotten what great news this is. I wonder if we're still trying to squeeze Jesus down into the mold of our expectations and our desires and our petty little kingdoms when he's opened up the kingdom of God for us.

Well, this brings us to our third and final point briefly. In our text today, we see the division that Jesus inevitably causes.

Look at the end, those last few verses. The disciples hail Jesus as the king with those words from Psalm 118, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. But the Pharisees say to Jesus, teacher, rebuke your disciples.

And don't those two responses represent two of the most fundamental ways that we can still respond to him today. On the one hand, we can consider Jesus a mere teacher, a teacher whose disciples probably got a little out of hand, a teacher whose disciples started making claims of Jesus that he himself would never have supported.

Of course, our text this morning shows that Jesus was making those claims. Jesus' identity wasn't something that was fabricated by the disciples as they played whisper down the alley in the decades after his death.

[31 : 46] But we can see him as a mere teacher, or on the other hand, we can rejoice before Jesus and praise him as the king who comes in the name of the Lord. And between these two options, what does Jesus himself say?

What's his verdict on these two responses to his identity, to his person, to his work? Verse 40, I tell you, Jesus says, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Well, that's about as definitive as you could make it, isn't it? In this moment, Jesus says, I have to be praised. And if human beings aren't going to do it, then the inanimate creation itself is going to break forth in song and hail me as the king.

That's what humans were meant to do, by the way, created in the image of God, to take the full praises of creation and reflect them back to its rightful king and creator.

And Jesus says, here, look, if you're not going to do it, then the praises of creation will crash over your heads and keep coming, whether you come or not. Even the stones will cry out.

[33 : 05] Teacher, the Pharisees called him. Teacher? What Jesus is saying here is that the universe exists for his praise. Everything, every rock, every star, every molecule in your body was fashioned by him and through him and for him, as Paul later says in Colossians 1.

And do you see what that means? That here is the one who can make your whole life sing. every stitch and every fabric within you was made to praise this king.

To not acknowledge him as such is to live at a joint with your very essence. Some of you are here this morning and you're wondering why life just doesn't seem to be adding up.

Why on the surface, everything in your life seems to be pretty good, pretty right, pretty commendable. But inside, there seems to be nothing but chaos. friends, have you ever asked and have you ever thought that maybe you're praising the wrong thing?

Maybe you're centering your life on something that just can't hold. I often think of our lives like a wheel on the spokes of the various parts of our life.

[34 : 29] And in themselves, oftentimes these spokes seem to be okay. Our work, our family, our relationships, they seem to be fine. And yet, no matter what we put in the hub, no matter what we put in the center, nothing keeps them together and they're always flying apart and they're always crashing into each other.

But friend, if there's a God who made you and who took on flesh to redeem you because he loves you, then surely he must be the rightful center.

Surely he must be the one around whom everything else must and can spin. Surely he must be the one you've got to praise above all else.

And that's the call of the gospel, to hail Jesus not just as a teacher but as a king, as the king, and to take up your cross and follow him, and in so doing to find peace and joy and true freedom.

But there's more in this little comment about the stones, isn't there? Because it points ahead to Jesus' second coming. When the resurrected Jesus returns to bring his kingdom to completion and fullness, when he does that he's going to renew all things, friends, and then at that moment it's not just going to be the rocks that are crying out, but it's going to be the entire creation that will rejoice in that moment.

[36 : 00] Here's how Psalm 96 put it. Psalm 96 says, let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice, let the sea roar and all that fills it, let the field exult and everything in it. Then all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth, he will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in faithfulness.

And we see it again in Isaiah 55, for you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace and the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

And friends, if the trees are going to clap their hands in that moment, what's going to be true of us? One day Jesus is going to make the earth resound with joy at his coming through the victory he won through his death and resurrection and even creation itself is going to be set free from its bondage to decay, Paul says.

And friends, if one day he will do that, and he will, then surely today he can take your heart of stone and make it cry with life again and with joy and with peace.

That's what Holy Week is all about. How will you respond to Jesus? Will you keep him at arm's length as just another teacher?

[37 : 28] Or will you praise him as your rightful king? Let's pray. Father, indeed, we ask for your Holy Spirit to come and to make us willing and able to receive Jesus as our Lord and King.

God, our own flesh pushes against that idea with almost everything within it. We don't want a king. We don't want someone to rule over our lives.

We'd rather try to just have a teacher who can give us advice and then we can stay in control and we can try to work things out our own way. Oh, Lord, would you give us your spirit to overcome our self-control and our self-love and pull us out of ourselves into where real life is found in the glad embrace of this great king.

Lord, make it so, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.