

Palm Sunday

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(John 12:12–13 ESV)

“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”
(John 12:15 ESV)

What Kind of a King is Jesus?

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John 12:12-19

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! Happy Palm Sunday!!! On Palm Sunday, which is the official start of Holy Week, we celebrate the coming of the King to Jerusalem so if you have your Bible with you, I’d love for you to open it now to John 12:12-19. This morning we are going to be asking the question: what kind of a King is Jesus? He was obviously some kind of king – even Pilate, who was no kind of Christian, understood that. The charge that he had written up and nailed to the head of Jesus’ cross said simply:

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (John 19:19 ESV)

But what KIND of a King was Jesus?

That’s the issue. It is very clear that Jesus wasn’t content to be a king on anyone’s terms but his own. In John 6 after he fed 5000 people in the wilderness, the Apostle John tells us:

“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.” (John 6:15 ESV)

Jesus refused to be the sort of King THEY were looking for. It wasn't "kingship" per se, that he rejected, merely their understanding of it. Jesus was very determined that he would not be King on anyone's terms but his own.

So what are those terms? What kind of King is Jesus?

It really, really matters how you answer that question.

We've almost lost faith in leadership, here in North American, over the last human lifetime, haven't we? Many say it started with Viet Nam and then the whole Watergate scandal. For a while there was more trust in business leaders than in political leaders, but then we had the whole Enron scandal and then the financial crisis in 2008 and all the sudden we realized that business leaders are at least as corrupt as political leaders – maybe more.

And then it started happening in the church too. We had the televangelist scandals in the 1980's and then it seemed by 2010 that not a year went by without some kind of high profile church leadership failure. From Bill Hybels, to Mark Driscoll, to James McDonald to Ravi Zacharias to Bruxy Cavey just a few weeks ago – it just never seems to end now and so we wonder: is there really such a thing as a Good Leader? Is leadership itself an inherently flawed concept?

We have LEADERSHIP FATIGUE now in the modern world and so there might not BE a more important conversation for us to be having than this one.

What kind of a leader is Jesus? What kind of King did he come to this earth to be?

We need to know the answer to that question. If you are here as an unbeliever this morning, you need to know whether you can trust Jesus, because he isn't just inviting you to be his friend, or his colleague today – he isn't just offering to be your soul physician and your personal life guru – he is calling on you today to receive him as your Savior and your LORD. Lord means MASTER

– that’s the strongest kind of leader that there is – so you need to know, what kind of a King is Jesus?

And if you are already a Christian this morning, but you are starting to grow weary with the church – because you’ve been burned too many times before by human leaders imitating the examples they see in politics or business or sports or the media – then you need to know – what is the MODEL, what is the STANDARD, what is the EXPECTATION for leadership and authority within the Christian church? You need to know the example that Jesus set so that you can insist on it as THE BLUEPRINT for leadership and authority within your local congregation. I don’t think the Bride of Christ can survive another generation of leaders who are taking their cues from Wall Street and the White House – and thanks be to God – and I don’t believe we will be allowed to. It looks to me like judgment has already begun in the household of God – and just like Scripture predicted, it has begun with the elders.

So I think we’re all in on this topic and we’re going to use as our starting place the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as told by the Apostle John. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.” (John 12:12–19 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I want to draw your attention back to the very centre of this passage. Look at verses 15 and 16 again. Verse 15 is a citation from the Old Testament Book of Zechariah, chapter 9, verse 9. John says:

“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that **these things had been written about him and had been done to him.** (John 12:15–16 ESV)

Did you catch that?

AFTER Jesus death and resurrection – after he had done all that was written about him – THEN they were able to see the whole picture. Then they understood who Jesus was and what kind of a King he had come to be.

According to John, Jesus was working against some sort of written plan. After the death and resurrection of Jesus the disciples came to understand that the entire Old Testament had been providing CLUES as to what sort of KING was needed for human beings to thrive and flourish as God intended them to do.

This story here in John 12 illuminated and fulfilled a particular prophecy found in Zechariah chapter 9 – in fact, I don’t know if you know this, but there are more citations from Zechariah in the passion narratives in the Gospels than from any other book of the Old Testament other than the Book of Psalms – did you know that? I didn’t know that either until I started studying Zechariah for an upcoming series in Into the Word, but it is true. There is a blueprint there in the latter chapters of Zechariah about the sort of Messianic King that would come and that would bring to pass all that God had promised for his people in the Old Testament. And so guided by John’s Gospel, guided by the Book of Zechariah and all the stories, prophecies and anticipations in the Old Testament and helped along by the Holy Spirit of God, I’m hoping that we’ll be able to provide a reliable answer to the question this morning:

What Kind of a King Is Jesus?

I think the first thing we can say with absolute confidence is that Jesus is:

1. A King who loves his enemies

That's the part that the crowds and the disciples most struggled to understand. Do you remember that story, after Jesus had determined to go up to Jerusalem, when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he intended to travel through an area of Samaria, but the townspeople wouldn't receive him; do you remember how the disciples responded to that? Luke 9:54 says:

And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54 ESV)

The disciples were on the warpath! Jesus was the King! And if people didn't come out to support the king then those people should be destroyed with FIRE!

Now – honesty check – how many of you are kind of on board with that? How many of you would be more than happy to convert people by the sword, if that was an option? By the way, isn't it interesting that the disciples thought that was an option? They obviously believed that if they prayed to God power would be given to them to DESTROY people who did not voluntarily submit to Jesus – isn't that interesting?

Listen there are still people looking for that power today – but Jesus will have none of it. He turned and REBUKED THEM. And then he arranged for a donkey so that he could ride into Jerusalem as the Prince of Peace.

That's the whole point here!

Jesus does not want to destroy anyone! He does not want to intimidate or coerce. He does not want to convert people by the sword! The whole reason behind the mystery of the two comings was so that in his first coming Jesus could INVITE people to bow before him VOLUNTARILY!!!

This is all part of the blueprint. In Psalm 110:3 it says:

“Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments” (Psalm 110:3 ESV)

Are you hearing that? All of the people in the eternal kingdom of God are going to be volunteers! Not a single one of them will have been converted by the sword! Not a single one is going to be there by force of political or military action! The Kingdom of Jesus is going to be filled with people who have responded WILLINGLY and GLADLY to his free and gracious invitation.

That’s why Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and not a war horse! Because he was not that kind of King. He was not on the warpath! He came in peace! He came to teach and to show and to serve and to save – and he offered himself willingly to all people – even those who hated him. That’s the kind of King that Jesus is - thanks be to God!

The second thing we can say with confidence here is that Jesus is:

2. A King who is humble and lowly

A donkey is a symbol of two things: peace – because nobody rides to war on a donkey – and lowliness – because a donkey was the mode of conveyance for regular people. Rich people and mighty LORDS would be carried around on fancy litters – but Jesus isn’t like that. He is humble and lowly. Matthew wants to make sure we don’t miss that aspect of the symbolism so in his telling of the Triumphal Entry he is a little more explicit. He says:

“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, **humble**, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” (Matthew 21:5 ESV)

Do you see that?

John didn’t mention that – it was implied in the symbol, but Matthew wants to make sure that we don’t miss it. Jesus was a King of Peace – but he was also a King of humility.

That’s important for us to see – because the problem isn’t “leadership” per se. The problem isn’t “authority” per se – the problem is human pride. A proud leader thinks that his people are there to serve him. A proud leader thinks that his people are the platform on which he takes his stand. They are there to lift him up. They are there to support his dreams and to provide for his comforts.

That’s always been the problem with earthly kings.

Remember Samuel warned the people of Israel about earthly kings? He said they would take your young men for their armies, they would take your daughters for their servants, they would take a tax on all your land to support their table.

You don’t want ‘a king like the nations’, Samuel said, because those men are men of PRIDE. They are takers! They will take from you to build themselves up – trust me, you don’t want anything to do with that.

So – did he tell them to live in complete anarchy? “Everyone go and do what is right in your own eyes”.

No.

What did he do? He anointed a young shepherd boy that no one had ever heard of named David. A man after God's own heart.

What's the bottom line? The bottom line is that authority is good – leadership is good – if the leader is humble. That's why Jesus told his disciples:

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:42–44 ESV)

Don't be like the LORDS of the Gentiles! Secular patterns of leadership are all based on human pride! It is all about position and prestige! That kind of leadership is abusive and dehumanizing to regular people! Have nothing to do with it! Instead, Jesus says, I want you to look to me. I rode to my death on a donkey!

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45 ESV)

Jesus is a King of Peace and Jesus is a king of humility. And then thirdly, Jesus is:

3. A King who assumes the obligations of his people

In Zechariah 9, in verse 9 the prophet says the bit about the king riding into the city on a donkey and then in verses 10-11 he goes on to say:

“he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” (Zechariah 9:10–11 ESV)

What does that sound like?

It sounds very much like the words we say every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper:

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:25 ESV)

He's talking about the cross – he's talking about one of the oldest lines of anticipation in Holy Scripture. Flip back in your Bibles to Genesis 15 for just a minute. The Gospel is like a snowball that gets bigger and bigger as it rolls across the pages of Holy Scripture. Most of the promises start off kind of obscure and mysterious but then, stage by stage and age by age they gain clarity until finally, they all land gloriously and climactically upon the person and work of Christ. Well, so it is here. In the Book of Genesis God makes a bunch of really amazing promises to Abraham: I will make out of you a great nation. Through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed. There will be prosperity, there will be peace, you will walk before me and I will be your God, it will be amazing!

But – there was a condition.

All of these promises would require perfect obedience and holiness. That's the nature of the covenant. God doesn't bless sin – if the Bible is clear about anything, it is clear about that. So how will all of this come to pass? How will Abraham and his descendants keep up their end of the bargain? That's the question hanging in the air in Genesis 15.

So God tells Abraham to take a bunch of sacrificial animals and to cut them in two. He is to slaughter them and to pull them apart so that the path between him and God is splattered in blood. Abraham knew this ritual well – it was a common part of the covenant cutting ceremony used to bond noblemen to their King in the ancient world. The nobles would walk through the pieces – down the pathway of blood – and they would pronounce a self-maledictory curse upon themselves: thus shall it be done to me if I do not fulfil my covenant obligations to the king.

Abraham was preparing himself to make that walk. He wanted all that God was offering – he wanted the kingdom, he wanted the peace, he wanted the prosperity and he knew that only God

could give those things – but the question in his mind was: “How in the world am I ever going to hold up my end of the bargain? I’m basically signing my own death warrant here. I’ll never be able to do this.”

Do you remember how that story ends?

Abraham was tending the pathway – he was literally batting the birds away who wanted to feast on the carcasses – but then all of the sudden God dropped him! He put him into a deep sleep and he came to him in a vision. Genesis 15:17 tells it this way:

“When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.” (Genesis 15:17 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

God – under the figures of fire and flame – passes through the pieces on Abraham’s behalf! God himself walks down the pathway of blood! He is telling Abraham that he will assume Abraham’s side of the bargain! He will guarantee both sides of this world changing deal.

That’s the Gospel!

The Gospel is God’s promise that he will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves – he will fulfil our duties – he will pay our debts – he will settle our obligations – so that we can enjoy everything he created and intended us to enjoy.

He will do that!

The when, the how and the who are not provided in Genesis 15 – just the promise, that one day, some way, somewhere – he would come and fulfil the covenant in his own blood.

Do you see that?

Zechariah saw it. He saw Jesus riding up to that pathway on a donkey. He saw him coming in peace ready to make peace at the price of his own blood.

Of course, the disciples didn't see that at the time – but when it was all over, they understood. Jesus is the King of Peace! Jesus is the King of humility! Jesus is the King of the nations and he has come to assume the obligations of all his covenant people – thanks be to God!

The fourth and final thing I think we can say with confidence here is that Jesus is:

4. A King in perfect obedience and submission to his Heavenly Father

Look again at the heart of the passage, John 12:14-16:

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” ¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that **these things had been written about him** and had been done to him. (John 12:14–16 ESV)

Jesus FOUND the donkey – he set this up! He didn't just happen to be riding a donkey that day – it was DELIBERATE, it was PLANNED, it was ON PURPOSE. Why? Because the Scriptures had spoken of it!! Jesus lived every day, he took every step IN ACCORDANCE with the Scriptures!!!

Think of how many times the Apostles pointed that out to us over the course of the passion narrative. Even the words he spoke as he hung upon the cross were carefully chosen by him SO AS TO FULFILL THE SCRIPTURES.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” (John 19:28 ESV)

The Scripture he is referring to there is Psalm 22:15 which says:

“My strength is dried up, like a potsherd; and my tongue is glued to my throat; and thou hast brought me down to the dust of the death.” (Psalms 21:15 LXX-B)

So as he is dying, Jesus remembers a line in a Psalm about Messiah being very thirsty and dried up even unto death – and he doesn’t want to leave anything unfulfilled so he asks for a drink so as to fulfil down to the smallest detail every single line of Messianic expectation contained in the pages of Holy Scripture. That’s the level of detail we’re talking about here. Jesus was meticulously obedient to every word and intention of his Heavenly Father.

And he wanted us to see that. He said:

“I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.” (John 8:28 ESV)

Everything I do, everything I say is in accordance with the Father’s will and authority. That’s the kind of King that Jesus is – and that is the kind of King this world has been waiting for!! That’s the kind of King that ADAM was supposed to be – do you understand that? Adam was supposed to rule over all creation UNDER the guidance and authority of God’s Word – but he didn’t want that deal. He wanted to rule under his own word and authority – he wanted to decide right and wrong for himself! And so reaching up, he fell down, and all humanity has been falling down with him ever since!

We need salvation!

We need rescue!

We need redemption!

We need a King who will obey God perfectly and who will rule over all things for GOD’S EVERLASTING glory and our everlasting good.

Do you want that kind of King?

Because there is only one King like that and his name is Jesus!

He is the King who loves his enemies and who offers even those who hate him the chance to repent and to be included in his everlasting kingdom.

He is the King of humility who comes in lowliness to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

He is the King who assumes all the debts, obligations and duties of his covenant people. He comes to do for us what we could never do for ourselves and to pay for what we have done in his body on the cross.

He is the King who delights to do his Father's will and who won't take a single step, say a single word – or even take a single sip of water without his Father's say so.

That's the kind of King that Jesus is – I wonder if you know him today.

If you know him – then follow him! Turn away from politicians and power brokers, CEOs and cultural influences – and look to Christ! See him on the donkey, see him washing the disciples feet, see him praying for the little ones, seeing hanging on the cross, giving his life as a ransom for many.

And if you don't him – if you haven't received him as your Lord and Savior then I am pleading with you – do that right now, do that today! You can trust him! You've seen him in the Scriptures and he is still that kind of King today and his invitation still stands. Jesus says:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
(Matthew 11:28 ESV)

He can give that to you – and he is the only one who can.

So come. Come today. Come now. Because at some point in the future the gates to his kingdom will close and all those who have rejected his kind invitation will be left outside, in the dark, in their sins, away from God forever.

So come.

Come unto Jesus – your loving, humble, gracious, obedient King and be saved.

Thanks be to God, let's pray together.