

Matt. 21:1-11 (Matt. 20:25-26)

March 10, 2019

(Zechariah 9:9)

Philippians 2:5-11

Psalms 118:22-29

Sunday: He Undermines Establishment

In a few weeks we'll celebrate Palm Sunday – praising Jesus who entered Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, hailed as the new king of Israel. Today, in our series on the eight days leading up to His passion, we're getting a preview of what that celebrated day meant then and means to us today. Unlike the expectations, He is a humble king who enters into our lives today offering to take away our sin ... if we will receive Him.

Last week we saw how Jesus was celebrated at a dinner party in Bethany, at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary anointed him with precious, performed oil in gratitude for what He had done for them: He had raised Lazarus from the dead. *"She has done a beautiful thing to me..."* Jesus said of her extravagant act. Have you done a beautiful thing for Jesus? given Him your all?

Jesus also said something that probably no one at the party was even thinking: *"... she has anointed my body beforehand for the burial."* Why would anyone be thinking about his burial? He knew, of course, what was to come: that he would challenge the authorities, religious and political, and would suffer for it, but His suffering had a purpose for by His death He would redeem humanity from its sinful way. Yet no one else understood what He was about to do, nor did they fully understand who He was.

Triumphal Entry

After the party in Bethany, and after the day of rest (Saturday, the Sabbath), Jesus and His disciples went into Jerusalem. It was Sunday. While they were in the village of Bethphage (between Bethany and Jerusalem) He sent two of His disciples to find the donkey and her colt and instructed them to bring them back. If anyone asked they were to say, *"The Lord has need of it; and immediately He will send it back here."* (Evidently the owner was a Jesus supporter).

All four Gospels tell of the triumphal entry; it is that significant. As you read this story, one impression stands forth: Jesus is in complete control of everything that happens on this day. He knew the crowds were fickle. He knew the leaders were plotting against him. He knew the cheers would soon turn to jeers. He knew on Sunday what would happen on Friday. He knew the cross lay directly in his path. He knew all those things but he went anyway.

It is now Sunday morning, five days before Passover. The historian Josephus says that during Passover the population of Jerusalem could swell to 3

million people (that seems an exaggeration, the numbers were great). Everyone who was anyone would show up for Passover. In such an atmosphere of festive anticipation stories would spread like wildfire. The raising of Lazarus was told and retold. People were abuzz with stories of Jesus' miracles, His teaching, and His way with people and God. They began to wonder if Jesus would come to Jerusalem for Passover (John 11:53). Everyone knew the tension that existed between Jesus and the Temple leaders. Add to that the general political ferment. There were the Pharisees who patiently endured Roman rule; the Zealots who didn't patiently endure anything, especially the hated Romans; the Sadducees who ran the Temple complex and cooperated with the Romans. Then there was the Romans themselves and their two key rulers, Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas, the "king of the Jews." He had gotten himself appointed king by bribing the Roman Senate ... and he wasn't even a Jew!

The crowd cheered Jesus as the rightful king who would free them from Rome's oppression. They chanted "Hosanna!" a Hebrew word meaning "Save us now" and Psalms for a king (Psalm 118). They called Him "son of David" indicating He was the rightful king of Israel. They waved palm branches and lay their cloaks on the road before him, maybe the most expensive thing they owned.

But one thing doesn't fit: the donkey. A conquering hero, a king, would ride on a stallion or a chariot. (Ex: Queen of England pulling up to Buckingham Palace on a moped.) Jesus could hardly have chosen a more unlikely way to present himself to the nation and to the world.

It's not hard to imagine the Romans laughing as they watched the spectacle. A pauper king, riding on a borrowed donkey's colt, his saddle a makeshift layer of cloaks, attended by an unruly mob whose only weapons were palm branches. He didn't look much like a king that day. That explains why the Romans sat idly by on this Sunday while tens of thousands of people flocked to Jesus. From their point of view the whole thing was a joke. A real king would ride a war stallion or a chariot, followed by disciplined soldiers. But that was the whole point. He's a king, but he's not like any they've ever seen.

Ride For A King

Yet Jesus knew who He was ... The King ... king of kings. And He knew the Scriptures: Zechariah 9:9 *"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,"* Matt. 21:5. The Prince of Peace did not arrive on a stallion or in a chariot of war. He did not come in earthly splendor or to reign in earthly power. He came in poverty not in wealth. He came in meekness not in grandeur. He came not to slay Israel's enemies but to give life to all humanity.

The Triumphal Entry was an “acted parable,” in which Jesus was sending a clear message to the nation. “I am your King, but I am not the King you were expecting!” Up to this time He had avoided any public declaration of His Messiah-ship. But today was the day of Jesus' self-declaration.

Jesus sat upon a colt that had never before been ridden, knowing that only unused animals could be used for sacrifices or sacred purposes. He entered Jerusalem as king and Messiah, who was also first Priest, knowing that He would become the sacrificial lamb of the Passover. This was the beginning of His road to the ultimate sacrifice. We might pause here and ask ourselves: am I willing to sacrifice for Him when He sacrificed all for me?

Because He was a King like no other king, His coronation was like no other coronation. His kingdom is not of this world. In a very real sense He was calling into question all earthly kingdoms. He was putting on notice all those in the establishment that His kingdom was arriving. His kingdom is a counterpoint to all earthly kingdoms, for He is the humble king ... more than laying down a cloak for someone, He laid down His life for all. Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on this Sunday was the establishment of His heavenly kingdom.

This King's Mission

What would this unlikely king accomplish? He came to conquer. He came to conquer two things that no other king, no general, no power on earth could ever conquer no matter how strong they are or how hard they tried. He came to conquer sin and death, and triumph over guilt and shame. The sin in our nature is that desire to turn away from God, the Source of life. As people turn from God, their problems pile up and the guilt and shame nags away the fun of it.

How will He conquer sin and death, guilt and shame? Through humility: “... *he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*” Philippians 2:8-9.

Even to the point of dying on a cross – the most shameful of punishments. He humbled himself before all, in order to take the penalty of sin for all, that He might redeem all, thereby conquering all sin that leads to death. His ultimate defeat of our ultimate enemy came from His sacrifice for us on the cross. “*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...*” Phil. 2:9. He did more than lay down a cloak for us to cover the dirt of sin that we walk through every day. He laid down His life to wash it away forever.

Jesus was commissioned to be just such a King: “*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him,*” Acts 10:38. He came riding on a colt of a donkey because He came as a gentle and humble

king showing how God approaches us, He came as a sacrifice for our sins, and He came as a righteous king bringing salvation to His people.

Truth Be Told

This whole concept of conquering sin and death through humility seems preposterous to many. Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard: “The truth must essentially be regarded as in conflict with this world; the world has never been so good, and will never become so good that the majority will ever desire the truth.”

Jesus is the one who said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*” The world that rejected Christ then still rejects Him today. The people of the world hate religious emotion just like the Pharisees hated the way the crowds cheered Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. They hate religious emotion because they do not understand it; to them religion is an intellectual affair that never touches the heart. But Jesus will have none of that. If a man or a woman will not give Him his/her heart, Jesus wants no part of him/her. The early Methodists were called “enthusiasts” because of their heart-felt passion for salvation in Christ, which they sang and shouted. Sometimes they were called “shouting Methodists.” They expected and experienced supernatural manifestations of God’s power in their lives. Where are we today? Are we afraid of Holy Spirit action among us?

This King’s Subjects

In church we’ve come to expect our leaders to be humble yet strong, self-giving but not self-righteous, following the model of Jesus. This is a good thing, as every Christian (whether a leader or not) should be seeking be more like Jesus. What happens when Christian leaders are not humble or abuse their power? What message do we give to our neighbors when we do not model our behavior after Jesus? “If you plan to build high houses of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility” – St. Augustine.

In a few weeks we’ll celebrate Palm Sunday, Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Let us do so fully knowing who He really is, and what His kingdom really means for us. If Jesus is king, then He must be king over all aspects of our lives ... our tongues, our bodies, our time, our money, our work, our leisure, our families. If He is not king over all, He is not king at all.

Phil. 2: 6 “*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage...*”

When this is so, His kingdom comes into our lives and ripples out to all around us.