

THE KING'S ARRIVAL

March 25, 2018 | Pastor Keith Jenkins

Today's message marks the beginning of holy week when we commemorate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

*"Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!"
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant." (Matthew 21:1-14)

NOT YOUR TYPICAL ENTRANCE

He doesn't ride into Jerusalem to promote himself. He comes humbly on a donkey. If he were interested in self-promotion, he made His entry at the perfect time, the Passover. All of Israel would assemble in the capital for that festival. How you make an entrance says something about you. It sets expectations. This entrance seems unlike for a king like Jesus, but this is not self-promotion. It's a fulfillment of Scripture:

"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. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9-10)

Jerusalem was occupied by Rome at this time and the Passover Festival was considered a dangerous time by the Romans. They worried about the unusually large gathering of an occupied people, the possibility of a riot, or even a revolt and an attempted overthrow of Roman rule. As a result, there would be a show of force by the occupying army. Pilate would enter Jerusalem at Passover with all of the pomp and power of a conquering hero.



Pilate entered with an army. Jesus, who had no earthly weapons, rode into the city on a donkey. He didn't come to claim territory, but to claim hearts.



However, if you were a Jew in Roman-ruled Jerusalem, you would have expected the Messiah to come with an army. As Isaiah points out (Isaiah 55:8-9), God's thoughts and ways are higher than our expectations. Jesus' Kingdom was to be established in hearts first, not territory. The people of Israel wanted a king who would save them from the Romans. But Jesus came to save them from something else, the domination and death of sin. The people of Jerusalem didn't get the king they wanted, but the one humanity needed.

AN UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM

Have you ever perceived things differently from God? It's like God to confound our expectations. This includes His ideas of royalty and kingdom. Jesus arrives not to sit on the throne, but came and serves the vulnerable in the temple and cleans out those who are oppressing others.

When we talk about the rule of Jesus, we must first talk about his rule in our hearts. From that place, Jesus influences the surrounding culture through His people, who voluntarily surrender to His lordship for the sake of God's Kingdom. They are not compelled by external power, but moved by the indwelling Spirit.

A ROYAL WELCOME

Jesus' first use of His authority is to cleanse the temple. But immediately after that, the blind and the lame come to him and are healed. This is a beautiful picture of who can come to Him in their brokenness. In contrast to Pilate, who used the power of Rome to keep everyone at bay, Jesus openly welcomes the people. He not only receives the powerful (for example, Nicodemus in John 3) as other kings would, but welcomes all. He invites the sinners, weary, broken, outcast, and the needy:

"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

"On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" (Matthew 9:9-13)

Because He is secure in the identity God, the Father, gave him (Matthew 3:16-17) Jesus was openly for others, regardless of their "label". Sometimes we give people labels, names, or titles, and in doing so we can dehumanize them. Names like leftist, right-wing, immigrant, refugee, LGBTQ or transgender, etc. Who have we dehumanized by naming them? The people who were named and dismissed as outcast came to Jesus (the blind and the lame). We need to remove titles and see people as broken people made in the image of God who God can resurrect like He resurrected us.

THREE TAKE-AWAYS FROM PALM SUNDAY

1. Jesus only agenda was to do the will of His Father.

Jesus was in perfect harmony with the will of God, and His example motivates our own response. When we are not in step with God's will, our motives are suspect. We are easily driven by a different agenda other than the will of God. There is no way Jesus can do what he does in his ministry without surrendering to the will of His Father. But how? We see the lively work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus life after His baptism by John. The Spirit is the One who reveals God's heart (1 Corinthians 2:10) and Jesus did only what the Spirit revealed of His Father's deepest desires (John 5:19). The Spirit is the One who comes upon God's people in power that they may do the works of Jesus, building His Kingdom (Acts 1:8, Acts 10:38, Matthew 28:19).

2. Jesus rides into Jerusalem not for power, but from power.

Jesus has all power and authority (Matthew 28:18), but He is meek and humble and only uses the power given Him in harmony with the will of the Father. We should use any power or influence we have in the same way, always to benefit people without a voice or power.

There is coming a day when Jesus will ride on a war horse and vanquish His enemies, though (Rev. 19:11-16). Until then, we are His "army", the people of God who willingly work at furthering the Kingdom of Heaven. As we contemplate the humility and accessibility of King Jesus, remembering His last days before the Cross, can we recommit our hearts to Him? To His example, and use what power we have to serve others, not ourselves.

3. The accessibility of our King:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

In the Kingdom of God, humility always precedes exultation. The way up is down. The way to gain our lives, is to lose our lives. Jesus was the perfect example of this upside down humility. In the Ancient Near East, it was common that no one would be allowed into the presence of a king without being summoned (Esther 4:10-11).

But the humility of Jesus makes a way for all to come boldly into the Presence of God, the King of Kings (Phil. 2:5-11, Heb. 4:14-16). We should never find ourselves afraid of Jesus, but instead we should anticipate His pleasure when we come into His Presence. Look again at the smile on his face in this depiction of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem.



May we welcome the King's arrival anew into our hearts. Everyone is welcome to come to Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who are the people to whom you have given names or titles which dehumanize them?
- 2) What influence (power) do you have? How can you use it to serve those in need who cannot return the favor?
- 3) Consider Jesus motive in cleansing the temple. What in your heart needs His cleansing touch?
- 4) What areas in your life do you still want to submit to God's will? Where are you holding out?