

The King on a Donkey

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[0 : 0 0] everyone in his word, and everyone needs to hear what God has to say. And so it's with that that we turn. We're in Luke chapter 19 today. If you've been with us, you know that we've been in the book of Nehemiah, and we're going to finish the book of Nehemiah. Don't worry, I'm not ending early just because there's one more list of names.

But because this is Palm Sunday, and we're looking forward to Easter next week, we're going to take a quick jump out to remember the final week, Jesus before his death and his resurrection.

And as we come to this passage in the gospel of Luke, this is in Luke chapter 19, but it was all the way back in Luke chapter 9 that we found out that Jesus, the author of Luke, tells us that he set his face towards Jerusalem. In other words, Jesus set his intentions, his desire, his purpose was to make it to Jerusalem for this very reason that he would die for the sins of his people.

And so as he's going along for the last 10 chapters in the gospel of Luke, as he's teaching, as he is healing, as he's performing miracles, all of it is in the context of him heading towards Jerusalem. All of it is towards his purpose of heading towards Jerusalem. While many people might think or say that they believe that Jesus is a good man or a great teacher, it would be an insult to Jesus to say that he was just teaching or performing out of context. When the author of Luke tells us over and over again, not just in chapter 9, but then in chapter 13 and 17 and 18, that Jesus slowly and steadily, as he teaches, as he interacts with people, has one mission. And that is to make it all the way to Jerusalem. And the reason he is there is so that he can die for his people. Now even as Jesus is making this journey, many people still misunderstand, even his followers misunderstand where we're picking up.

We're going to start in verse 28 of chapter 19, and Jesus has just told another parable right before it. And in that parable at the beginning, in verse 11, tells us that he told them a parable because he was near to Jerusalem, so he's on his way to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. In other words, as Jesus was going around preaching and teaching, as he was making his way to Jerusalem, while he knew what he was heading towards, there were many people who believed that the kingdom that he was teaching about was something that was going to happen immediately.

[2 : 3 3] Once Jesus came and entered Jerusalem, he was going to give them the political victory that they longed for. He was going to overthrow the Roman Empire. Every form of oppression that they experienced would be broken.

And so Jesus has just told them a parable to try to lower their expectations, that they would know that the kingdom is not going to appear immediately. Everything that he's come to bring, everything they want and long for, is not going to happen in that moment, just because Jesus is entering Jerusalem.

As we come to this passage, the triumphal entry, the time when Jesus actually enters the city that he is the king of, the city of Jerusalem, we're going to see two things. First of all, that Jesus is much less than we want.

Jesus is much less than we want. We're also going to see that Jesus is more than we could imagine. He's less than we want on the one hand, and he's more than we could imagine on the other.

On the one hand, he does not meet our expectations. On the other hand, he greatly exceeds them. And so it's with that that we turn to Luke chapter 9, starting at verse 28.

[3 : 49] You can follow along if you're with your worship guide. It's near the end. You can follow along on your phone. You can follow along in your Bibles. But we're going to start. And remember as we come to this passage that this is God's word.

And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so it's with that reminder that we begin in verse 28. And when he had said these things, he went on ahead going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethpage and Bethany at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the 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 yet 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? Verse 34. 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.

[5 : 07] 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, Lord, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that Jesus is a king, and he's not just a king, but he is the king.

We ask that you would come this morning, and you would help us to see him, even as he doesn't meet our expectations, as a king that is greater, and more glorious, and more beautiful than any other king.

And that we would be willing to follow him, and have faith in him, and trust him, and obey him for the rest of our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[6 : 31] At the beginning of this passage, Jesus is finishing his journey to Jerusalem. He is approaching from the east, heading west. That's what's happening as he draws near here to Bethpage and Bethany.

This is a suburb on the east side of Jerusalem. So he's completing his journey. He's traveling in. And he sends his disciples ahead of him, because what he's about to do is enter the king of Jerusalem, like a king.

The Romans were very familiar with a conquering king coming in to the city of Jerusalem, or any city really, after that they had finished a time of war, after they'd vanquished someone, they would come in with their triumph.

And so that's why this is called the triumphal entry, because Jesus is acting here like a Roman king coming with his victory behind him. And so he does what a king would do. He sends his disciples to find something for him to ride on.

And since he is the king and everything belongs to him, he has no problem with him taking the donkey, this colt here, from whoever they need it from. In fact, he anticipates that someone's going to ask them why it is that they are taking this away.

[7 : 38] And this answer seems to be sufficient, just to say, the Lord has need of it. And of course, that's exactly what they say in verse 33. The owners ask them, why are you taking our colt? He says, well, the Lord has need of it.

And no further explanation is needed, because this is a king who is taking his property. Everything belongs to him, because this is his kingdom. And then they continue to treat Jesus as a king, throwing their cloaks down on the donkey, throwing their cloaks down on the road.

They're giving him a sign of submission. This is how they show a king that he is the one who rules over them. Now, it doesn't specifically use the word donkey here. In this passage, it just says a colt, but we know from the other gospel accounts that this is the colt of a donkey.

And this is what Jesus is going to ride in as he comes in his triumphal entry into the city that is his, the city over which he is supposed to be a king. And we don't see it explicitly in this passage, but we also know from the other gospels that he is the king people come, as our children did earlier this morning, with palm branches to lay before him.

And so while the cloaks were a sign of their submission to him as a king, the palm branches were a sign of Jewish pride and nationalism. In other words, as they threw these palm branches down and they threw these cloaks down, believing that the kingdom was near, that it was going to come immediately, as I mentioned in verse 11 before, the hope and the desire and the expectation is that Jesus, as he comes in, is going to make Israel great again.

[9 : 14] They're putting down the sign of Jewish nationalism. They've been under Roman rule for too long. They've never been able to restore their political boundaries after the exile.

And so the hope and the celebration is that Jesus would come and finally make, politically, everything right. And just as their expectations are off, Jesus' entry is off as well.

Just as their expectations are wrong, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is also wrong. Because while he's following the pattern of a Roman general, he's made one mistake.

If you're a Roman general, you don't come in riding the cult of a donkey. Instead, you come in riding a mighty war horse.

And so while Jesus is playing into this known pattern on the one hand, he is disrupting it and disappointing it on the other. He's signaling what his disciples will not fully understand until after his resurrection, which is that he is a very different kind of king.

[10 : 29] He is not entering into Jerusalem to conquer it on a war horse. Instead, he's entering on a donkey because instead of conquering it, he is going to die.

And so while the crowds right now are cheering him on, there will come a time in just a few days where instead the crowds will cry out for him to be crucified. And while they don't realize it now, this is a king and a donkey and an entry that will be very, very disappointing.

They are looking for the fall of Rome and that is not going to happen. At least not right now. And so we have a bunch of crowds here, people cheering on that either are right now or will very soon be disappointed in Jesus.

Have you ever been disappointed in Jesus? Maybe you started following Jesus and you thought that if you were just a Christian, if you were obedient, it would guarantee that your children would not make horrific mistakes.

Maybe you thought that if you followed Jesus and you were faithful and obedient, it would mean that you could actually be on the winning side of every argument. You could always be right.

[12 : 04] Maybe you thought that if you followed Jesus, you could be a part of taking back America for God. Maybe you thought that following Jesus meant that Jesus would provide you a marriage in which there was no baggage.

Maybe you thought that following after Jesus meant that your life would not be confusing anymore. You would always know the next thing to do. You would always know the right path to take and the right decision to make.

Maybe you thought that following after Jesus, that Jesus being the king meant that you would not face devastating heartbreak and loss in this life.

Jesus can, at times, be very, very disappointing. When we long for him to come in on a war horse, often he comes in instead on a donkey.

Jesus is not interested in giving you your best life now. Jesus is not interested in taking back America for God.

[13 : 20] That is, one country, one area, one nation. That's actually too small of a vision for God. He wasn't interested in taking back Jerusalem for God from the Romans. Jesus is not interested in the political power that so many Christians long for.

In fact, this is part of what's happening in this chapter is that they believe that Jesus is going to bring in a political kingdom for them. He's going to do away with the Romans. And the problem isn't that their expectations are too high, it's that they're too low.

Jesus is interested in so much more than the Roman Empire. And so what we want to happen in the short term, Jesus has decided is going to happen in the long term.

Jesus is not going to fix everything right now. And so Jesus often comes in on a donkey when what we want is a king on a war horse.

If you are not a Christian, if you're someone who has doubts and questions and objections about Christianity, this might be part of the reason, that Jesus is disappointing. If you think that following after a savior, a man, who rather than being politically victorious, died, and then some people claim raised from the dead, if you think that is foolish, you know what the apostle Paul says?

[14 : 56] He says, you're right. Some people think this is really foolish because it goes against everything that this world wants and expects. Oftentimes, the gospel also looks like a donkey when we want a war horse.

And so as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1, Jesus and the gospel are on the one hand a joke to some people, they're foolish and offensive to others, and at the heart of it, what Jesus does here does not make sense to us.

If you find that it is disappointing and foolish to think that a place where people come together and sing songs and read an ancient book together is actually the most powerful place in the world, then I understand.

If you believe that a place where people come together and sing songs and read an ancient book is the most powerful place in the world, then I understand because it looks a lot like a donkey. We long for a war horse.

And so Jesus is often disappointing. He's going to disappoint many people in the next week of his life. He's going to be confusing for the disciples when he dies.

[16 : 21] He is risen from the dead. And so Jesus is often much less than we want or expect.

The problem is that Jesus is also a king. And while on the one hand he's disappointing, on the other hand he is more than we could ever imagine.

he disappoints us with our expectations. He also surprises us when he exceeds our expectations. That he is a greater king than they could expect.

That while they want the Roman Empire to be thrown over and turned down, Jesus has so much more in mind. He has not been journeying for ten chapters towards Jerusalem for the small and piddly goal of overthrowing the Roman Empire.

And so while we have these crowds praising him, some of them disappointed, others know what Jesus is capable of. He's not going to overthrow the Roman Empire but he can raise people from the dead.

[17 : 36] He did that with Lazarus in John chapter 11. He can heal the blind and the mute. And so that's what we see in verse 37 and 38. 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.

In other words, while these people were at times confused about Jesus' mission and his purposes, they were there when he raised Lazarus from the dead. They were there when he gave the blind man sight.

They were there when he made a lame man walk. They knew how powerful Jesus was. They just didn't understand how he was going to use his power.

And so they cry out in verse 38, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And they're right. They're right that Jesus is more, much more than they could ever imagine or expect or think.

He's not going to bring them the liberation that they want, but he is going to bring them the liberation that they need. He's not going to overthrow the Roman Empire, but he is going to overthrow the power and penalty of sin in their lives.

[18 : 56] He's not going to reign and rule over one country or one nation, but he is coming so that one day he will rule over every country and every nation.

And so their hopes are simply not high enough. because Jesus is less than the king they expect because he comes in on a donkey. He's also more than the king they expect, not just because of his works, but because of what we find out at the very end.

This last verse here of our section is what I think is maybe one of the most astounding claims in all of the Gospels. The Pharisees, Jesus' opponents, upset by the fact that he's being praised, come and tell him to tell his disciples to sit down and be quiet.

Verse 39, and some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, teacher, rebuke your disciples. And Jesus answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

he's not like other kings because he comes in on a donkey. He is also not like other kings because he demands praise and honor and glory.

[20 : 21] Unlike any Roman king who ever came in on a war horse, Jesus must be praised. There are many kings who came in on many war horses that you and I do not know the names of.

And there is no one around the world right now singing their praises. But Jesus tells the Pharisees that if he told his disciples to be quiet it would be futile because his need the demand for God to be praised is so serious.

It is so ingrained in the fabric of the universe that if people who God has put on earth as his representatives if people cease to praise God then the creation will have to step up and fill our place.

Now you could argue that Jesus is using hyperbole here that he's exaggerating I don't think he is.

If everyone around the world stopped praising God I believe what Jesus is telling us is that the earth would have to come and step in and fill the gap.

[21 : 32] That is how glorious and powerful and majestic this king is. Other kings would be praised for a time or for a day.

Other kings who came in with real time political victories. But this king is not going to be praised for a day. He is going to be praised forever.

And so he is disappointing. He's also surprising. I mentioned earlier that if you think that it's foolish to believe that people who gather in a place and sing songs and read an ancient book are actually doing the most powerful thing in the world.

We don't just gather here together and sing songs on a Sunday morning because that's what church people do. We gather together and sing songs because God demands our praise.

And if we stop, the very rocks will have to take over. And he demands our praise because he is greater than any earthly king.

[22 : 45] He's greater than any Roman general or emperor who could come in to Jerusalem or Rome or any other city. And so he's more than we could imagine.

if we are disappointed in Jesus it's because he's not interested in providing us with comfort. He's interested in giving us joy.

If we are disappointed in Jesus it's because he is not interested in taking back America for God but he is interested in one day taking back the entire world. If we're disappointed in Jesus it's not because he's uninterested in solving a few injustices or healing a few wrongs.

It's not that he doesn't care about that but he is coming back to heal every injustice and every wrong. He's not interested in overthrowing the Roman Empire because he's not interested in a political victory in one time or one place but he's interested in complete and total victory everywhere in every place.

If Jesus is disappointing it's in the manner of his victory. If he's surprising it's in the results. And the catch is this it's only by disappointing us that Jesus can surprise us.

[24 : 17] It's only by dashing our expectations that he can exceed them because imagine for a second that Jesus had come in on a war horse coming to have victory and conquer all of his enemies.

If Jesus had come in on a war horse and skipped his death and his resurrection then his victory would not be good news for anyone. If Jesus had come in first on a war horse he would have brought full and final and complete justice.

And the bad news is that that would have included every single one hope for what we want what these people want for Jesus to do is the last thing that is good for them.

Because if Jesus comes as a conqueror without first dying for the sins of his people there is going to be no hope for Israel. Because for both people who are Israelites and people who are Gentiles for people who are outside the church and people who are inside the church the only hope that we have is that when Jesus brings his full and final justice we will be able to say that he has taken the penalty for us.

And so it's the disappointing king it's the king that comes on a donkey that we need and it's only the king that comes in on a donkey who can provide us with the true victory that we want.

[25 : 45] The good news is he came to die so that he could pay the penalty for our sins and so that whoever has faith and hope and trust in Jesus and follows after him would receive life rather than death.

But the good news is also this Jesus is coming again and when he comes again he is not going to come on a donkey. Revelation chapter 19 gives us a picture of Jesus coming again to judge the earth and what is he riding?

He's on a white horse. The king coming in on a donkey is not the end of the story. It's the coming in on a donkey that makes his entry on a horse good news.

Because in Revelation 19 he's not coming to die. The ones who are dying are his enemies. He's not coming to overthrow the Roman empire. He's coming to overthrow anyone and everything that stands against him and his rule.

And so what they long for it's going to come. It's just not going to come in this moment because first it has to come through Jesus death and his resurrection.

[27 : 12] And so that is why Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem. That he could be the greatest king. That the rocks would cry out and they would cry out because he is greater and more powerful than any other king.

He is more worthy of praise than any other king. He has more grace and more love than any other king. Not only because he is capable of dying and rising from the dead but because he chooses to.

Because he does it for the sake of his people. And so if we're disappointed in Jesus we thought he was going to provide us more here and now this passage reminds us that he is coming with more more than we could ever expect or imagine.

He is coming to make everything right but he has to do it for our sake through his death and his resurrection. And so that's why we worship him as the king.

That's why the rocks will cry out if we do not. And that's why he can bring us life and joy and peace.

[28 : 30] He can bring us what these disciples praise him for. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And so that's exactly what we are going to do as we end.

We are going to sing a song about a king. We're going to sing a song about a king eternal. That's our first verse which means he's not just a king for one time and one place.

He's a king for all time. We're going to sing about sin's fierce war ceasing that not just some injustice is going to come to an end but all injustice will.

And then we're going to sing about deeds of love and mercy which reminds us of Jesus love and mercy for us that his justice is only good news if Jesus took the punishment for us.

And so that's why we're going to say at the end thy cross is lifted o'er us we journey in its light the crown awaits the conquest lead on O God of might because this is the king the disappointing king on a donkey is the one that we follow and trust and obey because he is the one for whom the very rocks will cry out.

[29 : 39] Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven we thank you that you are a greater king than we could ever want or imagine.

We ask that you would again show you might and your glory and your majesty so that we would see you for who you truly are. A king who was humble and laid his life down so that he could lift us up.

We ask all these things not because we have earned them but because Jesus our king through his death and his resurrection have earned them for us. And so we ask them in his name.

Amen.