

“HE WAS, AND IS . . . KING” **(John 12:12-19, Luke 19:39-40)**

4.14.19

INTRODUCTION

In our world today, we have many forms of government. Our own government is a democracy, meaning “government of the people.” The people who form our government are largely in their positions due to freely-held elections. We just went through that process last November. The nation of India is just beginning an election process that will last sometime into May. We also have dictators, rulers who have absolute and total control over a country. Sometimes that is the result of a takeover by force; sometimes it is done through means of the decree of government. Adolf Hitler became the dictator of Germany largely through constitutional means. Vladimir Putin is essentially a dictator in Russia, even though there is technically a people’s government in place. Often these dictators hold on to their power with the aid of the military, the control of the media, and the spying networks (not to mention the fear) of state or secret police.

Now there are also kings (and queens) in our world, but far less than in previous times, and often these monarchs are figureheads, with some form of government actually doing the work of the people. These are called “constitutional monarchies”; Queen Elizabeth in England would be a good example: She rules her country, but the actual power of governing belongs to her Prime Minister and the members of Parliament.

Of course, in earlier times of human history, kings or queens were absolute rulers, governing their kingdoms with complete authority over all matters of national life. Now today’s story is also about a ruler, a king, but of a completely different nature and style of leadership. But He is undeniably still a king. So, let’s take a look at a moment in the life of Christ where He seemed to actually be recognized for what He was: a King!

TEXT

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival (Passover) heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! (Psalm 118:25, 26) Blessed is the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your King is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt (Zechariah 9:9).” At first His disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Him and that these things had been done to Him. Now the crowd that was with Him when He called Lazarus from the tomb and raised Him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that He had performed this sign, went out to meet Him. So, the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after Him!” . . . Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!” “I tell you,” He replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” — John 12:12-19; Luke 19:39-40. So, let’s unpack this a little bit:

It is thought that the population of Jerusalem during Passover would have increased from a base of somewhere around 40-50, maybe even 60,000 to somewhere around 5-600,000 people with all the pilgrims coming into town for the Passover celebration.

Now, because the events of Holy Week are told with different perspectives as well as degrees of detail, we need to look at Matthew, Mark, and Luke's account to see that, in addition to the branches cut from trees that John mentions, people were spreading garments on the road in front of Jesus. The spreading of garments was an ancient symbol of recognizing royalty that went back some eight centuries to the era of the kings; when the Lord pronounced a man named Jehu [je-hu[^]] to be the king of Israel, his men ***quickly took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!"*** — ***II Kings 9:13***. Palm branches were considered a long-standing Jewish national symbol and would have been used to wave at Jesus in the recognition of a king or in the celebration of a conqueror over an enemy. Now the crowd this day may have had two motivations for their joy:

First, John tells us that there were some in the crowd who had been at the tomb of Lazarus and seen that amazing miracle, an incredible moment that had actually happened just a short time before and just a short distance away. Now the people who had witnessed that event hadn't been able to keep quiet about it, and now the guy who supposedly accomplished this incredible feat is arriving in town? Shoot; I'm going to go see Him, too! Just like celebrity today, you feel like you gotta check it out if somebody famous is around.

Second, we can't forget that there was a growing sense of people openly wondering if this Jesus of Nazareth might actually be the long-awaited Messiah [SCENE FROM "JESUS OF NAZARETH"]. But at the same time, we can't forget what "messiah" meant for the Jews of first-century Palestine: liberation of their homeland from the hated Romans and restoration of the glorious power and influence of the Israel of David and Solomon.

The arrival of Jesus on a young colt contradicted all these assumptions of what the Messiah should be like. Instead of riding into Jerusalem on a magnificent horse and celebrating the greatness of victories and military genius, Jesus arriving as He did signaled instead both peace and humility. Riding on a humble beast of burden reflected His own humility. And as He came riding on the colt, the offspring of the donkey, that would have underscored the gentle humility of this Messiah even more. Now prophetically, the picture of a king riding on a donkey would have been nothing new; long ago the Scriptures presented the picture of a king of Israel arriving in that manner. Jacob had prophesied concerning his son Judah: ***"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch"*** — ***Jacob, Genesis 49:10-11a***. But beyond this, OT prophecies stressed the peculiar nature of this king, as personified by Christ's humble arrival in Jerusalem. The whole of the prophet Zechariah's prophecy said: ***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 — Zechariah 9:9. And the prophet goes on to say: *He will proclaim peace to the nations — Zechariah 9:10b.* While this might not have aligned with the Jews' earthly view of the Messiah, His arrival was spot on as to aligning with the Scriptures' picture of this conquering ruler: *He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart — Isaiah 40:11a.* And the only empire He is interested in conquering is the empire of sin. In that regard, He absolutely will be a conqueror, and worthy of all glory and praise.

But at the same time that all this is going on, can't you almost feel the total frustration and exasperation of the religious leaders? Talk about failure: Every time they had tried to trick Him with questions — "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" — His answers had left them speechless. Every time they had presented Him with a situation they hoped would leave Him tripping all over Himself — the question of whether or not to pay taxes to Caesar, the woman caught in adultery — they were the ones that wound up looking like idiots. And the signs and wonders: What in the world could you do about those? They were too many, too often, and seen by far too many people to deny them. And now, all these crowds shouting all this praise. No wonder it seemed like the whole world was wrapped around His little finger. And, of course, in the background were the ever-present Roman authorities, supported by all those soldiers they saw everyday. The religious leaders had to be nervously asking themselves: What would the Romans be thinking about such a display of nationalism?

In the meantime, Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem for the last week of His ministry prior to the cross. And, unlike other times during the course of His ministry, when He deflected people's desires to proclaim His works and maybe even His identity, on this particular day He received the praise of the people; He accepted without reservation the words from the Psalms directed His way — even to the point of telling the religious leaders that, even if the crowd were to go silent, nature itself would erupt in praises to Him. What an amazing day that must have been!

APPLICATION

Jesus came into Jerusalem as a king worthy of worship, accepting the praise of the crowds and even the references to His majesty from the Scriptures. Two thousand years later, He is still that king. So, what kind of a king is Jesus? Exactly how does He rule? What are some highlights of His reign? Let's look at four specific things:

First, Jesus' reign is caring. Certainly, most contemporary rulers, whether presidents or prime ministers or dictators, even if they are deeply concerned for the welfare of their people, are simply too far removed from the individual lives of those they lead to know what is happening in all those lives. But not Jesus: A hallmark of His rule is His awareness of each individual. No matter gender, age, strengths, weaknesses, He knows us all intimately — as no one else could. In the Old Testament, the writer of Psalm 33 said: *From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on earth — Psalm 33:13-14.* In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews observed: *Nothing in all creation is hidden from*

God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account — Hebrews 4:13. That's part of what makes His grace towards us so amazing. He knows everything about us yet loves and cares for us completely.

Therefore, the Scriptures tell us:

Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken — David, Psalm 55:22.

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him — Nahum 1:7.

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you — I Peter 5:7

Second, Jesus' reign is consistent. One of the things we often see in governments in changes in policy and, of course, when an election brings in a new government or group of leaders, policies can change very quickly. Jesus' reign is always the same. He is not motivated by pleasing His base or positioning Himself for better electability. How He rules, how He leads His people, is always the same. The author of Psalm 10 declared: ***The Lord is King for ever and ever — Psalm 10:16a.*** He is motivated only by His passionate obedience of His Father, and His passionate love for His subjects: us.

Therefore, the Scriptures tell us:

The Lord is trustworthy in all He promises . . . The Lord is righteous in all His ways and faithful in all He does — David, Psalm 145:14a, 17.

"I the Lord do not change" — God speaking, Malachi 3:6a.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever — Hebrews 13:8.

Third, Jesus' reign is constant. Many governments experience the reality of term limits, meaning that somebody can only hold their elective office so long. Of course, dictators don't have that worry (although they are constantly concerned about any hints of revolution that could force them out of office). Jesus' reign will never end. He was, is and will always be ***King of kings and Lord of lords — Revelation 19:16b.*** Therefore, the Scriptures tell us:

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" — Moses, Deuteronomy 33:27.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures through all generations — David, Psalm 145:13.

Fourth, Jesus' reign is complete. Every human government has areas where they struggle if not outright fail. Jesus' reign is complete, perfect in every way. It lacks for nothing. It is completely just and completely fair without fail. And, at the end of time, the perfection and completeness of Christ's reign will be acknowledged by every human being who has ever lived. No one has ever been a better or more deserving king.

Therefore, the Scriptures tell us:

[A]t the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father — Paul, Philippians 2:10-11.

So, what does such a wondrous King expect of us, His subjects? After all He has done for us, these things:

First, Jesus expects allegiance. What does that look like? Three things:

First, by loving each other: ***“By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” — Jesus Christ, John 13:35.***

Second, by bearing fruit: ***“This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples” — Jesus Christ, John 15:8.***

And third, by obedience. Jesus said it best: ***“If you love Me, keep My commands. . . . Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching” — Jesus Christ, John 14:15, 23a.*** And certainly John, one of the apostles who was there in the Upper Room to hear those words, affirmed them in his first letter when he said: ***[T]his is love for God: to keep His commands — I John 5:3a.***

Second, Jesus expects ambassadors. Every government depends on specially selected and trained people to represent its interests and viewpoints to other nations around the globe. In that sense, Jesus is no different — except that we are ALL called to be those ambassadors. As Paul famously said to the church at Corinth: ***[H]e has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us — Paul, II Corinthians 5:19b-20.*** The “good news” of the gospel with which we have been blessed is not to be kept to ourselves or within the walls of our church. We have the greatest news ever delivered in the history of mankind. If we’re Christians, that means that, once upon a time, someone brought us that good news, and that moment changed our lives completely. As subjects of King Jesus, it has been given us to relay His message of love and salvation to the world in which we live. As God commanded Isaiah, so He commands us: ***“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet” — God speaking, Isaiah 58:1.***

CONCLUSION

And one more thing: Jesus expects us to be authentic — genuine reflections of Him. Jesus was so authentic and so completely a reflection of God that He could tell the disciples: ***“Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b.*** In the same way, as people watch us and listen to us, both inside these church walls, we should a reflection of our Savior. They should be able to tell that Jesus lives in our lives. Which means:

We care for others, in every way possible, as Jesus cares for us.

We are consistent in the demonstrating of our life in Christ. We are the same reflection of Him whether at church or school or job or neighborhood or wherever. Our lives always look the same.

We are constant in our pursuit of knowing Christ better and better. We understand this is a relationship, and the idea is that we are in love with our Master and, because we are in love, we want to do everything we can to know Him better and to please Him better. And because we live to please Him, it literally hurts us when we fail, in whatever area of our lives that happens. And because we live to please Him, we will do everything

we can to keep our relationship healed and strong — understanding that sin is first of all committed against Him, seeking His forgiveness because of that sin, and doing everything else possible to remedy the effects of that sin — on ourselves or on others.

And last, we desire to be complete in our Master. In other words, there is no limit on what we would do for Him. Do we really think that, after Christ did all He did for us, that just giving Him a couple of hours on Sunday morning is enough, that He's looking down here this morning and thinking to Himself, "Yeah; that'll do." I don't think so.

As we've taken a look at Jesus as King, it makes the final point this morning absolutely relevant? Who sits on the "throne" of your life? A couple of questions to help clarify that:

Is becoming a Christian the greatest thing that has ever happened to you?

Is there any limit on what you would do for Him?