

Whose Kingdom?

TEXT: Luke 19:29-48

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SCR. READING: Luke 19:29-48

Palm Sunday begins what is known as Holy Week – the final week of Jesus’ life before His suffering, death, and resurrection. It’s well worth slowing down and pondering what happened. The gospel writers certainly seem to encourage that—their accounts of Jesus’ life are clearly centered on this one week of Jesus’ life. Just notice their structure: almost 30% of Matthew’s gospel (8 chapters), 35% of Mark’s (6 chs), 25% of Luke’s (6 chs), and 45% of John’s (10 chs) are devoted to the events that include and follow Palm Sunday.

In Luke’s account, Palm Sunday plays out with the almost palpable tension of a Western showdown. Jerusalem vs. Jesus. The Holy City—with its temple as the abode of God, its religious leaders with their divine authority, and its solution to sin in the rule of law. Approaching is Jesus—who, too, has claimed to be the abode of God, who carries Himself with divine authority, and who deals with sin by personally forgiving repentant sinners.

Luke, like a skillful movie director, slows down the scene and zooms in on Jesus, filling the screen with His face, His character, His person, His glory, before the talk ends and the real shooting begins. Five facets: sovereign king, prophesied Messiah, divine Lord, compassionate judge, global Savior.

Sovereign King (vv 29-38)

This incident with the colt is intriguing. Why do the owners of the colt let it go when the disciples say, “The Lord has need of it”? Do they know Jesus? We’re not told. Luke isn’t interested in giving us that detail.

What he does give us is an example of Jesus absolute authority. Jesus is in complete control. At His command, the owners of the colt let it go. Whether this was prearranged or happened spontaneously, the point is the same: Jesus is in charge. Even the normal claims of private ownership of property must yield to the order of the King.

Jesus’ authority and control here exemplify His firm direction over all the events that eventually lead to His death. Nothing is an accident. He

is not the victim of fate or human cruelty or random chance. Jesus is in charge, accomplishing His plan.

Luke 9:30-31 ³⁰ *And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

Why a colt? Jesus is self-consciously fulfilling prophecy here.

Zechariah 9:9 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Zechariah prophesied that Israel’s king would come riding on a young donkey. Jesus knows this, and He takes deliberate steps to fulfill it.

He claims a man’s donkey, which shows He has kingly authority; and He rides it into town, which shows He has kingly dignity. Kings ride; they don’t walk. Verses 35-36 offer another indication of His nobility: the people toss cloaks in the road—other gospels tell us they included palm branches as well. It’s their version of rolling out the red carpet for a visiting dignitary.

And then there’s the shout of the crowd in verse 38: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” People are flocking into the city for the Passover, and it was customary for them to greet one another in words from Psalm 118:

Psalm 118:25-26 ²⁵ *Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

“Save us, we pray” = Hosanna (Greek transliteration of Hb)

This was a normal occurrence on the roads in to Jerusalem, to chant the words to this Psalm. But now, the traditional song is intensified by the presence of a popular teacher and miracle worker. On this day, the travelers, aware of Jesus’ popularity and mighty works, turn the song toward Jesus Himself. In all of it, Luke is clearly showing us that Jesus is the sovereign king—authoritative, dignified, humble, regal.

Divine Lord (vv 39-40, 44)

The Pharisees recognize that this year's song is different. The people aren't just shouting to each other as usual. They are shouting to Jesus, hailing Him as king. The Pharisees are indignant and instruct Jesus to quiet the crowd. Jesus does have a rebuke ready. Not for the crowd. For the Pharisees:

Luke 19:40 *"I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."*

Jesus knows what they are shouting is true and appropriate. They have taken a cry for help to God and turned it directly to Jesus. And the Pharisees know it. They say, "Jesus, these people are calling you 'God.' Make them stop." And Jesus says, "All creation knows who I am. If these people stop shouting it out, the rocks will start."

From the beginning of Luke, one of the things people say when they get around Jesus is: "God has visited His people."

Luke 1:68-69 [Zechariah:] ⁶⁸ *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David..."*

Luke 7:16 [after Jesus raised a man from the dead:] *Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"*

In these texts, people praise God for visiting His people *by sending* Jesus; but in just a moment Jesus will claim something more:

Luke 19:44 *And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*

Previously, people have praised God for visiting His people *by sending* Jesus, but here we see that God is visiting *in the person of* Jesus. To see it, we have to remember a prophesy from the last book of the OT:

Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple...*

Malachi predicted that the a messenger would appear and "prepare the way" for the Lord to come. Malachi's messenger was, of course, John the Baptist. After the messenger prepared the way, Malachi foretold that the Lord Himself would return to His temple. And where do we see Jesus go immediately upon arriving in the city? To the temple (v 45). What's the point? This man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the "Lord whom you

seek" – i.e., God Himself. Palm Sunday is a divine visitation—God Himself coming to rescue, and judge, His people.

Compassionate Judge (vv 41-44)

v 41 The word Luke uses for Jesus' weeping conveys more than mere tears running down the face—Jesus burst into sobs. He is broken hearted. He has come to bring peace, but they have rejected Him. And when God's offer of peace is rejected, the results are disastrous. Jesus sees what is coming, and it devastates Him.

Jesus weeps that the people missed the "things that make for peace" (v 42). What are these? The presence of the king and the favorable reception from the crowd. It's ironic that the City of Peace (Jerusalem) did not know how to achieve it.

The contrast between the destruction of the visiting armies (vv 43-44a) and the gracious visitation here offered by Jesus (v 44b) is stark.

Global Savior (vv 45-48)

The temple cleansing was more symbolic than anything. It was probably brief and small scale, but the moment is highly significant theologically:

- Religious – cleansing the profane (business) and returning to the sacred (prayer)
- Prophetic – a symbolic gesture signifying the Temple's coming destruction, God's rejection of the Jews and the beginning of the time of the Gentiles (Mark)
- Missiological

Notice what Jesus clears the temple FOR: prayer (v 46) and teaching (v 47). And that's exactly what He proceeds to do in the temple for the rest of this week: teach.

From this point on in Luke's writing, the temple shifts its purpose for the true people of God. Instead of being a destination for incoming worshippers, it now becomes the launch pad for outgoing messengers.

Luke 24:48-53 ⁴⁸ *"...You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you*

are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Cleansing the temple caps off the triumphal entry by reiterating all of the qualities we've seen formerly:

- He's the sovereign king, with authority to drive people out of the temple.
- He's the divine Lord, with the prerogative to call the temple "My house."
- He's the compassionate judge, who condemns empty religion.
- He's the global Savior, who recasts the temple as a launch pad for mission to the nations.

So how does all of this apply to you? I've entitled this passage "Whose Kingdom?" and it's the question I want you to ask yourself. Whose kingdom are you building: yours or Jesus'? By "the kingdom," I mean your vision of the good life. Your ideals for yourself, your future, your story. Whose story are you writing: yours or His?

The culture of Jesus' kingdom is created by the character of the King. You can tell whose kingdom you are building by examining your life in light of who He is.

- Sovereign King = submitted to Jesus, obeying His word
- Divine Lord = living to bring positive attention to Him (i.e., for His glory)
- Compassionate Judge = reacting to sin with tears of compassion
- Global Savior = on mission to spread His peace

Sovereign King = submitted to Jesus, obeying His word. We would prefer to live our lives in direct opposition to Palm Sunday. PS tells us Jesus is king, working His agenda. We would prefer to make ourselves king, and get Him to work our agenda. Do you self-consciously humble yourself under the word of God when it's read and preached? When was the last time you deliberately and systematically changed something in your life because you were confronted with God's word?

Life is hard, confusing, disappointing. When you are in a bind, where do you get your coping strategies? If the Bible doesn't make sense, will you do it anyway? If it seems hard, too hard, do you still obey in faith? If it doesn't look enjoyable, do you see the eternal joy beyond your temporary pain? Whose kingdom are you building: His or yours?

Divine Lord = living to bring positive attention to Him. How often are you self-consciously motivated by the worth of Jesus? Do you ever think of Him when you make financial transactions, work out, talk to people, handle conflict, serve your employer or this church, take in some entertainment? The Pharisees are such a sadly ironic case. "The stones know who I am," Jesus said. Inanimate objects have more receptivity to what God is doing than the very people Jesus came to save.

Compassionate Judge = reacting to sin with tears of compassion. Sin always destroys, perpetrators and victims both. Jesus knew what the sin of Jerusalem would cost Him. But His mind was on what it would cost them, not Him. What is your first reaction to sin? Do the gross sins of society break your heart because you see the Satanic bondage of those who would drink and drug themselves to death, those who would kill their own babies, those who would dehumanize themselves in a quest for power and money and pleasure through the adult entertainment industry? More personally, when you are sinned against, are you annoyed, indignant, offended, reactionary, vindictive? Jesus wasn't. He was heartbroken. Whose kingdom are you building: yours or His?

Compassionate Judge = on mission to spread His peace. The crowd's words in verse 38 are intriguing, particularly the phrase "peace in heaven." We might expect to hear the familiar "peace on earth" from the angels' song in Luke 2. Why "in heaven"? It's Luke's theologically informed paraphrase of the word "Hosanna"—i.e., "Save us, we pray." Save us from what? From the wrath of God. Bring peace in heaven. Pacify the angry God. And that's exactly what Jesus is going to do this week, through His death and resurrection.

Is this your mission—to share His peace-making work with everyone you meet? Whose kingdom are you building: yours or His?

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