

# The King

Sermon: **Palm Sunday**; 14 April 2019

Bible reading: [Matthew 21:1-9](#)

## Introduction

There's a bit of an art of making a good entrance isn't there?

Whether we've been in social scenes where this sort of thing is important, or whether we know the dynamic more from books and movies, there's an art in making a good entrance; of arriving and entering at just the right time, in just the right way, with just the right people.

It's why even football teams have these carefully orchestrated entrances onto the field of play to certain music through special banners. It's why one of our favourite moments in at a wedding is when the bride first appears to walk down the aisle.

The importance of making a good entrance.

Today is a day of entrances.

We the people of God enter into Holy Week once again. We retrace the steps of our Lord in his last week on this earth and, as we do, we are taken again into the heart of the Christian faith as we hear of all that our Lord Jesus does for our salvation in his suffering and death.

And as we begin that journey, we hear of Jesus make his entrance into Jerusalem. So, what sort of entrance is it? What do we make of it?

Well it's the entrance of a King, but no ordinary king.

Let's look today at this royal entry under three headings: He is the king who *comes*; the king who *condescends*, and the king who *conquers*.

## The King who comes

First notice that Jesus is the King who comes.

'Look your King is **coming** to you...', from the prophet Zechariah.

'Blessed is the one who **comes** in the name of the Lord', the crowds shout.

The big emphasis I want to draw out here is that in this week where Jesus will suffer and die for our salvation, he comes willingly; he comes of his own initiative.

Do you remember how often in Jesus' life and ministry the crowds would begin to get excited about who Jesus is and what he could do? We even heard in our text a few weeks ago how at one point they wanted to make him King by force.

The crowds never quite seem to get there in realising fully who Jesus is, but they get close. There are glimmers of holy enthusiasm as Jesus captures their hearts and minds.

But what's so striking in Jesus' ministry is that so often it was at exactly these moments when Jesus would withdraw to a lonely place to pray. Or he would order people not to talk about him. Or he would simply move onto to another town.

But now on Palm Sunday something is different. Now Jesus takes the initiative and puts himself right in the middle of the Messianic action.

Did you notice how this is carefully emphasised in the text? This is Jesus idea. He wants to do this.

It says,

*'Jesus sent two disciples saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her, untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you just say this, 'The Lord needs them'.*

Who's taking charge here? Who's making preparations here?

It's Jesus. He's coming ready or not.

He's not having his hand forced by his disciples here. He's not being lured by his enemies who are plotting against him. Jesus is not brought to Jerusalem as a captured prisoner. He comes freely. He comes knowing what lies ahead.

He's been talking about this, remember?

Matthew 16:21,

*'From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem...'*

Why?

*'...and suffer many things from the elders and chief priest and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised...'*

Matthew 20:18,

*'See we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over...'*

As we hear again the events of Holy Week and we hear of Jesus seemingly getting caught up in the deadly manoeuvrings between the religious leaders and the Roman authorities and Judas Iscariot, we must not lose sight of the simple fact that Jesus comes willingly to take this path.

He has 'set his face to go to Jerusalem', as St Luke puts it.

Jesus is a King who comes. This is the first thing to notice about his entrance on Palm Sunday.

## The King who condescends

Next in his entrance. Notice Jesus is the King who *condescends*, positive sense, who makes himself lowly and modest.

One of the strange things about this entrance of Jesus is that on the hand it does have these elements of a royal, kingly event. But on the other hand, there's a distinct humility to all this that's hard to miss.

So how do we see this in the text.

Well first in the prophecy of Zechariah itself,

*'Tell the daughter of Zion, look your king is coming to you, Humble, and mounted on a donkey...'*

Think of all the imposing animals a King could ride in on: a war horse, a great elephant, a camel even! But a donkey? Have you ever ridden a donkey?

I once spent several hours riding a donkey in Egypt and it was a bit of fun, but they're really not all that exhilarating or exciting. There's just something very ordinary about it.

It doesn't even have a saddle and so they need to use their own cloaks just to give the King something to sit on.

Next look at the pathway they set up.

It's interesting how this seems to be a custom all around the world that, when important people make an entrance somewhere, we want to have something special for them to walk on. We honour them in this way somehow. It's always been a funny thing to me when we have dignitaries getting off the plane out in the middle of a bit tarmac at the airport, and we'll roll out the red carpet right out in the middle of nowhere.

The crowd wants to do something similar for Jesus. He is a King, and yet all they have are branches from the trees and the cloaks from their backs.

Jesus condescends, he humbles himself. I even wonder if we don't see the humility of Jesus here in his silence. Did you notice how in Matthew's account here Jesus says nothing on his journey into Jerusalem?

And even in the other Gospels where Jesus does speak a few words, there are no great campaign speeches or rally cries. Jesus is definitely receiving their acclamations – he doesn't put them off or tell them to be quiet as he does elsewhere – but he himself is silent; reflective perhaps.

This is the King who humbles himself.

During the week I read a little about the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1953, which was quite interesting. Preparations were made for 14 months. Millions of people lined the processional route. The queen and her entourage travelled in luxurious horse drawn carriages wearing velvet cloaks and diamond jewellery. The event was estimated to have cost 1.57 million pounds. And remember this was 1953.

Yet here is the one through whom all things were created, who sits some old cloaks wrapped around a donkey.

Jesus the King who condescends.

## The King who conquers

So, he's the King who comes, he's the king who condescends, and finally he the king who *conquers*.

Notice the cry of the crowd,

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

This is a victory cry. This is a cry of acclamation to a *conquering* King.

Now originally and most literally the word Hosanna meant 'Save us. It's actually from Psalm 118 which we heard today,

*'Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!'*

The opening word there in Hebrew is **Hosanna**.

So originally and literally it's something like a prayer for help.

But it seems the use of this word moved over time to become more like an expression of hope and exultation; an expression of praise in acknowledgement of salvation.

And it's part of the section of psalms that the pilgrims prayed at Jerusalem when they came for Passover, so they used this word 'Hosanna' as a cry of praise remembering all that the Lord had done for them in the past.

But then what's so striking here is that they ascribe this to Jesus, Hosanna to this Son of David, Hosanna to *this* coming King. All their hope for Salvation is centred on this man on the donkey. This is the acclamation of Jesus as a king who *conquers*.

Now who knows what the crowds were thinking here? Did some of them truly know why Jesus was entering Jerusalem?

Or were they only hoping for a political victory? Were they only hoping that Jesus would conquer the Romans and give them the freedom from their human oppressors?

We really don't know.

But whatever the case we do know that they rightly hailed Jesus as the conquering King. He does come to conquer, but not in the way most expected.

One of the really striking things about Jesus royal entrance into Jerusalem, is that it sort of ends on an anti-climax.

When Queen Elizabeth entered London in that magnificent way it culminated in her actual enthronement and coronation, whereas for Jesus he comes in in majesty, but then nothing really happens.

And this, dear friends, is where we are taken into the heart of the mystery of holy week. The King does make a royal entrance, but he comes humbly. And so, his crown will be made of thorns. And his throne will finally be a cross.

He comes to conquer not the Romans or any other political enemy, but he comes to conquer sin, death and the devil. He comes to show his strength, but it's a strength that comes through weakness. He comes to win a victory, but the victory comes through death before resurrection.

That's why we are now privileged now to sing these words of the crowds every time we celebrate holy Communion:

*Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest!*

Because it's here in the Lord's Supper that your King comes to you, that he condescends to come in his body and blood in bread and wine, that he conquers your sin and death bringing forgiveness and new life.

## Conclusion

There is an art to making a good entrance, and this is the entrance of a King like no other.

As we enter Holy Week once again, may he enter your heart and mind, and may you rejoice and be refreshed in the salvation he comes to bring.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

*Preacher: Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer*