

A Better King Offers Himself

John 10:14-12:19

Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!

Introduction: We can easily take things for granted, especially when it comes to certain Bible stories that we hear every year. The *triumphal entry*, or what we refer to as *Palm Sunday*, presents a bit like movie that shows a triumphant scene to start, without context, leaving the observer a bit disorientated, and then flashes back – *3 ½ months earlier* – which then fills in the blanks leading up to the penultimate event. In our mind's eye, we have this picture of Jesus riding into Jerusalem to the shouts and cheers of a large crowd, throwing down palm branches for their messianic liberator, which creates a glorious and joyful scene. In fact, Jerusalem would have been swollen with people, with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims piling into the relatively small area to celebrate the annual Passover Feast. It was a truly profound day and time in redemptive history, but we often miss the significance of what happened before and after. *How did the people know to do this in unison?* Try communicating with thousands of people without modern technology like phones and texts, and it's a wonder that there was such unity. Add to this that there was an open order to arrest Jesus on sight, it begs the question, *how did Jesus operate in such open ways for the first few days of the week?* Did these things just happen, like God waved a wand and miraculously did it, or was there something else at play?

This morning we want to consider our **better King Jesus**, who entered Jerusalem on a Sunday and offered Himself to Israel as her long awaited King. The united monarchy Israel enjoyed during the reign of Saul, David and Solomon pointed to this day when the promised King Messiah would sit on His rightful throne. But just as Israel originally desired to have a king like all the other nations (1 Samuel 8:5), the people during Jesus' earthly ministry, particularly those given spiritual charge, mistook God's gift with something contrived in their own head. Israel in 1 Samuel rejected God's care, and Israel during Jesus' ministry rejected Him because they did not want to yield their life and control.

So we will see how Jesus is our Better King, a king who *willingly laid down His life for His own, who fulfilled all the requirements as king, and who opens His arms wide to all who would believe.*

A Better King Willingly Laid Down His Life

John 10:14-15, 18 - *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep*
No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord

3 ½ Months Earlier....

We now flashback in our mind to the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, which took place in the winter (John 10:22). As Jesus drew closer to the cross, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), and He began to stir up the opposition from the religious leaders more and more. In John 10:7-18, He presented Himself as both a **door and shepherd to the people of Israel**, the One by which people have access and care. In this He gave information that was divisive among the Jews:

- **He knows His sheep and they know Him (14)** – This gave the scope of who Jesus came for, who would know Him and who would not – *"but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep"* (v. 26)

- **He has OTHER sheep that He will gather** (16) – this is a reference to the Gentiles, or non-Jews, that He will gather – which is good news for us this morning
- **All of His sheep, Jew and Gentile, will be ONE FLOCK with ONE SHEPHERD** (16) – This looks forward to the call of salvation and the formation of the church where Jew and non-Jew will come to Christ the same way
- **NO ONE TAKES HIS LIFE FROM HIM, HE GIVES IT UP WILLINGLY** – This means that Jesus died on the cross willingly, joyfully taking our place as God treated Him in the way we deserved, pouring out His wrath on Christ (Heb. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:21). He did not do this out of **duty but out of love** (Rom. 5:8). His death was not something that was done TO Him, but what He graciously AGREED to with the Father.

As we read the gospel account, we must keep in mind that Jesus was never out of control, He never was caught off guard, never was surprised by circumstances, and was not outsmarted by the religious leaders, somehow getting arrested and killed as a result of some misstep. In fact, Jesus strategically planned all the events that would transpire to both **rile up the religious leaders to condemn Him AND be able to operate in the open**, in order to offer Himself as the perfect Passover Lamb in Israel. He timed it perfectly. So we want to walk through these last 3 ½ months to show exactly how Jesus did this, NOT miraculously but meticulously, not through supernatural means but providential ones. **Why?** So that He could be the **door and good Shepherd for His own, to lay down His life so that He could take it up again** (John 10:17).

Now, I direct you back to John 10:22 and Jesus is at the Temple interacting with the Jews. The question they asked Him was loaded, but asked **“If you are the Christ, tell us plainly”** (10:24). They were antsy, hoping He would say He was so they could condemn Him there. Instead, He said this:

John 10:27-30 - *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”*

Not only is this one of the sweetest statements of assurance in our lives – the fact that no one can snatch us out of the hand of the Father OR the Son – but He claimed He and the Father were ONE! At this, you could hear the guttural gasp of “blasphemy” of the leaders, and they **picked up stones to stone Him**. They accused Him as a man claiming to be God – which was true – and meant they understood plainly what He was saying. Jesus pointed to the **works He had done** as validation for why they should have believed in Him. But as a result, *“they sought to arrest him, but He escaped out of their hands.”* (v. 39).

NOTE: It is here that we have to make an observation about reading the Bible. We know that there are 4 gospels which each shed light on different aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry, and each should be read in light of their own purpose. But we also believe that in **harmonizing** them, we can see an entire picture, including a clear timeline of events. This is what we’ll attempt to do in the story culminating in the Triumphal Entry.

At the response of the arrest warrant, Jesus **“went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there He remained.”** (John 10:40). We know this is the area of Perea (see map). It is here the story is picked up by **Luke**, and particularly in Luke 13:22-17:10. **Why would this be an effective way to avoid arrest?** It was an issue of **jurisdiction**, as **Herod Antipas** had

rule over Galilee and Perea and the reach of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling body) had no jurisdiction. This came into play in **Luke 13:31-34**:

*31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, **for Herod wants to kill you.**" 32 And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. 33 Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' 34 **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!** 35 Behold, your house is forsaken. **And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'**"*

Several things to point out here: 1) **Notice that the Pharisees tried to drive Jesus BACK toward Jerusalem and in their control**, which Jesus clearly saw through. 2) **Jesus was operating on His OWN TIMING**, and was relentless in His return to Jerusalem, in which the irony laden statement of Israel's own prophets being historically killed by their own people was stated – and He would be in line with them. 3) **Jesus WOULD come to Jerusalem, but it would be to the proclaim of "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"**, a prophetic word that we will see Him fulfill completely.

After this, while in Perea, Jesus taught parables (Wedding feast, Great Banquet, Lost Sheep, Prodigal Son, dishonest manager, and the rich man and Lazarus) and the cost of discipleship. In the midst of this teaching schedule, word came to him that his friend Lazarus was ill. It is here that the narrative picks back up in **John 11:1**.

Jesus loved His friends, and He especially loved Lazarus (11:36). The expectation of Mary and Martha was that when he heard, Jesus would have rushed back to Bethany and heal him. But Jesus did not live up to that expectation, and instead said, *"This illness does not lead to death. **It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it**"* (11:4).

Here is what we learn about Jesus' interaction with Lazarus:

- 1) **Going back to Bethany was considered suicide – at least as the disciples were concerned –** Bethany was just under 2 miles away from Jerusalem, just on the fringes of the place where they tried to stone Jesus. **Thomas**, the doubter and realist, said, *"Let us also go, that we may die with Him"* (11:16). Returning to Bethany seemed like a one way trip.
- 2) **Jesus was so concerned about Lazarus, that He waited two more days** (11:6) – Why!? By the time Jesus came to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for **4 days** (11:17), which would have proved
 - 1) He was definitely dead – Jewish custom said after 4 days the spirit of a person actually left their body;
 - 2) **mourners would have gathered** – Most likely a wealthy family, there would have been a significant number of people at the location, since memorial services were not a couple of hours but several days;
 - 3) **He would have been wrapped and put into a tomb** – a body would have ointment and perfume put on it, since after 4 days a body will begin to smell (11:39). This set the stage for a **significant sign miracle that had several implications**:

Jesus was *deeply moved* by the death of His friend and *troubled in His Spirit* (11:33, 28), so it showed Jesus' great compassion as He called Lazarus out of the grave. At this sign, many who were present believed. But it did two other significant things. 1) **Solidified the Jewish Leadership against Him** – The

Pharisees were already set against Jesus, since He had significant interaction with them. They controlled the Synagogue, and the people were afraid of them, which kept some away from believing in Christ (see John 9:22). The Sadducees, which made up the other half of the Sanhedrin, controlled the Temple and were the priestly class. But the key reality that they denied was any type of **resurrection or afterlife**. When Lazarus was raised in front of many, they were now onboard with the Pharisees to get rid of Jesus. And notice the motives of these leaders in John 11:47-48:

*“So the **chief priests** and the **Pharisees** gathered the council and said, “**What are we to do?** For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and **the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.**”*

It was because Jesus threatened their power base of control that they wanted to kill Him! After Caiaphas made his inadvertent and unwitting prophecy of Jesus' soon substitutionary atonement (11:49-52), the **plans were made to put Jesus to death** (11:53). They were unified. They were ready. **But this clearly presented a problem for Jesus, since:**

Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews

How could He fulfill His own words by entering back into Jerusalem with the people shouting, “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*?” The rest of 11:54 tells us: “**but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.**” Notice that this was the same region and place that David went to avoid Saul, in the wilderness. But this is also where **Luke 17:11 picks up the narrative and tells us HOW JESUS DID IT.**

*On the way to Jerusalem he was passing **along between Samaria and Galilee***

Often we can read over a verse like this and we miss the significance because we either do not know geography or we simply miss the implications. But if you notice the map, to pass between Samaria and Galilee to go to Jerusalem meant that Jesus **went North to go South!** The reason this was so strategic is the fact that there would have been throngs of people traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem for Passover, which would have provided both safety of cover and a group to teach along the way. This would have been the same route Jesus' family would have taken when He was younger (see Luke 2:41-51 when Jesus the boy got separated from His parents on the route from Jerusalem to Nazareth). Along this route Jesus spent time teaching parables (persistent widow and Pharisee/tax collector), interacted with the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus, gave an explicit prediction of His upcoming death (Luke 18:31-34), and did two **clear miracles: healing of the 10 lepers and the blind beggar**. Suffice to say, all who traveled with Him would have known by His teaching and power that He was the Messiah. At Luke 19:28, the narrative catches back up with John 11, and that is where we go back to.

As Jesus got closer to Jerusalem, the group would have crossed the Jordan River, crossed by Jericho and made the trek up to Jerusalem. Many would have gone ahead into Jerusalem to purify themselves ceremonially before Passover, and since the city was so bloated, they needed a week to accomplish this (11:55). John 11:56-57 tells us two notable things: 1) **The people were looking for Jesus and wondering aloud whether He would show up;** 2) **There was a standing order that anyone who saw Him should report it so He could be ARRESTED on sight.**

Here is where Jesus was incredibly strategic. John 12:1 says that six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany. Bethany was just under 2 miles away (John 11:18), but it was also just over a **Sabbath Day's**

journey from Jerusalem. A Sabbath Day's journey was the acceptable amount of distance a practicing Jew could move on the Sabbath, since the Law said they were not supposed to travel (see Exodus 16:29). The acceptable distance would have been **2000 cubits, or about ¾ of a mile.** When Jesus came to Bethany on Saturday, He most likely only traveled that far, but it kept Him OUT OF THE REACH of the Sanhedrin, who could not travel on Shabbat (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday). Since there were many who would have gone ahead into Jerusalem *before Friday evening*, there were many who would have informed Jerusalem: ***He's coming, and He's coming on Sunday!***

After Jesus was anointed by Mary and Judas was revealed as a thief, the crowd would have been anticipating on Saturday night that Jesus was coming, since they not only wanted to see Jesus but also **Lazarus!** Though it'd be pretty cool to see a man raised from the dead, there were deeper motives as to why Lazarus was intriguing. The people believed that Jesus was coming as King, and as King, He was there to **kick out the Romans.** If we are about ready to scrap with the Romans, it would be good to have a king who could raise us from the dead if we died in battle. It was at this that the **chief priests ironically made plans to put Lazarus to death....again** (John 12:9-11).

No one took Jesus' life. He willingly laid it down. Jesus operated in the constraints of humanity, but had the ability to use His divine attributes to authenticate His identity in miracles. He strategically came to a point where the Sanhedrin was ready to put Him to death, but they could not touch Him while the whole of the people welcomed Him like a liberating king. This leads to Jesus' actual coming into Jerusalem as He crested the Mount of Olives to the praise of His people.

A Better King Fulfilled the Criteria

We have parades for winning teams and we used to have them for returning veterans, but this would have been the parade that trumped all others. This would have been the closest glimpse mankind would have received of how Jesus will rule one day, as He acted as Messianically as He ever had. He fulfilled several lines of OT prophecy reserved for the awaited Messiah King:

- 1) **He came in like the awaited offspring of David** – 2 Samuel 7 said that David's offspring would rule the throne from Jerusalem, would establish an everlasting kingdom, and would bring rest from the nations around. Jesus gave every indication that NOW was the time.
- 2) **He received the open praise of a Messianic Psalm** – The people began to shout a Hallel Psalm (Psalm 113-118), which was reserved for festivals and had a messianic tone. Jesus had prophesied exactly what they would shout, and so they shouted, ***"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel"*** (Psalm 118:25-26) – Hosanna means "save us now", and that is exactly what they were hoping. Passover was a celebration of God delivering Israel from the hand of a foreign foe. What a great time for God to do it again.
- 3) **He entered exactly how Zechariah 9:9 said He would** – Jesus came into Jerusalem riding the colt of a donkey, most likely with the momma donkey riding in front. This was in contrast to foreign leaders who rode in on chariots and horses (see Jeremiah 17:25).

But Jesus came in differently. He rode in on a colt, and showed that as a king He was just, a savior, but also **humble.** He was NOT like all the other kings. He was also not what Israel thought they needed. Just like the misplaced request back in 1 Samuel 8, most in Jerusalem wanted a political king, not one that would save them from their sin! But that is exactly what Jesus was offering.

A Better King Offers Himself to All Who Would Believe

What is undeniable about Jesus' offer as He rode into Jerusalem that day is that His arms were open wide to His sheep, that He would bring them in like a mother hen her chicks, to protect, save, and give them rest. He does the same thing with us today. It does not matter what you've done or what's been done to you, Jesus takes you while you are in your sin and offers forgiveness and life. **But He only takes us on His terms, and the terms are confession of sin, repentance, and following Him.** It requires humility and a giving up of our own control, self-reliance, and the need to have all the answers. Even people who saw Lazarus, who saw the man born blind, who saw the miracles REFUSED to believe, NOT because Jesus somehow failed to show who He was, but because they were like the Pharisees, who said, "Look, the world has gone after Him" (12:19), and they continued to try to get rid of Him.

When the cheers faded, the tears flowed. Jesus saw that the commitment of the crowd was wafer thin, cracking at the first sign of pushback.

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Ultimately, most rejected, not wanting life to change, bringing judgment on themselves. Though one day the Jewish people will look upon the one they pierced and God will bring them in again (see Zech. 12:10; 13:1), the generation at Jesus' Triumphal Entry missed the point.

The hope for the Jewish nation is our hope today. Jesus' arms are open and waiting, but only on His terms. He calls us to lose our life to find it in Him, to embrace Him as our Savior, Lord, and King. He is our good Shepherd who laid down His life for us, and is the door to enter to be saved. Today is the day of salvation for all who are His sheep.

The hope of the Triumphal Entry is found in **Matthew 23:37-39**:

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! **How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!** 38 See, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'*

Though the house is desolate now, there will be a day that Jesus will return again, when His people call out "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD". He will bring salvation and judgment, and that is sure.