

# Jesus, the King of Peace

MJCF

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Luke 19:29-44

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, I decided to take a break from the book of Revelation. We'll come back to it later. Today is Palm Sunday, the day we celebrate Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, with shouts of praise from the crowd all around, celebrating his arrival. But, things aren't always what they seem to be. Later that week, Jesus would be executed. God doesn't always answer our prayers as we hope or expect, because God's ways and answers are often far beyond what we can imagine. We learn that there is a deeper world around us that we cannot see. It's here where God is at work behind the scenes. There's a story told which can help us visualise how God often works.

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family! The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead the angels were given a small space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had, the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field.

The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, "How could you have let this happen? The first man had everything, yet you helped him," he accused. "The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die." "Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied. "When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it."

"Then last night as we slept in the farmers bed, the angel of death came for his wife ..... I gave him the cow instead ... Things aren't always what they seem."

This story shows something similar to what we find in the Bible's account of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem. The crowd expects a hero who will fix their problems, but it doesn't happen, at least not as they expect. It's only after Jesus' death and resurrection that the disciples understand that something much more significant than dealing with the Roman oppression has occurred.

Today's reading from Luke begins with Jesus giving instructions to two of the disciples. They are to go get a donkey for Jesus to ride. It's possible that Jesus had pre-arranged for the donkey to be available. A key point is that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his later arrest and execution did not just happen to him. This was all planned and expected.

As Jesus rode towards Jerusalem people praise him, because they recognise him as the "Messiah," the long-awaited Saviour, the one who they expected would get rid of all the Roman oppressors and establish a new kingdom where they could live in peace. All four of the gospel writers include this story, so we can assume that it was pretty important. With four different perspectives, we get a wider view of Jesus. In the other gospel accounts, the crowd shouts "Hosanna!" "Save us!"

In Luke's account, as Jesus rode the donkey toward Jerusalem people laid their cloaks on the ground for him to ride over. In other accounts, we hear that people laid palm branches on the road as well, signifying a hero's welcome. Many in the crowd had seen Jesus perform miracles. Many even saw him raise Lazarus from the dead. We read that a "whole multitude of [Jesus'] disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power 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 heaven!'" Here, Luke is highlighting the parallels with the birth of Jesus 33 years earlier. When the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus, he says that Jesus' kingdom will never end.

He would be a special kind of king. Also, when the angels announce to the shepherds that Jesus is born, they shout “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace...” This is very similar to what the disciples now shout, except the peace on earth does not come right away, as everyone expected. The mood changes when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. And, we read that he weeps over the city. He says, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!” Instead of peace, they would experience war, and their beautiful temple would be destroyed.

The people celebrating Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem expected he would use violence or some special power to crush the Roman oppression and make a new kingdom. But, they must have been quite disappointed when it didn’t happen as they had expected. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, there is opposition towards Jesus. Some of the Pharisees tell him to “shush” the crowd, but Jesus refuses. Within days, Jesus is put on trial with people shouting, “Crucify him!” I don’t know if these were the same people, but at the trial, we hear of no one standing up to defend Jesus. Even his closest disciples are so afraid that they all desert him.

Jesus was a different kind of Saviour than everyone expected. By riding a donkey into Jerusalem, he was making two statements. One was that he is indeed the Saviour. His symbolic act of riding into Jerusalem was foretold by the prophet Zechariah “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”(9:9) The disciples would have been familiar with this passage, and they were excited. “Jesus is finally going to be king over all!” But, a second statement that Jesus was making may not have been as clear to the disciples. That message was what kind of Saviour Jesus would be. He could have rode in on a horse, giving the image of someone who would use violence to overthrow any opposition to his kingship. By humbly riding on a donkey, Jesus was showing that he would be a King of peace rather than of war. He would use the power of non-violent, sacrificial love. In Jesus was the power of the Word of God. In the book of Revelation, we often read of an image of Jesus with a sword coming from his mouth. This would have symbolized the great power of God’s word. The words of God are absolute and unchanging truth. It’s easy for us to think that violence and force are the most powerful things around us, but then we miss the greater power of God’s word.

God doesn’t always follow what we expect. What sort of Saviour are we looking for? Do we seek a Saviour that will help us have success in our lives? Are we looking for someone to physically heal us? Fix our problems? At times, we may experience suffering. God does not promise to free us from all suffering, but you can be sure that God is close by, weeping with us as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. What we need to remember is that our lives on earth are only temporary, compared to living eternally in heaven. It’s easy to be caught up with the concerns of this world, but as David says in Psalm 119:19 “I am but a foreigner here on earth.” In a similar way, I remember how my aunt Agnes would often say, “We are but visitors here on earth.” It made an impact on me. It helped me think about things that are more important than buying things that I like. In Philippians 3:19-20, the apostle Paul says, “...their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven...” Paul also encourages us to “Set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth...” (Col. 3:2) The things of this world are only temporary but the things of God are eternal. Jesus kept that priority. Rather than gather the great crown of supporters and follow the temptation to take control by force, he continued the humble path of peace, and it eventually led him to the horror of the cross. At his trial, Pilate asks Jesus if he is a king. Jesus responds, “My kingdom is not from this world...” (John 18:36)

Jesus set his sight on the heavenly kingdom and the things of God. With this attitude, he could ride into Jerusalem knowing that he’d soon be facing death on a cross. He knew that God was at work behind everything and so he trusted God to lead him. Although Roman oppression was probably the biggest problem that everyone could see, Jesus saw beyond this. He knew that to violently crush the

oppression was not the answer to everyone's deepest problems. Jesus was riding into Jerusalem as the Saviour for all people, including the Roman oppressors. With his sacrifice on the cross, and the resurrection, he showed that God's power is stronger than the powers of evil and violence. Jesus dealt with the problem behind all our problems. He now empowers us to work for his new kingdom of peace. Let's pray.

O Lord, we confess that we easily get caught up with the challenges we face, forgetting that you are at work behind the scenes. Grant us eyes to see where you are at work all around us. We pray for the courage to follow your way of peace, even if it means facing greater challenges. Help us to trust in you. We confess that we often live as if Jesus is not our King. May our lives be filled with hope and expectation at what is possible through the power of Jesus Christ at work among us. Thank-you that the future you prepare for us is far beyond our imagination, Amen.