

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

PALM SUNDAY

The Veiled King Unveiled

(from Matthew)

Introduction: When pretending's not hypocritical...

In 1959, a white man, **John Howard Griffin**, under a doctor's care, artificially darkened his skin and shaved his head so as to present himself as a black man in the racially charged south, just as the civil rights movement was gaining momentum.

Griffin won international acclaim for the book that resulted from his six-week experiment, Black Like Me (1961).

As he expected, he had some tough experiences while traveling through the deep south in 1959 (and was hanged in effigy in his hometown of Mansfield, Texas!). But these experiences impressed upon him the reality of racism in our country and propelled him into working for social justice throughout the turbulent '60's.

John Howard Griffin pretended to be something (black) he was not. Normally, we think that pretending to be something we're not is bad. Hypocritical. And pretending sure can be bad! But I don't think it was bad for John Howard Griffin to pretend in the way he did.

There have been times when I've pretended. I've wanted people to think well of me and have been tempted (and at times have succumbed to the temptation) to represent myself as better, as grander, as more than I really am. That's bad. And maybe the hunger for approval has prompted you, on occasion, to the toxic sin of hypocrisy.

But, as John Howard Griffin's experiment reveals, pretending, masking who we really are, if properly motivated, can be noble.

Prince Harry, third in line to the throne of Great Britain, recently returned from a ten week stint in Afghanistan with the British Army. According to reports I've read, Harry put on no airs and he asked for no special favors while he was on the ground with the troops. He faced battle dangers as real as any other infantryman and didn't hide behind his status as a royal when the bullets started flying.

In a CNN article, the 23 year old prince remarked, "*At the end of the day I like to sort of be a normal person, and for once I think this is about as normal as I'm ever going to get.*"

Harry wasn't really pretending. But he sure wasn't taking full advantage of his true identity! I consider that an act of nobility.

For most of His life, Jesus of Nazareth veiled His true identity from those around Him. He allowed most everyone to believe He was LESS than He really was.

Like Griffin, He veiled His identity and entered a world that mistreated Him. Like Prince Harry, He refused to take full advantage of His status as the God-man.

But there were times when Jesus allowed others to see Him for who He truly was. And one of those times was Palm Sunday. On that day, He ripped off the veil and revealed Himself as the King. Today, we meet **King Jesus!**

For most of His life, Jesus was **not** recognized for who He really was. Of course, some knew...

Herod the Great, the Roman-installed King of Israel who reigned at the time of Jesus' birth was so convinced of Jesus' royalty that he ordered the slaughter of all the baby boys around Bethlehem so as to do away with his rival. (Matthew 2). Herod didn't want the competition that he knew King Jesus represented.

Then, the Gospel of John records a brief conversation between Jesus and Nathaniel, one of the Lord's earliest disciples. In this conversation, Jesus revealed that He had seen Nathaniel when Nathaniel was sitting under a fig tree.

There must have been something remarkable about this feat, because Nathaniel responded, *[John 1:49] “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”*

So, some knew. But for most of His life, Jesus was a King *incognito*. A King veiled and unrecognized. Most did NOT know.

There came a day, though, late in His brief life, when the veil came off and His identity became plain for all to see. His royal identity became obvious in the most obvious of places, the city of Jewish Kings: Jerusalem.

King Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem is recorded for us in Matthew’s Gospel, beginning at chapter 20.

The King’s Long Journey Home (Matthew 20:17-34)

The King Predicts His Death (vv. 17-19)

When the Lord’s thoughts turned to His final trip to Jerusalem, *[Matthew 20:17]...He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, [18] “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man (this is how Jesus often referred to Himself) will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, [19] and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.”*

Thus warned, the disciples accompanied Jesus south toward Jerusalem. Somewhere along the way, the following ugly and unedifying scene took place.

The King’s Subjects Fight for Firstness (vv. 20-28)

Two of Jesus’ disciples - James and John (ALONG WITH THEIR MOTHER!) - came to Jesus with a request. They wanted the places of prominence in Jesus’ Kingdom, a Kingdom they were certain He was going to establish when He arrived in the royal city in just a few days.

They wanted the two best places in any Kingdom: the seats next to the King!

Well, when Jesus told them that He couldn’t grant this request, the other ten disciples, who had heard about this exchange, were incensed - no doubt because they hadn’t thought about asking for the best seats first!

Jesus admonished the Twelve for their “me-first” mindset and reminded them of the value of **servanthood** in His Kingdom.

[25] But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. [26] “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, [27] and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

With that embarrassing episode behind them, the journey resumed. Jesus led the way to one of the oldest and most storied cities in Israel, the city of Jericho.

The King’s Sovereign Healing (20:29-34)

I can’t imagine that any Jew could ever wander through Jericho without thinking about the history of the city?

Certainly, walking through those gates and looking at those [rebuilt] walls MUST have brought to mind the event that had occurred fifteen hundred years earlier when God performed a miracle in the days of Joshua.

I’ll bet that Jesus, His disciples and the entourage that was now traveling with them must have thought about the tumblin’ down walls of times past.

Well, they made it through the city and were ready for the final push to Jerusalem, the city of Kings, when Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd that was following them heard two men crying out, *[20:30] “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David.”*

They were blind beggars. One of them was named Bartimaeus (and we’re never told the name of the second man). They lived by the side of this road. They survived on the charity of those who passed by.

But, on this particular day, the crowd that was with Jesus wasn't feeling terribly charitable. Matthew tells us that they [31] *sternly told them to be quiet.*

Hmmm... I wonder what they said? Did they holler out the Aramaic equivalent of, "*Shut up!*"?

It makes you wonder if this crowd had been paying much attention to the Jesus they had been following for the previous three years. They considered Him their King – but seem to have not adopted the values of His Kingdom.

Had they never noticed His compassion for the needy? Had they not seen Him heal the blind, the lame, the leprous?

Evidently, they had missed what was so clear from Jesus' life: that He had come to bind up the wounded, to touch human need, to help.

But those weren't the values this crowd embraced. They didn't want anything to interrupt their march toward Jerusalem. They were eager for Jesus to be crowned King, to sit on David's throne, to overthrow the Romans, and to re-establish Israel's glory days!

But the crowds' rude rebuke didn't silence Bartimaeus and his friend. No, [31b] *they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"*

Jesus stopped in the middle of the road and asked the two men a simple question. It's a real interesting question. It's warm and welcoming – especially coming from a King. Jesus asked, [32] *"What do you want Me to do for you?"*

Immediately, they answered, [33] *"Lord, we want our eyes to be opened."*

And the King, with healing hands, walked over to them, touched their eyes and restored their sight.

I've always been drawn to this story. It is the simple story of the healing of two blind men who saw their only chance for life in Jesus.¹

And for His part, Jesus took time at a time when He had precious little time left, to pour out compassion on desperate people.

This one event illustrates much of what we know to be the values of King Jesus: Love for the weak, compassion to the poor, responding in the moment to human need.

And people who understand that Jesus is the King - then and now - need to understand and embrace the King's priorities!

Now, this sight-restoring event on the western end of Jericho is the Lord's last recorded miracle prior to entering Jerusalem as the King.

The next time we see Him, He'll be riding toward Jerusalem to the praise of adoring crowds.

But, before we view that Palm Sunday Triumphal Entry, I want to back away and view Jesus. For just a few moments, let's do nothing more than take a simple look at the life of King Jesus.

The Life and Times of King Jesus

Looking Forward to the Life and Times of King Jesus

History had looked forward to the arrival of this King. His birth was first hinted at in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve sinned,² and it was predicted over and over again by the Old Testament prophets.

Dozens of events from the life of Jesus were prophesied hundreds of years before He was born, including the city of His birth (Bethlehem), His betrayal by a good friend (Judas), the method of His death (crucifixion) and the owner of the tomb in which He was buried (Joseph of Arimathea).

¹ One of the best descriptions I have ever heard of that event is this: The second Joshua performs miracles in Jericho again! After all, in Hebrew, Joshua's and Jesus' name are the same - *Yeshua*, meaning "Savior."

² See Genesis 3:15.

All of this and much more was predicted long before it happened. Around Christmas time we sing the song, “**Come Thou long-expected Jesus**” - and it is true. He was “long-expected.”

The Actual Life and Times of King Jesus

The unique conception of King Jesus

Jesus’ entrance into the world was long-expected and totally unprecedented. Every child born from the beginning of time (remember, Adam and Eve weren’t born, but created!) has been conceived by two human parents.

The only exception to the rule is Jesus. He was born to a virgin, to a woman who had never been with a man. That is the testimony of the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 7:14) and of the Gospel narratives (see Matthew and Luke).

Following a unique conception, Jesus’ birth was a unique mix of the common and ordinary and the wonderful and miraculous

King Jesus, as baby and child

An angel announced His birth - but it was to lowly shepherds that the announcement came that a Savior, Christ the LORD, had been born.

And where would the shepherds find this Savior, this Lord? They would find Him lying in a feeding trough in a stall in Bethlehem, a hick town just outside Jerusalem.³ Some birth for a King...

We know precious little about Jesus’ life from babyhood until the start of His public ministry at age thirty. Luke’s Gospel tells us that He **[2:52] continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.**

³ Joseph and Mary kept Jesus in Bethlehem for some months following His birth. While there, they received a visit from some wise men from the East (the region of Persia). These *magi* had ascertained from their astronomical studies that the King of the Jews had been born and they wanted to worship Him. (cf. Matthew 2:1-12)

But about the only other incident we are aware of occurred near the time of His bar-mitzvah, when He turned fourteen, and stayed behind the family caravan to remain in Jerusalem and question the rabbis.⁴

The story of the life of Jesus, the King, begins in earnest with the story of His public ministry, which began after His baptism at the hands of John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

The baptism marked Jesus’ first public appearance, and it signaled that He was about to present Himself to the nation of Israel as her King.

The public ministry of King Jesus

Following His baptism and wilderness temptations, Jesus began to preach. And what was the content of His first public message?

Matthew tells us that His ministry was launched with these words: “**Repent, for the KINGdom of Heaven is at hand.**” (Matthew 4:17, also Mark 1:14-15)

In order for any Kingdom to be a Kingdom, there has to be a King. And the King of God’s Kingdom was Jesus! Everything Jesus said and did validated His claim to be King!

- When He performed miracles of exorcism, He was demonstrating to the people that He was King over satanic powers.
- When He stilled the storm on the sea or walked on water or turned water into wine, He was showing that He was King over the powers of nature.
- When He cleansed lepers or healed the lame and the blind, He was proving that He was King over disease.
- When He brought back to life Jairus’ daughter or His good friend Lazarus, He was proving that He was King over death.
- He taught in such a way that those who listened to Him walked away saying, “*He teaches as one having authority, and not like the scribes teach.*” (Matthew 7:28-29) His teaching was regal, kingly.

⁴ It was at this time that His mother rebuked Jesus for causing her such worry, to which Jesus responded, “**Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?**” (Luke 2:49)

He did things so quietly and so far off the radar, that people usually didn't "get it." But for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, His life was a three-year advertisement of the fact that He was a King!

But as those three years drew to a close, His thoughts turned more and more frequently to Jerusalem. It was the city of Kings and it was the city of His own destiny.

So, the journey that began with an announcement to His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to die and that contained a disappointing exchange among His disciples about "firstness" as well as a beautiful miracle of healing for two desperate men, culminates with a regal entrance into Jerusalem.

From Jericho, Jesus moved on to Bethany, the home of His good friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus (whom Jesus had previously raised from the dead).

After the long journey, He spent the night in their home, anticipating an arrival in Jerusalem the following day.

It was the springtime of the year, exactly the same time of the year we are experiencing now! But, more important than a weather note, it was the time of the Passover in Israel.

Jesus had purposefully timed His arrival in Jerusalem to coincide with the annual celebration of the Passover.

Passover was the feast which commemorated the miraculous salvation of the nation of Israel from Egypt, when they were led by Moses through the middle of the Red Sea.

It was at Passover that the Jews remembered, too, that their ancestors had been spared the death of the first-born if they sacrificed a lamb and spread the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their homes.⁵

⁵ You might be interested to know that there is some debate as to the day of the week on which Jesus actually entered Jerusalem. That's right, some Bible students, in looking at the evidence, believe that the Triumphal Entry occurred on Monday and not on Sunday. Interestingly enough, if He arrived at Jerusalem on Monday, it would have also been the very day on which the Israelites in Jerusalem were choosing their lambs for the Passover, to be observed four days hence.

This was when Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, chose to enter Jerusalem.

King Jesus Takes Jerusalem By Storm! (Matthew 21:1-11)

The Disciples Prepare a "steed" for King Jesus (vv. 1-7)

On the day of the entry, the disciples and Jesus traveled from Bethany to Jerusalem, just a couple of miles walk.

After a few minutes of easy walking, they arrived at Bethphage, a little suburb between Bethany and Jerusalem's wall. There at Bethphage, Jesus gave His disciples instructions.

[1] When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, [2] saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. [3] If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

As Matthew goes on to tell us, *"this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled"*

And what prophecy did Jesus have in mind?

[5] "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

Jesus' directive would bring about a direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 62 and Zechariah 9, which foretold the manner in which the Messiah would come to Jerusalem. And why would a King/Messiah enter his capitol city on a donkey?

Well, in the ancient world a victorious King or a conquering general would often ride a donkey instead of a war horse into a town he was to occupy.

This was to demonstrate his sovereignty, to show that he had so completely defeated his enemies that he didn't need to ride a battle-tested war horse but could safely ride a beast of burden.

Riding a donkey was a way of showing that he had everything under control.

And Jesus' decision to ride a donkey into Jerusalem indicated that He had the Kingdom of God under control. Nothing to worry about. All is well.

Matthew tells us that *[6] The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, [7] and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.*

Don't miss this. Jesus is riding into town as a conquering KING, as the Messiah! Listen to and watch the reception He got from the crowds who were streaming into Jerusalem.

Crowds Welcomed King Jesus as He Entered Jerusalem (vv. 8-11)

Jesus' parade route lined with fans!

Now, as much as we might wish it were the case, we can be certain that the multitudes had NOT shown up for the purpose of accompanying Jesus into the city. They were already on the road, making their way toward Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover.

The road they were traveling was the heavily trafficked "Jericho Road" that carried Jewish pilgrims from all over the world to Jerusalem. Some estimates put the population in Jerusalem and vicinity at upwards of one million people during the Feast days.

This multitude saw Jesus riding on a donkey the last mile or so into Jerusalem, put two and two together, and figured, *"This is it! He's setting up the Kingdom!"*

And they began to treat Jesus the way people in a monarchy treat their King. They made a big fuss over Him.

[8] Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

Jesus' fans cry out to Him!

Some of those in the great crowd had heard about Jesus.

- They had heard the stories of His miracles and His teaching.
- They had heard about how He had bested the Pharisees in some great "one-on-ones."
- They had heard that He was a Savior (after all, His name, "Yeshua" means "savior" in Hebrew) and hoped that He might deliver them from the power of Rome.

So, the crowd began to chant and shout:

[9]... "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

Each word of their cheer is significant.

- *"Hosanna"* means "Save now!" It is a desperate cry. And the repetition of *"Hosanna"* (at the end of verse 9) simply adds to the intensity and desperation of their plea to Jesus for deliverance.
- They called Jesus, *"the Son of David"* which He certainly was, descended from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David and Solomon. The point of that designation being that the Son of David would be the One who would reign as King over Israel!
- The phrase, *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"* was a quote from Psalm 118, an enthronement psalm that was sung by the Jews in ancient times as they marched with their King to the Temple.

The eagerness is building as Jesus draws closer and closer to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem - stirred by King Jesus' arrival!

[21:10] When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" [11] And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

As the King descended into the Kidron Valley and then walked up toward the wall that surrounded Jerusalem, the city was all stirred up. By this time, the crowds had swelled into the thousands, perhaps into the tens of thousands.

Not surprisingly, Jesus moved through the gates and straight to the Temple (where He would find things in an awful condition).

This is not only what the ancient Kings of Israel did when they entered the city, it was what everyone expected Jesus, the Messiah, God's Man, to do! After all, He was the King!

Conclusion:

And THAT is the Triumphal Entry. It was the moment of Jesus' greatest popularity.

On another occasion, Jesus had people clamoring for Him to be crowned King and He put them off. John's Gospel records that after the feeding of the five thousand, the crowds wanted to make Him King by force.

At that time, He would have nothing of it and instead preached a message called "*The Bread of Life*" that resulted in His popularity plummeting and the crowd size dropping from thousands to exactly twelve. (John 6)

At that time and on many other occasions, Jesus deflected praise and worship and Kingship.

But not on this day.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus welcomed the recognition of the crowds that He was King. On this day, He received their praise, drank it up. On this day, as He said in another place, if the crowds had been silent, the rocks would have cried out.

Jesus rode toward Jerusalem to the accompaniment of the cheering crowds. And as this Palm Sunday drew to a close He continued through the Gates of Jerusalem, ever closer to the Temple itself...