

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

PALM SUNDAY

King Jesus Comes “Home”

(Luke 18:31--19:48)

Introduction: The proportion principle...

The greater the importance of something, the greater the emphasis we give to it.

If health is important to us we give a certain reasonable amount of time to exercise and are careful to eat sensibly. It is a priority.

If relationships are important to us we make sure to spend time with people, building genuine relationships with family members and friends.

If purity is important to us we are careful to rent or buy movies that reflect values we believe in.

If God’s work on earth is very important to us we will intentionally invest our financial resources in supporting our church, cross-cultural missions, and people in need for Jesus’ sake.

You can tell what is most important to someone by the emphasis they give to this or that thing.

We give important matters proportionately more time, energy, and attention than less important issues. Let’s call it The Principle of Proportion.

The Principle of Proportion is evident in the way the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are arranged.

The four Gospels give us a total of eighty nine chapters. About thirty of them (one third!) deal with the last WEEK of Jesus’ life.¹ That tells us that the thing to not miss about Jesus is His death and resurrection!

The rest of His story is crucial, of course. The story wouldn’t be complete without His miracles and teachings and interaction with the Twelve.

But Jesus’ life was aimed at the cross. The place the end of Jesus life plays in the Gospels is way out of proportion to the rest of the life of Jesus. The end is the point and that is because the salvation He offers is valid because of His death and because of Easter Sunday’s empty tomb.

This morning marks the beginning of our consideration of the final week of Jesus’ life. And that final week was full to overflowing!

This morning, Scripture reveals Jesus to be what He rarely is seen to be. We see Him as a king.

From the very beginning of His life, many people understood that Jesus was a king.

Herod the Great, the Roman-installed king of Israel who reigned around the time of Jesus’ birth, was so convinced of Jesus’ royalty that he ordered the slaughter of all the babies around Bethlehem so as to do away with his competition (Matthew 2).

The Gospel of John tells us that Nathaniel, one of Jesus’ first disciples, said to Jesus, [*John 1:49*] **Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.**²

Yet, for most of His life and ministry, Jesus was a King *incognito*. This morning, the veil is ripped away. We see Him for the King He always was as He neared Jerusalem for the very last time.

¹ Of course, the Gospels do record a few details about Jesus’ birth, His early family life, and His childhood - all found in Matthew and Luke. But the preponderance of the material is focused on the latter part of His ministry and life.

² This was after Jesus identified him as an Israelite in whom there was no guile.

We are going to begin today by looking at a couple of events that occurred near the end of His final journey south to Jerusalem.

The route Jesus chose to get to Jerusalem went through one of the world's oldest cities, the city of Jericho.

In the first century, Jericho was a smallish town of several thousand people located about twenty five miles to the northeast of Jerusalem.

It had a pleasant climate during the spring season (the time of year where we find Jesus in Luke 19), and it was a very wealthy city, since it had become a favorite winter capitol for the Roman rulers of Judea.

King Jesus Tells of Things to Come (Luke 18:31-34)

Jesus Warns His Disciples (vv. 31-33)

Jesus was accompanied by a pretty large crowd of people as He traveled south. What with all of His miracles and His wisdom and His teaching, there was lots of interest in Him.

At one point during this walk to Jericho, Jesus turned His attention to the twelve apostles. He took the time to explain to them - and to them only - the things that were about to happen to Him.³

For the third time, Jesus gave a “sneak preview” of the future.

When you or I see “coming attractions” at the theatre or at the beginning of a DVD we bring home from Blockbuster, the idea is to whet our appetites for what is to come. Jesus was not interested in creating eagerness for what was to come but to prepare His followers for the horror that was about to engulf them.

[Luke 18:31] Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. [32] “For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, [33] and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.”

³ For the third time - see also Mark 8:31; 9:31!

We would have hoped that their response to this bit of news might have been grief for their Master, or even fear for themselves. Tragically, they “just didn’t get it.”⁴

They SO “don’t get it” (v. 34)

[34] But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

There was simply a colossal lack of understanding. They were thinking of other things. What things? Things like...

*“Won’t it be great when Jesus becomes the King?”
“I can’t wait for Him to overthrow Rome!”
“I sure hope that I get named to His cabinet...”*

These guys were anticipating a coronation, exactly the opposite of what would happen, and exactly the opposite of what Jesus said would happen.

I can’t imagine a clearer statement being made than the one Jesus made about what was really about to play out. But the disciples’ response proves that when you’re thinking “crowns,” it’s hard to hear “cross.”

The entourage approached Jericho, the ancient city that had been destroyed under the leadership of General Joshua fourteen hundred years earlier when the walls came a-tumblin’ down.

Well, the second Joshua is just about to perform another miracle at Jericho.⁵

As Jesus neared Jericho’s city gates He encountered a situation of great human need.

⁴ In Matthew 20, this announcement gave rise to the disciples arguing among themselves about who was going to get to sit next to Jesus in the kingdom they thought He was about to establish.

⁵ “Joshua” and “Jesus” are the same name in Hebrew, pronounced “Yeshua.” The name means “savior/deliverer.”

King Jesus Heals a Blind Man (Luke 18:35-43)

A Blind Man Cries Out (vv. 35-39)

[35] As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging.

With no social safety net in place in the ancient world, physically disabled people who didn't have loving families to support them were reduced to begging for survival.

That was the plight of this blind man. But he has heard stories about Jesus of Nazareth. He's heard that Jesus raises the dead, cleanses lepers, makes the lame to walk - and the blind to see. We can hear the desperation in his voice as he cries out to Jesus -

[36] Now hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was. [37] They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. [38] And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" [39] Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

What follows is one of the most touching scenes we find anywhere in the Gospels. Keep in mind here that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die. The cross is uppermost in His mind. He's only recently told His disciples that He will face mocking, scourging, and crucifixion.

And despite His own coming nightmare, He turned His full attention on this man who was calling out to Him.

Jesus and the Blind Man (vv. 40-41)

[40] And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, [41] "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!"

In another place (John 9) Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. Now THAT was an incredible miracle. He put in place sight that had never been present.

This is different. This man knew what it was to see. He pleaded with Jesus to restore sight that he has lost. He knew what bluebonnets looked like. Had watched children play. He wants to see AGAIN.

And King Jesus responded as only He could have to this man's desperate cry.

God's Initiative and Man's Response (vv. 42-43)

Miracle working power! (v. 42)

[42] And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."

And just like that, the man could see again!

Can you imagine being there, watching the scene? Can you picture the unfettered joy of this man? The scene you imagine is probably just about what Luke describes for us.

Awestruck praise, worship! (v. 43)

[43] Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.

There is power here, no doubt. But we've seen Jesus' power before. What we see here as much as His miracle-working power is His amazing love, His compassion, His tenderness.

Of course, Jesus didn't heal every blind person in Judea while He walked the earth. He didn't cast out every demon or cure every disease or raise up everyone who died.

But those He touched show us that He is the power of God personified AND that He is the love of God personified. There is healing in the loving hands of King Jesus!

And from that incredibly touching scene we watch as King Jesus moves into the city of Jericho and deals with another very different, but equally needy man.

This man is Zaccheus, a chief tax-collector of Jericho. We are grateful to Dr. Luke, for he is the only one of the Gospels writers who records this story.

King Jesus Saves Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10)

Zaccheus, the Scoundrel! (vv. 1-2)

[1] He entered Jericho and was passing through. [2] And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich.

In the first century Roman world, there were several different classes of tax-collectors.

There were the publicans, who were on the bottom of the totem pole. They had no prestige, no authority, and virtually no benefit from their jobs as tax-collectors. They were the first century arm-twisters and kneecap-breakers.

Then, there were the tax-collectors, proper, who were the overseers of the publicans.

And, then, over the whole tax-collection system in each city, there was a “chief tax-collector.” In Jericho, the wealthy city, Zaccheus was the chief tax-collector.

Becoming a chief tax-collector required a man to pay a substantial sum of money to the Roman government.

But once he became a city’s top tax official, he had the authority to set tax rates at whatever level he wished (as long as Rome got its share), and could collect (or “extort”) tax money from the populace by whatever means he wished.

Usually, these men were Roman citizens, as they were considered more trustworthy by the Roman overlords. But, in Jericho’s case, taxation was overseen by Zaccheus, a Jew. That tells us that he had paid for the right to bleed tax money for the Romans from his fellow Jews.

As a class, it is not tough to understand why the tax-collectors of the first century were hated by the Jews. They represented all that was evil in being dominated by imperial Rome.

It has been verified through historical documentation that these tax-collectors often overcharged the people, and then pocketed the surplus. When a Jew was the CHIEF tax-collector, the animosity only increased.

There need be no doubt but that Zaccheus was universally hated by the tax-paying public in Jericho. Everyone would have considered him to be a cheating, thieving, traitorous good for nothing.

So, at the time that Jesus rode into town we know that Zaccheus was a greedy man. We also know that he was a short man.

Zaccheus, the Hungry! (vv. 3-4)

[3] Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. [4] So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way.

So, the kids’ song has a basis in reality. He really did climb up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see! Amazing.

Here is a grown man with a responsible position in society engaging in the child’s act of tree-climbing!

Does this tell us something about Zaccheus’ emotional state?

He was a dishonest, wealthy short man trying to get a glimpse of Jesus. Why was he so interested in seeing Jesus?

Certainly he had heard of the miracles Jesus had performed, so it may have been simple curiosity. Or maybe it went somewhat deeper.

A person’s involvement in really wicked behavior - such as the behavior Zaccheus had been involved with - may indicate a hunger and a thirst for *something*.

He or she may not even be able to articulate what that *something* is. They may not be aware that the *something* can only be gotten from God. But they will pursue that *something* with all the energy they possess and by any and every means available to them.

Zaccheus' frantic desire to see Jesus may tell us that he had a deep longing to see if this miracle-worker from Galilee could free him from the chains that bound him.

Zaccheus, the Welcomed (vv. 5-6)

*[5] When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."
[6] And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly.*

Immediately, people objected to this move on Jesus' part - and for obvious reasons.

[7] When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

Everybody knows that if you aspire to kingship you don't just hang with anybody. Messiahs or Messiah-wannabe's have to be careful about their associations.

Evidently King Jesus never got that memo.

As He walked by, He glanced up into a sycamore tree and saw a man who had lived very badly. And He promptly invited Himself to Zaccheus' home for the mid-day meal, a self-invite that Zaccheus gladly accepted!⁶

And no sooner were they on their way but Zaccheus' heart was touched. He received the grace of God and it came by way of the friendly, open, accepting words of Jesus.

How do we know that his heart was touched? Because of this chief tax-collector's words and his actions.

Zaccheus, the Saved! (vv. 8-10)

[8] Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."

Zaccheus, the sinner, was overwhelmed by the grace that had been shown him, the grace of acceptance. In an instant, God turned Zaccheus' selfishness into selflessness. And King Jesus said that Zaccheus' generosity showed that he was saved.

[9] And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. [10] "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Whatever you do, don't confuse the order! Zaccheus' generosity didn't save him. Repaying those whom he had defrauded didn't make him right with God. But, it did show that he had been made right with God.

So far today we have seen the love of King Jesus poured out on a blind man who made ends meet by begging by the side of the road outside of Jericho. We have seen the love of King Jesus poured out on a rich man who got that way through graft and corruption.

And all the while the King is moving closer and closer to His date with crucifixion, the point of His life. Jesus moved through Jericho and then he, along with His followers, turns a corner to head south and west to the capitol city.

We watch as He prepares to enter Jerusalem - and oh, how He enters Jerusalem.

King Jesus Rides into an Eager Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-40)

Arranging Transport (vv. 28-34)

[28] After He had said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem...

⁶ This was not presumptuous on Jesus' part. Hospitality was a great privilege in the ancient near east. For a renowned rabbi to announce that He was coming to his home for dinner would have been a great honor for Zaccheus.

[29] When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, [30] saying, “Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here.”

All that we are about to see took place on a Sunday, the first day of the Jewish week. From the other Gospel records, we understand that Jesus had been staying with Mary and Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, a small town just outside Jerusalem.

Luke takes us from Bethany to Bethphage, another suburb (more like a neighborhood; it was that small). It was perhaps a 30-45 minute easy stroll from the one town to the other. Jesus set His plan in motion at Bethphage.

Jesus directives are unlike anything we see Him doing anywhere else. He is ORCHESTRATING His Jerusalem entrance. He wants it “just so.” It has to be “just so.”

Jesus has in mind a certain kind of entrance, the kind that is described in Zechariah, chapter nine. That chapter tells how the Jewish Messiah will make His way into the city of Jerusalem.

This is the King who is going to destroy Israel’s enemies and who will set up a Kingdom ***“from sea to sea”*** and who will bring about a reign of peace.

Here is what Zechariah says about that King’s entrance into Jerusalem:

***[Zechariah 9:9] -
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

In the ancient world a strong King would often ride into town on a donkey or a young colt.

Luke tells us that Jesus gave explicit instructions to His disciples to get a colt. Not a war horse, but a young, inexperienced horse.

The King’s decision to ride a mount that would be useless in battle made a statement. It demonstrated that he was in control. It showed that he had things so completely under control that there was no threat of revolt or opposition.

A crowd that saw a King ride up on a battle-tested steed had every reason to fear. *“Uh oh, trouble’s here!”*

But if he showed up on a colt, they knew they could breathe easy. Everything was going to be just fine.

Jesus’ decision to ride a colt into Jerusalem said to the crowds who were streaming in for Passover,

“I’ve got everything under control. Nothing to worry about. Relax. The Kingdom of God is just where it should be and just where I want it.”

But Jesus’ followers were not wealthy men, and He Himself certainly had no reserves of money to purchase a colt. So, how were they going to secure this colt? **THEY WERE GOING TO TAKE IT!**

And the two disciples who were being sent on this mission might have had a question mark etched on their faces.

They might want to know how they were to deal with the OWNER of the colt should he object to their taking his animal! So, Jesus told them how to handle that circumstance should it arise:

[31] “If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of it.’

Sure enough, that is exactly what happened. And the disciples said exactly what King Jesus told them to say, and the colt’s owners let them take the colt, no more questions asked.⁷

⁷ [32] *So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them.*
[33] *As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?”* [34] *They said, “The Lord has need of it.”*

The disciples brought the colt to Jesus. And thus begins the short two mile journey into Jerusalem, a trip that couldn't have taken more than an hour or two, but a trip that marked the high point of earthly popularity for the Son of God.

A Triumphal Entry! (vv. 35-40)

[35] They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it.

With Jesus seated on the colt, and surrounded by His disciples, He began riding down the slopes of the Mount of Olives, toward Jerusalem.

Don't miss this! Jesus is riding into town as the KING He is! Listen to the reception He gets from the crowds who were streaming into Jerusalem! The air was electric.

At this time of year, all of the roads leading to Jerusalem were crowded with Jewish pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.⁸

Since the Jews coming from Galilee in the north would have refused to pass through Samaria⁹, many of those coming from Galilee would have taken the same route Jesus had taken on this particular trip.

Leaving Galilee, they would have crossed the Jordan River just south of the Sea of Galilee and then traveled south through the region of Perea (the area to the east of the Jordan River across from Samaria).

They would have then crossed the Jordan River again at Jericho and traveled on the main highway from Jericho to Jerusalem.

This route took them directly through Bethany and Bethphage and exactly on the road Jesus was taking on Palm Sunday on the back of a colt.

As King Jesus descended into the Kidron Valley and then rode up toward the wall that surrounded Jerusalem, the city was all stirred up.

It was the Passover season! The crowds have swelled into the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people, all coming to worship.

If you've ever had the thought that these crowds have all come out to see Jesus, well - sorry! The crowds were on the road anyway. Their response, though, as He passed by them, was truly all about Jesus!

Some of these folks had no doubt 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.

This multitude saw Jesus riding on a donkey toward Jerusalem, put two and two together, and figured, "*This is it! The Messiah, King Jesus is coming to set 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. Watch.

[36] As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. [37] As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen,

They gave up their garments and threw them on the dirt to keep the dust off of Him. See, you don't want the King to get dirty. You don't even want the King's colt to get dirty.

Branches from trees (palm trees, perhaps) that lined the roads helped make a carpet for King Jesus, so the crowds cut off those branches and piled them in the road, along with their outer garments.

They treated Him like royalty. They honored Him.

⁸ Conservative estimates put the population in Jerusalem and vicinity at upwards of 1,000,000 people during the days of the Passover.

⁹ Although Jesus Himself had not hesitated to pass through Samaria at least one time (see John 4 and the story of the Samaritan woman)

And they spoke to Him as they would speak to a King. Listen to them shout -

[26] “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Those words are quotes from Psalm 118, a psalm that was read every Passover season AND a psalm that was read in ancient times as the King led the people in procession to worship in the Temple.

And King Jesus moved through the Golden Gate, the easternmost gate of the city. This is what we expect that He would have done. This was the gate through which the ancient Kings of Israel always entered.

On this particular day, Palm Sunday, the crowds saw in Jesus the fulfillment of their desperate hopes.

And THAT is the Triumphal Entry. Notice how briefly Luke tells the tale. Short and to the point - but the important details are all there. It is the main event of Palm Sunday, and it stands as the moment of Jesus’ greatest popularity.

On another occasion, Jesus had people clamoring for Him to be crowned King and He put them off. That incident is recorded in John chapter 6, after the feeding of the 5,000.

John tells us that the crowds wanted to make Him King by force. At that time, He would have none of it and instead preached a message that effectively culled His followers from thousands to roughly twelve.

But here, on this Palm Sunday, He agreed to receive the praise of the crowds. Here, He welcomed it. Here, He drank it up.

When the Pharisees watching this display took offense and told Jesus to tell the people to stop making such a fuss over Him, He answered, **[40]...“I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!”**

King Jesus, the powerful healer of broken bodies healed a blind man. King Jesus, the compassionate healer of broken and twisted souls, saved the scoundrel, Zaccheus. King Jesus, the majestic Messiah, received the worship of the crowds.

And as the day drew to a close, King Jesus cleaned house.

Passing through the Golden Gate, He kept on riding as far as the Temple precincts. Upon arriving, He saw that something was wrong - dreadfully wrong.

King Jesus Cleans House (Luke 19:45-46)

[45] Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, [46] saying to them, “It is written, ‘And My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a robbers’ den.”

There’s no miraculous show of power here. Just a raw display of moral authority. And what gave Jesus to right to act like this in God’s Temple??!!

One thing and one thing only. He’s the King.

Conclusion:

We Americans embrace the idea that all people are created equal - and rightly so! We people ARE all equal. Democracy got it right.

But while there are undeniable advantages to living in an egalitarian society like ours, someone living in a country with a King might have a leg up on us when it comes to knowing how to relate to King Jesus.

Subjects of a king know all about being in subjection to a sovereign. They know that the King’s word is law and that his commands demand obedience.

This day, we see Jesus as the King He was and is. He is the King acclaimed on Palm Sunday, the King who died on a Roman cross, the King who rose from the dead, victorious, and the king who reigns in our hearts today!

This day we give to King Jesus our fervent worship, our eager submission, and our whole-hearted obedience.