

PALM SUNDAY SERMON

Today is a Palm Sunday. Across the world Christians celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. And the whole scene has striking similarities of other kings who have approached the great city walls of Jerusalem – Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Caesar. But this time it is no earthly king on stallion or charger. This time it is the heavenly king on a donkey.

What I would like to do this morning is identify three things that point to Jesus as the heavenly King, as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords - and that we should take comfort from this in the midst of the crisis we now face.

Firstly, Jesus is all seeing and all knowing.

After the events of that day the people must have reflected on what had happened before their eyes. The disciples must have wondered in amazement as everything that Jesus had foretold that day came true – from what village to go to find the donkey, to where to go in the village, and the fact that the owner of the donkey will appear as they begin to untether the donkey. And how on earth of all the donkeys in the village could it be a young heifer that had never been ridden on. The fact that the donkey had never been ridden on made it especially suitable for a sacred occasion. It had never been ridden by any man before - it was undefiled. All of this was to underline the sacredness of the occasion unfolding before the people's eyes. And what about the reaction of the crowd that day? The crowd received Jesus as King! They shouted 'Hosanna!' which means 'save now'. 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.' No Hollywood film director could have choreographed or scripted it in the way in which the events

unfolded that day. And all of this happens exactly as Jesus had said.

You see, there is nothing hidden from our Lord's eyes. And this should be of great comfort to us because there is never a time when he is not with us, or beside us, or there to comfort us.

We are told that he is acquainted with all our ways (Psalm 139:3). And so during these difficult times our Lord is walking with us. And with this in mind, this should have a restraining and sanctifying effect on our souls. If we know that the Lord is near, then we should seek him and be comforted by him in times of crisis.

Secondly our Lord's timing is perfect. It was Passover time and Jerusalem and the surrounding neighbourhoods were thronging with people. Jews from every corner of the world were making their way to the greatest of their national festivals. Jesus couldn't have picked a better time, a more dramatic moment. The city was surging with people keyed up with religious expectations that the coming Messiah was imminent. And we are told that by the end of the day the whole city was in turmoil with people asking each other, 'Who could this be?' And don't we know what it is like to be in turmoil. Strange events do unsettle us. I have to say since the Corona virus outbreak I have become more reflective and thoughtful. Things such as 'what if it happens to me or my family?' 'What if one of us reacts badly to the virus?' But if you are fearful at this time – take comfort that the Lord is sovereign. He is the Lord over time and in his hands are the depths of the earth (Psalm 95.4) Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37), He goes before you. (Deut. 31:8,9). And if you are fearful and anxious at this time, Take it to the Lord in prayer. (1 Peter 5:7). He is there for you.

Thirdly, the events that unfolding that day were exactly what was prophesied in the scriptures. Scripture was unfolding in their midst that day – wow! Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah. The Prophet Zechariah writes of the coming of Zion's King, 'See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey". The riding of the donkey is also significant and often misunderstood. The donkey was not the lowly beast that some of us think of it today. In the east the donkey could be a noble animal. A king may come riding on a donkey, but when he did, it was always a sign that he came in peace. The horse was the mount of war, the ass was the mount of peace. So when Jesus claimed to be king that day, he claimed to be the king of peace upon men. He came not to destroy but to love, not to condemn, but to help. To rescue us out of a crisis. And don't we need rescuing. There is a popular worship by Matt Redman, some of you may know it, it goes something like this,

'You alone can rescue, You alone can save, You came down to save us, led us out of death, to you alone belongs the highest praise!'

And death we fear at this time. I don't know whether you have thought about death at this time, *but I have!* I fear the Corona virus because it could kill me or someone I love. But I need not fear death because my Lord and Saviour who rode into Jerusalem that day was on a mission to conqueror the chains of death. And this victory is exactly what we will be celebrating one week from now. There is no doubt that the corona virus has made people feel anxious and afraid, stressed and confused. But if that is you, remember you are not alone.

The Bishop of Oxford spoke recently about saying Psalm 23 every day as a source of comfort and as a reminder that God is with us. In Jesus our saviour we have the Good Shepherd and just as sheep are

dependent on the shepherd so are we dependent at this time for his provision, guidance and protection. This plague that has come upon us, as that is what it is, has cast a frightening shadow over us because we feel entirely helpless. There is the fear of death. But Take courage as Jesus did as he approached the most difficult time of his ministry and claim the victory that Jesus won on the cross.

‘God raised him from the dead, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.’ (Acts 2:24)

At times like this, there is only one person who can walk through the dark vale that is upon us and that is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. He will watch over you now and forevermore, so put your trust in the LORD. **AMEN**

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