

Mark 11:1-11

Introduction

We're used to people making big entrances. Think of the way professional boxers enter the ring. Pumping music. Flashing lights. A cheering crowd. And lots of swagger and bravado. It's all intended to make a statement.

In our passage this morning, Jesus makes a big entrance. It's unlike him. Normally, he avoids the spotlight. But on this occasion, he deliberately draws attention to himself. He isn't full of swagger and bravado. But he does make a statement as he enters the city.

His entrance reveals two things about him. It reveals both his glory and his humility. And as Mark tells the story, he wants us to see both. So, let's take them one at a time.

First, Jesus' glory.

Glory

If we're to understand what Jesus is doing in those verses, we need to delve into the Old Testament.

Firstly, we need to remind ourselves what is said in Genesis. In chapter 49 of Genesis, the great patriarch, Jacob, is on his deathbed and he calls his twelve sons to himself. He wants to tell them what will happen to them in days to come. And he speaks to them one at a time. When he comes to his fourth son, Judah, he says this: **The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.**

Jacob is identifying Judah as the royal tribe of Israel. It will be a tribe of kings. And it will continue to be a tribe of kings until a certain king comes. This is a king to whom all nations will pay homage. He will have the obedience of the nations.

But who is he? Who is this king who will have the obedience of the nations?

We might naturally think of King David, who we've been reading about as we've studied 1 Samuel. David was the greatest of all Israel's kings. He was from the tribe of Judah. And he certainly established Judah as the ruling tribe. He established a huge and extensive empire. Yet we can hardly say that he received the obedience of the nations. He didn't.

No, this figure that Jacob speaks of is someone even greater. A descendant of David. Elsewhere, in the Old Testament, he's described as a glorious figure who would bring peace and blessing to the world.

I'm told that one of the greatest ambitions of any violinist is to play a Stradivarius. It's a very rare violin, meticulously handcrafted by a man called Antonio Stradivari in the 18th century.

Apparently, they produce a beautiful sound, and they're rare because very few of them have survived. So, you can imagine the excitement of this man, British violinist Peter Cropper when, in 1981 the Royal Academy of Music offered him a 258-year-old Stradivarius for a series of concerts. He was over the moon.

But then the unimaginable happened. As he entered the stage for a concert in Finland he tripped, landed on top of the violin, and snapped the neck clean off. A priceless masterpiece destroyed!

Apparently, Cropper was inconsolable. He took the violin to a master craftsman in the vain hope he might be able to repair it. And he *was* able to repair it. In fact, the repair was so perfect that the break was undetectable. And, more importantly, the sound was exquisite. It's reported that it sounded even better after the repair than before. What Cropper had thought to be irreparably damaged had been fully restored by the hand of a Master craftsman.

God is a Master craftsman. And it is his intention that through his coming king, he will restore this fallen and broken world. It may look irreparably damaged to us. We may despair when we hear of all the evil in the world. And when we experience it ourselves. Yet God is a Master craftsman. And it's his intention that through a coming king he will restore this fallen and broken world and bring peace and blessing to people of all nations.

That's who Jacob's referring to in Genesis 49. And in Mark, chapter 11, the crowds greet Jesus as this person.

So, back to Mark 11.

Jesus tells two of his disciples to go ahead of him to a village, where they'll find a colt, tied at a doorway. They're to bring it to him. Mark doesn't tell us how this arrangement came about because that doesn't seem to be the point. The point is what happens next.

Verse 7.

When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

'Hosanna!'

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!'

'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

After centuries of waiting, the crowds are proclaiming that Jesus is the great and glorious king that God had promised. He is the descendant of David who will receive the obedience of the nations. He is the one through whom this fallen and broken world will be restored.

His kingdom has been inaugurated. Men, women and children of all nations are coming to him through faith and receiving a place among his people.

And one day he will return. On that day, every knee will bow before him: some willingly, others not. And from that day forth, his people, the faithful of every nation, will live with him forever in a restored and glorious creation.

There was a woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. She contacted her pastor and asked him to come to her house to discuss her funeral arrangements. She told him which songs she wanted, what scriptures she would like to have read, and requested that she be buried with her favourite Bible. Well, everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

“There’s one more thing,” she said.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“This is very important,” the woman continued. “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.”

The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say.

So, she explained. “In all my years of attending church meals I always remember that when the dishes were cleared, someone would lean over and say, ‘Keep your fork.’”

And she said, “It was my favourite part because I knew that something better was coming... like chocolate cake or apple pie. Something wonderful! So, I just want people to see me there in my coffin with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them: ‘Keep your fork... the best is still to come.’”

If you wouldn’t yet call yourself a Christian, the invitation of the gospel is to come to Jesus and take your place among his people. His kingdom may not look much today. But it is all around you. He’s drawing people to himself from all nations, through faith. And the best is yet to come. When he returns, he will finally be seen in all his glory. It will be a day of celebration and rejoicing for all who have received him as their King.

But if we’re to understand what Jesus is doing in Mark 11, we need to see more than his glory. We also need to see his humility.

That’s our second heading: humility.

Humility

And we need to delve back into the Old Testament

We need to go to Zechariah chapter 9. Particularly, verse 9.

Let me read it. It speaks of the coming of this king that Jacob had spoken of. And it says this: **Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

In his book *Written In Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. She had a rare blood type which she shared with her little brother. The fact that he had recovered from the same disease two years earlier made the chances of a successful transfusion using *his* blood quite high. The doctor carefully explained all this to the little boy, pointing out that without the transfusion his sister would die.

“Would you be brave and give your blood to your sister?” the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip began to tremble. Then he smiled and said, “Sure, for my sister.” The time came and the two children were wheeled into the hospital room – Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. He smiled reassuringly at his sister. But as he watched the blood travelling out of his body, down the clear plastic tube, his smile faded. He looked up and said, “Doctor, when do I die?”

Johnny thought that giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life for her. Yet because he loved her, he was prepared to do it. Thankfully, he’d misunderstood.

Yet it’s precisely what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to bring salvation to his people.

That isn’t salvation that comes through military might. Jesus didn’t ride into Jerusalem on a warhorse. He didn’t come as a warrior king to take on the Romans. Rather, it’s the salvation that comes through the humility of a gentle king who’s willing to lay down his life for those he loves.

We all face death. The Bible says that death is the just penalty for sin. And we all sin. Not one of us is sinless. But Christ came to bear the sin of his people at the cross, suffering God’s wrath in our place, so that we will never have to.

Without Christ, you and I stand before God, bearing our own sin, and facing his condemnation. But if we come to Jesus through faith and let him bear our sin for us at the cross, then his death brings salvation. And as a result, we have peace with God, and are welcomed as his friends. That’s why the message of the cross is a message of peace.

Zechariah chapter 9 speaks of this coming king and says: **He will proclaim peace to the nations.**

That's the message of the cross. Jesus is the gentle King, who willingly laid down his life for us so that we might have peace with God. And it's the whole purpose for which Jesus came. As he rides into Jerusalem, he's riding to the cross.

There's a painting of Christ by Holman Hunt. Here it is. It shows Jesus standing inside his father's carpenter shop in Nazareth. He has put his saw down and is stripped down to a cloth around his waist. Wearily, he's stretching out his arms above his head, and if you look carefully, you can see that he casts a shadow onto the wall. And the shadow intersects with a rack of tools to form the shape of someone who has been crucified.

There's a woman in the foreground on the left-hand side. She kneels among the woodchips. Her hands rest on a chest that contains the gifts of the magi, given to honour Jesus as king. It's Mary. And as she looks up, she's startled by the cross like shadow cast by her son.

Hunt is showing us in art form what the Gospels show us with words. The shadow of the cross was cast over Jesus' life from the very beginning.

The very purpose for which Jesus came was to die on a cross to save his people from the penalty of sin and to bring peace with God. As Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, this is where he's heading: to the cross.

He is God's King. A glorious king. A king who invites people of all nations to come and be part of his kingdom. But the only way into his kingdom is through faith in his cross. It's to recognise that you are a sinner in need of salvation. And to trust in his cross to bring you peace with God.

Conclusion

So then, the question is what will you do with Jesus? Will you delight in him and worship him? Will you acknowledge him as your King and receive the salvation he offers you? Or will you reject him and cast him aside?

For those who receive him, he promises blessing in this life, and abundant joy for all eternity, as members of his kingdom. But for those who cast him aside, there will be only the regret and the remorse of those who have missed out.

Getting the identity of Jesus right is of crucial importance. This Easter, make sure you know who he is.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he came us as our King, to lay down his life for our salvation. Please help us to get his identity right and to rejoice in him this Easter. We ask it in his name. Amen.