

Luke 19:28-48

Introduction

People like to make an entrance. Think of boxers entering the ring. Lights flashing. Music pounding. Think of pop stars arriving on stage to a deafening cheer from the crowd. Think of the Olympic torch being carried along the river Seine for the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics, followed by athletes from the competing nations. People like to make an entrance.

We might be surprised, though, to find that Jesus is one of them. Yet that's what he's doing in our passage this morning. We're used to him trying to avoid drawing attention to himself. At times, he almost seems secretive. But not in this passage. His arrival in Jerusalem after a long journey up from Galilee couldn't be more dramatic. He rides a donkey. His disciples throw their cloaks on the road in front of him. They shout his praises, declaring him to be God's long-awaited king. It couldn't be more dramatic. He's announcing his arrival. He wants people to take notice. And as we read Luke's account of it, there are three things to observe.

Firstly, it was intentional. But secondly, it was divisive. And thirdly, it was tragic.

And we're going to consider each of those one at a time. So, firstly then, as we've already seen, his dramatic arrival in Jerusalem was intentional.

Intentional

Look again at verse 28.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

In chapter 9, at the very start of the long journey from Galilee, we read that Jesus **resolutely set out for Jerusalem**. And here he is, once again, going on ahead. Here is the king leading the way as a king should. And in the verses that follow, we see his royal authority. Verse 29.

As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" say, "The Lord needs it."'

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?'

They replied, 'The Lord needs it.'

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

Do you see how intentional Jesus is? He's in full control. None of this is happening by accident. It's all deliberate. He's making his identity plain for all to see.

These actions are intended to recall the words of Zechariah 9, verse 9, written many hundreds of years earlier: **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.**

Here's is God's king, the Messiah, coming to his royal city, Zion, just as the scriptures foretold. Jesus couldn't be making it any more obvious. The meaning of his actions is unmistakable. The challenge for the inhabitants of the city is whether they will receive him as king. And it's the same challenge for us. Will we recognise Jesus' claim and receive him as our king? Because not all will... as Luke goes on to make clear, Jesus' claim is divisive, which is our second heading.

Divisive

Look at verse 37.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

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

'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!'

'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

Claims about the identity of Jesus divide opinion. They always have done, and they always will.

The disciples joyfully proclaim him to be the long-awaited Messiah. He is the fulfilment of Israel's hope. He is the answer to the nation's longing for a king who would bring peace to earth. He is the king they had been waiting for. And they had reached that conclusion based on all they'd seen.

They'd been with him throughout his earthly ministry. They'd seen him drive out demons and cure the sick. On one occasion they'd seen him heal a man of leprosy. On another occasion he had given sight to the blind. When a paralysed man was brought to him, they'd

heard him claim authority to forgive the man's sins, and then, to their amazement, they'd seen him prove it by healing the man of his paralysis.

They'd seen him raise a widow's son from the dead; giving him back to a grieving mother who thought she had lost him forever. On another occasion, he had raised a twelve-year-old girl who had died and reunited her with her astonished parents. They'd been there when he'd fed more than five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish.

Everything he did he did well. They could reach only one conclusion: Here is God's King. **'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'** they shout.

And we who live this side of the cross have even more reason to rejoice... because we know where this procession is heading. We know that Jesus is going to the cross to pay the penalty for sin so that we will never have to. He's going to open the way to heaven so that we can know God and enjoy him forever. We have every reason to add our voice to theirs and proclaim that he is king.

But not everyone agrees. To some, that claim is scandalous. Among them are the Pharisees. When they look at Jesus, they refuse to acknowledge his claim. In fact, they find his disciples' celebrations offensive. **'Teacher,'** they say, **'rebuke your disciples!'** Get them under control. Tell them to be quiet.

Claims about the identity of Jesus divide opinion.

And as you and I live for Jesus, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom in the world today, we too will divide opinion: some will be drawn to Jesus as their King and Saviour. Others will reject him. Some will want to hear more. Others will find what we say offensive and will try to silence us by mocking us or even attacking us. That's how it's always been. For the disciples, following Jesus into Jerusalem meant following him into rejection and controversy. And it means the same for us today. People will tell us that our message is offensive. It will cause controversy. They will reject the claims we make. But we need courage to tell them that they're wrong to take offense at Jesus.

Look at Jesus' words in verse 40. The Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke his disciples. But do you see what he says?

'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

He's saying that if his disciples didn't proclaim his praises, then creation itself would step in and do so. He's saying that it's absolutely right that people should recognise and receive him as their King. It's right that they acknowledge him as King and give him the praise he is due. And if they don't do that... if they reject him as King... then they are at fault. They are withholding the praise that he rightly deserves. And they are blameworthy.

Many years ago, when I was attending a church in London, I went with some of the congregation to knock on people's doors in the surrounding streets - we wanted to speak with them about Jesus and invite them along to Christianity Explored. Some people wanted to talk. Many didn't. And when people said that they weren't interested and didn't want to talk I had to fight the temptation to say, "That's ok. It's not a problem."

That's a very British reaction.

"Let me tell you about Jesus."

"No, I'm not interested, thank you."

"Oh, that's ok. Sorry to disturb you."

Jesus is saying that it's not ok. He rightly deserves our praises. It's not ok to withhold them. It's not ok to be uninterested in him. It's not ok to reject him. As we share the good news of Jesus with those around us, we need to help them see who he is, and we need to ask God for courage to tell them that how they respond to him matters. It isn't just a matter of personal preference. It has consequences. Which bring us to our final heading.

The journey to Jerusalem was intentional. It was divisive. And it was tragic.

Tragic

Please look down at verse 41. See what it says there. **As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.**

As the disciples shout and celebrate, Jesus rides on the donkey with tears rolling down his cheeks. He weeps. And Luke tells us why. Verse 41 again.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you.'

Here's the tragedy. It's that those who refuse to recognise Jesus and reject his message will face God's judgement as a result.

What Jesus is describing here is the siege and sacking of Jerusalem that happened a few decades later, in AD70, at the hands of the Romans. Jerusalem was destroyed.

And verses 45 to 48 go with them.

When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. ‘It is written,’ he said to them, ‘“My house will be a house of prayer”; but you have made it “a den of robbers”.’

Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

Jesus’ actions at the temple are a warning that the temple itself was under God’s judgement. It was a national symbol. God’s footstool. The place where heaven met earth. But all along it was a signpost pointing forward to the coming of Jesus, in whom heaven truly meets earth. He is the true temple. And now, not only had the Jerusalem temple served its purpose; it had also become corrupt. It too would be destroyed at the hands of the Romans. The Romans would be God’s agents and bring his judgement on a corrupt nation that had failed to recognise its King.

This is what their rejection of the Messiah would cost them. And Jesus knows exactly what’s coming: the horror, the misery, the loss of life. And it grieves him deeply. That’s why he weeps.

And, of course, it points to an even greater judgement to come for all who reject him. That judgement is real. It’s inevitable. It’s painful. And it’s tragic. It is something to shed tears over. As Jesus rides to the cross to lay down his life as the penalty for sin, he weeps for those who spurn the rescue that he is providing. And as we read this, we need to ask ourselves whether we share Christ’s compassion for the lost. Do we care that people will one day have to face the consequences of rejecting him?

Does it grieve us to think that our neighbours who we live with, and our colleagues who we work with, and our families who we love so dearly, will one day have to face the consequences of their rejection of Jesus? If it does, as it should, then surely it should spur us on to use our best efforts to warn them and to reach out to them with the hope of the gospel.

If you wouldn’t yet call yourself a Christian, do you see how vitally important your decision about Jesus is?

He is the eternal Son of God, who left the glory of heaven to lay down his life on a cross. He did that out of love, so that your sin might be forgiven. He willingly gave up *his* life so that you might *receive* life. But the warnings are there for you, not only in the pages of the Bible but also in the ruins of the temple in Jerusalem, which are there to this day: to reject him leads to judgement and loss. That’s how serious your response to Jesus is. That’s why he weeps for those who reject him.

But it doesn’t need to be that way.

Conclusion

Jesus came with a message of peace. It's peace with God and eternal life in his kingdom, through the forgiveness of sins. He came to secure that peace, through his death on the cross. He came to open wide the doors to eternal life in the kingdom of God by suffering death himself. That's what we're celebrating this Easter as we remember the cross and the empty tomb.

Please don't write him off or disregard him. Please come back and find out more about him this Good Friday and Easter Sunday. And discover for yourself the peace with God that he alone can bring.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for Jesus and for the message of peace he proclaims. Please help us to receive him as our King this Easter and to rejoice in all that he has accomplished for us. And please give us the courage to urge others to do the same, while they can. We ask it in his name. Amen.