

THE RETURN OF THE KING**LUKE 19:28-40**

I love the famous trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, written by J.R.R. Tolkien as well as the movies based on them. The last book, *The Return of the King*, has a pivotal scene. Aragorn, the rightful king, has long endured obscurity and has given up kingly comforts to serve his subjects and fight their battles. He's repeatedly risked his own life for them. At last, he prevails over the forces of his evil enemy, Sauron, and is poised to enter the city where he will rule as king at last. When Aragorn enters the city of Minas Tirith for the first time as king, the city's steward proclaims Aragorn's royal pedigree for all the citizens to hear: "Here is Aragorn, son of Arathorn, chieftain of the Dunedain of Arnor, Captain of the Host of the West, bearer of the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, the Elfstone, Elessar, of the line of Vandalil, Isildur's son, Elendil's son of Numenor. Shall he be king and enter into the city and dwell there?" Sounds mighty impressive, yes?

Palm Sunday is about the return of another King who also long endured obscurity. He, too, humbly served the people over whom He had every right to reign, laying down His life for them. Back then and today He claims the throne of your life and mine. Here is His pedigree. This is Jesus the Christ, the Second Adam, the Bright and Morning Star, the First and the Last, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, Mighty Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, the Son of Man, Word of God Incarnate, Wonderful Counselor, High Priest, and Prince of Peace. Shall He enter our hearts – and our church – and dwell there as King of kings and Lord of lords?

For hundreds of years, Christians all over the world mark today – Palm Sunday – as the beginning of Holy Week which climaxes next Sunday with Easter. We believe it was and is the single most important week in human history. Nearly 2,000 years ago, this week was ground zero for God's mission to bring a lost world of people back into a relationship with Him. One story is the focal point of Palm Sunday. It's referred to as the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. Was this the first time Jesus had visited Jerusalem? No, He'd been there before numerous times. So, what made this time "triumphal"? We'll get to that in a few minutes. Why is it called "Palm Sunday"? Because some of the people greeted Jesus as He entered the city by waving palm branches in celebration. Let's read Luke's version of the story today, which – oddly enough – doesn't mention palm branches at all. The same story in Matthew, Mark, and John do, but not Luke for unknown reasons. Today, let's ask and answer three questions prompted by this passage.

DOES GOD'S WORD MATTER TO ME ABOVE ALL?

The Bible was very important to Jesus. For example, when He was being tempted by the devil, Jesus quoted a verse from the OT book of Deuteronomy. "But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Mt. 4:4 NLT) Jesus was fully aware His coming into the world was a fulfillment of OT prophecy. He knew He was the Messiah – the One God was going to use to provide salvation to everyone in the world. It was generally

acknowledged that Zechariah 9:9 (NLT) depicted something the future Messiah would do. “Rejoice, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey.” That depicts what we read in Luke 19 very well, yes? It was also assumed these verses in Psalm 118 pointed to the future Messiah. “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful to see.... Please, Lord, please save us. Please, Lord, please give us success. Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Ps. 118:22-23, 25-26 NLT) Those were the words the crowd used in Luke 19 to welcome Jesus into the city: “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” (Lk. 19:38 NLT)

This remarkable story begins when Jesus instructed two of His disciples to go and get a young donkey and bring it to Him so He could ride the animal into Jerusalem. Now, it’s easy to assume something miraculous happened here. Jesus knew, mysteriously, that a certain donkey lived in a nearby village. Supernaturally, He knew the animal’s owner would just hand it over to the disciples once they used the phrase, “The Lord needs it.” Is that possible? I suppose so, but I think there’s a better explanation. I think Jesus intentionally prearranged the use of this animal with its owner, precisely because He knew exactly what He wanted to do just a few days before His crucifixion and resurrection. He wanted to enter the city in an unmistakable way that fulfilled OT prophecy about the Messiah. That also better explains why the owner would just let two strangers – the disciples Jesus sent – walk off with his donkey. If Jesus and its owner had decided in advance on a kind of password when the right time came to use the donkey – a phrase like “the Lord needs it” – then the owner would have recognized it and gladly released the animal into the care of the disciples.

What we have here, then, is an example of how important it was to Jesus to fulfill OT prophecy right down to the last letter. It reveals His attitude toward the Word of God – the Bible. The questions I ask myself are these: Do I have the same respect for and attitude toward God’s Word that I see in Jesus? How important is the Bible to me? In our KRBC picture of a disciples the S in the acrostic word ROPES stands for Scripture. In other words, a disciple of Jesus understands the value of and lives out the importance of relationships, obedience, prayer, evangelism and, also, Scripture in our daily lives. But is that true of me? Is it true of you?

Let me suggest two ways you and I can make God’s Word vitally important like Jesus did. First, consume God’s Word regularly. Think of the Bible as food. Reading the Bible can be compared to God’s gift of manna to the people of Israel in the OT. It was a strange, but highly nutritious bread like substance. The people were told to collect fresh manna – fresh bread – every day. Any leftovers from yesterday’s manna would actually spoil and become inedible. You are never going to reach a place this side of Heaven when you no longer need to consume God’s bread. You need fresh bread. Eat God’s Word. How? Read it. Listen to it. Memorize it. Study it. Journal about it. Discuss it with fellow believers. Pray it back to God. How often do you consume a portion of this book? Daily? Several times a week? Twice a year whether you need to or not? Never? Jesus intentionally set up His own triumphal entry into Jerusalem because He

had infinite respect for and knowledge of His Father's Word. If you're His follower, you will consume God's Word regularly. If you aren't Jesus' follower; you won't.

Second, obey God's Word completely. That's the whole reason to consume God's Word regularly. The Bible puts it like this, "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it." (Jam. 1:22-25 NLT) True, the Bible doesn't give you explicit instructions for every conceivable area of life, but it addresses many issues clearly and plainly. For instance, it tells us how to do sex God's way. It tells us what to do when someone offends us. It tells us how to handle money. It tells us to care for the poor and uphold justice for everyone. It tells us how to relate to the government and be a good citizen. Those aren't just suggestions we get to pick and choose from. We don't retain some right to select the parts of God's Word we like and discard the parts we don't. It's not enough just to believe Jesus lived, died, and rose again! To be His follower means we are making the effort to obey God's Word completely because Jesus obeyed God's Word completely. If you're Jesus' follower, you will make every effort to obey God's Word completely. If you aren't His follower; you won't. A second question.

DOES GOD'S MISSION MATTER TO ME ABOVE ALL?

The mission of His Father was as important to Jesus as the Word of God. He rode that donkey into Jerusalem five days before His crucifixion with full knowledge of what was going to happen to Him and why. I want you to recognize the courage of Jesus. He could have remained safe back up north in Galilee or perhaps in the desert areas south of Jerusalem. He could have just walked away, but instead He freely chose to fulfill His part in His Father's plan. He entered the city on that day to die – to suffer the physical torture of the cross, to endure spiritual separation from His Father, and to pay the penalty for your sin and mine. Some scholars tell us that over 200,000 lambs were herded into Jerusalem just a few days before the Jewish Passover. They were to be sacrificed at the temple for the sins of the people. It's suggested those lambs might well have been streaming down the streets and alleys of the city at the exact moment Jesus entered the city. Can you picture that scene and its irony? Thousands of sacrificial lambs and in their midst the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus displayed absolute allegiance to His Father's mission above all even when it required the ultimate sacrifice: death on the cross.

Here's the question I ask myself: Do I have the same attitude as Jesus toward God's mission in this world? Do I really? The Bible makes it very clear every follower of Jesus has been given a mission by God. We are called to point other people to Jesus with our lips and with our lives. It's not just the job of pastors, or church staff, or church leaders. Each of us and all of us. In other words, we need to be prepared every day and any day to say something about Jesus or do something in the name of Jesus that bears witness to the fact we believe He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. That is God's Plan

A. There is no Plan B. If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus this morning, your primary and ultimate mission in life isn't to have a successful career followed by a leisurely retirement. It's not to be a great spouse or a great parent. It's not to be a good provider for your family. It's not just to be happy. How did Jesus put it? "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Mt. 28:19 NLT) That's our mission given to us by Jesus.

I believe our church is called to make disciples of men, women, boys, and girls who live in Northland, but also other parts of greater Columbus. Our church is making steady progress in developing a strong, prevailing discipleship culture expressed through our discipleship triads, through a new ministry called Re:Gen you'll hear more about in the future, and in other ways. It's really Christianity 101. Help people who are here become more fully devoted followers of Jesus in intentional ways. Help them to reproduce their discipleship experience into new believers. Live out the truth that spiritual growth happens best in relationships, through intentional obedience, through times of prayer with other believers, through an emphasis on evangelism, and by a focus on Scripture. That's what ROPES stands for. It's really simple, basic Christianity.

I've already shared with Jeff Lashley, the new chair of the Pastoral Search Team, my fervent hope that your next pastor will have a track record of living out and leading discipleship. Not just lip service. Anyone can do that. No, already doing it before coming to KRBC. Look for it. Insist on it. Demand it. If this church is to have a longer and more wonderful impact for Jesus, we need to have the same attitude toward God's mission that Jesus did. It really starts with a very personal surrender to the Holy Spirit who is able to give each of us a mission mindset. He will help us pray, "Father, please give me the same attitude toward Your mission in this world that Jesus had."

Every time I read the story of Jesus' triumphal entry, I can't help but be reminded of Ben Stone. I got acquainted with Ben when I did some volunteer work at his ministry to runaway boys when I was in college. Ben wasn't some great intellect. He wasn't a Bible scholar. He wasn't a gifted administrator. He was kind of a big red-neck, to be honest. But Ben loved Jesus and he loved troubled boys and men because he himself had a rough time in his teenage years. When he was in Bible college – from which he never graduated – he poured out his heart to God one night wondering if God would or could use him in some way to point people to Jesus. Ben told me God reminded him of this story of the triumphal entry and that little donkey that carried Jesus into the city. Ben felt as if God spoke directly into his spirit that night with this message, "Ben, if I can use a donkey, I can use you!" How's that for "a call to ministry"? I lost track of Ben and his ministry. He might be in Heaven now for all I know. But I have no doubt there are going to be some men in Heaven because Ben Stone pointed them to Jesus when they were troubled, runaway teenagers. He got them started on the road to being Jesus' disciples. When it came to God's mission, Ben was willing and available.

Will anyone be in Heaven because of you? I don't ask that question to shame you or discourage you. Instead, I want to motivate you and challenge you in a positive way. I just know after being a pastor now far longer than I want to admit that we Christians

throw out two excuses why God can't, or why God shouldn't, or why God won't use us to point other people to Jesus. The first excuse is sheer unwillingness. It just never shows up on our personal radar as to what matters in life. Too busy! Too this! Too that! It's always the job of other Christians, not you, not me. The second most popular excuse might surprise you. It's feelings of unworthiness. You've committed too many big sins for God to ever use you. You're not perfect yet, so God couldn't possibly work through your life. You haven't memorized enough Bible verses yet, or your prayers sound childish, or you're not sure your theology is 100% correct; therefore, there's no way God could use you, right? Wrong! May I suggest you let the Holy Spirit speak this message into your spirit, "If I can use a donkey, I can use you!" A third question:

DOES JESUS BEING MY KING MATTER TO ME ABOVE ALL?

The triumphal entry underlines an important truth about who Jesus is. "Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey." (Zech. 9:9 NLT) Yes, to be sure, Jesus came to die and pay the penalty for our sins. But, when Jesus rode that donkey down the streets of Jerusalem – make no mistake about it – He was acknowledging the fact He was and is the King. The fact this donkey Jesus chose for that occasion was one which had never been ridden seems unimportant to us. But in that culture it meant Jesus selected it for a holy and special purpose.

Yes, Jesus certainly was and is humble. But the way He rode into Jerusalem was not necessarily an act of humility. It was actually a statement. It was an acknowledgement. Bible scholars tell us that back in Jesus' day, kings often deliberately chose to ride on a donkey instead of a horse when they came in a time of peace. When they came to make war, yes, they rode a horse. But when they came in peace, they often rode a donkey instead. Jesus didn't come as some military hero intending to free the Jewish people from Rome's tyranny. Instead, He came to make peace between God and human beings through His shed blood. Jesus saw His triumphal entry as the return of the rightful King of the universe and He was proclaiming the coming of God's peace.

Jesus knew even then He was the rightful ruler over and the supreme authority in the universe. The way He entered Jerusalem underlined that truth. The Bible goes on to say this about Jesus, "Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Ph. 2:9-11 NLT) The question isn't whether Jesus knew He was a King. Instead, the real question that begs to be answered is this one: Do I fully acknowledge Jesus' kingship over me?

The people of Jerusalem are a good reminder we can be pretty fickle when it comes to recognizing Jesus as Lord and King. Oh, they treated Jesus like a king when He entered the city that day! Shouting "Hosanna," waving palm branches, letting Jesus and the donkey walk over their garments were, yes, all words and actions you would offer a king. But many of those who greeted Jesus as King that day had no real personal

understanding or appreciation of His true authority. It's quite probable some of those very same people who cheered and celebrated Jesus were among those who yelled, "Crucify Him" five days later. I wonder if some of those people turned on Jesus because He refused to be the kind of king they wanted. They wanted someone to kick out the Romans. It reminds me of how often we try and force Jesus to be the kind of king we want Him to be instead of simply yielding our lives to His authority.

You don't tell a king how to be king. You just submit to him. As we leave that amazing scene we explored today – Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (what we call Palm Sunday) – and move into Holy Week itself, the question that lingers deserves an answer. Yes, Jesus is your Savior. But is Jesus your King? Do you know what that means – how all-inclusive it is? Do you acknowledge His authority over every area of your life? Does Jesus being your King matter to you above all?

By the time she went to college, Michelle Akers had become a soccer star earning ESPN's female athlete of the year award back in 1985 – the same year the US formed its first women's national soccer team. Michelle was a starter. In 1991, the US team won the first ever women's World Cup and Michelle scored ten goals in five games, including the goal that won the championship game. She signed a lucrative endorsement deal. She played professionally in Sweden. She even tried out as a field goal kicker for the Dallas Cowboys. Her longest attempt cleared 52 yards.

But just as Michelle's star was rising, her health was declining. By 1993, her life had become unmanageable. She suffered from Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS). It's a debilitating disease affecting more than a million adult Americans. For the first time in her life, being physically strong and working hard didn't result in success. Then her four year old marriage broke up in 1994. Michelle was at the bottom. She was so sick, she couldn't take a 5 minute walk without needing two days on the couch to recover. Her condition forced her to spend a lot of time thinking about who she was and she didn't like what she saw.

Michelle had put her trust in Jesus as a high school student, but ignored God in college and after graduation. Now sick and alone, she reluctantly accepted an invitation from her strength coach to attend his church. Looking back now, she knew she needed to get things right with God. She believes God was gently, patiently tapping her on the shoulder and calling her name for years. But she brushed Him off repeatedly, saying, in effect, "Hey, I know what I'm doing. I can make these decisions. Leave me alone. Then I think He finally said, 'OK,' crossed His arms and looked at me sadly – because He knew I was going to make a lot of mistakes by ignoring Him. It took total devastation before I would acquiesce and say, 'OK, God. You can have my life. Please help me.'"

Despite our fascination with the royal family of the United Kingdom – Queen Elizabeth, Prince William and Kate, Harry and Megan – we Americans are completely unfamiliar with having a king. We have politicians we can vote in or out of office. They take opinion polls frequently in order to figure out how to keep getting re-elected by you and me. But a king doesn't take opinion polls. He doesn't ask for your vote. He expects

you to submit to him and do life his way. He doesn't exist to serve you. You exist to serve him. As we enter Holy Week today, may I leave you with these questions? Is Jesus your King? Is every area of your life submitted to Him, available to Him, and surrendered to Him? Does Jesus being your King matter to you above all?