

“A Confusing Coronation”

As we enter into holy week... as we begin our earnest look at this week that will culminate in Jesus' death and resurrection... we must first wrestle with the question that everyone was wrestling with in Jesus' day. Each one of us must personally answer the question for ourselves. It is a question that affects your entire perspective on Jesus. It is a question that has implication that ripple out into every single area of your life today. How you personally answer this question affects all other decisions and priorities in your life. It's a question that so polarized people in Jesus' day that its answer led them to either want to kill Jesus, or to die for Jesus.

So the Palm Sunday question each of us must wrestle with today is: "Who is Jesus?" I know there are some life-long Christians here who can offer a quick and accurate answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" This may be a question you feel you put to rest years, even decades, ago. But I want you to seriously consider again today, because the cognitive answer to the question... the one that comes from our intellect... is not enough. We need to understand and embrace Jesus with all our heart as well. A true understanding of Jesus will ultimately impact our lives too.

Does your daily life reflect a profound, deep understanding of who Jesus is? Let's take the time today to know him better... to know him really... to consider who Jesus is.

Who is this that enters Jerusalem triumphantly? ...that clears the temple? ...who boldly confronts the hypocritical religious leaders? ...who teaches all about the last judgment? ...who washes his disciples feet? ...who gives bread and wine but says it is his body and blood? ...who prays earnestly, sweating profusely, that the cup of suffering may be taken from him? Who is he that is silent before his accusers? Who endures unjust suffering and mockery? Who is nailed to a wooden cross? Who is forsaken by his Father? Who is he that bleeds and dies? Who is Jesus?

The question is more difficult to answer than you might think. Jesus' contemporaries certainly struggled to answer it. Even his own disciples didn't fully get it. Do you? Let's follow Jesus on the first Palm Sunday as it is recorded in Mark's Gospel. What we see I am calling today, "A confusing coronation." It kind of sort of looks like Jesus is entering Jerusalem as a king. And an Old Testament prophecy said this is how Israel's true King would enter Jerusalem. So is this is coronation? If it is, it sure looks strange. So just who is he? Let's consider:

Mark 11:1-11

11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

So we have this interesting preface to the actual story. Jesus would enter into Jerusalem riding on the untamed colt of a donkey. But where did that colt come from? And why ride a colt?

Three things I'd like you to notice: 1) The colt was borrowed. 2) The colt is obtained by a demonstration of Jesus' omniscience. 3) The colt is in fulfillment of prophecy.

1) I think it's noteworthy that Jesus rode into a Jerusalem on an animal that did not belong to him. It's part of a larger pattern we see in Jesus' life. He was born in a borrowed stable and laid in a borrowed manger. During his ministry, he had no home of his own, but laid his head in borrowed homes on a borrowed bed. He celebrated the final Passover with his disciples in an upper room that was borrowed. Jesus was nailed to die on a borrowed cross... one that truly belonged to you and me. And his dead body was laid to rest in a borrowed tomb, one belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus was not of this world and did not belong to this world and so did not attach himself to the things of this world, so he was frequently borrowing things. He knew that heaven was his real dwelling place and treated the things of this world accordingly. We who follow him would do well to look at the things of this world in a similar way.

2) The second thing to note is that Jesus reveals his divine omniscience in this story. Yes, it's possible that Jesus simply privately arranged the details of borrowing the colt privately, but then there would be no reason to include all the details included in the Gospels. It could have simply said, "The disciples brought the colt as Jesus had arranged and..." But why all the detail? This was memorable to the disciples because they saw that Jesus knew things he should not have been able to know. It was an evidence that he is true God. Jesus is entering Jerusalem by divine plan, and with full knowledge of how that week would end on the cross.

3) But the most important thing to note about riding the colt is that it was a fulfillment of prophecy. We heard it earlier in Zechariah 9:9-10. The prophecy foretells Israel's king entering Jerusalem on a the colt of a donkey. That king would usher in an era of peace. The disciples didn't understand that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy at the time... but they would later.

So if Jesus is entering into his city as King, then this in a sense could be called his coronation. Yet as we're about to see, it's a bit confusing. It's not what you would expect. Because this king is not what you would expect. Listen:

7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. [This was a sign of homage and respect. It served two purposes. It was done to give a softer ride to the dignitary you were honoring. It also was a sign of your subservience. Placing your cloak under foot showed that you yielded to his authority over you.]

9 Those who went ahead and those who followed [So there were some already with them traveling into Jerusalem, and there were others who heard Jesus was there and were making their way toward Jesus from Jerusalem. Huge crowds of people! And what were they doing? **They shouted, "Hosanna!"**

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

10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

"Hosanna" is a Hebrew explanation which means "Save!" It was both a plea and an exclamation. It was an acknowledgement that the person had the ability to save, and the request that he do so.

They were quoting Psalm 118:25-26 which is a Messianic Psalm... so a Psalm about the coming Christ. And they apply it to Jesus. It says: **"O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."**

They acknowledged that he was a king coming to establish a kingdom: **“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”**

All fitting words for a king entering his capital city on his coronation. And yet the final verse, verse 11 reminds us this is a confusing coronation.

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Well that’s anticlimactic! He entered the city, went to the temple, took a look around, then left to make the two mile trip back to Bethany. What happened to the crowd? I don’t know, they must have dispersed. What was Jesus doing? Well, he was casing the place out. He would be spending the rest of the week in the temple area. The next day he would be clearing out the temple area of moneychangers and people selling animals. So he’s getting a good look at things before all the fireworks start.

That was strange, but let’s review the other things that make this a confusing coronation.

- This wasn’t a pre-planned coronation. Jesus knew he would do this, but no one else did.
- There was really no pomp and circumstance. Besides the crowds shouting, all you saw was a man dressed in common clothes riding a common colt. Where are the heralds? Where are the trumpets? Where are the fancy clothes? Where is the steed or chariot?
- There were no dignitaries on hand.
- There was no crown placed on his head at the end, or acknowledgement of his kingship by anyone that mattered... like the current rulers!
- There was no big ceremony or coronation party afterwards.
- He left “his” city immediately after entering it. A king doesn’t do that.
- And finally, if this was a coronation, it certainly didn’t last. By the end of the week, the people who shouted Hosanna are shouting, Crucify!

I have to think that when all was said and done, the crowds were left looking at one another. I imagine they went home asking, What was this? Who was that? What did we just do? Many thought a new king was entering Jerusalem to *overthrow the Romans*. Some thought a miracle worker would take care of their *earthly ailments and needs*. They were looking for an *earthly kingdom* and an *earthly king*. But they came away from the confusing coronation with more questions than answers. I imagine there was a lot of shoulder shrugging and few if any really understood what had happened or what was about to happen. They imagined the kind of king they needed, but Jesus wasn’t matching their expectations.

And how about us? Are you sometimes confused when it comes to Jesus? Who is he? What kind of king is he, anyway? Like the crowd, do we sometimes look at Jesus and scratch our heads? I would suggest to you we tend to do what the crowds did.

- We try to define him, instead of letting him define himself... and us.
- We seek to shape Jesus into our preconceived image... instead of letting him shape us.
- We think our will is supreme instead of his.
- We think he should give what we desire, instead of us giving what he desires.

In short, we also look for a king will conquer our earthly enemies, troubles, challenges and needs. He should heal me when I’m sick, get me the job that will make me lots of money, provide me with the perfect family, and support all of my plans, wishes and desires. He should make me wealthy, healthy and wise. My life should be easy! We look for a king who will bring

earthly glory to all of his subjects. That's the kind of "saving" we tend to think of when we should "hosanna!" to the king.

But this confusing coronation corrects our notions about this king.

- He is a king whose destiny is the cross.
- He is a king whose kingdom is heavenly, not earthly.
- He is a king who suffers and dies. And in his death, the glory of his majesty is hidden, but present.

So this coronation is confusing, because it was in a sense not really a coronation at all, was it? It was instead a prelude to the real one. The real coronation came when Jesus completed God's plan of salvation. When Jesus cried out on the cross "It is finished!" he bowed his head and died. With sin paid for and the plan complete, Jesus paraded through hell declaring his victory. He was received into heaven by the heavenly Father and he crowned his Son King over all. He rose on the third day. He ascended into heaven. He is King over all and rules at the right and of the Father. He will come again in glory on the last day and will judge all people, the living and the dead. And on that day, the real day of his coronation (at least as far as we're concerned) every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord and King. He will be our King and we will be his loyal subjects living with him and under him and for him, blessed by him for all eternity. That is the coronation day we truly look forward to. That is the Kingdom that truly matters!

In this world, what you see as a subject of your King, Jesus, will sometimes look and feel confusing. There will be times of suffering, and pain, and death, and frustration, and bad days. There will be times when it seems like the most unfair and unjust things are happening to a loved one believes in Jesus... or to you.

Don't be confused like those first Palm Sunday worshipers. See things clearly. See yourself for you who are: a broken sinner in need of mercy and help. See Jesus for who he really is. God's Son who took on human flesh, who rescued you from sin and its horrible consequences through his perfect life and innocent death. See this world for what it is: your temporary dwelling place – your just passing through. See that your true home is in heaven, living in the immediate and glorious presence of your victorious King, Jesus Christ! Amen.