

JESUS: “Blessed is the King”

Matthew 21:1-9

- 1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
- 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.
- 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”
- 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:
- 5 “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”
- 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.
- 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.
- 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
- 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Matthew 27:11-26

- 11 Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “You have said so,” Jesus replied.
- 12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.
- 13 Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?”
- 14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.
- 15 Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.
- 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas.
- 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”
- 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.
- 19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”
- 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.
- 21 “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered.
- 22 “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”
- 23 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”
- 24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

“I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

25 All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Introduction

It’s known as “substitutionary atonement,” how Jesus died in your place and mine (substitutionary) as he took our sin and its consequences upon himself (atonement) so that we could be in a reconciled relationship with God in this life and the life to come.

The Bible tells us how “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). Speaking of himself, Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

This is why Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, knowing that his “time had come” to go to the cross on Friday. When Jesus had prayed to the One who could save him from death, he didn’t get that salvation; he got instead your salvation and mine and of countless believers all over the world.

I. Triumphal? Entry

Palm Sunday is often referred to as the Triumphal Entry. And yet, “This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ” Triumphal? Hardly! If Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a white stallion demonstrating worldly, victorious power, yes. But on a donkey?

Alexander the Great rode into Jerusalem in 332 BC on his magnificent warhorse. The king of peace did not. Donkeys were lowly creatures, slow and stubborn, the work animals of the poor and not particularly handsome. Jesus comes not to terrify people with pomp and power, not to drive or oppress them, but to help them. Like the donkey, Jesus has come to carry our burdens and take them upon himself. Jesus would become the crucified Messiah.

Did the people then and do people now get this message? It says, “A very large crowd spread their cloaks and cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. They shouted well-known liturgical phrases: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” They clearly didn’t understand Jesus or why he was coming into the Holy City.

Jesus was certainly making a Messianic claim riding into Jerusalem this way. But the kind of Messiah would only be shown in the Cross. This word “Hosanna” means “Help! Save us,” remembering that “Jesus” means “Savior.” Yet, strangely, Matthew quotes this Psalm 118 as a prayer for Jesus, adding “Son of David – God save the Son of David.”

So, did God save this Son of David? Well, yes and no. Next Sunday, we will say “yes” in the Resurrection of Jesus: “Hosanna in the highest.” We human beings, all of humanity, people in every time and every place are in dire need of salvation. God provides us his highest resource, his Son. In saving Jesus by resurrection, God will save all who trust in Jesus Christ from the terror of death. Next Sunday, yes. But first, we must say “no” on this Friday.

I have come to celebrate this Sunday as Palm/Passion Sunday. Because most regular church attenders will be here today and next Sunday without going through Friday. So, we move from Jesus’ Palm Sunday entrance to passage dealing with the crucifixion. Without Jesus’ difficult self-sacrifice, his substitutionary atonement, Easter Day wouldn’t hold much meaning for us.

II. The Scandal of the Cross

In Matthew 27, the Roman governor and commander Pilate asked the jury-rigged crowd, “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” That question has been asked of people throughout the world for centuries. It’s a great question to ask anyone in a religious conversation: atheist, Muslim, “man on the street”, whoever... “What are you doing with Jesus?” Consider? Accept? Reject? Or with the crowd, “Crucify him.”

There is sharp irony in this first encounter between Church and State, between Jew and Roman, between Jesus and Pilate. Jesus was ordained by his Father God to be the Judge of the whole creation. Yet, Jesus humbled himself and was content to stand before the judge of the land of Judah at that time. Thirty years earlier, the Magi arrived asking where they could find the child born king of the Jews. Now Pilate asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“King” in Roman language means the same as “Christ/Messiah” in Jewish language. But in the Roman Empire there was no king but Caesar. Pilate could care less about the charge of blasphemy. King is another story. Jesus would be executed on the charge of sedition.

Pilate asked another question. “Why? What crime has he committed?” But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

“I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!” All the people answered with this blood-curdling, mob-scene declaration “His blood is on us and on our children!” Ironic: do we human beings know that Jesus’ death is “on us and on our children?” The contradicting difference is how Jesus went to the cross on purpose.

Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Here we see the first indication of “substitution.” Pilate releases the guilty Jesus Barabbas and hands over the innocent Jesus who is called the Messiah to be executed. The name Barabbas is “Bar-Abbas” (a son of a father). Jesus, the Son of the Father, takes the penalty, the curse, the punishment that was due Barabbas.

In his first letter to the churches, Peter quotes Isaiah 53: “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed” (I Peter 2:24).

Conclusion

As you know, gift cards often come with expiration dates. Sometimes, sorry to say, I’ll stuff one in my wallet or leave it in the car and then forget about it. A gift card can be worth \$100 one day, and the next, it expired. I’ve missed the opportunity to enjoy it.

God’s gift of forgiveness is like a gift card that is more valuable than anything we can imagine. He paid for it with his Son’s life. God is holding that priceless gift card out to us, waiting for us to take it. If we don’t accept it and use it, however, it’s of no value to us.

A gift card is only plastic unless it is redeemed. Don’t wait to claim God’s gift before it’s too late. Let us pray this for ourselves and for others.