

Jesus the King

“Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

‘Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!

His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”

- John 12:14-16

What’s So *Triumphant* About the “Triumphal Entry”?

In the Gospel of John, we read an account of what’s known as the “Triumphal Entry.” This is when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, which was known as the city of Jewish kings, riding on a donkey. As he approached the city, he was met by a crowd of enthusiastic people, some of whom had come from the city, while others were following Jesus. The two groups merged, creating a loud and lively scene, with people waving palm branches, throwing their coats on the ground, and chanting phrases from an ancient Jewish song.

But we are left asking: what was so “triumphant” about this entry? The crowds that welcomed Jesus were not wealthy and influential people, but rather ordinary peasants, many of whom were children. Especially when compared to the grand entrances of Roman conquerors, who mounted white warhorses, this was a humble scene.

Only later would Jesus’ followers realize that his decision to ride into the city on a young donkey, instead of a warhorse, was a deliberate choice that fulfilled an ancient prophecy from Zechariah 9:9-10. It was a sign of Jesus’ humility, as he presented himself as a radically different kind of king—a Servant-King who had come to offer salvation to his people. The Triumphal Entry, then, was a prelude to Jesus’ ultimate triumph over sin and death through his death and resurrection.

Our study focuses on John’s account of this event, which is designed to help us understand what kind of king Jesus is.

1. Jesus is a Promised King.

The quotation from Zechariah teaches us that Jesus is the King who fulfills God’s promises—not only to the nation of Israel, but also to the entire world (“His rule will extend from sea to sea,” Zech. 9:10). The life events of Jesus were not random happenings that popped onto the scene in the 1st century. On the contrary, a divine blueprint had been drawn up in eternity, sketched out throughout Israel’s history, and carried out in the life of Jesus.

The fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of these ancient prophecies demands our attention, strengthens our faith, and clarifies our understanding of Scripture.

2. Jesus is a Perplexing King.

John plainly admits that he and the other disciples did not understand at the time what was going on. They had expected a political leader, but Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem—riding on a borrowed donkey, greeted by children, opposed by the religious elite—was perplexing, to say the least.

It was not until after Jesus “was glorified” that they understood. John here uses a special sense of “glorified” to refer to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The “glory” of his kingship was unlike the glory of other kings—it was to conquer sin and death, thus releasing people from their fatal grasp.

People will always be perplexed by Jesus unless they see the cross as his central work and the resurrection as what validated that work. The cross is, and always has been, offensive and undignified. Most people prefer to see Jesus merely as a moral exemplar, ethical teacher, physical healer, or political revolutionary. Those who separate Jesus’ morals, ethics, healing, and politics from his central work on the cross, will always find Jesus to be ultimately perplexing, like a stone they trip over instead of a foundation they build upon.

The root problem here is our tendency to use Jesus to get what we want. We want Jesus as an accessory, but Jesus came to be our Sovereign. The only way around this confusion is to entrust our lives to him as the one who loved us and gave his life for us.

3. Jesus is the Perfect King.

The perfection of Jesus’ kingship is foreshadowed by his triumphal entry. The fact that he did not need an outward display of earthly power meant that his *power* is perfect: he came to defeat sin and death, and did not need “chariots,” “warhorses,” and “the battle bow” (Zech. 9:10). He is the “grain of wheat” that fell into the earth and died, but by dying bore much fruit” (John 12:24).

Discussion

1. Why did Jesus’ disciples not understand the significance of his entry into Jerusalem at the time, and what happened that made them understand? What are some modern-day misconceptions about Jesus and his mission?
2. How does Jesus’ fulfillment of ancient prophecies strengthen our faith in him?
3. How does Jesus’ kingship offer a different kind of salvation from the world’s systems of power and control?
4. In what ways have you found Jesus perplexing? How has your understanding of him changed over time, and what role has the cross played in that?
5. How do we tend to use Jesus to justify our own desires and preferences, rather than submitting to him as our Sovereign?
6. How can we pray for one another as we seek to live as loyal subjects of Jesus the King? What challenges and opportunities are we facing, and how can we support and encourage one another along the way?