

“The True King” | John 20:11-18

(Easter Sunday)

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Christians think of the last week of Jesus’ life as Holy Week. It is a week packed with events of the utmost meaning. And I want to suggest to you this Easter that the proper theme to hold them all together is *Kingship*.
Kingship.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as a King: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! ... Behold, your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey... (Zech. 9:9). He challenged the power structures of the Temple on Monday, inviting crowds to join his movement by Tuesday. On Wednesday, we was anointed with oil, like his forefather King David was, as any Monarch should be. On Thursday, he acted as a king again, issuing his new covenant, his new law, that his people love one another. Into Friday morning, he was tried as someone claiming to be the king of the Jews. On Friday afternoon, he was crucified under a sign that read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (John 19:19). On Resurrection Sunday, he rose in glory—like a enthronement—beginning his ascent above all powers—and commissioned his followers to spread his kingdom over all nations: “Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in my name.”

This Easter, I want to ask what type of King He is, what his kingdom is like, how we become a part of it. I will do this by noting three essentials of his kingship: **(1) Authority; (2) Responsibility; (3) Power.**

1. Jesus asserts his authority over any other lord’s that would claim our allegiance—including ourselves.
2. Jesus takes responsibility for his realm, his people, to a depth and breadth unmatched
3. Jesus has a power unlike any other—a power that wins, not by coercion, but grace.

I. Authority—over and against other lords

If we step back for a moment, we can see that Easter Week in Jerusalem saw the clash of multiple kingdoms.

Herod Antipas: There was figure present named “Herod Antipas.” During Jesus’ trial “Pilate sent Jesus to meet with Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at the time” (Luke 23:7). Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee, a client king of Rome. The Bible refers to him as “King Herod” (Mark 6:13), how we was perceived by some.

Fickle: He was a fickle man and fearfully cruel. Recall it was he who imprisoned John the Baptist then had him beheaded at his daughter’s request (Mark 6). Jesus refers to him as “that fox,” referencing his sly ways.

Entrance: Though his jurisdiction was north of Jerusalem, in Galilee, Herod made his way to Jerusalem for Passover week. He surely arrived in a regal procession, perhaps on a horse or in a chariot, flanked by marching men. He would have made his way to the Palace his father had built, towering over the Western wall of the city. Kingdom: we might say Herod Antipas represents a by-gone kingdom of a Jewish nation

state, last realized in the Maccabean rule of a century or so earlier. Herod represents the possibility of peace with Rome, but not true independence for Israel.

Pontius Pilate: There was yet a second man who represented kingship in Jerusalem that week—Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the procurator of Judea, having been appointed by Cesar himself. His job was to keep the peace amidst the indigenous people of Roman territories.

Tumult with Jews: Historians depict Pilate as a ruthless administrator who offended Jewish customs and reveled in brutal methods of suppressing dissent. Once he “mingled the blood of a group of Galileans in their own sacrifices” (Luke 13:1).

Entry: Pilate left his palatial home in Caesarea on the Mediterranean to come to Jerusalem for Passover. These religious holidays were highly nationalistic and could arouse a rebellious spirit. Of the equestrian rank, Pilate would have arrived on a horse or chariot, flanked by centurions: dozens of soldiers marching in precision, bronze helmets and coats of armor glistening in the sun, red tunics blowing in the dry wind.

Kingdom: Pilate arrived under the Eagle of Rome, whose talons gripped an ever-increasing part of the world—He represented Rome’s so-called universal Kingdom.

Satan: Then, behind the forces of all, is Satan. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he told his followers, “the ruler of this world is coming” (Jn 14:30), meaning Satan and his powers.

Satan is a fallen angel, and his procession to earth came after war in heaven when he was hurled down like lightning. Ever since Creation, he has warred against those made in the image of God. He has come to the Holy City with one purpose: to kill Jesus (though he doesn’t see that he’s walking into a trap).

Jesus: Then there is Jesus of Nazareth. Having traveled previously on foot, we are told he stops just two miles outside Jerusalem in Bethany, secures a young donkey, and rides the rest of the way into the city. The people respond as though it’s a coronation:

Many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! (Mk 11:8–10).

King and come out: Surely Pilate and Herod would have heard of this entrance; Satan has watched every minute of it.

Kingdom of God: In Jesus’ entrance, the kingdom of God is set for a violent clash with the Kingdoms of men. Onlookers expect a battle—and Jesus has in fact signaled as much, earlier saying to His Disciples:

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.’ (Jn 12:31-33)

What no one anticipates is how Jesus will go about establishing his kingdom.

But here is the clash of kingdoms: The kingdoms of men, the kingdom of Satan, and the kingdom of God.

Asserts his authority over and against other lords

And the first thing I want us to see, is that in this very public act, Jesus is asserting his authority. He is going public as king.

Secretly: Jesus never denied he was king. But throughout his ministry he remained quiet about it. There are times when after performing a miracle, people tried to make him king and he forbade it. When Peter confesses Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God” (a royal title), Jesus “strictly charges him to tell no one” (Mark 8:30). It seems he knew what swelling publicity would mean, and didn’t want this clash of power until it was time.

Public--Response: But now the time has come. Every action Jesus takes during this final week asserts his authority over and against every other kingdom. He is saying, publicly, I am King. He is forcing a decision: either crown him, or crucify him, but no more indifference.

As C. S. Lewis said long ago: Jesus is either a Lunatic, a Liar, or Lord. I wonder if you will crown or reject him?

A king has authority, but also must rule his realm. We want to know turn to that question—how does Jesus rule. And to answer this, we’ll first note how he exercises his kingly responsibility.

II. Responsibility—to depth unmatched

Define: a King has a realm, or domain, and must rule it, or take responsibility for its welfare and people.

Expectations: Now, the Israelites how saw Jesus as David’s heir had certain expectations of what was unfolding. God was visiting his oppressed people with His Messiah, who would take responsibility for Israel’s welfare by liberating them from the power of Rome. This was to be a **military victory** followed by **a political establishment**.

Strange: Jesus, however, does nothing of the sort. Instead of addressing Rome, he begins by rebuking the Temple establishment for corruption. He then washes feet, tells parables, and passively goes through a trial leading to his crucifixion. The same people who welcomed Jesus with cries of “Hosanna,” by Friday were screaming “Crucify Him.”

If a king takes responsibility for his kingdom, what on earth is Jesus doing during Holy Week?

The deeper problem: During Holy Week, we realize that Jesus’ realm, though far reaching begins very deep, in the human heart. During Holy Week Jesus is taking responsibility for far more than a nation state. He is taking responsibility for the fact that his subjects—human beings—are in bondage to sin and death.

Jesus wants to free his people from more than Rome; he wants to free them from a far deeper sickness.

Don’t know need: It’s a strange fact that so often human beings don’t know what they really need. We have wants and desires that can be blindingly acute; but so often these felt needs are not indicative of what’s really going on in our hearts. This is why we need God, in Christ, to deal not with superficial matters, but with that which is truly ailing us.

A few years ago, there was much reporting on the health of young people in Palo Alto California. One of most beautiful and privileged places to live in, Palo Alto has seen a teen suicide rate more than four times the national average.¹ This has confused many because of the seemingly perfect circumstances of life in the bay area for students. They are from wealthy families, attend great institutions, do excellent in school and sport, and have such promising opportunities before them.

Journalist Hanan Rosin asks,

Why? How could it be that they all lived in a place that inspired jealousy from out-of-towners, where the coolest gadgets and ideas come from, where the optimism is boundless, and where ... people are working on inventions that will slow aging and probably one day stop death—and yet also a place where a junior in high school is closely familiar with the funerals of other teens?²

Carolyn Walworth, a junior at Palo Alto High School at the time, offers this opinion:

We are the product of a generation of Palo Altans that so desperately wants us to succeed but does not understand our needs. We are not teenagers. We are lifeless bodies in a system that breeds competition, hatred, and discourages teamwork and genuine learning. We lack sincere passion. We are sick.”³

If an oppressed Israelite in Jesus’ day would have seen an image of life in **Silicon Valley**—they might have mistaken it for a retrieval of **Eden**. Here is the perfect climate, beautiful people, outward peace and endless opportunity. Any oppressed person would cry, “Give us this Lord, and we will be well!”

When Jesus looks upon us, he sees a bondage and sickness that is deeper than the political, social, or economic realities surrounding us. He sees hearts made sick by sin, minds darkened by fear, insecurity and hate, and bodies racked by death.

Giving the Jews in Jerusalem that week a little political freedom would have been like giving a man dying of cancer a room with a nice view; sure, it’s better, but I’m still dying.

The deeper touch: What unfolds during Holy Week is this: The One True King comes to us as the One True Physician. He rides up to Jerusalem not to fight Pilate, but Satan. He is furiously concerned not with imperial taxes, but with sin. And as only the One True King can, he takes responsibility for our deeper malady—to the point of suffering and dying for it.

There is a last aspect to notice. A king must exercise power.

III. Power—not coercion, but grace and forgiveness

There is nothing sadder than a king with no power. A king may have authority, and take responsibility, but without power, he is useless. I want us to notice briefly how Jesus exercises power, because it’s unique.

Gentle: First, his power is not exercised in pride, but humility. Notice how the prophecy from Zechariah describes the King: “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey” (Zech 9.9).

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/12/the-silicon-valley-suicides/413140/>.

² Ibid.

³ Carolyn Walworth, “The sorrows of young Palo Altans,” *The Palo Alto Weekly*. March 25, 2015.

<https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2015/03/25/guest-opinion-the-sorrows-of-young-palo-altans> Accessed March 23, 2015.

This is shocking. That God in the flesh would come to rebellious humankind in humility. C. S. Lewis once wrote that "[God] is not proud.... He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to Him."⁴

Grace: Along with exercising his power with gentleness, Jesus exercises it in grace. Rather than coming to be served, Jesus says the son of man came to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many. Rather than standing victorious over the necks of sinners, Jesus became the victim in their place. Rather than taking up a sword, he lays down his life.

Forgiveness: And as he is resurrected from the grave to take his heavenly throne, how does he command his followers to extend his kingdom? Not by political force, but through the preaching of forgiveness in his name. Here is what he tells his disciples after appearing to them alive:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

Followers of this king wield the power of the Gospel—the Word of Grace that God came as Jesus, died for our sins, fought Satan on our behalf, rose from the dead, and now offers us peace with God and life eternal.

What we meet when the Kingdoms clash in Jerusalem during holy week, is One True King, Jesus of Nazareth. His coronation is a crucifixion, his chariot a donkey. And he wins by losing. And in all these things, he puts before our eyes his absolute authority; he shows us that he takes responsibility for saving his subjects from the hell of their own hearts and habits; and he shows us that his ways are gentle and humble, and it is by grace that he will win our hearts. How should we respond?

(1) *Expect him to work from inside out:* Second, be expectant that he will work in paradoxical ways, and often from the inside out. He didn't ride Jerusalem of Romans, because he wanted to ride Jews of the hatred of Romans, and romans of the hatred of Jews. A far, far deeper problem. His rule will be exercised in your life in strange ways—but he is always working to make your heart new, to bring you lasting peace, and to draw you toward the source of His Grace and Mercy, which is himself.

(2) *Humble Surrender* to him as Lord A humble and complete surrender. Lay your coats down in his path; lay your life down before his love. Let him have all of you. Invite him to deal with the deeper darkness that no other power or ruler can handle.

Pray to receive him.

Close: One night during holy week, Jesus would sweat blood, alone under the starlight on the Mount of Olives. One day he would hang on a cross. One night he would be in tomb. It is likely that **Herod Antipas** and **Pilate** enjoyed luxurious meals on those evenings and afternoon, and reclined on comfortable couches in the Herodian palace. Satan and his minions surely rejoiced. But little did they know that in his death, was victory.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*