

Why did Jesus Ride?

So Two Weeks Ago Kory preached on the question: Why did Jesus live – You know, the incarnation. Big Stuff. Why did God take on flesh?

Then Last week Kory preached on the question: Why did Jesus die – You know, the atonement. Big Stuff. Why was Jesus crucified?

Well – He asked me if I would teach on the question: Why did Jesus Ride – You know... a donkey. Seriously. Why did Jesus ride a donkey. Well – He didn't want to walk and he couldn't get an uber.

So it turns out we've got some time to kill this morning.

In scripture, sometimes a prophet would speak his message and at other times a prophet would act out his message. When Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem on what would be known as Palm Sunday – He's not just picking a mode of transportation but He's acting out a message.

The question for us today is twofold: What message was Jesus sending? What should our response be?

First, let's read what happened in Matthew chapter 21:1-11

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."

Immediately we see that Jesus is deliberately setting this up. There's a plan here – and it's not just because he didn't feel like walking or couldn't call an Uber. He gives the disciples specific directions and tells them what they can expect to happen. This is divinely orchestrated. And so we have our first clue that what's happening is meaningful and as we've said, perhaps it's a message that's being acted out rather than spoken. **We read on:**

⁴This 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.'"

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The 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!"

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

¹¹The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

I love how that ends because it even alludes to the fact that everything that just unfolded was a prophet's message. Who is this? This is Jesus, the prophet.

So What's Jesus telling us? Three things. He's telling us that he's king and he's telling us the kind of king He is and He's telling us how His kingdom will come about.

That He is the King

Matthew tells us explicitly that Jesus is riding on a donkey to fulfill a prophecy. When we read that prophecy in it's context, we see what kind of a King Jesus was to be. It comes from Zechariah 9:9 and I want you to notice as we read that at first glance it sounds like a militant king. In fact it sounds very paradoxical, like there's competing messages and you say: okay I think I can see how that relates to Jesus but as you keep reading you're not so sure anymore. **Let's take a look.**

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

When Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem, His message is that He is King.

What kind of a King is He?

He is King of the Jews

Notice that the Prophecy says in Zechariah says , **"See, Your King comes to you."** When Jesus is crucified on Friday they'll place a sign over his head with the charges against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Jesus was born a Jew to a Jewish family in a Jewish town in the line of Jewish kings and ultimately He was executed for the crime of claiming to be King of the Jews.

What kind of King is He?

He is a Righteous King

Zechariah says, "See, your king comes to you, **righteous... "**

At different points throughout the gospel Jesus asserts his sinlessness. He even invites others to tell him if he's sinned. In John 8 he says: Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?

No human, no other prophet, no other religious leader, no other man or woman aside from Jesus would ever claim to be perfect and yet Jesus does on multiple occasions and He's not afraid to invite others to examine him.

During Jesus' trial, Pilate will tell Jesus' accusers three times that Jesus is innocent. **We're told in Luke 23:22-23:**

²² For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand.

What kind of king is he?

He is A Victorious King

Zechariah says "See, your king comes to you righteous and **victorious,**"

When Jesus dies and breaths his last, He knows his death is not a loss but a victory and so he says, "it is finished." There's a prophecy in Genesis that says that a male offspring of Eve will be struck on the heel by Satan but that He in turn will crush Satan's head. And we see this in the cross – Jesus suffers but is not defeated and by suffering – even to the point of death, he defeats sin and death.

The early Church and all those after them will look at Christ's resurrection and ask: **"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"**

What kind of a king is he?

He is A Humble and Peaceful King

See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace who comes not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. If a king was coming to a city in Peace, he would ride a donkey. If a king was coming to a city in battle, He would ride a horse. Zechariah's prophecy foretells that the Messiah would come in peace. Jesus comes in peace. And Jesus makes peace between God and man and Jesus asks of his followers to be peacemakers.

On the night when Jesus is arrested he tells Peter to put his sword away and says: Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

What kind of king is he?

He is not a King of Earthly Power

In the next verse of Zechariah, we read:

¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the warhorses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.

Chariots and warhorses for Israel were a sign of those who trusted in human power. When Joshua and The Israelites were fighting their enemies in the promised land, they were told to burn the Chariots of their defeated enemies because God wanted them to trust in His power. When Israel asked for a King so that they could be like the other nations because they weren't content with having God for their king, God warned them that their sons and horses would be used for chariots – a sign that they would be trusting in human power.

So that the early church will say:

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

What kind of king is he?

He is King of All

A universal king.

The rest of verse 10 says

He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

And after Jesus' death He will tell the disciples

Therefore go and make disciples of all **nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

So God's people will no longer be the Jewish Nation but rather all those who put their hope in Jesus Christ. So the early church will say

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

So in Heaven, Revelation tells us there will be

...great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (Revelation 7:9)

What kind of king is he?

He is King of a New Covenant

A covenant that frees us from death. Verse 11 says

¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

In Scripture, a covenant is a special relationship and each covenant has its own set of commitments and expectations. Zechariah says that this covenant would be a blood covenant that frees prisoners from Sheol. In other words, it was a relationship that promised salvation from death.

So on Thursday when Jesus eats the last supper with his disciples, He tells them,

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Jesus establishes a new covenant by his blood for the forgiveness of sins and He promises his followers that one day He will share this meal with them again – This covenant frees people from Sheol.

When Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem He's fulfilling a prophecy to tell us about what kind of King He is. No other person on the face of this earth has ever been able to fulfill this prophecy the way that Jesus has.

But this message is also a parable. It's an object lesson. In the object lesson, Jesus tells us how his kingdom will come about. So check this out. In every parable, certain things represent other things, right? Every parable has symbols. So what are the symbols of this parable?

There's two main ones. The Donkey and the Palm Branches.

You see Jewish people have a concept called

"The Messiah's Donkey."

For Jews, the Messiah's Donkey is an idiom for saying, "God will use evil and sin and folly to accomplish his purposes." In other words, the picture of the Messiah on something as mundane and earthly as a donkey is conveying the fact that God can use anything for His Good. God uses earthly, foolish, even sinful things, as a vehicle for good. Pun intended. It's not that He wills sin but He's sovereign enough to use sin for the sake of His kingdom. And when that happens, when God uses sin as a vehicle for his goodness, it's called a Messiah's Donkey.

So for example, we see this when Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery and Joseph ends up being in a position in which He's able to provide for his family during a famine.

Joseph's brothers then were being a type of Messiah's Donkey.

The other symbol is the Palm Branches.

Palm Branches in Jesus' time were symbols of victory. For both the Romans and the Jews. When a victorious King or military leader, entered a town after a successful campaign, they were greeted with palm branches.

When Jesus rides a donkey over palm branches that are laid at his feet, He's saying that He will use the foolishness and sinfulness of man to trample on man's apparent victory.

In just 5 days from Palm Sunday – the same crowd that shouted "Hosanna" will be shouting "crucify him" and by Saturday morning, that crowd will appear to have won.

But God will use the work of sinful man to trample on that apparent victory.

You see... Jesus was a sacrifice but He couldn't kill himself because suicide would be sin. He couldn't die of old age or sickness because He needed to take our place.

The Just Judge would be unjustly judged.

The Sinless man would be condemned by sinful men so that sinful men could be justly freed by the sinless man.

The crowd's victory is a Messiah's Donkey. It's through their wrongful condemnation that God's will can be accomplished.

John Calvin put it this way: A Form of death had to be chosen in which he might free us both by transferring our condemnation to himself and by taking our guilt upon himself. (in other words he has to take our punishment AND our charges). Had he been murdered by thieves or slain in an insurrection by a raging mob, in such a death there would have been no evidence of fulfilment. But by his prosecution as a criminal we know that as one innocent he voluntarily took the role of a guilty man.

Jesus had to die at the hand of sinners in a public trial.

Christ's accusers thought that by killing Jesus they were ending his reign. In truth, they were starting it.

The Messiah's Donkey tramples the palm leaves of men.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was telling us that one day soon God was going to use the actions of sinful men to overcome what appeared to be an ungodly victory.

So what then is our response to this king?

That We Would Trust in His Perfection, In His Power, & In His Process.

You see Jesus is a perfect King. He is a righteous King. He is an innocent King. He lived and walked his whole life in perfect obedience. He faced trials and temptations, had good days and bad days, he faced suffering and humiliation, wrongful accusations, torture, and death and the whole time he was without sin. And put quite simply – we are not.

Who among us has not sinned? Who among us has never told a lie? Never stolen? Never used God's name as a cussword and treated it unholy? Who among us has never lusted after someone else? Who among us has never worshipped an idol?

You see, on judgement day, if we try to get by on our own merits, on our own good works, on our own righteousness – we'll be found guilty. We will be liars, and thieves, and blasphemers, adulterers, and idolaters.

Apart from Jesus, you and I will not be able to stand on judgment day.

Apart from Jesus – we are sinners who will face righteous judgment.

So we have two options – will we trust in our own righteousness or will we put our trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ?

You see when we read the prophecy of Palm Sunday and see it so clearly fulfilled in Jesus – we're faced with a decision. A decision that only we can make. A decision that Billy Graham says takes place in the lonely arena of our soul where we fight alone. No one can make this decision for you. There are forces in this world that want you to resort to indecision. But indecision is a decision. If you never decide to go to the airport, then you'll miss your flight. If you never decide to propose then you won't get married. If you never decide then ultimately you have made your decision.

Today we're faced with a decision. Is Christ my King?

When we look at Palm Sunday – we can be like the crowd, we can get swept up in the moment, wave our palm branches, and have an emotional experience that doesn't amount to any significant life change. Or we can start making decisions.

For some of us in the room – your decision today is: will I make Christ my king? You know the risks of doing that and you know the risks of not doing that and you know that indecision is a decision. Every person that ever lived has to make the same choice: The world, and its pleasures or Christ. Which is it for you?

In 2 Corinthians 6:2 Paul tells the Church: For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you." Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation.

Is it your day for salvation? If so then God has chosen you for this moment. God is hearing you. God is helping you. And now is the right time.

For those of you have decided to trust in Christ's righteousness and not your own – the response for you is will you trust in his power and his process?

What I mean by that is quite simply this:

Jesus has shown us a new way. The prophecies about Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, and the life of Jesus have demonstrated this new way. We have a choice.

Will we choose to rely on our own power? Will we choose to fight with human weapons? Will we be a Messiah's donkey? Will we have our palm branches trampled on? Because let's be honest, all human effort and all human victory and all human advancement will amount to nothing. That is, if it's not blessed by God. Or will we rely on the power of God? Will we lay down human weapons and fight with spiritual ones? Will we lay down selfish ambition?

Will we be humble peacemakers like Christ on his donkey?

Will we live lives of sacrifice and service like Christ in his earthly ministry?

Will we submit ourselves to God's will like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Will we not defend ourselves but choose instead to let God defend us like Christ on trial?

Will we forgive our enemies like Christ on the Cross?

Will we live according to God's power and God's process?

The question for the rest of us in this room is: will I put some skin in the game? Will I follow the way of Christ, even when it doesn't come naturally, even when it doesn't make sense, even if it will cost me, even if I don't want to?

Will we look at our King – riding on a donkey and lay our palm branches at his feet and trust in His power and His process.

Let's Pray.