

March 26, 2023

THE KING'S ENTRY AND JERUSALEM'S JUDGMENT

Luke 19:28-48

*(6 of 16 in a series through Luke 16-24)*

This fall I'll teach a course at our seminary extension site on Bible interpretation. I taught the same course four years ago, right as covid began to be a thing, which meant the seminary required me to teach the course on Zoom, sitting for four hours every Monday night in front of my computer, talking to students who filled little squares on my computer screen. But that's not what I remember most about that course. It was the preparation. You can feel like you know how to teach something, but when you're charged to cover thirty hours of teaching over eight weeks, it's time to sit down, start writing, and make sure you have sufficient material to cover that time and benefit the students.

Well, as I was preparing, I realized that I needed to cover each literary form in the Scripture. After all, interpreting a historical narrative is a lot different than interpreting poetry which is a lot different than interpreting apocalyptic literature, like we find in the book of Revelation. But, perhaps surprisingly, one of the more difficult literary forms to talk about was the gospels. After all, what is a gospel? I don't mean what is *the* gospel—the good news that Christ lived, died, and was raised so that we might repent, believe, and find life in him. I mean, what is *a* gospel, like we have here in Luke. We've been going through the gospel of Luke for weeks, and are no doubt feeling familiar with it, but if you try to define what a book like the gospel of Luke is, it's challenging.

It's not quite what we'd think of as a biography because there's almost nothing about long periods of Jesus' life, especially his upbringing. In fact, John tells us in his gospel that there were so many other things Jesus did besides those which were written in his gospel that he supposed if they were written down, the whole world could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25). Moreover, as we've seen in Luke, the material isn't necessarily arranged chronologically but thematically. It's something altogether different from other literary forms we're used to. So, in the end, I say to my students that we must remember that the gospels are an entirely unique literary form because the person they focus on is entirely unique. It makes sense that to write about God the Son incarnate is a bit different than writing about any other figure. And then I say to my students, "Just remember, as you're going through the gospels, don't lose sight of the fact that the focus is Jesus."

Now, we might note that this is obvious. Who could forget the focus of the gospels is Jesus? But as we've seen in Luke's gospel to this point, the book is filled with events, stories, teachings, confrontations, and the like. There's so much here, we could forget that the focus is on showing us who Jesus is and what he's done for us so that we might believe in him.

But just in case we've allowed ourselves to lose focus along the way, Luke begins this last portion of his gospel as Jesus comes into Jerusalem by devoting these verses of his entry into the city to

focusing on who Jesus is. He brings us back to remembering once more who Jesus is. Interestingly, there have been times in Luke's gospel that Jesus wants to keep his identity a secret from the masses. Remember when Peter earlier accurately identified Jesus as "the Christ of God," and Jesus "strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one" (9:20-21)? Well, that was because it wasn't time for him to die. But now, his death awaits him, and Jesus is no longer intent on keeping his identity a secret. He comes into Jerusalem with an open declaration of who he is, and Luke (fittingly) ties in stories around Jesus' entry that also emphasize the identity of Jesus.

Therefore, that's what I want to highlight this morning—who Jesus is. As Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem for the last week of his life Luke shows us who Jesus is in four ways. First, he shows us that Jesus is God's promised king, that is, the Messiah.

### **Jesus is God's promised king (the Messiah)**

Our text begins with Jesus getting everything ready to enter Jerusalem. He sent two of his disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this, 'The Lord has need of it'" (vv. 30-31). And sure enough, they do exactly as he says and it turns out fine. Now, it could be that Jesus had arranged this ahead of time, but the fact that the gospel writers lay out this detail suggests that it highlights Jesus' supernatural knowledge. Once more he is showing his disciples that he's not just another man.

So, Jesus is going to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, on a colt the foal (or young offspring) of a donkey. This is the first element that reinforces Jesus' identity as God's promised king. Why? Well, first of all, this is an intentional decision by Jesus to come into Jerusalem on a young donkey. I mean, think about it. We've been walking through Luke's gospel for nearly thirty sermons before today. How many times have you seen Jesus riding a donkey—or any other kind of animal for that matter? Never. He walked everywhere he went. But now, right before coming into Jerusalem—from where Israel's king would reign in the line of David—he decides it's time for him to start riding a donkey. This is clearly "a calculated symbolic act"<sup>1</sup> on Jesus' behalf. But why? What does it communicate?

Well, in short, Jesus is communicating that he is God's promised king. In the Old Testament God's kings consistently ride on donkeys or something similar. When Absalom wanted to suggest that he was a rival king to his father, David, he rode on a mule (2 Sam 18:9). Then in 1 Kings 1:38, in order to communicate that Solomon was king, Zadok and Nathan had Solomon ride on King David's mule. But the clearest indication that Jesus was sending the message that he's God's Messiah—the promised king—is seen in Zechariah 9:9-10 as the prophet says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the

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<sup>1</sup> David Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 769.

foal of a donkey. . . . [He] shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” God’s promised king who would reign over the whole earth was prophesied as coming to his people riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. So this is an intentional act and an intentional message by Jesus. He’s not mistakenly picturing himself as God’s promised king. He’s deliberately announcing to the crowds as he enters Jerusalem that this is who he is. He’s showing them that he’s the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy.

And it’s not lost on the crowd. First, after throwing cloaks on the colt for Jesus to ride, they begin throwing their cloaks on the road, which is precisely what the people did in 2 Kings 9:13 where Jehu was welcomed as king. These actions suggest already that they see Jesus as king. But they weren’t content merely to symbolically recognize him as king. Rather, they started praising him and declaring, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (v. 38). And, again, Jesus knows what they’re saying, and he doesn’t stop it. In fact, far from stopping it, he demands that he receives this adoration as God’s king.

As they crowds are praising him and praising God for the mighty works that have been done through Jesus, the Pharisees say to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples” (v. 39). Now, our response might be, “Yeah, no surprise here; the Pharisees are always trying to ruin things.” But put yourself in their shoes. These crowds are praising Jesus as if he is God’s promised king in the line of David who would be David’s son but also “Mighty God” according to Isaiah 9:6. They’re claiming he’s the king who will reign over the whole world, forever and ever. If anyone spoke these things of any other human on the planet, it would be worth a rebuke, as the individual would say, “I’m not he” or “I’m not worthy of that kind of adoration.” But instead, Jesus answers the Pharisees, saying, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (v. 40). Jesus is not shy about who he is, and he knows he’s so deserving of praise that if these crowds don’t do it the created order itself will burst forth in praise.

Simply put, there’s not a clearer time in Luke’s gospel when Jesus declares that he is king. Everything he’s doing is chosen to communicate this message. Everything he’s saying supports this. Even the praise and adulation he receives tells us that he’s the Messiah. He’s God’s promised king who comes to reign forever. Those who think Jesus is just a good Jewish teacher who claimed nothing for himself other than that fact must come face-to-face with Jesus’ claims here. He is God’s promised king. And yet that’s not all Luke tells us about Jesus. We also see that Jesus is the divine judge.

### **Jesus is the divine judge**

The next scene we have is Jesus drawing near to the city and weeping over it. As he weeps, he says, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that made for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you

down to the ground, you and your children with you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (vv. 42-44).

In order to see what’s going on here, let’s start at the end. Jesus is weeping because Jerusalem—by and large—isn’t recognizing him as the promised king and savior. But the specific language he uses is “the time of your *visitation*.” Why does Jesus use that language? I think the answer is that the Old Testament uses this language of God *visiting* a people when he comes to them for salvation. So, for example, when Joseph speaks to his brothers about the day when God will deliver them from Egypt, he says, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land he wrote to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Gen 50:24). And, though I could reference many more, the Lord says in Jeremiah 29:10, “When the seventy years [of exile] are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill you my promise and bring you back to this place.”

Now, I’ve given us a mere sampling of this, but if we worked through the Old Testament, we would see that the Lord is the subject of visiting his people again and again. When he comes to them for salvation, he is said to “visit” them. So, when Jesus says that the Jews have missed the time of their visitation, what he’s saying is that they’ve failed to recognize that the Lord himself has come to them for salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. They’ve missed the time of their visitation because they’ve failed to see him as the Lord, the divine Son of God. Therefore, instead of knowing salvation, they’ll know judgment—one form of that being that the things of salvation “are now hidden from [their] eyes” (v. 42).

But Jesus announces more judgment on them as well. In just a few decades the Jews would revolt against Rome, and the Romans would come and lay siege to the city. As the Jews sought to escape, the Romans would capture them and crucify them. Those who remained in the city, cut off from supplies, would starve. Historians tell us stories of mothers eating their own children to survive. Eventually the Romans entered the city, killed many, and took others as prisoners. It was a gruesome time.

But Jesus makes clear that this day to come wouldn’t be some accident of history. They should see it as divine judgment. This terrible day would come “because you did not know the time of your visitation,” Jesus tells them. The Lord had come, they did not accept him, and they would face his judgment.

But they could’ve known peace. Jesus said, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!” (v. 42). By that he’s not suggesting that had more Jews believed, there never would have been war, etc. But they would’ve known peace with God. No matter what enemy attacked them, they would have been able to say, “It is well with my soul.” But they’ve hardened their hearts to Jesus, and now it is too late. They’ll face his judgment.

What’s key for us to understand here is that what Jesus says of this first century Jewish crowd is true for us as well. How you respond to Jesus determines where you will stand in judgment. If we deny that he is Lord, we’ll face divine judgment as well. And that is why we look to Christ in

repentance and faith and encourage others to do the same. He is the divine judge. Next, we see that Jesus is the Son of God who demands obedience

### **Jesus is the Son of God who demands obedience**

As Jesus comes into Jerusalem, he enters the temple. Luke tells us, “And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer,” but you have made it a den of robbers”” (vv. 45-46).

The temple had a thirty-five acre courtyard where Gentiles could gather for the sake of prayer. However, it had become a marketplace. The reason why is because Jewish travelers who came to Jerusalem every year would be in great number, but of course all those people couldn’t bring sacrificial animals with them, so they would come and look to purchase them there in Jerusalem. Now, there were markets around for this kind of things, but apparently these markets had moved right into that courtyard which had been designated for the nations to pray. And you can imagine that between all the commerce and animal noises, this would make prayer next to impossible. The place of prayer had been turned into a den for those hoping to turn a financial profit.

But Jesus comes in, driving out those who sold and noting that they’d made the temple a den of robbers. This is an allusion to Jeremiah 7:11 where the Lord rebuked those who walked in disobedience to him throughout each day only then to come to the temple and act as if all was good. Jeremiah was suggesting that they were looking at the temple as somewhat of a place of safety and security when really they were just making it a hideout for wicked men. Jesus is saying something similar. They’ve made the temple a place housing wicked men, looking to make a quick buck, and not concerned about the things of the Lord.

Now, notice how Jesus is acting like he absolute authority, like he owns the place. This is not by mistake. It’s because he does. He is the Son of God, coming to *his* temple, and bringing discipline and judgment where necessary. If he’s the Messiah, and the Messiah is the God-man (see Isaiah 9:6-7), then this temple his. So Jesus fittingly demands obedience to God’s Word, but we might also say that he demands obedience to *his* words. He is the Son of God who demands obedience. We must never lose sight of this reality of our king. He is good beyond anything we can imagine, but he does demand obedience of his followers. Let’s not think that pursuing sin is acceptable. Rather, let’s repent and strive for the holiness without which we will not see the Lord (Heb 12:14). He is the Son of God who demands obedience. And, finally, he is the suffering servant who lays down his life for us.

### **Jesus is the suffering servant who lays down his life for us**

This section ends with a note that the Jewish leaders were against Jesus. Actually the language is much stronger. Luke writes, “And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to *destroy* him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words” (vv. 47-48). They wanted

to destroy him. And by the end of the week Jesus would indeed be hanging on a cross, breathing his last, and dying. These last few verses are setting us up for what is to come.

At the same time, however, we can't forget what we've just seen in chapter 18. In 18:31-33, Jesus had just foretold his coming death and resurrection for a third time. In other words, yes, by the end of the week Jesus would hang on a cross and die, but it wouldn't be an accident. Nor would it be a picture of his enemies getting the best of him. It would be a picture of Jesus carrying out his purposes and plans. The one who worked miracles and was being praised for those miracles as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey could have shown off his miraculous power and overcome his enemies or come off the cross or conquered Rome altogether at any time he chose. But he chose to lay down his life because he came to redeem a people for himself.

Certainly Jesus was opposed, and Luke includes that note to remind us of what is coming, but Jesus' death was his own choice. He was the suffering servant who laid down his life for his sheep. He died, bearing the wrath of God for sinners, so that anyone who repents and believes in him might not bear the penalty for our sins. The reason there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ isn't because the Lord decided to ignore our sin but because punishment for our sin has been meted out. The Father, in his love for us, sent his Son to redeem us, and Christ, in his life for us, gave himself for us.

So, as we come to the portion of Luke's gospel where Jesus begins the last week of his life, heading to the cross for us, let's not forget who he is. He is God's promised and forever king. He is the divine judge. He is the Son of God who demands obedience. And he is the suffering servant who laid down his life for us. Therefore, let's praise him and give thanks for who he is and what he's done for us as we come to the table. Amen.