

You must be jo-King

Mark 11:1-11, 15:1-15

It's Palm Sunday, a day where the church often focuses on Jesus being hailed as King. In the passage that we read, Mark 11:1-11, that's exactly what is going on. This man that has been touring Galilee, teaching, healing, serving, rescuing, including the outcasts and challenging the in crowd, has arrived at the gates of the capital. And many have seen enough to conclude that this Jesus is the King they have been waiting to put their hopes in.

The nation of Israel had read their Bibles. They knew that the prophets promised that one day, God would send a King to lead them, rescue them, set them free. They were watching for it. There had been many pretenders to the throne who had come and gone - leading a movement, stirring up hopes, then being crushed along with that hope of the people who aligned themselves with them.

So the people of Israel wanted to be sure... sure they weren't gambling their lives, hopes and identities in the wrong person. Sure that when they said, 'This is the King we need!', that they were right about that. Into this context steps Jesus. And after three years of unique, life-changing ministry, there are people who are convinced and ready to jump in with both feet.

Like the people in the village in vv.2-6 who are ready to lend their colt to Jesus for the entry into Jerusalem that He's about to make. One of the predictions of the prophets, centuries before this moment, was in Zechariah 9:9 - 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

People in ancient Palestine knew this prophecy. So the action of taking up a seat on a colt and riding into Jerusalem was to declare very publicly, 'I am your King; God sent me to you for you to put your lives in my hands.' v.3 says that the people in the village near the colt were to be told, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' v.6 tells us that when they heard that - that the One they believed in as 'Lord' needed it - they gave it over.

These nameless village dwellers started a ball rolling in the simple act of believing that Jesus was the King they were waiting for, and just giving Him what He asked them to give. The ball was to keep rolling and keep growing. The disciples brought the colt, and threw their cloaks on it for Jesus to sit on it. And then it sort of just... kept going.

People sensed that this was the moment - the moment of decision, declaration, looking at each other and silently nodding before shouting together: 'Here's Jesus, and He's our King.' What started in the village grew and grew towards the city - people lay down cloaks, and then others joined in with palm branches.

A tipping point had come, people got brave and they started joining in, sensing that 'this is the day, this is the time, this is the King...' They got bolder; they raised their voices: 'Hosanna!' That means, 'Save!' All around Jesus, the people surrounding Him front and back were shouting, 'Save!' They were lifting their voices to declare their hope that somehow, this Jesus would save them. And ringing in Jesus' ears were the cries of the crowds, 'Save! Save! We think *you* can save us!'

The train of cloaks and branches and cries of hope and praise grew bigger and louder. The crowds shouted, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' - a quote from Psalm 118, which is all about the coming of the King sent from God. It was another declaration: 'This is the arrival of the King we need; that we've been waiting for! Come and join Him!'

A crescendo soars here of bold hope, defiant allegiance swapping and declared trust. But here's what we read in Mark 15:1-15...

Read Mark 15:1-15

What happened? Mark 11 narrated the arrival of the King on a Sunday. Then Mark 15 narrates the rejection of the King on the Friday. Pilate keeps referring to Jesus as 'the King of the Jews,' that's the word on the street about Him. This 'King' label never shifted in those five days. Indeed, it's one that Jesus now explicitly accepts in v.2, not long after agreeing that He was claiming to be the very Son of God in 14:61-62.

But the crowds have lost confidence in this King. They were shouting 'save!' five days ago, convinced that Jesus was the One they needed. Now they are shouting 'Crucify!' They don't get that the two things are linked - that it's in being crucified that He *is* going to save them. The tide is turning, and the people in the presence of Jesus find themselves shouting for the release of a terrorist over the One they'd called King that same week.

Why do you think the crowds lost confidence in Jesus being the King they should put their hope in?

At least two significant things changed that week. Here's the first one: Between Jesus' arrival at the temple in Mark 11 and Jesus' early morning trial here in Mark 15, the people of Jerusalem had learned what kind of King Jesus is - and it made them uncomfortable. People began to realise that they weren't so sure they *wanted* a King like Jesus.

And what make this more than a historical comment is this - people today *still* aren't sure they want a King like Jesus. For some, it's the real reason they don't want to become a Christian. For some Christians, there's a part of their lives they don't want to let Jesus be King over; and it threatens to draw them from proud shouts of faith to quietly slipping away or loud cries of 'He's not my King anymore.'

Let's look at what happened in between those chapters and why the idea of Jesus as King began to disturb people. The first thing Jesus does after arriving in Jerusalem, seeing what was happening in the temple and sleeping on it, was to cause a scene.

The King turns the tables on exploitation, segregation and materialism in 11:15-18. He enters the temple, where the normal practice of buying and selling things that were necessary for worship there had been corrupted into a profiteering business for those in charge.

The poor were being exploited, being made to pay more than they could or should for the things of temple worship. Those outside the nation of Israel were being excluded, when God had made provision for them to be included. In short, people had bastardised the worship of God.

And Jesus reacted by walking through the temple, turning over the tables of the merchants who were party to all of this. Money went flying, people would have been running for cover, the authorities were furious. Jesus was causing a scene.

And He was very, very publicly shaming the human heart's warped tendency to build our lives up on the backs of the poor, exclude people who aren't like us, and at the end of the day care more for money and possessions than anything else; and then lie to ourselves that we're not really doing it.

People don't want a King like that. They're impressed with Him, sure - but they don't want to line up with Him. 'He's going to cause a scene, and I don't want to make a scene... He's going to get us into trouble... He's going to

expose things in my life that need to change, and that I'd rather not think about...' I'm not just talking about those crowds. I'm talking about you and me.

Are you afraid that if you make Jesus your King, that'll cause a scene? In your family, your friendships, your workplace? Are you afraid that He's going to get you into hot water in this world of ours as you take a stand for others the way He did? Are we afraid that He's going to lift the lid on how we're exploiting the poor, excluding people that aren't like us, and making money and stuff our first love?

Another thing that makes people uncomfortable about getting anywhere near Jesus is that *the King asks better questions of us than we do of Him*. From 11:27-12:37, there's a section where people try to catch Jesus out with their questions. Their motive is not to have their question answered so that they know that life with Jesus in charge makes sense. It's to discredit Jesus. It's to tell themselves that, 'because Jesus can't or won't answer this question, we don't need to take His claims over us seriously.'

The problem for people trying to catch Jesus out with their questions is that Jesus turns the tables (this time metaphorically), and asks better, more searching questions of them - questions that expose their foolishness and hypocrisy.

In 11:27-33, the religious authorities demand explanations, and end up not being able to explain themselves. In 12:13-17, they try to trick and trap Jesus, but end up being shown up as hypocrites. In 12:34, we read: 'And from then on no-one dared ask Him any more questions.' Because they kept getting asked more searching, uncomfortable ones in return.

There's a place for asking Jesus questions - I've got plenty for Him just now, as I'm sure you do too. But my questions come from a place of trust that He *is* King. They are not, 'answer this or everyone will see you're full of it, Jesus.' I've learned not to dare approach Jesus like this, unless I'm prepared for Him to respond with, 'answer *this* or everyone will see *you're* full of it, Scott.'

A lot of people simply aren't prepared to have a King who turns out to be smarter, bigger, more able and more wise than they are. As long as you want to be your own king, your own god, you won't want a King like that. But you're missing out. Because you're left with a flawed hypocrite on your throne, who can't add a day to your life. Where as those who can stomach

Jesus as King have a perfect King of integrity on their throne, who can add eternity to their lives.

The next problem for the crowds watching the conduct of this King during the week was this: *The King taught that familiar authorities will crumble and tumble.* In 12:1-12, Jesus tells a story about how the religious authorities of the day will be held accountable by God over their treatment of those God has sent to the world - including the death that Jesus is about to suffer.

In 12:38-40, Jesus teaches the crowds to 'watch out' for these religious leaders, with their penchant for prestige and greedy consumption of the poor. In 13:1-2, Jesus shares with His disciples that the temple itself, so beloved of the Jewish people, was going to be overthrown.

The authorities that people were used to living under and that were held in high regard were going to fall. And some people aren't comfortable with that. That which is familiar to people, that which is sacred to them, that which they've always lived under the leadership of unquestioningly - that stuff is going to slide under the Kingship of Jesus.

What are you so familiar with living under the leadership of, that Jesus taking first place in your life threatens your sense of being in control? What authority is so strong in your life that making Jesus King becomes a real wrench for you? Is it a person whose influence over you is incredibly strong - a family member, a friend?

Is it a sense of identity in your career, or parenting? Is it your pride or your perfectionism? Is it a shadow you live under, or an expectation you try to live up to? Is it an experience in your life, good or bad, that has shaped you, and you're worried about who you are if it isn't what defines you?

Okay... the truth is, it wasn't the *crowds* that worried about the authorities crumbling. In 11:32 and 12:12, we read that the authorities kept quiet because they were afraid that the crowd was with *Jesus*, not them. It's the other things that claim authority in our lives that are afraid of Jesus becoming your King. Is it *their* fear that's stopping you bowing the knee to Jesus, rather than *yours*?

Actually, the thing that ultimately caused the crowd to lose confidence in Jesus being King was not so much that they didn't *want* Him to be, as that they didn't think He *could* be in the end.

Imagine you're in that crowd, early one Friday morning, seeing Jesus chained, bound, and paraded in front of the occupying force's governor. Jesus is not answering any of the false charges that are being thrown His way. In fact, He's not saying anything at all, except this one thing: 'It's true - I *am* the King of God's people.'

This is not what anyone imagined when they were parading into Jerusalem five days ago, with revolution in the imagination. 'Look at Him... He's just another so-called King, about to be killed off like all the rest. There's no point shouting for Him now' thinks the crowd. 'Maybe if we shout for Barabbas, he might at least try and *do* something active for our cause.'

So one of the reasons they aren't shouting 'Jesus is King!' any more is because it looks like Jesus is washed up, done, incapable now of doing anything to help them. They've written Him off just in time, as far as they're concerned. Sure, they're embarrassed that they invested so much so publicly in Him, but at least they can pull out now just before the nails go through His hands, and probably through the hands of anyone stupid enough to still be standing with Him when it comes.

Have you done that? Was there a time in your life where you would sing or shout that Jesus is King, but now you've pulled back? Maybe you grew up with something like hope in your heart that was joined up with Jesus, but at some point you figured that looking at Him now, there's nothing to hope in. That He's washed up, dead, irrelevant, mythical, overrated, incapable of changing anything for you now.

If you're not throwing your life, hope and identity behind Jesus as King, is it because of that? Is it because you think *He can't be*? If that's what it is, just heed this note of caution - the crowds got it wrong. In the moment that it looked like Jesus was defeated; He surprised everyone with a victory in death *and* resurrection that redefined absolutely everything.

In the moment that it looked like Jesus clearly had nothing further to offer us; He did something with an empty cross and an empty tomb that was a complete game changer. But only for those who hadn't written Him off, walked away, and moved on to focus on something or someone else. Have you written Jesus off too early? Think carefully; the answer matters forever.

If Jesus is not your King, is it because you don't want Him to be, or because you don't think He can be? If Jesus is your King, what is He telling you needs to change, and how are you responding to that?

'This *is* our King! Jesus *is* the One that's going to save us! I just wish He wouldn't challenge me and turn the tables in my life as well!' *That's* the reality that many of us must learn to deal with.

God's big claim and God's good news is this: *Jesus is a better King for you than you are.*' People got it right on Palm Sunday; they realised that Jesus really is the King that God sent to lead and rescue us. But they lost confidence in Jesus being the King when they concluded either that they didn't *want* Jesus to be their King if *this* is what it meant; or that Jesus *couldn't* really be a King for them as it turned out.

All of that is just what the *crowds* saw and heard and what got them thinking through that week. We haven't touched on what Jesus said and did in front of His *disciples*, that challenged them about what kind of King they'd thrown their whole lives behind.

Much of Mark 13 is taken up with *the King teaching them that the world will end, and only those bowing to Him will survive it.* Most people find both of those ideas repulsive to consider. But bowing to Jesus as King means not just considering them, but believing them with the whole of our lives.

In 14:1-11, *the King welcomes scandalous people, and prizes extravagant worship over common sense.* A woman arrives that everyone thinks of as dodgy, and she pours out her most expensive, treasured possession in one act of loving worship to Jesus. Everyone else says, 'What a waste - that could have been used better.' Jesus says, 'She got it right.' Judas has had enough by now; he's ready to throw Jesus under the bus. This is *not* the kind of King he wants.

Then throughout chapter 14, as well as many times on the road to Jerusalem in the earlier chapters, *the King says that He must go and die, and that this death is important enough for us to remember together.* The disciples are beginning to understand; 'Jesus is going to die. He *means* to die. Is this *really* a King to rescue us?' Nobody wants a dead King, right?

Finally, *the King calls out their fickleness and weakness.* Around the dinner table in chapter 14, Jesus says, 'You're all going to desert me, I know that. I just want you to know that I'm going to die for you anyway. And after I rise, I'm inviting you to come and join me again where I'm going.' The disciples all put on their best brave face: 'I won't let you down, Jesus.' But they do. Every one of them runs away.

Jesus goes to the cross, with people either shouting to kill Him off, or running away from Him in hiding. Nobody in this story can be found standing *with* Jesus in the crucial moment in front of Pilate where Jesus confirms 'I *am* the King God sent to save His people.' Nobody who didn't conclude either that Jesus couldn't be their King, or they didn't want Him to be given the challenge of it all.

But here's the thing... Jesus *is* the King God sent to us. What Mark - along with the rest of the Bible - tells us this: Jesus was revealed to genuinely be the King from God as He died on the cross. His authority over all things, even death, was declared with power in His resurrection.

This *is* our King. If we will bow the knee to Him, let Him be our representative, our head, our God. If we let Him be the One who takes the fall for our weakness, hypocrisy, exploitation, materialism, segregation, failures, false gods and efforts to kill Him off or run away from Him. If we let Jesus as the King that died on the cross for His people become *our* King, then He really will *save* you.

He will save you from sin, guilt, the burden of how you've messed up. He will save you from death being the enemy that ends you and separates you from God and hope forever. He will save you from being ruled by some crumbling authority in your life that's sapping your life, joy, peace and hope.

He will set you free from stress, anxiety, materialism, career, keeping-up-with-the-neighbours, performance, charades, achievements, failures, addiction, crisis or anything else ruling you. He will set you free from your own fickle self being in charge.

He will *save* you. Hosanna!