

Part 1: The King and His People

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What makes Christians Christian?

Jews believe in the God of the Old Testament. Muslims have no problem affirming an overlap between the God of the Bible and Allah. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, spiritualists, all affirm the existence of a God who might sound a lot like the God that Christians claim to believe in.

But what makes a Christian Christian is not just a belief in a supreme and spiritual God, but the work of Jesus as fully God and fully man. The second person of the Trinity. From a biblical perspective, a claim to know God, but to not understand the centrality of Jesus' work is to lock the keys inside of your car. You can know exactly where you want to go, you can know exactly where the car is, and you might stand right at the door, but without the keys, you can't actually gain access to any of that.

This is in fact the biblical point of the New Testament authors. Last week Jonny shared with us from Colossians 1, that if we want to see God, we must first learn to see Jesus who is the image of the invisible God. To see Jesus is to see God, to not see Jesus is to miss God.

And the week prior to that, we saw in 1 Peter that it is only through the ransoming work of Jesus Christ that actually can see God. It is through Jesus, and his work to save us from our own futility, that Peter says our faith and our hope is in God. To not have faith in Jesus is to not have faith in the biblical God.

This is why Christians celebrate and remember Easter. Easter reminds us of the centrality of who Jesus is and the work he did to reveal and restore broken sinners to God. For the next few weeks we are going to pause and focus on some major themes that run through the whole Bible which help us understand the centrality of Jesus and the way in which that shapes not only our understanding of the Triune God of scripture, but how it helps makes sense of our own life.

Today, which is Palm Sunday, highlights a tension which can only be resolved when we understand rightly who Jesus claims to be. Palm Sunday is Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem only a few short days before he would be crucified. And yet, Palm Sunday features what is called the "Triumphal Entry."

In one sense Palm Sunday seals Jesus' death, and in another sense it is triumphal. Why is that? Well let's look for ourselves at **Luke 19:35-40**.

The reason why the crowds were excited, the reasons why the Pharisees were frustrated, and the reason why Jesus came knowing he was going to die were all the same: They understood the reality that if Jesus was who he said he was, Jesus was the Lord's King.

Our lives are riddled with tension, but the only way that tension can be resolved is if we understand the significance of Jesus the King. But to really understand the significance of the idea of king, we need to make sense of a few things first. The truth is that if the Pharisees understood the type of king Jesus came to be, they probably would have believed him. On the flip side, if the crowds understood the kind of king Jesus came to be, they probably wouldn't have lauded him.

So what we are going to do today is look at how the Bible talks about and prepares us to think about Jesus the King. We are going to do this in three ways. First we are going to make sense of the kingdom (**Making sense of the Kingdom**), then we are going to make sense of the king (**Making sense of the King**), only then can we make sense of Jesus (**making sense of Jesus**) and lastly we are going to see some **Application**.

So first, let's see how the Bible makes sense of the Kingdom. This is our first point, **Making Sense of the Kingdom**.

Why do we start here? Because in a sense this is where the Bible starts and in a very real sense this is where our experience with a king is really formed isn't it.

There are dozens of countries which are still led by kings, queens or monarchies of some sort. But you're not clamoring to pledge allegiance to any of those kings right? Why is that? Well it's probably because their kingdom isn't that attractive to you. Life's pretty good here.

For many of us, the call to see Jesus as King might as well be the same call to see the King of Norway as a king. Could be true, he could be a great guy, but it doesn't really compel me to move to Norway.

But this is why we must understand the wonderful kingdom of God before the king ever becomes beautiful. If following Jesus is disconnected from the kingdom which Jesus invites us into, it's easy to keep Jesus as a novelty king. But when we see how wonderful life is in the kingdom of God, we see that not only is it far superior to anything this world offers, but it is in fact what we were made for.

This is where the Bible starts, Genesis 1, God created the heavens and the earth. God created his own kingdom, and as a privileged people, distinct from all other things, we see that God created male and female in his own image, they were made in the image of the king.

And look at how wonderful this kingdom was: **Genesis 2:8-17**. Do you sense the beauty of the garden yet? Here we have God, the perfect, wonderful God, who creates a people for his own glory. We see later on the book that God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. There is an intimate nearness between God and man. We also see that there was an intimate nearness between male and female. And we see that they get to live in this wonderful garden where God has richly provided food and safety for them and their job is to keep it and work it.

There was harmony with God, harmony with man, and harmony with nature.

We all know the law of entropy, that things tend to go by nature from a state of order to disorder. And yet why is it that we still long to experience, bring, and live inside of order? Because we were created to live in God's kingdom where we experienced total order with God.

This garden, was a garden Kingdom where the good rule of God told Adam and Eve all they needed to do to have purpose, find meaning, and enjoy him for all eternity. We were made to live with God in a perfect world free from the pains of death. But a problem came.

Adam and Eve were deceived into thinking that there was something better than the Kingdom. God told Adam and Eve that their greatest joy was to be with God, the serpent tried to convince them that their

greatest joy would be to be God. Satan told them that their greatest joy wasn't in their king, but their greatest joy would be in being their own king.

They disobeyed God and in so doing they lost the kingdom. Why? Because they rebelled against the king. So what happened? Two things. First sin took hold of the hearts of man. The peace with God was shattered, relationships with other people was complicated, and our ability to work the ground was made far more difficult. Sin brought death.

But for Adam and Eve that death wasn't an immediately physical death, instead it was a relational one. They were put out of the garden. **Genesis 3:23-24.**

We lost the only kingdom which we were made to live in. This is what sin does, sin keeps us from getting back to God. It keeps us from the King who made us and the kingdom which we were made to enjoy.

But the good news is that though man rejected God, God did not forget about man. He set forth to recreate what sin broke. Immediately after man is removed from the garden we read about the ways in which man is utterly incapable of building a kingdom on their own.

We read of arrogance, murder, and exceeding wickedness. In fact what's interesting is that many enemies of religion would say that once humanity left God's kingdom, humanity should have flourished. That's Lennon's line right, "Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too." That's Genesis 4. And yet right away Adam and Eve's firstborn son killed their other son.

Don't you find it interesting in biographies or documentaries that those who appear to have the most control via power or wealth often wrestle the most to keep control? Why is that? Because we make lousy kings. A broken relationship with God wasn't the end of humanity's problem it was the beginning.

But in Genesis 12, God enters back into the scene and promises to once again recreate a people for his own possession. What was lost in Eden was promised again in Abraham. And look at this covenant God makes with Abraham in **Genesis 17:1-8.**

God made a covenant with Abraham for two things: first he promised them a land, but secondly he promised them a kingdom. A nation, with kings, and everlasting nation. Why? Because God was going to be their God and for God to be their God, he was going to rebuild his kingdom through his king.

This is what we saw in the book of Deuteronomy, as the people who had been delivered by grace from Egypt stood on the doorstep of the Promised Land. Look at what God said to them: **Deuteronomy 17:14-20.**

The people are about to go into the Promised Land and here God shows them by what manner he will care for them in the land, God will give them a king.

This is our second point today: **Making Sense of the King.**

We know we want the benefits of the kingdom of God, who doesn't. Peace on earth, unity, health, security, these are all universal desires. And because of this we get a little angsty in times like this. As if an election year didn't press our hopes enough, we are in the midst of a pandemic. And all people

everywhere are looking for a person, a government or a corporation who can seemingly promise to bring all those blessings of the kingdom into our reality.

And it's really easy to simply disregard all these hopes as foolish hopes. But the truth of the matter is that we really do have right hopes. Whether your hope is in your own liberty as being the rule you need for your own peace, or another type of government, we long for a proper ruler as our hope because we were made to long for such things.

It's just that we can easily miss the nature of God's king. In Deuteronomy, God says you will ask for a king because that's really what you need. You need a king. But it will be a king who I will choose. A king from among you. And he will be a good king.

Because it was Adam and Eve's disobedience which lost them the kingdom, it would be the obedience of a good king who would help establish the Kingdom. This king won't use his authority to amass armies for his own might or women for his own gratification. This king won't exalt himself over his brothers, but instead he will submit himself to God's law.

And as this King, this king whom we want but whom God will choose reigns over God's people, it will continue long and go well with them in the land. The good of the people is in the good of their king.

So what do God's people need to do? Wait for God's king. The problem is that we don't wait well do we? As the rest of the Old Testament we see kings all over the place. Edom has kings. Moab has kings. The Ammonites, the Philistines, the Hivites, the Hittites, the Amorites, all of them have kings. But there was seemingly no king for Israel.

This led Israel to seek to worship the gods of false kings. It lead them to sin, so God sent judges to rule over God's people. And the judges would have success for a bit. But soon the people would fail to wait on God, and they would turn again to idols. And the book of Judges ends with some of the most cringe worthy descriptions of evil and depravity among God's people and concludes with this thought: **Judges 21:25**.

God had given his people his law, they had the rule of God, but without a visible and present king the people showed how quickly they disobeyed God and what came was not human flourishing, but pain and death.

So the people finally have enough. They are tired of waiting, and in 1 Samuel we read this: **1 Samuel 8:4-9**. Israel demands a king, a king on the timeline of men and not the timeline of God. This is what the people said to Samuel: **1 Samuel 8:19-20**.

Why do we want a king? Now you might say, "I don't really want a king..." But while you might not use the same language consider the motivation of Israel. Israel wanted to look like the other nations who had the picture perfect kings of success. Israel wanted someone to fight their battles for them.

Israel didn't want a king so that they might look like people of God's kingdom. They wanted a king so that they might look like the world's kingdom and have all their battles solved for them. Don't we know that temptation?

What's really behind Israel's request are right desires, they don't want to feel like outsiders, and they don't want to live in fear. They want belonging and they want someone who can deal with the problems they can't. Those are good desires, but good desires spent in the wrong place leads to trouble.

This is what drives some of us into foolish relationships. We think that this other person can fight our battles for us. This is why we cave to sin, we think that the sin can whisper in our ear the good news of a king: that though the war rages around you, stay near to me and I'll take care of you.

What I love is that in the passages following, Samuel goes and anoints Saul as king over Israel. And at this formal swearing in ceremony, Samuel calls Saul to the front of Israel but he won't come out because he's hiding among the luggage, the king Israel thought they wanted was too scared to even stand before his own people. But when he did, the only thing the people noticed was that he was tall. And in seeing his height they completely forgot about his cowardice.

We know we need a good king to rule us and bring us peace, yet none of us in the history of the world have yet found one. But it hasn't stopped us from recycling the kings of man has it? Though it may have shown us its failures moments before, we get seduced by its height, its scent, its flash, its glamor or its attractiveness and we immediately begin to think: "This will work out beautifully."

But this never works. Though God permitted and guided the process himself, it was to show Israel that God's king is worth waiting for. And after Saul showed his own failures, David came. David was a king after God's own heart. Where Saul failed, David succeeded.

In fact, God made a promise to David in **2 Samuel 7:10-16**.

God again narrowed his promise. God was going to give Israel its place, its kingdom, and someone from David's line would sit on the throne forever! Eden it appeared, was right around the corner.

But you can imagine Israel's pain when a few chapters later, David, their king, forcefully takes another man's wife, sleeps with her, impregnates her and then has her husband murdered to cover up his own sin.

Certainly this is not what God's king would look like. Even after him, his son Solomon, the next in line, he was sidetracked by all the things Deuteronomy warned of: he took many wives, had many horses and exalted himself above his own brothers.

Because God's kings were riddled with sin, Israel actually split in a civil war, into the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel. During this divided kingdom we hear of a prophecy that God will yet do something about all this mess that the good of Israel's people will one day be secured through the goodness of her true king, the king which God will choose.

Look at **Isaiah 9:6-7**. But not long after this prophecy, the tribe of Israel was lost by conquest to the Assyrians. Then Judah was taken captive by Babylon, but even then prophet's like Ezekiel predicted a renewed and restored Jerusalem, a new temple, and a new ruler.

But even after King Cyrus allowed the exiles to return and after the temple was built the kings of Israel were mere shadow kings, still failing to obey. The temple was built, the city restored but there was no real kingdom. Where was the King?

But this is what makes the Triumphal Entry so triumphant. Because Matthew opens by showing how Jesus came from the line of David. Mark shows the simple message of Jesus himself: **Mark 1:15**.

This is our third point today: **Making Sense of Jesus**.

Jesus was the king who in God's timing was going to come to rebuild his kingdom. Like Adam, Jesus was tested by the devil, but he obeyed. Here was the king who not only was going to know the law like Deuteronomy spoke of, but he was going to fulfill the law. He was going to obey God perfectly in a way the kings of the past never could.

But what of Jesus' death? Why is it good news that this king came to die?

Let me go back for a moment to the reign of David. In the end of David's rule, he was filled with arrogance and commanded a census. Why did he command a census? Because he wanted to boast in the number of people under his rule.

Because of this sin, God was going to punish David and in 2 Samuel 24 we read of this unprecedented offer from God. God says to David, "I'm going to punish you. I'm going to give you three options for punishment and you must choose one. The first is that there would be three years famine in the land. The second that you will run for three months from your enemy. The third is that there will be pestilence in your land."

David's answer in verse 14 basically says this: "The famine and pestilence come from God, but don't let me fall into the hands of man." Anything but option 2, which is the option where David himself will be pursued.

So what happens next is that God sent pestilence upon the land, and 70,000 of David's people died. Because David feared being pursued himself, huge amounts of his people suffered. But look at what David says to God as he realize this: **2 Samuel 24:17**.

David realized that as Israel's king, he should have suffered instead of them. Why? It was his own sin. That's what a good king would do.

This is why Jesus went to die. Not because he had any sin, for he had none. Jesus was the representative King Israel needed, he was sinless. But his people weren't. While Jesus had no sin, we did. We had no access to the kingdom because we still rejected God. There is nothing that keeps you from God except the blindness and hostility of your own heart.

That's why Jesus is more than just our representative and righteous King, obeying in our place. But he's also our substitute King, dying for our unrighteousness.

Look at the work of this King: **Philippians 2:5-11**.

This is the King we were waiting for. Because as the Garden of Eden shows, our greatest problem is not enemy occupation, not a global health crisis, not taxation, poverty or climate change. Our greatest problem is the sin that separates us from our God. Sin which our King came to die for so that we might once again be brought back into the garden. He has fought your battle.

Jesus the King restores us to God. Jesus the King defeats the sin in our hearts. Jesus the King is the savior we need. He fought the battle we couldn't win and restored us to peace with God.

So how do we apply this to our own lives? **(Application)**

First, *Recognize this King*. How do you do that? You repent and believe. You can't recognize who Jesus is without repenting of the ways in which you tried to live as king.

In 2020, when we hear language of Kings and kingdoms, we think that it is a fairy tale. Or that it's something so antiquated that it doesn't apply to us. But the truth is that while we now might live in a democratic republic, we will all one day live under a divine monarchy.

You must realize that you will be judged in relationship to this King. This isn't a fairy tale. On your own you are an enemy of this kingdom and left unaddressed, one day you will be treated as one. But by grace this King came and laid down his life for you so that you might become a friend of the kingdom.

If you're not a believer listening to this today, you have battles in your life that will wear you out. Because we were made for a kingdom like this, you will spend your life laboring to build it on your own, or to seemingly work your way back into God's kingdom. But both those hopes will exhaust you and crush you. Jesus has fought that battle for you.

He died for your sins so that you might repent, believe and be restored to God. Jesus solves the internal problem and one day, a day we will talk about in the coming weeks, Jesus will call us home and forever solve the external problems too. Faith in Jesus is what makes a Christian Christian.

Secondly, *Respond to the King*. Once we repent, our lives as citizens of this kingdom is only beginning. And our new identity shapes our new role. So what do we do if we are ruled by a king like this? Two things: we hail the king and we herald the king.

We hail the King by worshipping him. Before we do anything else Christians must first submit themselves to worship. He is worthy of it all. If you wrestle with this idea of worship, which can be incredibly hard in times like this, I would encourage you to two things. First pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to open your eyes to the beauty of Jesus. And second, read the gospel of Mark and notice what this King and his Kingdom look like.

We also herald the king. Because we have what the world wants, we make him known. We should say, especially this Easter week, come and see the beauty of my king! This is indeed a unique Easter season, but it's also a season where people are more aware of the realities of life and death, and battles bigger than ourselves. What a great way to invite others to hear the good news of this King by sharing it with them yourself.