

Part 49: The King and His Glory (Easter 2019 Part 1)

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The other day in my morning devotions I was reading through one of the Old Testament books something really cool stood out to me. And so when my son woke up and came out to sit on my lap I thought that I would have a super-dad theology moment and explain to him this idea.

I said, "Owen, do you remember Moses, the guy who God used to part the Red Sea and lead God's people out of Egypt? Well God also told Moses that once the people were out of Egypt he should build this place called the Tabernacle. And the very presence of God would come and live in that Tabernacle. Wouldn't that be cool? Except the problem was that God is holy and his people were sinful so most of the people couldn't come near God. But what God did was set apart a specific group of people called priests and these priests had to live really pure lives and they had to make all the sacrifices for the sins of the people. So if you wanted to go near to God, you had to go to a priest with a sacrifice and the priest would have to sacrifice for you and that was as close to God as you could get because of your sin.

"The problem was that there were people who tried to approach God who were not priests and bad things always happened to those people because of their sin. But the New Testament calls Jesus our new High Priest, because he was a priest, but he was a priest who offered himself as a sacrifice once and for all. And because Jesus did this we are now what is called "the priesthood of believers," meaning we can approach God through Jesus whenever we want. Isn't that great!"

As we were driving to school later that morning I asked him, "Hey Owen, what stood out to you about the discussion we had this morning?" He immediately said, "That Moses parted the Red Sea."

What stood out to him was the story component. There was a man whom God uses to part a sea. That should stand out. And that's why scripture is so powerful. The Bible is not just a bunch of truth statements, though it does communicate truth. The Bible is a story which reveals truth from God.

But the challenge we have as we hear the story of God is to understand the story the way God wants us to understand it. That is we not only need to hear the story, but we need to see God's world through the story.

It reminds me of another Old Testament story of a pagan prophet named Balaam. Balaam was contracted by one of Israel's enemies to prophecy against Israel, and they offered him money to do it. Now Balaam, who was just in it for the money, gladly took the fees offered to him, but he told his employers that he can only speak what God tells him to speak (he was a mercenary prophet, but at least he was an honest one). And while God does speak to Balaam, God is increasingly displeased with Balaam's heart. Even though Balaam is speaking God's words, Balaam doesn't see the beauty of God. He's in it for the money. In fact twice he gets paid to curse Israel, but is unable to do so.

But then he gets taken up to a mountain where he can see the whole people of God, and in that moment God opens his eyes to see his beauty. And listen to how he describes his own experience: **Numbers 24:3-6.**

You see the first two times Balaam heard the word of God, but it wasn't until God opened his eyes that he not only heard the word of God, but saw the glory of God.

This Easter season we are finishing the book of Matthew and we are looking at the story of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. And for many of you this story is an old story, one well-worn in your mind. For others this might be a new story.

Yet for all of us, this is a story we must not only hear, but by God's grace we must learn to see it. In fact what's interesting is that Matthew himself is writing in the clearest way he has written in this book.

Matthew is writing this book to a generally Jewish audience, and so he was always quick to interrupt the story of Jesus' life and insert commentary on the way Jesus was fulfilling prophecy. And in today's text there are at least four explicit fulfillments of prophecy, but what's interesting is that Matthew points out none of them.

Which is rare. When it comes to specific quotations of Old Testament texts, Matthew includes almost twice as much as the other three gospels combined, and he alludes to the Old Testament over a hundred times. But here in the story of the crucifixion Matthew includes nothing but the story.

A story silent of explicit teaching but powerful in truth. I pray that today as we examine this story our eyes are opened just like Balaam's to not only hear the story of God, but to know the God of the story.

So here is what we are going to do today: we are going to begin by looking at this story in the book of Matthew, and then we are going to circle back around and try to see three points of emphasis that I think Matthew is trying to communicate to us today. We want to **See the Glory of Jesus, See the Gospel of Jesus, and See our Own Hearts.**

But first let's read this story again together, the one which Jonny just read for us a moment ago. And as we read it, I want you to really hear the story. So if it's easier for you to close your eyes and listen than it is to follow along, please feel free to do so: **Matthew 27:11-44**

Before we move on I want you to take a minute and think about what stood out to you from that story? What did you like? What parts moved you? Why did it move you?

These are important questions to ask because even though Matthew is telling a story, there are not infinite ways to understand it. This story is God's story which means we want to take all of our experiences with this text and we want to bring it back and examine it as God would have us do that.

So let's begin by looking at the first thing the Matthew wants us to see in this text. Let us **See the Glory of Jesus.**

For those of you who are familiar with Holy Week, you know that today is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday was the Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem and people shouted "Hosanna," and threw palm branches and cloaks on Jesus' path. Five days later on Good Friday, Jesus will be killed. We actually looked at Jesus' triumphal entry way back in November which means Jesus was able to do in five days what it has taken us five months to do.

But in one sense what we just read is Jesus' triumphal entry in the realest sense. For those of you who have been with us the past month you have noticed the unique answer that Jesus is giving to his enemies during these final days of his life.

Judas asks Jesus if he is the one who will betray him and Jesus says, "You have said so." In Jesus' first trial the high priest asks Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the messiah of God," and Jesus replies, "You have said so." And here we saw in our text today in verse 11, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you King of the Jews," and Jesus replies, "You have said so."

Now why is Jesus giving such vague answers to such pointed questions? It is not because Jesus isn't the Christ, or that Jesus isn't King. In fact if you remember back in Matthew 16, Jesus asks his disciples this question and look at how Jesus responds to their answer: **Matthew 16:15-17**.

Jesus affirms Peter in rightly identifying that Jesus is the Christ, but in all these situations Jesus' response is more loosey goosey. Why is that? Because Jesus knows that unless you, like Peter, understand Jesus rightly through the eyes of faith, you will never fully understand Jesus.

Is Jesus the messiah like the High Priest is asking? Yes he is, but he is not the messiah as the High Priest imagines it. The High Priest imagines the messiah to be a patriotic liberator of the Jews. But that is not what Jesus came to do. Is Jesus King of the Jews as Pilate asked him? Yes he is, but not in the sense Pilate is asking. Jesus is not the king of a physical kingdom, his kingdom is not of this world, and his kingdom far exceeds one specific people group as he is king over all creation.

You see as we examine this story of Jesus it is important to remember that Jesus very rarely fits into our human boxes of understanding. He is exactly what we needed, it's just often we don't see what is needed. Which is why I believe this to be the perfect text for Palm Sunday even though it is the antithesis of what Jesus experienced when he rode into Jerusalem.

Because it is here in this text where we see the King in his glory.

When you think of Jesus, how do you think of him? Is he synonymous with success and comfort? Is he a far off judge keeping score of what is right and wrong in your life? Because here in this text Matthew is using the most royal language he has used so far in his book, but he is not the kind of King most of us would imagine.

In fact the parallels between Palm Sunday and this trip to Golgotha are staggering. On Palm Sunday the hopeful prophecy was proclaimed that the King is coming. At Golgotha he is hailed king of the Jews in jest and spite. On Palm Sunday he came humble and mounted on a donkey. At Golgotha he was humiliated and mounted to a cross. On Palm Sunday people cast their cloaks on the road to honor his path. At Golgotha, lots were cast by greedy men for the clothes of Jesus as he died above them. On Palm Sunday branches were cut, at Golgotha beams were fixed. On Palm Sunday the crowds were stirred with the cry of Hosanna, at Golgotha crowds hurled hate. On Palm Sunday the crowds cried in excitement, "Who is this?" At Golgotha people mocked saying: "Some king this is."

In fact in the book of John, Pilate presents Jesus to the people bloodied, beaten, robed in purple, fitted with a crown of thorns, and holding the staff used to punish Jesus as a mock scepter. And Pilate says to the crowd: "Behold your King!"

And angels wept their tears of joy. For this was the king in all his glory. You see we will see Jesus as risen, we will see him ascended to the right hand of God, we will see him ruling and reigning in all his splendor. But it was in this passage, broken, burdened, humiliated and hurting that his glory was being validated.

As the King was being rejected by men, he was being established by his father. Consider the Psalm speaking about this very scene: **Psalm 11:19-24**.

When you consider the cross of Jesus, when you heard this story does the pain give way to gladness? It is only the gospel that promises joy in hardships, salvation in sorrow, and security in the brokenness of its King. But it's only when we learn to see Jesus as God sees Jesus that this is possible.

This irony is seen all the more if we take for a moment and examine the mockery the crowds provide Jesus in the closing passages of this text. This is where we will turn to our next point and learn to **See the Gospel of Jesus**. I call this the gospel according to scoffers because in each of these messages meant to humiliate Jesus are bits of truth which make Jesus all the more beautiful.

Let let's examine these words together: **Matthew 27:39-44**.

As I sat with this text this week, this is the part of the passage that stirred my heart every time I read it. Because each sarcastic remark reveals to us not the failure of Jesus, but the gospel of Jesus. When we talk about the gospel we aren't just talking about the Bible, or a type of music. The gospel is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. In all of these words intended to scorn Jesus, they are actually revealing the depth of that good news.

First, the crowd says: "Ha! You can't even finish what you said you would do. Finish your plan and destroy the temple." But it was God's plan all along that the temple to be destroyed would be Jesus himself. The gospel is the plan of God. It was always God's plan.

Then the religious leaders shame him saying: "He saved others, but he cannot save himself." But it was actually in Jesus' willingness to not save himself that others can be saved. You see Jesus knew that if he wanted to save others, it meant that he would deny himself salvation.

Jesus died because that's what our sin deserves: death. When Jesus died he didn't die for his own sins, he died for your sins. You see central to seeing this king in his glory is seeing this king in your place. If you want the wonderful salvation which comes in Jesus you must see that this is what it costs. This is the love of God laid bare for even mocking hearts to see. The gospel is the loving salvation of God.

The Pharisees then continued to mock Jesus saying: "He is the King of Israel, come down from the cross and then we will believe you."

If we are honest isn't that how we often treat Jesus? Come down from the cross and I will believe. The problem isn't that we ask the question, it's that we believe the truth of the question. The truth is that Jesus could have come off that cross at that very moment and no one would have believed.

Why? Because the problem of belief isn't a lack of evidence, the problem of belief is the captivity of the heart. Our hearts will not believe because dead hearts don't believe. This is why Jesus had to die. Jesus died so that he could defeat the power of sin over our hearts.

We don't need new evidence to believe in Jesus, we need new hearts. So it was because Jesus stayed on the cross that you in here today have hope for salvation because the chains of sin are left in the grave which Jesus broke. And what would be a greater testimony to God's power to save? His son still living and writhing his way off of the cross? Or his son dead three days in a grave risen to life? The gospel is the power of God.

God's gospel solves the problem of sin that most of us do not fully see with a power that most of us refuse to acknowledge. But do you see that today? Do you see that this salvation, this power, this belief can be yours today?

And lastly the chief priests deal what is probably the most painful irony in all human history. Look back at **Matthew 27:43**.

Here we have the son of God dying on a tree, bloodied broken, wet with weakness, and the chief priests say: God isn't delivering him because God must not desire him.

Now there is some painful truth to this that we will see this Friday. When Jesus took our sins he was rejected by God, but rejected for us! But a simultaneous truth is that this Jesus, Jesus fulfilling all the righteousness of God, Jesus dying in the place of sinners, Jesus meeting the demands of holy justice was the thing which God desires most for his glory.

The gospel is the desire of God. Have you ever felt the emotions that these men are trying to make Jesus feel? That because your life is a painful mess, that God must not desire you? Jesus would never treat you that way. Don't we see in this text that there can be nothing further from the truth? In fact it could be that through the sorrow and dysfunction of your life that God is lovingly turning your heart to him.

The cross shows God's good plan for you, God's salvation accomplished for you, God's power made manifest in you, and the desire of God for you. The beauty of the gospel doesn't look like the world's beauty. The power of the gospel doesn't look like the world's power. But this is why we must not only hear this story, but we must learn to see this God.

This is our final point today: **See our Own Hearts**.

Now if we want to really understand this story, this is where we need to not only hear it, but soberly assess our own hearts. What do you make of a King like this?

I want to pick two characters in this text and ask us to consider our own hearts in light of them. The first is the heart of Pilate.

Now what's very clear in this text are two things: 1. Pilate liked Jesus, and 2. Pilate doesn't believe in Jesus. It wasn't common for Romans to be sympathetic at all towards Jewish criminals or to really even care about such suits as this. But repeatedly Pilate tries to get Jesus off the hook. First he proposes a prisoner swap.

During the Passover it was custom as a favor of the Roman government to release to the Jews a Jewish prisoner. So Pilate presents Barabbas and Jesus hoping that the crowd might choose Jesus. But at that point the chief priests have worked the crowd up in favor of Barabbas.

Seeing this Pilate goes a second time and says, "But seriously, who do you want me to release to you." And look at what happens next: **Matthew 27:23-26**.

Pilate sees nothing wrong with Jesus, calls Jesus just, fought for Jesus' rights, had a wife who was in favor of Jesus, and even washed his hands in trying to remove himself from Jesus' death. But what this text shows is that familiarity and fancy towards Jesus is not equal to seeing Jesus for who he is.

And where do we see that in this text? Ultimately Pilate obeys the crowd because he is more concerned about his personal reputation of ruling in peace. Look at what James says in **James 4:4**.

If we have heard the Easter story it's easy to rest in a Pilate like relationship with Jesus. We know Jesus is good, and just, and that we should esteem him highly, and we might even know that he is sinless. But when rubber meets the road and the crowd of our heart, or the roar of popular opinion begins to sound who is it that we are really following?

What pain Pilate's heart must have felt wanting to do justice while fearing the response of men? But if you see Jesus as the true king you can set that pain aside. If Jesus is our king we don't even fear death, why would we fear the opinion of man? We are finally free to risk because we suffer no loss at all. We can stand up to the desires of our flesh or the fears in our heart and take comfort that Jesus loves us and has proved capable in dealing with our problems.

It is only when we see the glory of the Jesus who was killed in our place that we can begin to trust him in a way that produces joy and life instead of fear and anxiety. Because no amount of good will towards Jesus, no amount of water will be able to cleanse your heart. But the blood of Jesus can, and that is what has been offered to you in faith.

The second person I want us to look at it is found in **Matthew 27:32**.

Simon of Cyrene. Now here is what we know about Simon from all four of the gospels. He was from Cyrene, he had two sons, and he was just coming into the city from the countryside, and for whatever reason and by whatever force he was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus because Jesus had become physically unable to carry his own.

And we don't hear anything else about Simon in the rest of scripture. We know so little about him, but what we do know is that his narrative, his story was indelibly changed by the cross of Jesus. There came a point in his life where whether he had planned it or not, Jesus' story became part of his story.

We don't know if Simon was a believer, or became a believer. But we know he had to make sense of what he was drawn into. Who was this man whose cross he carried, and what was he to make of him.

The same is true for each and every one of us in here. We are all Simon of Cyrene, thrust into a story so much bigger than ourselves. The cross you carry if you are in here today is the knowledge of this story. What will you do with it? Where will it take you?

If you are a believer you are called to carry your cross. That's something that Jesus himself told his disciples to do earlier in this book. This is what discipleship is, losing your life so that you might find it. But the truth is, even though you carry your cross, it is Jesus' cross to die on. You cannot disciple or work

your way into heaven. It is only after we have seen that Jesus has died in our place that we can begin to carry our cross in a way which will not crush us with the burden of performance.

And if you are wrestling with the hardship of your cross, then look to Jesus' cross. See that he has died so that you might have new life, and new help in every area of hardship.

And for you who still have no idea what this weight means on your shoulders, I can't pretend to know what it is you are going through in this life. But Jesus does. Jesus knows what it is you are looking for, and he is here reminding you that he is better. Jesus knows your pain, and he has promised to take it from you. Jesus knows your desire to be loved, and he has shown how much he loves you on the cross. The cross you bear will lead you to death, but Jesus has offered to die on it for you. That's the gospel. Go to Jesus with your sins and ask him to take them from you.

This is what Jesus came to do, and this is where your story is forever tied to his story. I pray that today as you hear it, that the Holy Spirit gives you eyes to see it. For that is salvation from God, and that is what Easter is all about.