

## Mortal Combat: Jesus vs. Kings

### Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup> "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.'" <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The 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!" <sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Even though last week we saw Jesus defeat death with a simple, three word knockout blow, we're still combating death some 2000 years later. No one is exempt from this fight, not even royalty. On September 8, 2022, Queen Elizabeth II died. And so another must ascend to take her place. This means that for the first time in 70 years, there will be a coronation in the United Kingdom as Charles III is set to be crowned as king on May 6.

What can we expect for the coronation of Charles III? Three days of festivities, including working holidays for those in the UK. A star-studded concert at Windsor Castle, with multiple choirs and 12 new pieces of music, including a new Coronation Anthem based on Psalm 98 composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber. A service conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the senior bishop and leader of the church of England. Not 1, but 2 epic processions, 1 of which, I kid you not, includes a gold coach drawn by horses. Charles will dress in his military uniform instead of the more pageantry breeches and stockings of coronations past. A diamond and jewel encrusted gold crown with purple velvet will be placed on his head. Maybe a small protest by anti-monarchists. But this will be an epic procession for the new king.

Then we have the procession we just heard about, this Palm Sunday procession. If the Duke of Norfolk was in charge of that procession as he is with Charles', I wonder how different it would have looked. Jesus, what are you doing riding this colt, this foal of a donkey, with its mother in tow. You need a proper steed, a broken-in horse, one that will be tamed, one that will give you a smooth ride, one that reduces the risk of you being bucked off. And, honestly, why are you borrowing some common person's donkey? We'll spare no expense on your steed. You don't have to suffer through these makeshift, secondhand clothes as a saddle. We'll get you a proper saddle, custom made with the richest, softest leather, the cushiest padding. Maybe we get you a gold carriage or at least one of those bulletproof limos that the president or the pope rides. Forget these common palm branches. We'll actually roll out the red carpet for you. And these commoner's clothes? Let's get you a proper king's robe or a military uniform, something to go with your gold crown to show everyone that you mean business as king.

Not just the Duke of Norfolk would be appalled at Jesus' procession, but also many Jews were expecting something else. They expected the promised Son of David to come with mighty power, a king who would lead a violent rebellion against the Roman government. Where are his war horses? Where are his soldiers? Where's his sword? Where were his speeches of victory and liberation? This common guy riding on a foal of a donkey with a makeshift saddle is kind of a letdown.

As Jesus comes into Jerusalem for one more week of mortal combat, he's fighting against the expectations the people had of him as their king. He's been fighting this battle since the day he was born. He wasn't born in a palace, no silver spoon in his mouth. No, he was born to a blue-collar carpenter, and his first bed was an animal's feeding trough. There was not a declaration from the state announcing his birth, no concert with 12 pieces of new music by famous composers, but angels to a handful of dirty, smelly shepherds got the news and went to see this King. When the Magi showed up to present gifts to the one born the King of the Jews, they went to the palace, expecting to find him there. Instead, they found Herod. The king they were searching for was in a regular house with average parents. Were they let down finding King Jesus this way?

Are we let down with how Jesus, the King of Kings, processes into our lives? Do we think he should come to us as a conquering hero, in military garb, with a sword on his side and bulging muscles to show his power, with his armies of angels with swords out, ready to fight, ends all wars just by his presence, that he stops a school shooter before a single shot is fired? Should he come with a golden tongue to defeat every objection ever raised against him, that outspoken atheists cower before him and concede allegiance to this

king without me having to sit down and share who my God is with people, never experiencing rejection or persecution for my faith? Should he come showing unlimited luxury so that we see that he's rich and that he can spread that wealth to us, that we can finally relax and take it easy, spend money like there's no tomorrow because he will take care of us, giving us more each day that we can spend, that we will finally have that easy life?

Yet, we see this: "Your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (verse 5) He's not coming in military garb with a legion of angels with swords flashing. He doesn't have golden tongue, converting his enemies with powerful speeches. He isn't throwing out money to the crowd, making their lives easier. He doesn't look ready for a fight, let alone to win one. He's kind of a letdown.

Do we reject Jesus as our king when he comes into our lives not meeting our expectations? Do I throw my hands up in the air when I hear of another school shooting on the news, this time targeting Christians? Do I shake my head at him when he comes in a still small voice instead of powerfully silencing his objectors, smiting false teachers? When he doesn't give me what I want when I want it, when he doesn't make my life easier, when I still struggle to pay the bills, that I still have anxiety or depression, when I can't cope with the busyness of everyday life, do I say that I have no use for him? When he has a command that limits me from doing that things that I think will make me happy, do I push him and his rules away as silly, not applicable to me? Is this humble, gentle, common man not my king because he's not doing what I want him to do, not coming into my life how I want him to come?

Jesus did not ride into Jerusalem that day to meet our expectations. No, he rode in that day the way that he did to meet the expectations that were laid out for him by God through the prophets Zechariah and Isaiah. That's why he borrowed someone's colt and brought the mother with instead of getting a war horse. That's why he wasn't wearing regal clothing but his everyday clothing. That's why he didn't come flashing a sword but came gently. That's why he didn't have a great golden tongue coronation speech but let the people see Scripture fulfilled before them. By coming into Jerusalem the way that he did, he came to do the will of God and met the expectations set for him in the Word of God, defying our expectations so that we would see someone different.

Jesus is unlike the kings we have come to expect. He's the only one who actually answers the cries of the crowd. They shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (verse 9) "Hosanna" was probably meant by many of the people just as a way of praising Jesus, but it literally means, "Save us!" No earthly king, not King Charles III, not any president, can save us. Only Jesus can.

Jesus is the only one to win these combats that we have seen through Lent. Only Jesus perfectly followed the will of God, did everything that was foretold of him by the prophets. Only he can extend his rule over Satan, over death, over us and our sinful, rebellious nature that wants to reject him as King of our lives. Only he can pay our debt of sins and wipe it out, forgiving us totally and completely. Only the God and Man King Jesus could do this.

This King still comes to us in that same gentle, humble way, but still in doing so was fighting the fight for our souls and the souls of all people. He wins our hearts in a different way than any other king does. He comes to us through simple words, words that the Holy Spirit uses to establish his kingdom, his rule, in our hearts, that we would give up our will, the way we want things, what we think he should do things to make for a more satisfying and easier life. This guy who looked like nothing special, instead changes us by what he has done to that we, being born again, want to put aside our selfish expectations and rejoice in the king we have. This is not the king we expected or even want sometimes, but he is the king that we need, a king who met the expectations of God, who did what was foretold of him. This means that when it comes to Jesus vs. kings, Jesus wins.

Rejoice, my brothers and sisters, fellow citizens of God's kingdom, on this Palm Sunday because you see a king coming to you unlike any other, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He is the only King to ever answer our cries of "Hosanna." "Save us." His Words, his deeds, changed our hearts so that we now live to follow him and his rule – even when does not meet our expectations of a king. When it comes to Jesus vs kings, Jesus wins. Amen.