

INTRODUCTION

Animals are a type of living being that many of us have found ourselves attached to at some point in our lives, or at least know of someone who is attached to an animal. Whether it's a dog, a cat, or something more unique, it is easy for us to feel connected to these animals. We become bonded to them; often they become a part of our family. We experience joy and frustration interacting with them; we feel heartache when they exit this world.

I know for me, it has been so fun for me to become an uncle of Gigi and Lola, which are Kyra and Devin Nelson's dogs. They are sweet and meet you at the door (sometime with barking) but really want you to pet them and connect with them. I know they are a bright part of the Nelson's day and they are sad when they have to leave them and happy when they are united with them. Thinking to Biblical times, I'm sure the Israelites had a similar connection to animals, even if that connection was formed in a different light.

Traditionally speaking, after the Israelites were rescued by God out of slavery in Egypt in the book of Exodus, they were required to engage in the practice of the passover. In this practice, each family would choose a lamb, as unblemished and spotless as possible, to offer as a sacrifice in the remembrance of the rescue that God brought to the people of Israel. This lamb, however, was chosen and examined in a more intimate way that we would assume. After being selected by the family, the lamb would become "their" lamb; they would spend time with it leading up to the time of the sacrifice, careful not to blemish it or break any of its bones.

I'm sure this would have been significant and emotional for the family involved. As they offered this lamb up to be the sacrifice for remembrance of what God had done, there might have been tears shed: both tears of sadness for their "spotless" lamb and tears of joy as they remembered what God had done for them and continues to do.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday today, which is also traditionally known as "lamb selection day", we get to celebrate our Lamb, Jesus Christ, who was chosen by our Father, and declare Him once again as the King of Israel and the King of our very lives, just like the crowds of the New Testament did on Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Passion week. Would you go there with me today? Would you engage with the text in a way that once again moves us to declare Jesus as the King of Israel?

PRAYER

READING

If you would, turn with me to Matthew 21. We will be starting in verse 1 and reading through verse 17 today. For context, Jesus is approaching the final week before His death and eventual resurrection. He has lived a life of perfection and ministry, dedicated to His Father and calling those around Him to repentance and following Him. Jesus knows what is ahead; yet He willingly presses forward. Today, we get to explore the first day of what many call "Passion Week" and examine Palm Sunday. Let's read.

Matthew 21:1-17

"21 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me."³ If anyone says anything to

you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion,

'Behold, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

on a colt,^[a] the foal of a beast of burden."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them.⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹² And Jesus entered the temple^[a] and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant,¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

"'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies

you have prepared praise'?"

¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there."

A DONKEY, NOT A STALLION (v1-7)

At the beginning of this passage, Jesus sent two of His disciples to a town called Bethphage to retrieve for Him a donkey and colt to Him that had never been ridden on. Bethphage was a small town on the way to Jerusalem from Bethany, about 1.25 miles from Jerusalem. This was not a town of renown, or a necessarily special place, other than the fact that it was used for the place that Jesus would get this donkey from.

As Jesus Himself says, this was to fulfill the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9, a prophecy that the people of Israel would have understand and would have carried great significance. Many at the time viewed Jesus as a prophet, but very few, if any, viewed Him as a King; yet this was a clear sign - the King was coming... humbly.

As with everything that Jesus did, this was purposeful. Not only did this affirm a prophecy that had been foretold by the prophet Zachariah, but it also pushed back against what many of the Israelites thought that the Messiah would be. Many assumed that the Messiah would come on forcefully... Jesus came

peacefully. Many thought the Messiah would arrive proudly... Jesus arrived humbly. Many believed the Messiah would come on a war stallion... Jesus rode in on a donkey.

"Ride on, ride on in majesty!

In lowly pomp ride on to die;

O Christ, thy triumphs now begin

O'er captive death and conquered sin" - Henry Hart Milman

But isn't that our King? The King I know Jesus to be is kind, caring, and humble. The King I follow is loving and compassionate. The King I know is full of wisdom and truth. THIS is the King we celebrate today! Not one that ride through the gates of Jerusalem on a stallion, but one that arrives humbly on the back of a donkey. I don't know about you, but I love getting to follow a King who approaches His Kingship in a humble way.

JESUS DECLARED AS KING (v8-11)

As Jesus begins His descent down the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, and up to Jerusalem, the people start to meet Him. They spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road in front of Him and shout:

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

This was a loaded phrase and full of significance!

Hosanna came from the Hebrew words *yasha* ("deliver, save") and *anna* ("beg, beseech"). It was similar to the term "Hallelujah!", but more focused on salvation. When the people were shouting this out, it quite literally sounded like... yasha-anna! yasha-anna! With the blending of voices, it might have sounded like... yesh-ua! yesh-ua! The people were crying out to Jesus to save them. They were recognizing Him as someone who could.

And they were acknowledging Him as "the Son of David." This was the Son of David that the people of Israel would have been expectantly waiting for in relation to 2 Samuel 7:12-16, where the Messiah and Savior was prophesied to come. And they were declaring Him as King of Israel by placing Palm branches, an extension of the Feast of Tabernacles and symbol of victory, and their cloaks before Him, which seems to have come from 2 Kings 9:13,

"Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare^[a] steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."

This was a symbol of declaring Jesus as King!

Augustus Toplady, an Anglican clergy and hymn writer, says it well of what we should do to mirror the response of these people:

"When Christ entered into Jerusalem the people spread garments in the way: when He enters into our hearts, we pull off our own righteousness, and not only lay it under Christ's feet but even trample upon it ourselves."

These people quite literally were shouting and declaring Jesus' Kingship. They were alluding to His entry being authentic and what they had been waiting for. And yet, there were crowds there who didn't quite recognize Him as the King, but simply a prophet. This distinction between Jesus and Jesus Christ is important to realize. Many in that day knew Jesus as a man, but not as a King... as the Messiah... as their Savior. Jesus was showing them that He was, without a shadow of a doubt, the King of Israel and Savior that they had been waiting for.

Where are you today? Can you confidently say "Hosanna to the Son of David!" or are you still wrestling with if that is fully true, like some of the crowd was? I implore you to see Jesus in the light of His Kingship as we celebrate Him today, this week, and forevermore.

THE KING'S AUTHORITY (v12-17)

Jesus doesn't stop with His entry; He enters into the Temple and exudes His authority.

The Temple had been changed into a den of robbers. Jesus was not mincing words. What should've been a place of prayer and healing had turned into a money ploy. Those who needed healing the most had been excluded by the ones who had turned the Temple into a legalistic place of their own evaluation. Jesus drove these people out in a false of righteous anger. This is not what His Temple was meant to be used for; this is not the love that He had come to show; this is not a practice that He was willing to allow continue.

And this is something that we do all the time. We create barriers in the experience of what God is wanting for us and for His people. Like an episode of hoarders, we have cluttered our church: with status, self-righteousness, and blind eyes. But Jesus, our gracious King, comes in and clears the clutter... so we can focus on Him and experience His Church in the way it was supposed to be experienced.

After Jesus clear the Temple, something beautiful happens... the blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple. Past the previous money collectors and evaluators, they came to the King for the healing that they believed would come from Him... and they received it. This would've affirmed Jesus as the Messiah even further. No where in the Old Testament was a blind man healed... until Jesus. This moved the people to continue to shout:

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

The people couldn't help but beg Jesus, the one they've now declared as King, to save them! They saw His miracles, felt His authority, witnessed His love.

And as Jesus was healing and hearing the cries of His people, the chief priests and scribes questioned Him... do you hear them? Are you going to say something? Tell them they're wrong! And Jesus responds...

Yes. Of course. These people must declare my praise. They have found the good thing. They have recognized their King. They have sought healing and prayer. They are looking past the legalistic ways of the world and focused on the salvation that only I can bring.

Our King is not a King that is okay with sin; but He loves the sinner. He is not a shy and timid King; He carries authority. Authority to heal, authority to drive out what doesn't belong, authority to accept the praise of others.

Have you submitted yourself to the authority of King Jesus today? Are you submitted to the places He directs you to go as someone under His guidance? Are you authentically approaching Him for healing or trying to get it on your own terms?

A KINGLY LAMB

We may read this story of Jesus and think "why didn't He raise Himself up on a throne and declare Himself King?" It's a good question. But on this day, as the families were selecting their unblemished lamb for the Passover sacrifice that was coming, the Father reaffirmed His selection of the most perfect Lamb that had ever existed. This Lamb was no ordinary lamb; this Lamb was a kingly lamb. A lamb that carried authority. A humble and meek lamb.

This lamb would be examined by the people of Israel for the week leading up to the Passover sacrifice; the lamb would be tested and found perfect. Many would bond to this lamb, become attached, and weep at the moment of its death.

This lamb, however, was different from all other lambs. It would be sacrificed, not only in remembrance to God's deliverance of the people of Israel, but for the sins of all as well. Except for that this sacrifice would not be final... this lamb would rise from the dead three days after it's death. It would conquer death and sin; it would provide exactly what the crowd had been chanting...

"yasha-anna! yasha-anna!" ... "Save us! Save us!"

This lamb, kingly and humble, would change the lives of those in its vicinity eternally; who would then take the news of this kingly lamb to Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth. And now, here we are, thousands of years later, celebrate the lamb of God, our King, Jesus Christ. And as we look back on this sacrifice that our selected Lamb went through for us, we, like the Israelites, remember the deliverance that God brought us out of in our personal lives and the life that He brought us into.

He is worthy of our praise. He is the One we serve and are submitted to. He sits on the throne and reigns eternally. He has saved us. And the cry of "yasha-anna! yasha-anna!" has been answered. Praise Him! Praise the Lamb! Praise the King! Praise Jesus! May this Passion Week be a reminder to us all of the one we serve.