

Sermon: Matthew 21:1-11
March 16, 2008

You may have heard of the legend of the man in the iron mask. He was a prisoner of King Louis XIV. One legend says that the man in the iron mask was a twin brother of King Louis. The King who was a bloodthirsty, power-hungry womanizer sought to keep his brother under lock and key for fear that the people would like his brother better and seek to put him on the throne. Louis's brother was the exact opposite of Louis. He was kind, compassionate and honorable. In the Hollywood version, the three musketeers secretly replace the King with his twin brother and France lives happily ever after. Would you like to replace some leaders if you could? Would you like to be able to swap out bad rulers for good ones? I have got a suggestion for you. How about a King named Jesus? You won't find a better one. Matthew chapter 21 shows us that Jesus is King. He comes as King and he is acclaimed as King.

Have you ever gone to see a famous person? Perhaps you were so excited to see this person for real. Your expectations were high. This is a powerful person! Then they finally appear and you are a little disappointed. They didn't seem as great as you thought they might. The prophet Zechariah tells Jerusalem to pay attention because her King was coming. "See, Daughter of Zion, your King comes to you." Then he appears, a gentle man riding on a donkey's colt. He doesn't come as the people might have expected.

Matthew says that Israel's King is gentle. Certainly those who had experience with Jesus could understand that. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the people that the poor in spirit, the mourners and the meek are blessed. He taught the people to love their enemies. He teaches people to turn the other cheek instead of seeking revenge. And the examples could go on and on. Jesus certainly didn't act like a king who commands thousands. He didn't act like a king who had to be strong and lead.

As much as his manner showed his gentleness his mode of travel into Jerusalem showed that gentleness even more. If Jesus was going to be king, there were much more majestic and powerful ways to ride into Jerusalem. He could have forced all to bow before him, not just those who were in the procession. He could have been carried high on a platform carried by all the people. Jesus rode a baby donkey, a colt. He rode into the city looking powerless. Rulers would have laughed at him and mocked him if they saw this sad display of majesty.

Many have looked at Jesus and see a weakling. They see someone who won't fight back. They question how Jesus could be a great leader if he acts like a wimp. Certainly such a person like him could not be God. Don't let his manner fool you.

Jesus was gentle and humble by an act of his own will. Paul explained it to us in the lesson from Philippians today. Jesus was in very nature God. Yet he did not consider that equality something that he should hold onto. Instead he humbled himself and made himself nothing. He became a human being. As a human being he lived a life of gentleness and humility. All this he did on purpose.

All of his divine glory is still there. He just chose not to use it. He could still cast out demons, rebuke storms, raise the dead, and walk unscathed right through the middle of his enemies. Even in the text today we see Jesus' power. He sent those disciples into a village to pick up a donkey that no average human being could know was there. He even predicted the objection by the owners of the animals and allowed them to be taken no questions asked. I wonder what the conversation of the disciples was like on the way to get that donkey. I wonder even more what it was like on the way back with the donkey.

It may not look like it, but Jesus comes as a King. He comes as the King. Zechariah predicted his manner and mode of coming and Jesus comes as fulfillment of that prophecy. He came humbly and gently because he wasn't there to set up an earthly kingdom. He was there to win souls back from hell. He was there to conquer the devil. He was there to win our salvation. Had Jesus come in any other way, would the Scriptures, and God's prescribed plan for saving the world reached fulfillment? More personally, would you and I be saved if it was any other way? Jesus could have come and wiped out disease and provided bread for free. But mankind's real problem would still remain. The spiritual battle that Jesus was waging would be conceded to Satan. People would still be dying for their sins. Worse yet, people would be going to hell for their sins. Jesus came to do what needed to be done. He needed to be humble and gentle. He needed to come into Jerusalem on a colt. We needed him to come in this way. To unleash his divine power and majesty at this point would do no good. He was going to unleash it, but it would be on the cross. It would be in the grave. It would be in a resurrection and an ascension and a judgment, but not now.

Though the mode and manner of his entry into Jerusalem was humble and gentle, he certainly received a royal welcome. "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!'" Though he didn't look like a King, the people acclaimed him as one.

It must have been a sight. There were three groups of people that were a part of this procession. There was a group that came from Jerusalem to meet Jesus. There was a group that walked ahead of Jesus and there was a group that followed behind Jesus. Together they said "Hosanna". This was a Hebrew word that meant "Save now". It became more of a way of saying, "Hail" or "Praise be to you." The people recognized Jesus as one to be praised, one to be honored and they did so with their words and actions.

They called Jesus "the Son of David". They confessed that this was the one promised in the Old Testament. This is a descendant of David, more than that he is the descendant of David that would come and rule on David's throne forever. Now the people at the gates of Jerusalem see the dawn of the new spiritual kingdom. Finally, the Messiah, the Savior of the world has come.

The people also praised Jesus, not just for who he was, but what he has come to do. They said, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Again, Jesus was the Savior that God promised to send. Jesus comes in God's name, carrying out God's purpose. His reason for being

there is not his own. His reason for going to Jerusalem to die is God's plan. He comes in the name of the Lord, to carry out the plans of the Lord.

The plan is that he comes to save. This makes me think of when David came to defend Israel and God's name against Goliath. Here comes ruddy little David, whom King Saul called a boy. He goes out against a giant who seemingly could not be defeated. David said to Goliath, "You have come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord almighty. The battle is the Lord's." Here we have Jesus, seemingly unfit to be a King or a warrior who comes to Jerusalem as a King and to defeat the spiritual forces of evil. But this battle is the Lord's and belongs to the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We lose the battle to the spiritual forces of evil every day. Satan rages against us with his temptations and his deceitfulness. We react to his temptations and hurt people with our words. We fall to the temptation to use the internet for sexual purposes. We take what doesn't belong to us. We worry about things that we have no control over and don't put those things into God's hands. We hold revenge in our hearts instead of forgiveness. We are losing the battle.

But look, see, here comes our King. He doesn't look much like one, but he rides in the name of the Lord and for the purposes of God. "Ride on, ride on King Jesus. Ride on to die." He is not interested in increasing his own power, but in securing our eternal freedom. He uses none of his authority to serve himself. He comes to serve you. If you consider what Jesus does after he arrives at Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he might as well have just walked right up to the cross and hopped on, because he knew exactly what he was doing. He knew exactly who he was saving. So cry out with the Palm Sunday crowd, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."