

THE MAJESTY & MERCY OF GOD'S KING

Luke 19:28-40

April 9th, 2017, Benny McGrath

» INTRODUCTION & BIG IDEA

I'm gonna be honest with you, this is a hefty message. I'm a little worried that I'm going to have to cut it short. So just in case that happens, I'm giving you the big idea right now.

"If God's King can make worshippers from stones (Which he can and does) then he can make a worshiper of you, and I." Transforming even the hardest part of the sinner's heart. God's king can do it! He can make beautiful and glorious things happen in hard and lifeless places. And we're going to see how in the text we're about to read.

Whoever you are, no matter how long or how short you've been sitting in the pews. It doesn't matter. To the God of creation, you are nothing but dust—that he personally breathed his life and his purpose into. And you are not so hard right now that he can't breathe his life and purpose into you again right now. And tomorrow. And all of next week. And for the rest of your life!

If we make it all the way to the end of this message, then we'll have time to talk about some practical ways this comes about in our life. But if not, then make sure you're in a growth group where you can work this stuff out!

» ACKNOWLEDGE OUR DISTASTE FOR POWERFUL GOVERNMENTS

I moved to Canada in 2005 and in my experience, I've noticed that many Canadians can be a pretty cynical when it comes to powerful governing officials. Denis Diderot is a french philosopher that died in 1784, but I think his words sums up the cultural sentiment poignantly when he said "Men will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest."

What do you think? Is that an accurate reflection of your sentiment? Maybe that's a bit extreme.

But today is Palm Sunday. So we're going to do our best to put ourselves in the shoes of first century Israel. A nation that had put its faith in the promise of a coming king.

Imagine you've just woken up on a regular morning in first century, Roman controlled, Israel. It's a busy time of year because Passover is in about a week. You've heard about this guy, Jesus. There are rumours going around about who he is. The consensus is that he's pretty significant. Maybe he's a prophet. Maybe a zealot. Or maybe even the long awaited Messiah that God has promised through the prophets for centuries. You don't know yet. I'm gonna read this snippet of history from the bible in a moment. But first I want to get some feedback to a question that will help us empathise with the crowd we're about to read about. "What kind of king do you want? "

Now we're gonna dive into Luke 19:28-40 in our bible to read about Palm Sunday.

"After telling this story, Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. "Go into that village over there," he told them. "As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying that colt?' just say, 'The Lord needs it.'" So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying that colt? And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it." So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on. As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!" But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

» JESUS STEPS INTO A KINGLY ROLE

Up to this point, Jesus has pretty much dodged any assertion that he might be the promised king. He isn't exactly denying it, but he hasn't given a straight answer either. At one point the crowd gets impatient and tries to

make him king by force, but Jesus slips away. Soon after that, Peter, one of the 12 disciples says, aloud, "You are the Messiah!" But even then Jesus tells them to keep it under their hat.

I mention that because Jesus had fulfilled a lot of prophecies. Some scholars say that Jesus definitively fulfils between 1000 to 1200 bible prophecies about God's promised Messiah. But on Palm Sunday Jesus really starts to step into his role as king when he says something that sets the royal tone for the rest of the day. He says "Go to town, there you'll see a little baby donkey. Take it. And when people ask what you're doing, say, the lord has need of it."

That might sound like Christianese to some of us. And I didn't realise until another pastor pointed it out. But to the average Israelite on the streets, the word "Lord" or kurios (ke'-ree-os) is not a spiritual word (like when you see the LORD in all caps) but more like an official title for an authority figure. And this sentence "The lord has need of it" is like this donkey is being commandeered for government use. This is a kingly statement! A big deal because Jesus is finally publically exercising his authority as King. He's finally stepping up to the plate. But... On a baby donkey?

Donkeys don't quite have that royal lustre that we might expect from a coming king. Practically speaking, a baby donkey doesn't get you much elevation in a crowd. A horse and chariot would definitely have been more impressive! But the crowd didn't seem to care about that as they sang "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"

» JESUS VS HEROD

So with Jesus stepping into his kingly role, there are now 2 kinds of kings with a presence in Israel. We have Jesus, who this crowd is calling a king. And Herod, who is the official Roman Tetrarch King of Israel.

Herod was a political hustler. He played the game since he was a kid, using friendship, marriage, family ties, social status, and secret deals to accumulate power. » Jesus didn't play the political power games. He sought the lowly and he used his power to elevate others instead of his own career.

Herod had the means of a forceful kingship. Complete with horses, chariots and extravagance. » Jesus wasn't at all war-ready. If you wanted to win a war against Rome, you would at least need a horse. Riding a donkey to battle was suicide.

Herod was glorious, a go-getter who had done a terrific job at rebuilding the temple. He had put Israel back on the map in the eyes of Roman civilisation. » Jesus was pretty much homeless. A modest carpenter for most of his life. Then at 30, he had a career change and stepped into this travelling rabbi role which he'd been doing for almost 3 years.

So Herod had a lot working in his favour. But, Herod was a puppet king. He didn't have any sovereign power of his own. He's actually hired by Rome to maintain Roman control in Israel. Jesus had one HUGE thing going for him. He was the son of God. Kind of a big deal. And he was fulfilling messiah prophecies with uncanny resemblance to God's promised hero. And the baby donkey actually sealed the deal. Jesus was God's promised king...

Check out Zechariah. 9:9: "Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt." So the crowd goes wild! Celebrating because the king has come. They're singing and shouting the words of a 1000-year-old song, Psalm 118:25-26. "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" and "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" "Hosanna in the highest." Basically, they're saying "Heaven has won! God has the victory! He has sent his king to save us now!"

» THE PHARISEES ARE DISPLEASED

But not everyone in the crowd was a fan. The religious authorities were not pleased. Ironically, they of all people had the best insight to Jesus' royalty. They were intimately acquainted with the words that foretold the moment unfolding before them. Because all the prophecies were read aloud in the synagogues every year. And because literature was a limited resource, they had them all memorised! But king Jesus had threatened them in two ways. He threatened their peaceful relationship with Rome (genocide was Rome's typical response to this kind of outbreak.) And Jesus threatened their authority! They were the highly-respected cultural and spiritual gatekeepers of Israel. Here comes God's King, overshadowing their place as the most distinguished spiritual role models. And Jesus wasn't anything like them.

The Pharisees were outraged! “Jesus! What are you doing? You’re stirring up the crowd. They think you’re a king! They’re treating you like you were sent from heaven! Tell them to stop!”

This is where we should pay attention! If you consider yourself a bible knower. If you’ve ever caught yourself pooh-poohing someone’s worship because of your superior spiritual maturity. Listen to Jesus’ response. You might find it a little odd. I hope you find it refreshing. Life-giving!

» **THE MAJESTY & MERCY OF GOD’S KING**

Jesus says “If these people kept quiet, the very stones would cry out!”

If you’re new to the bible, you might be asking, “What the heck is that suppose to mean?” Is Jesus smack-talking? Is he revelling in the crowd fandom? Is he trying to stick it to the Pharisees by bragging about his huge crowd? — I don’t think that’s what’s going on here. » That would be really out of character for Jesus. I believe that here, Jesus is using one sharp word picture to declare 2 important realities. Speaking to both, the hardened Pharisees, and to us the readers, 2000 years later. Jesus response tells us that: 1) His majesty is far greater than they would ever dare to imagine. And 2) his mercy is far deeper than they could ever hope to encounter.

And I’ll explain why I think that by bringing some other parts of the bible into the picture. Parts that both the crowd around Jesus and certainly the Pharisees were much more aware of than we typically are today.

» **MAJESTY: A KING THAT CAN MAKE WORSHIPPERS OF STONES**

We’ll start with the first important reality that Jesus illustrates in this sharp word picture: That Jesus’ majesty is far greater than they (or we) would ever dare to imagine.

This isn’t the first time God personifies dirt/clay/rocks to teach us something about ourselves. So I did some bible-geology and found at least 9 times God parallels people and rocks/dirt/clay to illustrate his power to transform meaningless dirt into something with transcendent, heavenly glory/worth. And each time he makes that connection, God’s majesty is lit up for the reader to see clearly. Because the only way something meaningless becomes glorious is for something a lot more glorious than the meaningless thing to transform it. And so we see God’s transforming power declare that there is only one who majestically creates something from nothing. One who makes and owns all of life. One who can rightly be called the king of kings. So when Jesus referred to stones becoming worshippers, he was drawing attention to his divine sovereignty. He’s not just a zealot, not just a king over Israel, but the king of all creation.

Jesus may have been pointing at the stones on the path. But he might just as well have been pointing to the Pharisees whose hearts had become as hard as stone to make the case, he has the power to heal even them.

» **MERCY: A KING THAT OFFERS LIKE TO STONE-HEARTED GOD HATERS**

The second important reality for us to notice: Jesus’ mercy is far deeper than they (or we) could ever hope to encounter. I believe Jesus is doing more than just showing that he is able to make life from these stones. He is also willing! As he responds to the hardened Pharisees—who will arrange his arrest, torture and murder over the next 5 days—I believe Jesus is extending his powerful mercy to them, his opponents.

But it’s not just for them! Luke records this moment and these words, spoken to the hardened Pharisees so that we, the people of Campbell River 2000 years later, would read it and know that no matter how lost we are, no matter how hard we’ve become, Jesus’ mercy is for us. There is no heart so stone-hard that it can not be transformed into a worshipper of God’s saving and satisfying King, Jesus Christ. The bible is dripping with promises and examples of how God longs to work this miracle in us.

In Ezekiel 36:25-27 Jesus speaks to a people that are so dirty that he compares their wickedness to a used tampon. And he tells them that he will “remove the heart of stone from [their] flesh” and “give [them] a new heart, and a new spirit.” In Ephesians 2:8-10 we learn that God saves us not because of the “good things we have done...” How often do we treat God like we’re the ones trying to impress him into saving us? But the bible teaches us that God works in us to make us his “masterpiece... made anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” When we are transformed by God, we bring him glory, AND we get to share in that glory! Enjoying it

and radiating it, because God has planned good things for us. Things that bring him glory. And things that bring us glory when we bring God glory!

» THE FICKLE CROWD TURN THEIR BACK

So that all sounds like really good news. Right? So why did this crowd rally to ensure Jesus' crucifixion just 5 days after celebrating his royal entrance? What kind of fickle people could turn their back on their king so fast?

If we keep following the story in Luke 19 and 20 we see the Pharisees becoming more and more nervous. So they plan to turn the tables against Jesus by send spin-men into the crowd to butter Jesus up and then corner him with this maliciously crafted question in Luke 20:25

"Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" Now let's take a second to understand how well crafted this malicious question actually is. Because, if Jesus said no, he likely would have been arrested for conspiring against the emperor. Their Jesus problem is solved. — On the other hand, if Jesus said yes, the crowd would reject him as king. Because what's the point in having a messiah, if you still have to pay taxes to an evil Gentile governor! — So Jesus responds with what I consider to be the dopest quip in the whole bible. Surrounded by the crowd leaning in, hanging on the moment as Jesus looked at a denarius in his hand. A piece of metal with Caesar's face on it. A stone, so to speak, bearing the image of Rome's king. Jesus says "Give to Caesar □what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God."

I believe Jesus' plummeting popularity over the next couple of days had a lot to do with his answer to this question. He was supposed to bring freedom to Israel. Instead, he directed them to surrender everything. If Caesar wasn't bad enough, requiring homage from their wallets. Jesus' just implied that under his rule he would demand homage from their entire lives. That's not really what they wanted to hear. They wanted liberty. Jesus offered servitude. And so days later, "Good Friday," Jesus' bloodied corpse was hanging from a piece of wood about on a hill 15 minutes from the temple where they'd hailed him as king. Now we know from Acts chapter 2, that months into the future that this fickle crowd would realise what they'd done. And some of them would repent and turn to worship King Jesus. But here, on Palm Sunday, looking at this passage, it's crazy to think how quickly the hearts of the crowd shifted from holy worship to rejecting God king. Or is it really that crazy?

» WE'RE NOT SO DIFFERENT

The crowd had rejected Jesus because he hadn't given them what they want. And we can't really say it's that crazy because we do the same thing all the time. Just like the crowd, we're often guilty of worshipping whoever/whatever seems to give us what we want.

If the word "worship" is throwing you off because you connect that word with temples and candles and things like that, to think of the word "worth."

Worship is the act of ascribing ultimate worth to some thing or idea; ei worth-ship. With that in mind, we can measure what we worship by asking: 1)"What do I find worth/value in?" And then add to that question 2) "Why is that thing so valuable to me?" If the answer is "Because it serves this other higher value." Then you ask the same question again. » "Why is that thing so valuable to me?"

If you find worth in your kids, then you would ask "Why are my kids so valuable to me?" Maybe the answer is "Because I can demonstrate God's selfless love to them in the way I nurture them to become the best they can be... So the higher value there would be bringing glory to God. Or, maybe your reason is value "Because I never really found myself attractive, but my kids are like a more attractive version of me." Then the higher value there would be attractiveness. Which is a very vain and despicable example that I have obviously never experienced. But you get the point. We can find what we worship by seeking out what we ascribe the most value to.

We all centre our lives around what we value most. And, friends, it has never been easier to centre our lives around the cultural value of: "the pursuit of happiness" Which might get us a lot of fun things. But it does nothing about our sin. In fact, it actually blinds us to our sin.

» THE PROBLEM IS NOT OUT THERE

One theologian, Dr R.C. Sproul, makes this great point, saying that if Jesus had given Israel what they'd expected, and liberated Israel and made it the most powerful governing force in the world; then it wouldn't have solved anything at all. Because Israel's problems were the result of their sin. And likewise, the problems in our world are not caused by bad neighbours or nations, or the liberal or conservative governments, or regime out there. The reason why we fail to love and serve others with the same devotion that we love and serve ourselves is because of something that has gone wrong in here — in our worship factory.

The root cause of every single moral failure we've ever committed against God or each other is that rather than centring our world around the one truly most valuable thing object, the good king of creation, we mistake ourselves for the most valuable object in our world.* The centre of our world.

My life, my purpose... it all revolves around this 180 pounds of dirt.

» PUTTING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

Well, no! That's not really fair. I'm not just dirt, and I shouldn't refer to myself as just dirt. You might not know this, but I'm wonderful. I have skills, talents, and dreams. In fact, I have glory that goes beyond your comprehension! I'm not lying! This glorious dirt that stands before you is able to do incredible things! And actually, you can do incredible things too! But, our glory doesn't come from within. Remember, meaningless rocks aren't glorious until something glorious transcends upon them. Some ONE much more glorious. Someone of ultimate worth. Someone who truly deserves worship. God Almighty! And he made us reflect his glory to each other by the way that we love each other. And we fail to worship King Jesus when we centre our worth around ourselves. — That's what self-worship is.

That's why the fickle crowd could hail Jesus on Sunday, and crucify him on Friday. Because God was never at the centre of what they valued. And that's why we can sing Hosanna in the pews on Sunday, and still find a way to reject God's authority before we even get to work on Monday.

» THE BIG QUESTION: HOW DO I WORSHIP JESUS

How do I worship Jesus, when I want to worship myself. Alright, those are some pretty lofty statements. So I'm gonna break it all down to something really practical. I think it's important to be able to walk away from a sermon with something that you can put into action. So I'm going to boil all of that down to one practical question "How do we worship Jesus when we want to worship self?"

To honestly answer this question, we have to acknowledge that it is impossible to heal your own heart when you are hardened against God's King. Stones don't make themselves into worshippers. But, remember those two important realities Jesus gave us. 1) His majesty is far greater than you would ever dare imagine. And 2) his mercy is far deeper than you could ever hope to encounter. And that means that he is both able and willing to make a worshipper of you and me.

So with our eyes on King Jesus, with faith in his majesty and mercy, we pray. We pray for ourselves, for each other, and our community as a whole, and beyond. And ask the King to unhardens our hearts. We Ask him till the dirt and make it good soil. To remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh and a new spirit that cries out to him in worship! And with a new heart, we face temptation with a new centre.

» PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This next part is really practical! These are not biblical imperatives. They're my personal approach to centring my life around our good king. We've all got It's important to spend time with other worshippers observing and learning how you can make a daily habit of centring your life around Jesus.

When faced with real temptations in life to worship something that is less valuable than God, stop and ask, "What is it that I want? And how does King Jesus satisfy that desire in a way that glorifies his worth?" What is it that I want: —» What am I tempted to value more than King Jesus. AND How does King Jesus satisfy that desire in a way that glorifies his worth, rather than making me the centre of my world?

So, an example: If we're tempted to gossip slanderously about someone that God loves, we say "No! Because if I said that I'd miss out on the glory that God shares with me when I lift others above myself. Or if we're tempted to lie to boost our ego, we say "No! Because if I lie, I miss out on the glory that God shares with me when I walk in integrity." This is how we worship God. Worship really doesn't have to be a deeply ceremonial or emotional experience.

And here's a real example from my real life: Last week. I sat down in the washroom. And like any normal person sitting in a washroom, I checked my facebook notifications. And about 30-seconds in, I felt tempted to just escape my life and let dank memes and so-flo prank videos roll over my iPhone screen. So I asked myself: "What is this desire that's tempting me right now?" It was pretty simple.

I wanted my time in the washroom to be less boring. And then the next question: "How does king Jesus satisfy that desire in a way the glorifies his worth. Or in this situation "How does Jesus direct me to escape bathroom boredom in a way that glorifies him? (Maybe you're thinking, "Does Jesus sovereignty really extend into my washroom time? YES! It does!) » There's nothing crazy spiritual about this, it's just the practicality of living a life that is centred around the ONE who is worthy to be in the centre of my life.

I had an email that had been sitting in my inbox for days. A friend asking for some advice. I'd been waiting for a chance to think about.

So that's what I did. God was glorified in a moment that I was tempted to live selfishly.

» **PREPARE FOR BATTLE**

I don't want to make this sound easy. It's not. It's a dying experience. And dying is not comfortable, or satisfying. But, we see in Jesus that dying to our sin is a doorway to living in God's glory. » Just like he died for our sin, trusting in the power of God to raise him from the dead (and he now sits enthroned in heaven with earth as his footstool) we pin our sin to his cross and let it die! And we trust in the power of God to give us life and purpose in his glorious kingdom.

» **BIG IDEA AND SUMMARY**

So don't be a stone. Don't harden yourself to the God's King. You were made for a glorious life and a glorious purpose. Your life is meant to reveal the worth of the love, power, grace and truth of the Almighty God. And if God's King can make worshippers of stones. Then he can make a worshipper of you and me.

Don't do it alone. Stone's can't transform themselves. But surrender to King Jesus. And be made alive in him. The king, Jesus Christ!