JESUS WHO DIED

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Category: Observations

INTRODUCTION

There are three key things that we need to remember.

- When we read the Gospels, we know the end of the story. It is really hard to grasp exactly what is going on when we know that everything will work out well and that Jesus will eventually triumph.
- We are dealing with something that happened in history. We arenâ€™t at liberty to change the story around, to make it fit what we want it to mean. And we certainly canâ€™t remove bits from it because it doesnâ€™t fit our views.
- We need to remember what we talked about last month. Jesus came to announce the Kingdom of God â€“ the message that God is about to take charge and to rule the world as King. This is absolutely key to what happens next.

Now we need to place ourselves inside the story.

PALM SUNDAY

John 12

> *12Â The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitorsÂ 13Â took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted,*
>
> *â€œPraise God!*
> *Blessings on the one who comes in the name of theÂ Lord!*
> *Hail to the King of Israel!â€*
>
> *14Â Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said:*
>
> *15Â â€œDonâ€™t be afraid, people of Jerusalem.*
> *Look, your King is coming,*
> *riding on a donkeyâ€™s colt.â€*

After three years of ministry across Israel, Jesus came into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday and a large crowd acclaimed him as king. They seemed to be saying that his proclamation of the Kingdom of God was coming true there and then.

That being said, Jesus was a rather strange king â€“ he didnâ€™t ride into Jerusalem on a big white horse, but on a young donkey â€“ hardly the most dramatic representation of a powerful national

monarch.

However, Jesus was deliberately following a pattern from the Old Testament. 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 donkeyâ€"*
> *riding on a donkeyâ€™s colt.*

However, over the next few days, Jesus did absolutely nothing to reinforce the idea that he was King. He even suggested that people should pay their taxes to the Romans â€“ this was as far from the image of a Jewish king than you can get.

TRIAL BY PILATE

Less than a week later, Jesus had been arrested by the Jewish authorities, who wanted to execute him for blasphemy, but in the Roman Empire, they didnâ€™t have the authority to do that â€“ so they handed Jesus over to the Roman governor, Pilate to get him to pronounce the death sentence.

In this short cameo, we have one of the most significant events in the Bible. The representative of the most powerful human authority in the world comes face to face with Godâ€™s authority in the person of Jesus.

There are a couple of really important things to notice about this confrontation.

They Represent Very Different Powers

> *36Â Jesus answered,Â â€œMy Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.â€*
>
> *37Â Pilate said, â€œSo you are a king?â€*
>
> *Jesus responded,Â â€œYou say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.â€*
>
> *38Â â€œWhat is truth?â€*

Jesus does not represent a temporal, human power in the same way as Pilate does â€“ and because

of that he doesnâ€™t bring an army to fight against Rome. His role is to speak truth into the corrupt system of human powers â€“ but Pilate canâ€™t cope with the idea of truth.

Pilate Is Literally Powerless

Pilate wanted to set Jesus free; but he backed off when the Jewish leaders threatened him.

> *12Â Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, â€œIf you release this man, you are no â€˜friend of Caesar.â€™Â Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.â€*

He was supposed to be in charge of the Jews, but he wasnâ€™t able to stand up against them, even when he was in the right. But Jesus points out something even more important:

> *10Â â€œWhy donâ€™t you talk to me?â€ Pilate demanded. â€œDonâ€™t you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?â€*
>
> *11Â Then Jesus said,Â â€œYou would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.â€*

The only power that Pilate had was given to him by God. Jesus might have been the one in the dock, but it is clear that he is far more powerful than Pilate. Despite this, he allowed Caesar to put him on trial and to condemn him to death â€“ and so Jesus was led out to a hill called the skull, and nailed to a wooden cross until he was dead.

LESSONS FOR US TODAY

Human Structures Are Opposed to the Kingdom

We need to face up to the reality that human political structures are fundamentally opposed to the Kingdom of God. Like Jesus, we must speak truth to power, challenging the way that political powers work and their basic assumptions. But we must avoid being seduced by them.

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Ultimately this is represented in the cross. The Romans brought peace right across the Empire. This is generally seen as a good thing, it allowed the development of technology and communications as

well as allowing the spread of the Gospel. However, that peace was only achieved through the use of massive amounts of violence.

God brought peace through a cross, too (Col. 1:20). But this was at the cost of his own life and suffering â€“ weâ€™ll talk a little bit more about that in a second.

Put Yourself in the Disciplesâ€™ Place

I mentioned at the start, that we find it difficult to grasp these stories fully because we know the end already. Now just imagine you are one of the disciples. For three years you have been listening to Jesus preaching about the kingdom. Just a week ago you saw Jesus ride into Jerusalem, seeming to claim the kingdom for himself. And now he is dead. Make no mistake about it, Jesus really was dead. He was executed by professionals â€“ if they took him down from the cross it was because he was absolutely, 100% dead.

Just imagine how you would have felt. Your whole world had come crashing down.

This is important, because just a few days later, this bunch of crushed and defeated fishermen were announcing to the world that Jesus was actually alive. Nothing could explain this movement from a scattered defeated rabble, to the vibrant church apart from the resurrection of Jesus â€“ but we are getting ahead of ourselves.

It Shows Us What God Is Like

Jesus could have defended himself. Even on the cross, he could have ordered an army of angels to rescue him, but he didnâ€™t.

On the cross, we see God, the source of ultimate authority, submitting to humanity in order to rescue us.

This is important in todayâ€™s climate where Christians are starting to feel under threat from wider society and from perceived enemies. How are we to react when we see the gospel attacked or we feel that Christians are being attacked?

There are lots of positive things we can do. We can advocate for persecuted Christians, we can support organisations that speak up for them. We can write to newspapers, to our MPs and so on. But, violence is not the answer. God did not fight back, he submitted, and we have to be prepared to do the same.

There may be good reasons for military intervention in the Middle East, but you cannot defend Christianity by force of arms. Itâ€™s been tried before and it always leads to disaster.

For weÂ are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the

unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

Jesus fought against those enemies on the cross and ultimately defeated them â€“ but thatâ€™s next monthâ€™s talk.

It Shows That We Can Be Reconciled To God

Again, this is something that will need to be unpacked more next month when we talk about the resurrection, but we can briefly touch on it here and now.

> *and through him God reconciled*
> *everything to himself.*
> *He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth*
> *by means of Christâ€™s blood on the cross. Colossians 1:20*

The back-story to the whole of the Bible, is the notion that God and man were separated. God created humanity to love and serve him, but human beings turned their backs on him and rejected his rule. Because of this, humanity deserved to be punished. The Bible term for our rejection of God is sin and sin is punishable, ultimately by death.

And there, on the cross, Jesus took our punishment. He died, he was separated from God

> *Then at three oâ€™clock Jesus called out with a loud voice,Â â€œEloi,Eloi, lema sabachthani?â€ Â which means â€œMy God, my God, why have you abandoned me?â€ (Mark 15:3)*

And in so doing he took the punishment that was ours, so that we can be reconciled to God.

> *For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice forÂ sin. People are madeÂ right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that GodÂ wasÂ being fair when he held back and did not punish those whoÂ sinned in times past, (Romans 3:25)*

Jesus death was literally earth changing. Nothing has been the same since. The question is, what impact does it have on you?

These are notes from my talk at Exilio Southampton on December 7 2014. Follow these links for the earlier talks in the series; The Jesus Who Was Born and the Jesus Who Lived.