

Today is Palm Sunday, a Christian feast commemorating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem one week before his resurrection. Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week, the beginning of what is often called Christ's "Passion"—his suffering, death, resurrection.

In all four gospels, Jesus and his disciples descend the Mount of Olives on their way to Jerusalem. The city is full of people who have come to celebrate the Passover. Jesus sends two disciples to get a donkey and its colt. He rides one (or both) of these animals into Jerusalem.

When the crowds hear that Jesus is approaching, they spread their cloaks and palm branches on the ground before him. They shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!"¹ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"² "Hosanna" is a Hebrew word meaning "save us!" They recognize Jesus as the Messiah out for him to save them.

As you know, the name Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus. It means "the Lord saves." So, on the Sunday we remember Jesus' triumphal entry, it's fitting to study Joshua's triumph and how it points to King Jesus. We'll consider three points as we move through chapters 10, 11, and 12.

(1) The Lord is a Warrior — If you read **Joshua 10:28-43** aloud, you'll notice both its quick pace and repetition. One city is named after another, repeating the same basic elements:

- Joshua captured City A, destroyed it, and executed its king as he did in a previous city.
- Joshua crossed from City A to City B, captured it, destroyed it, and executed its king, just as he had in the previous city.
- Joshua crossed from City B to City C, captured it, destroyed it, and executed its king, just as he had in the previous city.

The pattern continues, moving quickly from city to city until Joshua has conquered the whole land. This rapid-fire pacing "heightens the sense of Israel's invincibility."³ Like dominoes, cities and kings fall before Joshua and Israel. Nothing can stop them now.

In **verses 40-43**, we learn the reason for their victories. They completely conquered the southern region in only one campaign "**because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.**" Israel did not defeat the five-king alliance at Gibeon because Joshua was a military genius or the Israelites were elite warriors. No, the Lord threw the kings and their armies into confusion (v 10). The Lord fought for Israel (v 14).

The Lord fights for his people. When the Israelites watch the bodies of Pharaoh's soldiers wash up on the shore of the Red Sea, they saw the Lord's power. Moses led them in a song that proclaimed: "**The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.**"⁴

On Palm Sunday, the crowds cried out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!"⁵ They recognized Jesus as the King. They were right to do so. Jesus rode a donkey and its colt to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy: "**Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**"⁶ This righteous and victorious King would end warfare, bring peace, and free the

¹ Jn 12:13.

² Mk 11:10.

³ Lissa M. Wray Beal, [Joshua](#), ed. Tremper Longman III, *The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 235.

⁴ Exodus 15:3

⁵ John 12:13.

⁶ Zechariah 9:9.

Israelites from captivity. On that day, Zechariah writes, "**The Lord of Armies will defend them.**"⁷

Jesus did enter Jerusalem as the Lord of Armies. He would triumph in battle, end his people's warfare, and free them from captivity—only not as anyone expected. No doubt, the crowds expected Jesus to lead Israel in battle and free them from Roman oppression. They ought to have paid more attention to his choice of transportation. Ancient kings rode horses when they went to war but donkeys when on a mission of peace.

Jesus did not arrive to establish a kingdom with military might and political power. He came to cast out Satan, the ruler of this world, end the reign of death, and set his people free from bondage to sin. He arrived humbled because he would do all this in a humble way. Jesus' kingdom is not like the kingdom of this world, nor does it come by the ways of this world. At his trial, Jesus told Pilate:

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.⁸

All this has application to how we live in this world.

Over lunch last week, a friend asked me what future generations would see as the blind spot of today's American church. We can't see our blind spots, of course. But my best guess is that later generations will criticize the church of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century for its obsession with power, wealth, and politics. The American church has fought and clawed to possess these, even willing to abandon its message and principles to keep them. It looks nothing like Christ.

In the kingdom of Christ, we control our tongues and are quick to listen. We're slow to speak and slow to anger, knowing that "human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness."⁹ In the kingdom of Christ, the greatest is the servant to all.¹⁰ The kingdom of Christ looks like Jesus rejecting the offer of worldly power, choosing to serve and make his life a ransom for many.

(2) The Lord is Wins in Surprising Ways — Joshua 11 opens with King Jabin calling other kings to join him in a battle against Israel. They form a super-army equipped with cutting-edge weaponry—"a vast number of horses and chariots." Moreover, this *army was massive*—"a multitude as numerous as the sand on the seashore." Do you recognize that language? The Lord told Abraham that his offspring would be "as numerous as the sand on the seashore."¹¹ Israel grew to this size in Egypt. So, the author portrays the opposing army as the same size as Israel. That's not an even match.

Two-thirds of Israel would be women, children, and others who would not fight in battle. That makes Israel's army about a third the size of the opposing army. Compared to their enemy, Joshua and Israel looked small, weak, and foolish. But this did not bother the Lord.

The Lord told Joshua, "**Do not be afraid of them, for at this time tomorrow I will cause all of them to be killed before Israel.**"¹² Then, the Lord doesn't even do so much as give Joshua a battle strategy or an explanation of how he'll kill the enemy. The Lord skips directly to post-

⁷ Zechariah 9:15.

⁸ John 18:36.

⁹ James 1:20, 26.

¹⁰ Matthew 20:26

¹¹ Genesis 22:17

¹² Joshua 11:6.

battle instructions: **“You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.”** *Don't be afraid. I'll make sure they die. Here's how to clean up after the battle.* God is not intimidated by his army's small, weak, and foolish appearance in the eyes of the nations. He doesn't operate on the world's terms.

That is why Jesus enters Jerusalem as a humble king. That is why Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword. That is why Jesus laid down his life on the cross.

The Jews wanted signs of power and strength. The Greeks wanted wisdom and polished rhetoric. But, Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles."¹³ But those called into the kingdom of Christ understand that this weak, foolish, crucified King is "the power of God and the wisdom of God."¹⁴ **“God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.”**¹⁵

This, too, has application for how we live. God chooses and sues people who look like the weak and foolish crucified Christ. Paul writes:

Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence.¹⁶

Are you embarrassed by your church? Do you think it looks weak, ordinary, foolish compared to the world? Its people aren't the kind whose friendship makes you feel important. Its music isn't as professional as that other church. Its leaders are weak. You're afraid your friends would roll their eyes if they saw the people you worship with—and what that corporate worship is like. No one wants a church like that!

Do you view yourself as a "nothing," as "insignificant" in the eyes of the world? You can't speak eloquently or rattle off sophisticated theological point like the next rising-star of the popular theological "tribe." You're neither famous nor connected to anyone famous. Your Instagram posts influence no one. Your family isn't nearly as happy as those you see on Facebook. Your home isn't picturesque, your marriage is struggling, and your job is meh. Your parenting looks nothing like the formulas in the books your friends rave about. Your grown children are not living the successful lives of other's kids—materially or spiritually! You can't seem to go three days in a row without missing a quiet time, and you fall asleep after praying for two minutes. You're sure that if people knew how weak you really are, they would laugh stop loving you. You suspect Jesus is embarrassed by you.

These thoughts and attitudes betray how little we know of Christ's kingdom and how it grows in this world. He chooses those the world calls “losers” so that no one can boast about being a winner!¹⁷ God's kingdom does not consist of or grow through impressive people, churches, and organizations. God inaugurated his kingdom by the death of a despised king on a repulsive cross. He grows it through the preaching of a message that the world finds laughable.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:24.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:25.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:26–29.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:26–29.

The people of his kingdom seem as insignificant and despised as their King. They don't minister with "brilliance of speech or wisdom."¹⁸ Instead, in weakness, fear, and trembling, they talk about Jesus Christ and him crucified. They don't show favoritism to those with power and wealth to help their church succeed. Instead, they honor the poor and care for the people the world looks past.¹⁹

So, if you feel like a spiritual loser in a crowd of spiritual losers, then let me congratulate you! You're the kind of person God chooses and uses! God is not ashamed to be called your God.²⁰ Jesus isn't ashamed to call you his brothers and sisters.²¹ "Blessed are the poor in heart, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs."²²

(3) The Lord is the King of Kings — Kings constitute a significant theme in Joshua 10-12. In **chapter 10**, Joshua does not merely capture and destroy cities; he captures and destroys the king. In **chapter 11**, "all these kings joined forces," but the Lord caused them to die. In **Joshua 12**, we find a roll call of kings that Joshua struck down, like notches on a gunfighter's pistol. There's a point to all this.

The Lord was not merely a warrior who fought for Israel; he was Israel's king.²³ This litany of conquered kings shows that he is the king who rules kings. In fact, **Joshua 11:20** says **the Lord "intended to harden their hearts, so that they would engage Israel in battle, be completely destroyed without mercy, and be annihilated."**²⁴ "A king's heart is like channeled water in the Lord's hand: He directs it wherever he chooses."²⁵ Yahweh is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Once again, we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem on his way to the cross. Several weeks later, on the day of Pentecost, Peter would proclaim, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."²⁶ Through the humiliation of the cross, God exalted Jesus, giving him a name above every name, at which every knee will bow and confess Him to be Lord.²⁷ The Lamb who conquered by being slain reigns as Lord of lords and King of kings.²⁸

This, too, calls us to live in a new way. In Christ, we do not crave strength and power. When we have authority, we do not lord it over others; we use it to serve. We do not comfort our souls by storing up wealth; we give it away because the Father is happy to give us the kingdom. We do not find our security in military might or sidearms, nor secure our future through a majority. We do not debate about which of us is the greatest in the kingdom. We surrender ourselves in faith to Jesus, boasting in him who reigns over all things and works all things for our good.

We do not brag about our spiritual lineage, theological education, or zeal in spiritual discipline. We count all that as loss to be found in Christ.²⁹ We are happy to be the last and the

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:1.

¹⁹ James 1:26-2:12

²⁰ Hebrews 11:16

²¹ Hebrews 2:11

²² Matthew 5:3

²³ 1 Samuel 8:7

²⁴ Joshua 11:20.

²⁵ Proverbs 21:1.

²⁶ Acts 2:36.

²⁷ Philippians 2:5-11

²⁸ Revelation 17:14

²⁹ Philippians 3:4-7

servant of all.³⁰ “Even now, we are like the scum of the earth, like everyone’s garbage.”³¹ Insignificance does not bother us. For one day, an angel will blow his trumpet, and loud voices in heaven will proclaim, “**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.**”³² Then we will be brought to “**the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.**”³³ We will eat from the tree of life, and there will be no more curse. We will worship God and the Lamb. We will see his face, and his name will be on our foreheads. The Lord God will be our light, and we will reign forever and ever.³⁴

³⁰ Mark 9:35

³¹ 1 Corinthians 4:13.

³² Revelation 11:15.

³³ Revelation 22:1.

³⁴ Revelation 22:2-5