

In the Name of the Lord

Isaiah 59:14-20, Luke 19:28-48 (ESV)

October 30, 2005

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” These are not the unknowing words of an enthusiastic but fickle crowd, as we often characterize those around him at his entrance into Jerusalem. These constitute, instead, a profession of faith and a hymn of praise on the part of “the whole multitude of his disciples,” who “began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.” “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” They had seen what Jesus had done. They had heard what he had taught. They had followed him to Jerusalem. They knew who he was. They may not have understood his entire ministry then as well as they would after his crucifixion and resurrection, but they knew who he was, and we would do well to hear their witness to us.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” They were singing Psalm 118, which says, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” This is high praise, indeed. Psalm 118 is a tremendous hymn of praise and thanksgiving specifically for deliverance and salvation. “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” “The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” And, as we say every Sunday morning, “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Moreover, it is clear in this Psalm that it is the Lord himself who is the agent of this salvation and therefore the object of this praise. “This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!” “You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.”

That is to say, when the disciples praise Jesus as the one “who comes in the name of the Lord,” they are acknowledging him not only as one who comes from God but particularly as God himself among them. He is not only a messenger but actually God himself. The multitude of disciples are singing to Jesus a hymn written to be sung to God. And they are doing this not to dishonor God but to worship Jesus as God. No wonder the Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” They were not worried about the crowd, as such, but they knew blasphemy when they heard it. And this was blasphemy, unless it was true. There could be nothing in between. That it might have been true was an option they did not consider. Luke has recorded this incident for our benefit so that we might hear the witness of those first disciples and so that we might join them in professing our own faith and in worshiping Jesus as God.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” Again, Psalm 118, which they were quoting, says, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” For them to have changed the pronoun “he” to the title “King” does not mean that they could not remember the Psalm accurately. But it does indicate that they fully expected Jesus to initiate and inaugurate the kingdom of God about which he taught them so much. The kingdom of God would surely come, and Jesus was none other than the king of the kingdom of God, none other than God himself with them. It was in chapter nine that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” It is now in chapter nineteen that Jesus is entering Jerusalem, the holy city, the capital city, surely to be the seat of government of the kingdom of God. Maybe they did not yet understand the nature of that kingdom or the price that Jesus would pay for it, but they knew and understood who he was, and we would do well to hear their witness to us. Jesus is God, and Jesus is king of the kingdom of God.

There is more. Jesus “entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer,” but you have made it a den of robbers.’” The temple is the place of priests. There the priests lead worship. There the priests offer sacrifices to the Lord. That is the reason for the temple. That Jesus cleansed the temple of its abuses and then also occupied it himself means clearly both that he was purifying and preparing it for true worship and also that he is our one true priest. He is the one who leads our true worship of God. He is the one who offers true sacrifice. In fact, he is the one who not only offered the true sacrifice but also actually offered himself as the one true, perfect, complete, and efficacious sacrifice on the cross outside Jerusalem. We have no other priest. We need no other priest. Jesus is our great high priest.

Moreover, Jesus “was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.” Jesus, who came “in the name of the Lord,” was also speaking the word of the Lord. The prophets of old had spoken the word of the Lord on behalf of the Lord. Jesus spoke the word of the Lord as the Lord. Jesus is the prophet par excellence, the prophet without peer, the true and final prophet, the prophet who speaks the word of God with authority. He is the one to whom we should listen. He is the one whom we should believe. He is the one whom we should obey. As it is written in the Theological Declaration of Barmen, “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.”

All of this is to say that in these few verses, Luke sets Jesus before us as Prophet, Priest, and King, indeed as God himself with us and for us. Why is that of interest to us? Why is that of interest to you? Why is that of interest to the world? It

may be of interest to us simply because it is the truth. It may also be of interest to us because of the human predicament and the fallen condition of the world. For instance, if you are perfectly satisfied with what Hollywood teaches the world about what is good and true and beautiful and honorable, then maybe you are not interested in the Prophet who speaks the true word of God. If you are perfectly satisfied with our society's glorification of violence, sex, lust, power, and abuse in our world, then maybe you are not interested in the Priest who offers himself for our salvation, redemption, and renewal. If you are perfectly satisfied with how the rulers of this world rule this world—with terrorism, with war, with exploitation—then maybe you are not interested in the King who establishes the peaceful, just, and righteous kingdom of God.

But if you share with me, even in the midst of profound gratitude for life, a profound dissatisfaction with the gonewrongness of life, a profound dissatisfaction with the emptiness of what the world offers, and a profound dissatisfaction with the fear of what seems likely to come, then maybe you are interested in what Luke has to say. Maybe you are interested in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe you are interested in who he is and what he does as Prophet, Priest, and King. Maybe you are interested in acknowledging him as God himself with us and for us. Maybe you are interested in serving him as Lord and Savior. Maybe you are interested in singing his praises. Maybe you are interested in sharing his gospel around the world.

What we have read together this morning is not simply ancient history. Yes, what we have read together is an ancient account of the triumphant entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. But it is also the word of the living God spoken to us today, to you and to me, about who Jesus is, about what he has done and is doing, and about how he does it. We know, of course, that his victory was hard won. He did not simply ride into the city and take it over. He died a horrible death outside the city later that week. But that apparent defeat was his real victory. That cross is the altar where he gave himself. There he broke the power of sin, death, and evil, once and for all. There he became true Prophet, Priest, and King in ways his disciples could not have anticipated. There he showed us the awesome reality of God with us and for us. From there he calls us to be his very own. And for the sacrifice that he made, God rewarded him with resurrection.

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Jerusalem. They knew who he was. They may not have understood his ministry then as well as they would after his crucifixion and resurrection, but they knew who he was, and we would do well to hear their witness to us, to receive their witness to us, and so to join them in their hymn of praise. Let us praise and worship God. Let us believe in God and in his Christ. Let us give thanks to God, not only in our prayers but also and especially in our offerings and in our pledges. Let us obey God and his Christ. Let us serve him well with all that we are and all that we have. “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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