

Our King In Contrast.

Text: Psa 22:19, 21a, 1

Suggested Hymns:

502, 733, 62, 87, 603

- 1) A lowly King
- 2) A Suffering King
- 3) Our Victorious King
- 4) A Brief Overview Of Psalm 22

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is based on the Introit for today, Psalm 22:19, 21a, & 1, ***¹⁹ But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! ... ²¹ Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! ... ¹ My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me?*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

God save the king! This was in effect what the multitudes shouted at Jesus on that great day when He made His final entry into Jerusalem.

Our Gospel conclude with these words, Matthew 21:9, ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!”***

They knew that the Messiah would be a king. They had the sure promise of Jehovah that the kingdom of David would be restored. King David himself spoken glowingly of the glorious kingdom that was to come. The prophet Zechariah, 500 years before, described the very scene in which they were now involved and which was taking place before their very eyes.

We read in Zechariah 9:9, ***⁹ “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.*** And here He was, just as the prophet had said.

Four days later, in the palace of the Roman governor, the whole beautiful dream collapsed. The great hope that had been generated in the hearts of the people turned into bitter disappointment. Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth in

Galilee, their King, was under arrest now as a common criminal, charged with treason.

His own people had betrayed Him; friends were deserting the lost cause; the Roman occupation authorities had Him up for questioning. And the one question in which Pilate, the Roman governor, was really interested was this: ***Are You a king then?***¹

This is also the question we must ask ourselves about Jesus. Is He a king? If so, what kind of king is He?

The message of Palm Sunday proclaims that Jesus is a king indeed. But it also tells us that He is *A King in Contrast*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A Lowly King

Those spectators and participants in the events of that first Palm Sunday were not at all taken aback by the fact that Jesus entered the Holy City on the back of a donkey. This is just the way it was supposed to be. He was a lowly king. We heard in the Gospel, ***‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.***²

In carefully planning the event that was to proclaim His kingship, Jesus made sure that the emphasis would not be on power and the use of military force. He specifically told the disciples to go and get a donkey, the symbol of service and burden-bearing, not a horse, the symbol of military prowess.

The people of His Oriental culture clearly understood the significance of His choice. He was truly a king, but not a king of political power, not a king who came to challenge the authority of the Roman occupation, not a latter-day Solomon whose many-splendored wealth rivalled the kingdoms of this world in its magnificence. ***“My kingdom is not of this world,”*** was the answer Jesus gave to Pilate’s searching question.³

For three years Jesus had gone about the Holy Land proclaiming the kingdom of God. He had identified Himself with that kingdom. He had declared in John 10:30 that ***“I and My Father are one.”***

He had warned all who cared to listen that the kingdom of God was at hand. And in the events of that first Palm Sunday He put Himself on record publicly as the fulfilment of all those Old Testament prophecies about a king who was to

deliver Israel. But not as a king “of this world,” not as a king of wealth and power! He was a lowly king, ***“Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”***

2. A Suffering King

Jesus, our King in contrast, entered Jerusalem in the full knowledge that He would also be a suffering king. A king, suffering? This appears on the very face of it to be a contradiction in terms.

The crowds that cried ***“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*** along the road into Jerusalem were perfectly willing to accept Him as a lowly king, but once the suffering began, the contrast was too much. It was at this point that most of His followers and friends deserted Him.

But Jesus knew that if He was not willing to be a suffering king, He could not be a king at all. In His conversation with Pilate He had said, as written in John 18:37, ***“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”***

And the greatest truth in the world is the truth about the kingdom of God and its suffering King.

The truth is that God is a God of love, who wants us for His kingdom even though we have sinned against Him and justly deserved temporal and eternal punishment.

The truth is that ***“that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”***⁴

The truth is that Jesus had to be a suffering Christ if He was to pay the penalty for our sins and make us eligible for citizenship in His kingdom.

How great and how genuine that suffering was is indicated by the words of the Introit for Palm Sunday.

¹⁹ But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! ... ²¹ Save Me from the lion’s mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! ... ¹ My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me?

These words of the psalmist David, recalled by our Lord in His agony on the cross, describe the greatest suffering that can come to anyone: being far away from God, forsaken by Him without whom no one can live.

This is the centre of anguish. This is death. To save us from being eternally separated from God, Jesus had to become separated from Him in our stead. He had to allow Himself to be *“stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.”*⁵ In order to be our Redeemer He had to be our suffering King.

3. Our Victorious King

Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday is often referred to as a “triumphant entry.” It certainly was not triumphant because of the fact that He was a lowly king. Even less triumphant was the royal suffering which began not long after the hosannas of the procession had died away.

Rather, it was a triumphant entry in a way not realised even by the multitude which hailed Him along the way. It was a triumphant entry because before the dawning of another week Jesus would prove Himself to be also a victorious king.

Forsaken by God and man, Christ could nevertheless declare with the psalmist, *Save Me from the lion’s mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen!* Even though His heavenly Father had forsaken Him and had permitted all the violence of Satan’s unbridled fury to be heaped upon Him, God nevertheless heard the cry of His beloved Son.

God did not let the wild beasts of hell prevail. He did not allow His Holy One to see corruption. To be sure, Christ died the death, the excruciating death of the cross. But, thanks be to God, death could not maintain its dominion over Him! The forces of hell could not claim the victory.

Rather, after His death Christ descended into hell in order to declare His victory over Satan, over sin, over death, and over all the spirits opposed to the desire of our loving Father to save us from eternal destruction.

Therefore we can declare in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:57, *⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Ours is the victory through Him, our victorious King. The Epistle appointed for Palm Sunday is a dramatic summary statement of everything there is to say about our King in contrast.⁶

Firstly, He is a lowly king. Christ *“did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself.”*

Secondly, He is a suffering king. Christ *“became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

Thirdly, He is a victorious king. *“⁹Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

4. A Brief Overview Of Psalm 22

Psalm 22 from which the Introit is taken is one of the most important of all psalms. No psalm is quoted more frequently in the New Testament. This psalm rises above the surrounding psalms, which describe primarily the sufferings and triumphs of David, in order to give us a graphic picture of the suffering and triumph of the Messiah.

The first half of the psalm portrays the humiliation and suffering of the Messiah. Only Isaiah chapter 53 equals this psalm as an Old Testament description of the Saviour's suffering. The second half describes the Messiah's exaltation.

The Introit ends with the first words of Psalm 22, *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?*

Jesus used these words as His own prayer on the cross.⁷ To the scoffers standing around the cross, it seemed that the Father had abandoned His Son. In Gethsemane, Jesus had fervently prayed, *“Take this cup away from me.”*⁸ Now it seemed that this prayer was not being answered. Certainly God had the power to deliver His own Son. Why wasn't He doing it?

The apparent failure of God to deliver His Son could not be due to injustice or weakness on God's part. The Lord was enthroned in heaven as the holy God, who received the praise of Israel. Time after time He delivered His people when

they had called to Him in distress. God's ability to help is beyond question. Yet the crowd could see no evidence that God would deliver Jesus from the cross.

God seems to be absent. Jesus is scorned like a slimy worm that people crush underfoot. In their mockery Jesus' enemies draw this logical conclusion: *"God could rescue Him if He wanted to. God isn't rescuing Him. Therefore God does not want Him."* Could that be true?

Jesus knows that the taunts of the enemy cannot be true. From the beginning of Jesus' life, the Father had been declaring His love for Him. Angels had announced His future glory to Mary and Joseph even before He was born. On the day he was born, angels announced the peace He would bring. The Father Himself had declared His pleasure in Jesus at His baptism and transfiguration.

In the same way, Jesus had shown His love and obedience to His Father. Already as a 12-year-old boy, He had placed His Father's business first. This loyalty had continued throughout His life. Jesus would not renounce it now.

Jesus stands alone, abandoned by His disciples. His enemies are powerful and vicious. Only God can deliver Him now. Although His enemies are strong and vicious, Christ is not left without help.

This is now where we hear the words of the Introit, *¹⁹ But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!*

Although the power of the enemies is great, the power of the Lord is greater. This section of the psalm concludes with a confident prayer that the Lord will deliver Christ from His enemies.

Finally, we get the answer to the question, *"Why have You forsaken Me?"* The Father let the Son die for the sins of His people so that He could give them eternal blessings. Christ suffered as one who had been separated from God by the curse of our sins. He was forsaken by the Father as He hung dying on the cross.

The Father did not abandon Him to the grave, but raised Him to life and glory. Now He is seated at the right hand of the Father in power and majesty.

The Messiah promises to share the good news of His triumph with the assembly of God's children. This promise is fulfilled when Jesus proclaims the Gospel in the church.

As true man, Jesus became our Brother to fulfil the Law in our stead and to die for us. Through the Gospel He gathers us together as the children of God who will share His glory.

The Messiah invites believers to join Him in praising God because the Messiah's deliverance is also our deliverance. Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 18:37

² Matthew 21:5

³ John 18:36

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:19

⁵ Isaiah 53:4

⁶ Phil 2:5-11

⁷ Matthew 27:46

⁸ Mark 14:36