

Prophet, Priest and King  
Luke 19:28-48

It should have been a day for rejoicing, a grand and glorious day. After all, this was the day that the people of Israel had been awaiting for 1000 years, ever since the time of David. This was the day that their Messiah, the promised Son of David was finally coming into His capital city.

And who should have been more elated, more excited than Jesus Himself? He was surrounded by crowds of adoring disciples, who gave their garments for his saddle and who laid them on the road before him. They were rejoicing and praising God, and saying that Jesus was their King. Indeed, this was a day for all of Heaven and Earth to rejoice – in fact Jesus said that if His disciples hadn't created such a stir, the very rocks would have filled the gap of silence.

But in the midst of all this joy and excitement, Jesus weeps. When He saw His capital city, He was moved, not to joy and pride but to tears. And when He entered the temple, that physical expression of God's presence in the midst of His people, He was moved, not to worship and adoration but to anger. Why?

Well, of course there's nothing wrong with Jesus. It's just that He already knows how the story will end. He can't rejoice with His disciples because He sees the whole situation so much more clearly than they do. He knows how this week will end. And He knows that, in spite of their accolades, His disciples really have no idea who Jesus is.

But it's not as though He hasn't dropped enough hints for them. In fact, in this very passage, Jesus clearly points to the offices He came to fill as Messiah – the offices of a King, of a prophet, and of a priest. But how He would perform each of those roles would bewilder His followers – so much so that by the end of the week, they would all abandon Him. The adoring crowds of Jesus' disciples would by the end of the week leave Him to die alone.

But didn't they hail Him as King on this day? Of course they did, and for good reason. They had seen His awesome, supernatural power displayed so many times as He healed the sick and even raised the dead. In so many ways He had proven His kingly authority, and it was so widely recognized that He was even able to command the use of a colt for His trip into Jerusalem.

Yes, the crowd was right, Jesus is the Messiah, the King. But they completely missed the symbolism of his riding into town, not on a mighty warhorse, but on a donkey's colt. Jesus drew this image straight from the words of the prophet Zechariah:

“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.”

In other words, Jesus was a King, but He would reign in humility, not in might. He would come bringing peace to all His people, not bringing war against the hated Romans. In short, He was a King, but not the sort of King His disciples expected. And so by the end of the week, they would abandon Him to the very same Romans against whom He refused to lead them in rebellion. No wonder He wept when He heard their shouts of adoration.

We know so much more than that crowd of disciples, don't we? We know how Jesus came to establish His kingdom on earth, not with a crown, but with a cross. And it's precisely because He came to rule and reign in this way that we Christians have pledged our allegiance to Jesus as our King.

Yes, like those long ago disciples, we hail Jesus as our Lord, but do we obey Him any more wholeheartedly, any more consistently than they did? Are we any more willing to accept His Lordship on His terms? Or do we insist on having things in our own lives work out the way we want them to?

Put it this way: do we really try to obey God, doing what He wants us to do or do we just make up the rules as we go along, trusting in our own goodness or virtue? More seriously, do we lose our faith, our trust in Jesus when sickness or poverty or unhappiness or disappointment come our way? Do we turn our hearts away from Him, abandoning Him because He's not our kind of Messiah?

In short, should Jesus respond any differently to our protestations of loyalty than He did when He heard His disciples proclaiming Him as king so long ago? Is He really any more our King than He was theirs? Does He have any reason to respond to our professions of faith with smiles instead of tears?

But of course a principal reason for Jesus' tears on that day so long ago was the fact that He was not just a King, but a prophet. He wept over Jerusalem, not just because He knew what would happen to Him at the end of the week. He also knew that the people's mania for a military strongman to lead them in battle against the hated Romans would prove to be their downfall.

For in A.D. 66 the people would rise against the Romans, following leaders such as their hearts desired. But in only four years, the inexorable might of the Roman Empire would crush their rebellion, reducing Jerusalem to a smoking ruin, leaving not one stone standing on another. So great was the devastation that even today archeologists debate the precise location of the Temple itself. No, Jesus as prophet knew that in rejecting Jesus as King, the people were sealing their own doom. No wonder He shed tears as He gazed upon the beautiful city, so soon to be totally destroyed.

Why didn't they listen to this great prophet? After all, He was even able to predict little things, like where the donkey would be that He would ride into Jerusalem. And all throughout His ministry, people were very attentive to hear Him, as Luke points out at the very end of today's passage.

And remember, Luke identifies the people in this crowd as Jesus' disciples, His students, His followers. If they respected Him as a rabbi and revered Him as a prophet, why didn't they listen to Him when He told them He would be killed in Jerusalem? Why didn't they heed his warnings about what would happen to the city? Why didn't they do what He said? No wonder He wept as the crowds rejoiced around Him.

We know so much more than that crowd of disciples, don't we? For we know that Jesus would be crucified by the end of the week. We know that 40 years later Jerusalem would in fact be reduced to rubble. We know that Jesus was a prophet, and that every word He spoke was true.

But we conservative, evangelical Presbyterians believe much more than that. We confess that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, all of it given through the mouths of true prophets. We claim that we can trust everything in these pages as true and trustworthy, a sufficient foundation on which to build lives and even societies that are faithful to God. And we are rightly incensed when those who claim to be Christians reject its clear teachings.

But are we listening, really listening to our prophets? Would we even know where in the Bible the important issues of our day are discussed? And when we find some teaching in the Scripture that differs from what we do, or from what we want to do, do we do what the Bible says? Do we really listen to what the Bible says about tithing, or the need for Church discipline, or proper gender roles or divorce? Or do we rationalize away the prophetic word, claiming that it is unclear, or out of context, or subject to different interpretations?

Let's face the facts. The people of Jesus' day saw their Messiah standing before them, doing mighty miracles, fulfilling prophecies at every turn. But they turned away from Him, and they and their civilization were soon destroyed.

*The people who built this magnificent sanctuary read the same version of the Bible that we read today. They knew its teachings about love for neighbors, about doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. And yet they held slaves, profiting financially from the unwilling labor of others. The plaster was scarcely dry on this building when their whole civilization was destroyed, and they and their descendants were reduced to poverty for the better part of 100 years.*

What about us? Will God ignore the sins of our culture when He did not spare those of the past? For we must remember that sorrow isn't the only emotion that Jesus displayed when He entered His capital city. No, when He came as the Great High Priest into His temple, the eyes that had been wet with tears now blazed in anger. As He came to what should have been a house of prayer for all the nations, He found it instead to be a den of thieves.

And Jesus drew this scathing language from Jeremiah chapter 7, the second passage that we read today. For Jeremiah had also come into the Temple, the House of God, and had found things not as they ought to be. Oh, he found people putting their faith in the fact that God had established His temple in Jerusalem. But they were thus taking their deliverance for granted, trusting that they were the people of God while acting like the servants of Baal – stealing, murdering, committing adultery, and swearing falsely.

Jeremiah thus warned the people that God's house used to be at a place called Shiloh, but that God was worshipped there no longer. In the same way, Jeremiah warned the people that the Temple in Jerusalem would also be destroyed if they continued in their infidelity – and the First Temple was indeed torn down by the Babylonians during Jeremiah's own lifetime.

In short, the temple that Solomon built was destroyed because it had become a den of thieves. The temple of Jesus' time would likewise be destroyed because it had become a den of thieves, a place where people were more concerned with personal profit than with prayer.

Well, what about the Presbyterian Church today? Can any of us imagine that God is pleased when our General Assembly spends more time talking about whether perversion is acceptable behavior for ministers than talking about strategies for evangelism and outreach? And it may very well be the case that God will bring down His judgment on our denomination, even as Jesus cast the money-changers out of the Temple of His day.

But a more important question to ask is, what would Jesus do if He were to come into this house of worship, right here, today? Would He feel at home, or would He have to throw the money-changers out of here as well?

Now, of course there aren't any stalls set up in here to sell sacrificial animals. We don't see any altars to burn incense to Baal, as Jeremiah might have seen in his day. No, our house of worship, with its central raised pulpit and its lack of representational artwork, appears to be consistently Christian, thoroughly Reformed.

But Jeremiah's criticism of the worship of the First Temple should nevertheless make us wonder – where is the real focus of our worship? Are we really living for God's glory? Or are we

worshipping God for what we can get out of the deal? In other words, do we come before God as servants, seeking what we can give, or as thieves, seeking what we can get?

For the attitude we have in worship will invariably spill over into the rest of our lives. If our focus in here is on ourselves, on how we feel or even on what we learn, then that's who we'll spend the rest of the week trying to please – us, and not God. Once we are focused on self rather than on God, we may not be burning incense to Baal, but we are just as guilty of idolatry. And if we don't end up stealing, murdering, committing adultery, or swearing falsely as did the people of Jeremiah's day, it's only because we are afraid of getting caught.

No, we have no room to criticize either the people of Jeremiah's time or the people of Jesus' time. We are no more loyal to our King, no more attentive to our Prophet, and no more faithful to our Priest than they were. Although we know much more about Him, and although we know the extent to which He gave of Himself to set us free, we continue to live as though we are in bondage to sin. Even though He died so that we might live an abundant life, we continue to live as though we are dead.

But the good news is that Jesus is the Great Prophet, and He knew all that. He knew what His people would be like, past, present, and future on the day that He rode into Jerusalem. Jesus the Great High Priest knew that it would take more than throwing out some money-changers to cleanse His temple – He knew it would take all of his blood to wash the sins of His people away. Jesus the King of Kings knew He was coming not to a crown, but to a cross – and He knew He would be nailed to that cross by the very same people He came to save.

But the good news is that He came into Jerusalem anyway. And He came for the same reason that He has come into the lives of everyone who trusts in Him. He came to His people for the same reason that He wept so bitterly over them, and for the same reason that He raged so at their infidelity. He shed those tears for the same reason that He shed His blood, because He loved His people too much to let us die in our sins. He knew we would reject Him, but He came to us anyway, for His love wouldn't allow Him to do anything less.

Yes, we disciples of Christ do know much more than those other disciples did on the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem. But we have the same need as they did – we need a prophet to guide us, a king to rule over us, and a priest to pay the price we cannot pay. May we give Him the same welcome they gave Him, singing His praise with all our might. But may we also worship Him with our lives, giving Him what He deserves – all that we are and all that we have. He has given nothing less to us, and He deserves nothing less in return.