

“Triumphal Entries”

(The Great Story of the Bible, Chapter 79)

2 Samuel 1.1 – 5.10; 1 Chronicles 10.1 – 11.9

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March 20, 2016

Last week we heard about the battle against the Philistines that resulted in the deaths of Israel’s King Saul and three of Saul’s sons, including David’s best friend Jonathan. When David hears the news, he weeps bitter tears. “Look how the mighty warriors have fallen! ... Daughters of Israel, weep over Saul! ... I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan!” (2 Samuel 1.19, 24, 26) David had spent years fleeing for his life in the face of Saul’s mad obsession with him, but David knows that Israel has just suffered a great loss. Unsure what to do next, he does what any wise person would do: he turns to the Lord in prayer. God tells him it’s time for him, after years in exile, to return to his homeland. When he arrives in Hebron, the people of Judah gather around him and declare, “We want you to be our next king.” But Saul’s remaining son Ishbosheth has set himself as Israel’s next king – and a two-year feud ensues between men loyal to David and men loyal to Ishbosheth. At the end of it all David emerges as the uncontested leader. He makes a covenant with the elders of Israel, and they anoint him as their king.

Seven years into his reign, in about the year 1003 BC, David sets out to resolve an issue that had been plaguing the Israelites for 200 years. There was a fortified city high up in the hill country of Judea, one of the last remaining Canaanite strongholds in the land, occupied by a group of people who called themselves Jebusites. The Israelites had tried to take the city during the days of Joshua, and failed (Joshua 15.63); they tried again during the period of the judges, and failed (Judges 1.21). Now, David makes a third attempt, sending troops into the city through a system of water tunnels. (2 Samuel 5.6-10) The men enter the city and seize the mountaintop fortress, called Zion. King David makes a triumphal entry into the city, which becomes the new capital of Israel. The city’s name ... is Jerusalem.

A thousand and thirty-three years later, Jesus of Nazareth makes a triumphal entry into the very same city. Jerusalem had been through a lot during that span of years: destroyed by the Babylonians, rebuilt by the Jews, captured by the Greeks, liberated by the Jews, captured by the Romans. At the time of Jesus, the city was occupied by three thousand Roman soldiers, and was ruled by a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate. The troops resided in a large fortress overlooking the city, with a commanding view of the temple mount. Pilate resided in an immense, ornate palace in the city, near three large towers built to maintain Roman control. As Jesus approached the city from the Mount of Olives, the tallest buildings in the city would have conveyed a very clear message: *this city belongs to Rome.*

Many of the Jews were looking expectantly for a Messiah, a king who would deliver Israel from foreign occupation. Just as King David had beaten the Jebusites and kicked them out for good, so too did the Jews hope that a king would come who would beat the Romans and kick them out for good – restoring Jerusalem and the whole country to the glory that had once been theirs under David, long ago. Some Jews thought that *Jesus* would be that king. As he approaches the city, a crowd of people gathers. Some spread their cloaks on the road; others wave branches pulled from palm trees; someone starts shouting: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” They are excited, jubilant, expectant: they believe *Jesus is going to restore things to the way they ought to be*.

Not many days later, their hopes are crushed. Jesus is betrayed by one of his own hand-picked disciples. He is arrested, charged with blasphemy by the Jewish leaders, handed over to the Romans, interrogated by Pilate, condemned, beaten, whipped, stripped, mocked, and publicly executed.

That wasn’t how the expectant Jews thought things would turn out. When David entered Jerusalem, things had turned out *great*. When Jesus entered the same city a millennia later, things turned out *awful*. On that very first Good Friday, it sure looked like Jesus had completely *failed* where his ancestor David had succeeded. David had *won*. Jesus had not only *lost* – he had *been killed*.

What they didn’t realize, of course, was that there was *another* triumphal entry yet to come. The triumphal entry that *really* counted wasn’t the one when Jesus entered Jerusalem on that donkey. The triumphal entry that really counted was the one that took place a few weeks later: when the risen Christ ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. The chains of death could not hold him. He appeared to his disciples in the flesh, he shared breakfast with them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he gave them instructions about their new responsibilities and about the Holy Spirit that would empower them, then he left this earth and took his place on the heavenly throne that had been prepared for him from before time began. God seated Christ “at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the age to come.” (Ephesians 1.20-22) “Now that he has gone into heaven, he rules over all angels, authorities, and powers.” (1 Peter 3.22) Christ takes up the *authority* that is rightly his. All the powers of the cosmos – *all* the powers of the cosmos, including the powers of Sin and Evil and Death – will ultimately fall before Christ’s heavenly throne. *All* of them. It’s not the triumphal entry into Jerusalem that won the victory. Jesus didn’t come to throw out the Romans and liberate the Jews. Jesus came to throw down Sin and Evil and Death – to throw down Satan himself – and liberate *all* of us from the cosmic forces of darkness, into glorious freedom and life.

For that to happen, for that to truly happen, there’s one more triumphal entry that needs to occur. One more place where Jesus needs to enter and take his rightful place on the throne: *in our hearts*. What Jesus has done in heaven needs to be reflected by us, *here* and *now*. “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2.10-11) There’s something that every single one of us needs to do: we need to give Jesus his rightful place in our lives as *King* and *Lord*, placing him on the throne in our heart, not just once but *daily*. “So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him” – you remember those fabulous words from “What

Child Is This?” – “the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.” That’s it, right there, in a nutshell: we need to *enthron* him. There comes that moment when we realize: it’s not about just *believing* in Jesus, not even just about *following* Jesus, but also about *enthroning* Jesus. We need to be willing to tell ourselves, and our church, and our family, and our friends, and the whole world, “Jesus Christ is my King and my Lord!” We need to be able to say with *boldness* and *conviction*, “You are the Lord of my life, Jesus – you and you *alone!*” That means that all the other little gods we create need to take their place *under* Christ in our hearts. Love your spouse, but don’t *enthron* your spouse. Love your children and your grandchildren, but don’t *enthron* them. Love your friends, your neighbors, your alma mater, your favorite sports team, your favorite TV show, but don’t *enthron* them. Love your job, your vacations, the things you do for fun, but don’t *enthron* them. There’s only *one thing, one being anywhere* in all of creation that’s worthy of a *throne*: Jesus Christ. *Nothing else belongs there!* Don’t let anything else in your life usurp the place that Christ alone should rightfully have. Come to church – but don’t *enthron* the church. Value our church traditions – but don’t *enthron* them. Enjoy church music – but don’t *enthron* it. Appreciate church architecture and furnishings – but don’t *enthron* them. Listen to the word proclaimed, but (for heaven’s sake!) don’t *enthron* the preacher! Read and study the scriptures, but *don’t enthrone even them*. It’s not the *Bible* that sits on the throne – it’s *Jesus*. It’s easy, *so easy*, to miss the mark, right here in church. We get caught in all the trappings, and we *lose sight of Jesus*. We let him slip off the throne, and we put something else that’s *kind of close* in his place. *We must not do that!* Only one thing in this whole universe belongs on that throne: Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, King of kings, Lord of lords, Son of God, Son of Man, Alpha and Omega, Prince of peace, author of salvation, great high priest, lamb of God, pioneer and perfecter of our faith, firstborn of the dead, Lion of the tribe of Judah, root and descendant of David, seed of Abraham, last Adam, Word made flesh, dawn from heaven, bright morning star – *that’s* who belongs on the throne, and *nothing* else.

In 1934, in Germany, as Adolf Hitler was consolidating his power and abolishing political rights and democratic processes, a small group of very concerned Christians gathered in a city called Barmen to write an appeal – at great personal risk – to their fellow Christians to stand firm and not let their faith be shaken by political pressure. The most important sentence in that document is this: “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.” They were sending a message to the world: whatever happens in this country, come hell or high water, Jesus Christ is *still on the throne, and we intend to keep him there*.

It shouldn’t require such dire circumstances for the world to know that we’ve put Jesus on the throne in our hearts. It ought to be evident by the way we’re. People should see it in our actions and hear it in our words. It should be reflected in our values, our habits, our pastimes, what we post on Facebook, the way we vote, the way we handle our money. The person who prepares your tax return ought to be able to tell, without any shadow of a doubt, that *you’ve put Jesus on the throne*. It should permeate *every single aspect of our daily lives*, from the moment we wake till the moment we sleep.

Have you put Jesus on that throne? Have you *really* put him on that throne? Have you truly allowed Jesus to make a *triumphal entry* into your heart? That’s the triumphal entry that matters *most*.

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