See - Your King Has Come

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0:00] Amen. So, we are coming into the final week of Jesus' life in this gospel, and if you would picture this with me for a moment, try to put yourself back in Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30, 2,000 years ago. We are on the outskirts of the city. It is hot. It is dusty. Crowds of people, are walking on the roads, all crowding in the same direction, and as the day gets hotter, the crowds get bigger. More and more people. The roads are busy heading up into the city.

Walking up into the city, it is festival time. Crowds bustle through the street. It's noisy. Animals are being sold. Children are playing. Old friends catching up.
And at the highest point of the city, where everyone is going, stands the temple. One of the wonders of the ancient world. The temple is heaving, because it is festival time. It is coming up for Passover, and the place is filled with people coming to worship God.
And then there is shouting. People running, streaming back down out of the temple, down through the city to the city gates. You see a cloud of dust coming on the road, a new crowd coming into town. And as they get closer and closer, you see that this crowd is following a man riding on a donkey. You see, as they get closer, this man is none other than Jesus. And by this time, there are hundreds of people waiting for him outside the city. Some begin to cut down branches from the trees to wave. Some begin to shout. And as he gets closer and closer, the crowd catches on to the words that are being shouted as this man comes into the city. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel. You just imagine the dust, the heat, the sweat, the shouting, the excitement is at fever pitch because the King has come. And the long, long wait is over for God's people and for God's King.
That is what is going on. That's the scene as Jesus rides up into Jerusalem for the last time. John is incredibly sparing with his words, but that is the scene he's painting for us there in verses 12 and 13. The great crowd that had come from the festival heard that Jesus was on his way.
[3:05] They took palm branches, went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna. Okay, the air is electric. We've hit the climax. The wait is over. Here is the King. Now they think he is coming to take up his crown, to take his rightful seat on the throne.

And John in this passage simply says to us today, yes, he has come. This is your King.
It is exciting. It's meant to be exciting, but your King has come, maybe not in the sense that you think, maybe not in the way that you were expecting.
And so John gives us this morning two prophecies and a sign to help us to recognize and welcome and celebrate King Jesus rightly. And the first prophecy he gives us is a cry, save us.
Hosanna. It's one of those words that only comes out at this time of year, doesn't it? What does it mean? Many of us who've grown up with it, it seems obvious. That's what the crowd shouted as Jesus came in. But what is it saying? Well, simply it means, please save us.
[4:31] It's an SOS call. If you're in danger and you spoke Hebrew, this is the word that you needed to know. Now, that whole situation seems a million miles, doesn't it, from the party atmosphere of the crowd on that day. But it's not. And to some degree, at least, the crowd knew that. They knew that they needed saving quickly now. But why then, you wonder, didn't John just write that, just save us?

It's not just in our English Bibles that the word doesn't get translated. John is writing in Greek, but he leaves this word in Hebrew. Why does he do that? Well, because for his hearers, his readers, hearing that word in this context would send them straight back to the original source of that word, that cry, which is the psalm that we have just sung, Psalm 118. And it was a psalm that growing up, or even now, God's people would have sung in anticipation of the Passover, the night before the lamb was slaughtered, these words. Here it is, the original Hosanna from Psalm 118. Lord, save us.

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Hosanna. Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord, we bless ye. And so it's coming up for Passover again. The crowds have come down from the temple, and these are the words they used to greet Jesus. Because they knew, if only in part, that these precious words that they had sung all their lives were coming true before their very eyes. This is history unfolding, God's promises flowering. And for us to really get the power and the thrill of that realization, we kind of have to get the thrust of Psalm 118. So if you have a Bible and you humor me, please turn back there to Psalm 118 in the church Bible. That's page 616. I promise it's worth it.
Psalm 118, we find straight away in verse 1, it's a song of thanksgiving. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. And we see it's the public, collective thanksgiving. There's a call to everyone to join in, to the nation, Israel, and the priests, the house of Aaron, to those who fear the Lord. Let them say his love endures forever. So this is everyone shouting, crying, singing together. Then in verse 5, Luke, suddenly one person is speaking.
When I was hard-pressed, I cried to the Lord. And as it goes on, we find that this Psalm, the reason for all the thanksgiving is because this one person has come and fought and suffered to save everyone, God's people, from his and their enemies. Okay, he tells the story of how that happened from verse 10, all the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord, I cut them down. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the Lord, I cut them down. They swarmed around me like bees, but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns. In the name of the Lord, I cut them down. I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my defense, and he has become my salvation. Okay, so it's graphic, isn't it? It's like watching a bare-knuckle fight. But the point is that having been surrounded and threatened by all these enemies, this one person in the strength of the Lord threw them off and overcame them. And the result of that is collective thanks and praise and rescue, because this one person's victory now belongs to all God's people, because he came and fought and suffered and ultimately won for them. And so it's as this great champion, this hero enters in verse 19 through the gate of the Lord into Jerusalem, up to the temple, to himself give thanks to God.
[9:17] He is praised and celebrated and blessed by everyone. You'll be beginning to see the connections between the psalm and what we have just read in John's gospel. Here in Psalm 118, this is where we get that wonderful image that Jesus used so often, that Peter used, as we saw not so long ago, this wonderful picture of the stone that the builders had rejected becoming the cornerstone.

He was done and dusted and left for dead, raised up, put in a power of glory and honor and authority. And it's then at that point that as the hero of Psalm 118 makes his way up into the city, to the temple, that the crowd cry out, verse 25, Lord save us.
Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, that they recognize now our king, our hero, our savior has at last arrived to deliver us.
So do you see why this is such an exciting and climactic scene in the gospels then? When the people of God, the city, the nation comes down from the temple out of the city to greet and welcome their champion, the one who's come to rescue them, their coming king, and it is Jesus.
It's happening, they think. Those ancient words written hundreds of years before are coming true. He's finally here. Friends, this should thrill us. If we have caught up with the story, God's promises unfolding before our eyes, and to see him come, well, the response that it should draw out of our hearts today, as it did that day, is this cry, Lord, save us.
[11:28] Please save us. Because we need saving. And we, his people, need the rescue that he brings. He came.

He fought. He suffered. He conquered for us. And now, as he comes to us, we cry out. We must cry out to him to save us, to bring his rescue home to us.
For us today, as for them, then, our enemies are too big for us. Too strong for us. Our own sin, it is too big for us to deal with.
Every week, we confess this together, don't we, in prayer. That once again, another week, and sin has got the better of us. We cannot cheat death.
The last enemy, he has chosen the day of their death. He has put it off until it's convenient. He has come back from death to life.
[12:35] We cannot overpower the devil. We cannot do it. These are great enemies. But here is one who came and crushed our sin and death and the devil for us.

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He is big enough. He is strong enough. And to benefit from his victory, to be saved, we must cry out to him and put our trust in him.
That is the unique message of Christianity. Every other belief system, whether religious or non-religious, will tell you, if you have things going on in your life, you need to get a grip.
Get on top of it. Take it in hand. Your faults, your failings. Live better. Take it in hand. You can do it. You must do it. And if it's not working, you just need to try harder at that.
And that sounds, on fresh hearing, positive and inspirational. But if you follow that logic, it is crushing. Because it is asking something of us that we cannot do.
[13:49] How many times have we tried to overcome our sins and failed? How many times have we resolved to live better lives and hit a dead end?

How many times have we found, in fact, that we cannot do it? And friends, only the Bible is honest enough to tell us that. And that news would be crushing too, wouldn't it, if the Bible didn't also tell us the good news, that there is one who can do it and who has done it for us, on our behalf.
The Bible tells us we need a champion, a conqueror, a king, a rescuer to cry out to you, who is strong enough and good enough to deal with these great enemies for us.
And here in John 12, the Bible says to us, here he is. He has come. See, your king has come. His name is Jesus.
Is that not the good news for us today? That we have one who we can cry out to, to save us, rescue us. Is that not the good news that we take out from here?
[15:10] Into our week, into our streets, our workplaces. Our classes. Jesus has come to do for you what you could not do for yourself.

Come and see who he is. Come and see what he has done. And trust him with that work. Trust him to do it for you. What about us today?
Friends, as he comes to us this morning. The risen Christ, the Lord Jesus, who came, who fought, who suffered, who died, who rose again to rescue us from our great enemies.
Well, let our hearts cry out to him today. Please save us. Perhaps you did this long ago. And you rest today in the security of that salvation and his rescue.
If that is ye, simply look at him and praise him. Bless him from this place. Perhaps you haven't yet cried out to him in your heart, though.
[16:16] Friends, whoever we are today, we are all in that crowd together, aren't we? So is everyone that we know. We all need to cry out to him.

Because none of us, none of us can deal with our sin and our death on our own. Perhaps the first step for you this morning is simply to come to terms with that.
Stop the endless cycles of trying again and again to get it right. Just to lay down that attempt. And to recognize that you need a king and a savior.
If that is you, know today that there is a king and a savior. See your king. Cry out to him today. Please save me.
And John wants us to know next that when we do that, when we cry out to him to save us, that he will. This is our second point, our second prophecy, which is an answer to that cry.
[17:18] Do not fear. Do not fear. Okay, so what does Jesus do when he sees this crowd welcoming him? When he hears the cry, please save us?

Well, if you haven't already, if you flip back to John 12 and have a look there at verse 14. Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. Now, again, if we've heard this a thousand times, it seems obvious that Jesus did that, doesn't it?
But it's not that obvious, is it? Why does getting a donkey answer the cry of the crowd to be rescued? Well, again, Jesus is showing us how his coming is fulfilling promises that God made about him hundreds of years before.
So, as it's written, verse 15, do not be afraid, daughter Zion. See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.
So, Jesus, he accepts that identity, doesn't he? He is claiming to be the king as he sits on this donkey. We picked up that prophecy in our first reading from Zechariah 9.
[18:32] God promises a king he will ride to the rescue on a donkey. Now, even for people back then, that is an anticlimax. You know, the stage is set, the crowds are crying, the king is coming, and he finds himself a donkey.

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What would you expect a victorious king to ride into the city on? A war horse or a tank? But if you remember, Zechariah's point is that this is a humble king, a different kind of king.
He is not cut from the same cloth as the kings of this world. He does not ride in on a war horse, but rather on a donkey, and a baby donkey at that, a foal, a colt.
So, the crowds were right, weren't they, to cry out to him for rescue, but the crowds that day were still only halfway there.
How do we know that? Because before long, within a week, the same crowd that cried out, please save us, was to cry out, crucify him. Because they still did not understand the kind of saving that they really needed, the kind of rescue that Jesus had come to bring.
[19:56] To put it this way, if it's Psalm 118 playing through their minds as they call out to him, what kind of rescue do they have in mind? All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

They are imagining this king to be a military messiah. A rescuer from their here and now political enemies and oppressors, the Romans. We have problems in this world, they say, so we need a worldly rescue.
Uprising, revolution, violence. But John tells us there in verse 16 that this day only made sense looking back after Jesus was glorified.
Only then did they realize that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.
On that day, even at the end of this week, Jesus did not look like the kind of person that they were asking for.
You're a man on a donkey, a king on a cross. How can he save us from our enemies? Well, it all depends, doesn't it, on the kind of rescuer he is and the kind of rescue he came to bring.
[21:14] Because Jesus didn't overthrow the Romans. But he did overthrow death for us. He didn't cut down nations, but he did cut down the last and greatest enemy.

And he did it not by riding into town for war, but by dying and rising again from the dead for us. That is what he rode into the city to do that week.
So the crowd was halfway there. But brothers and sisters, his resurrection gets us the whole way there. To see that he did come as our champion to fight and suffer and conquer for us.
And we are right to praise him for that. See that we are right to cry out to him for salvation because we do need saving. But what kind of rescue do we need?
What kind of rescuer? Well, friends, John reminds us that Jesus did not come to rescue us from our here and now felt needs. In his kindness, he does help us and sustain us and strengthen us each day.
[22:27] Sometimes he does take the difficult things away from us and out of our lives. But often he doesn't. Not because he doesn't care about us.

But because that is not ultimately what we need rescuing from. Things like illness or debt or a difficult job or broken relationships.
Things that we cry out to him about. First and foremost, John tells us, Jesus tells us, we need rescuing from the curse of our sin.
Death, condemnation, hell. We could have our lives put back together today. But if the problem of our sin isn't settled, the rest won't help us.
And so thanks be to God that Jesus came to rescue us from our sin. Thanks be to God for that trustworthy saying that we began our service with.
[23:29] That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. So when we cry out to him, please save us. It is that kind of rescue that he promises.

Forgiveness. Peace with God. Eternal life. And his answer to us when we cry out to him for a rescue like that from our sins is, do not fear.
Do not be afraid. Because that is what he came for. That is the kind of king that he is. These passages known sometimes as the triumphal entry.
And there is certainly triumph in it. But Jesus doesn't let us think that it is worldly triumph. A here and now success. Rather, that his triumph will come through his suffering, his death, his resurrection.
And it is only in his glory that we understand the triumph of that day. And so the big question for us is, what kind of rescue do you come to Jesus for?

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[24:40] Is it the rescue that he came to bring from sin and death and hell? Is that the rescue that we praise him and love him and thank him for today?

Your friends, perhaps you don't know Jesus. But know this, that when you call out to him for a rescue like that, he will give it. He will. That is his promise.
If you say to him, please save me, he will save you. Don't fear that he won't, says God's word. Because God promises that he will.
Just listen to the end of that passage again from Zechariah. The Lord, their God, will save his people on that day. As a shepherd saves his flock, they will sparkle in his land like jewels and a crown.
How attractive and beautiful they will be. You're like a shepherd gathering his sheep like a king, counting his jewels.
[25:44] So, Jesus loves to rescue sinful people like me and ye. He loves to do it. He doesn't do it grudgingly, but so willingly.

He's done it for countless people through the ages. He's done it for many of us here. He can do it for ye. He loves to do it for many of us. He loves to do that because that is the kind of king that he is.
A savior for our sins. And lastly, John leaves us with a sign that proves these prophecies true in Jesus. So, to help us to receive and to celebrate him today, a sign of life from the dead.
I hope you're noticing that John keeps bringing us back to Lazarus, doesn't he? Back to this guy Jesus raised from the dead.
And if you went back and read chapter 11 last week, you'll know why. He was well and truly dead. And with simply a word, Jesus brings him back to life. We cannot brush over that.
[26:48] Okay, that is life-changing. That is earth-shattering. Here is someone who gives life from the dead. And John reminds us of that as we close as a proof of what he has been telling us in this passage.

Okay, the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they'd heard that he'd performed this sign, went out to meet him.
Okay, so that is the crowd that went out to greet Jesus. They had heard that he can raise people from the dead. And if anything today could give us confidence to cry out to someone for rescue without fear, well, surely it is the person who raises people from the dead.
What more could he have done to prove to us that he is the king to save us once and for all? What further proof could we ask him for?
The people back then, they knew that. They crowded to him. They cried out to him for that rescue. And nothing could stop them. If you have been following John through, you'll notice time and again the Pharisees, the religious leaders, they don't want Jesus around.
[28:03] But right now, look what they say in chapter 12. This is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him.

They could not stop people coming to Jesus. And so what could stop us coming to a rescuer like this and asking him for rescue for ourselves today?
What kind of sign would it take to convince you that he is the one that you need? As John has reminded us soon, Jesus is not only going to raise the dead, but rise from the dead himself to tell the world that he is the king.
He is the rescuer for us. And that really is what our Easter services are about. Okay, our faith isn't a leap in the dark, is it?
It's founded on the facts, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And that is what we want to celebrate. That is why our Easter morning service is titled, How Do We Know It Happened?
[29:10] Because we want to take heart in that fact. We want to share that with the people around us. That Jesus concretely did something, rising from the dead, to tell us that he is here to save us.

That is what ties all these threads together, isn't it? So do take a leaflet. Do invite people to that. That is where our hope is found, in that sign. Because through his resurrection, he says to us today that he has indeed come.
That he has died for our sins. That he has risen to life again. And that he lives to save to the uttermost all who draw near to God through him.

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So let us draw near to God through him together now as we pray. Let's pray together. God, our Father, we praise you for this good news.
That even while we were dead in our sins, you loved us. That you sent your Son to bear our sin away. That he came so freely, so willingly.
[30:22] That he showed himself to us so plainly and clearly. Lord, that any of us could see that he is the one that we need. Lord, we confess our hearts are so often cold and dead and dull, Lord, to him.

Father, how we pray that you would show him to us afresh. That by your Spirit, Lord, you give us such joy in him. Lord, that he would thrill us.
Lord, that all our hope would rest upon him. Lord, and for those who do not as yet trust him. Lord, that you would warm their hearts to him.
Lord, we thank you that by your Spirit, you are not content to leave us as we are. But Lord, you do shine your light into the dark corners of our hearts to show us our need for you.
Lord, not to threaten and torment us, but so that we might have the greatest good, which is to be reconciled to you and have peace with you through Jesus.
[31:30] And so we pray, Lord, that each one of us would today. For we ask in his wonderful name. Amen. Amen.

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