

Seeing the Whole Picture

Luke 19:28-40

“There’s just one more thing ...”. Earlier I talked about people who would be recognised by various items so can anyone tell me who would be recognised by this catchphrase?

Columbo was a US detective drama that ran for 35 years and featured Peter Falk played a detective with the Los Angeles Police Department who went about solving murders in his rumpled beige raincoat. However, it had one major difference from most detective programmes where the viewers find out who committed the crime when the detective does. In Columbo, viewers would see the murder being committed at the start of each episode and thus would know who the culprit was before they even saw Columbo start to investigate – so instead of a Whodunnit it was a Howcatchem! In Columbo the viewers had the big picture while Columbo didn’t - hence why he had to continually ask “Just one more thing” to build up the big picture that we watching already knew.

In the Palm Sunday story we are in a similar situation, we know the complete Easter story so we know the big picture in which the events of Palm Sunday occur. However, the people of Jerusalem who come out to welcome Jesus into the city with such enthusiasm and celebration are in a similar position to Columbo – they don’t yet know the big picture and will have to try to work it out as events occur.

When God made his promise to the Israelites, through the prophet Zechariah, recorded in Zechariah chapter 9, that he would send a King the Israelites had been allowed to return to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon and were in the process of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, following its destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar during the siege of Jerusalem. So the promise of a King whose “Rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth” would have given them great reason to celebrate- a king will come and restore Israel. How they must have looked forward to the day when God would fulfil his promise. And on the Sunday before Passover 5 centuries later, Luke tells us that Jesus entered Jerusalem, humbly riding on the back of a donkey, exactly as Zechariah had prophesied. And it is important to note that Jesus is deliberately making this statement. By this time Jesus was extremely well known, everyone coming to the Passover feast had heard of him and Jesus wants to make the people recognise that he is the fulfilment of Zechariah’s prophecy – having walked all the way so far he deliberately sends two of his disciples to get a particular colt so that he can complete that entry into Jerusalem as had been predicted of the king. To announce that he was indeed the Messiah, the fulfilment of the Prophecy, Jesus chose a time – the Passover feast – and place – Jerusalem – where all Israel would be gathered and a way of proclaiming his mission that was unmistakable. But it is interesting to look at what those celebrating Jesus’ arrival think is happening. In v38 Luke tells us the crowds that gathered, quoting from Psalm 118, shouted

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Those who had gathered recognised that Jesus was the King that God had promised and are shouting out to him to Save them – they are expecting that now that their King has arrived he will get rid of their Roman overlords and restore Israel to independence and glory. Yet a week later Jesus had been crucified, this King that they had celebrated on Palm Sunday had been put to death on the cross and was gone. It seemed that God hadn’t kept his promise to his people after all.

However, the people cheering Jesus into Jerusalem can’t see the big picture and the first pointer towards the truth is in the thing that allowed them to recognise Jesus as a king in the first place – the donkey that he rode in on.

The Biblical scholar William Barclay in his commentary on Luke, when talking about Jesus’ fulfilment of Zechariah’s prophecy writes that *“Even in this Jesus underlined the kind of kingship which he claimed. The*

donkey in Palestine was not the lowly beast that it is in this country. It was noble. Only in war did kings ride upon a horse; when they came in peace they came upon a donkey."

In the ancient Middle Eastern world, leaders rode horses if they rode to war, but donkeys if they came in peace. The mention of a donkey in Zechariah's prophecy fits the description of a king who would be "righteous and having salvation, gentle." Rather than riding to fight and conquer the Romans as the crowds expected, this king would enter in peace. So, in riding in on a donkey Jesus is fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy and showing that he is the King that God had promised his people. This adds an key piece to the picture of the Easter story but if his entrance shows Jesus is not going to be a King who brings down the Roman empire and free God's people from the tyranny of their rule, to help us understand the bigger picture we need to look at what kind of King Christ was going to be.

Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah helps us to see the bigger picture of the kind of king that Jesus came to be. Seven hundred years before Jesus came into the world, God opened the eyes of his prophet to see into the very heart of Christ's saving work. And the king that is described is not a great warrior but is instead a servant king – and not just a servant but a suffering servant. The Messiah would be "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering". To the crowd waving palm branches on that first Palm Sunday that would have seemed impossible, Jesus was at the height of his fame, adored by his many followers who saw him as their saviour. But less than a week later that prophecy would be proven true as the same people who had cheered Jesus into Jerusalem called for him to be punished and ultimately to be put to death on a cross. Again, those who witnessed these events would see this as the ultimate failure, the man they had celebrated as a king sent by God had turned out to be a fraud who had been unable to save himself, never mind save God's people. But, again they don't know what is to follow so cannot see the bigger picture - Christ was a conquering King – Jesus was raised from the dead, conquered sin, and death and He is a great and glorious King in the presence of God. God did keep his promise – the righteous and victorious King described by Zechariah came in Christ and through the events we celebrate this week conquered.

The crowds aren't the only ones who cannot see the big picture - notice the role that the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders play in this, they can see the statement that Jesus is making through his entrance into Jerusalem. They can see who he is claiming to be. But they, in a different way, also don't see the full picture, they are blinded to it by their fear of a threat to their position of authority so instead of celebrating the fulfilment of God's promise to send a King, they tell him to rebuke his disciples for what they see as blasphemy. The Easter message still poses a major threat to those who don't want it to be heard and understood and like the Pharisees, they will use whatever means that they can to prevent us seeing the whole picture and instead trying to twist the bible message to support their own message and protect their positions.

Thus the challenge for us today can be how much of the big picture do we see? Maybe we're meeting Christ for the first time and like those who welcomed him into Jerusalem are excited and celebrating. Or maybe we are going through a difficult time and are angry and want to punish God or maybe we are sitting in Church thinking we know the Easter story – we have heard it every year for the last x number of years and are tuned out or maybe our lives are so busy that the story of Easter is getting lost in amongst chocolate Easter Eggs and school holidays. Whatever our situation, it is important to focus on the awesomeness of the big picture of Easter starting with Palm Sunday and the arrival of God's chosen King going in Jerusalem through the despair of his death on the Cross to the ultimate victory that he has on Easter Sunday.

If Jesus showed up today I think we might expect the same things as those in the crowds did. That Jesus could end war, poverty, and homelessness. He could eliminate stress - financial stress, work stress, emotional stress, family conflict, fear. But to expect that is to miss the big picture – that isn't why he came – why He came was to go to the cross and sacrifice His life for us so that we can be saved and thus can be

transformed. Our core purpose as a church family is to bring people to know Christ and his saving Gospel message so that we see spiritual transformation of individuals, families, our community, and the world for the glory of Jesus Christ. For that transformation to happen, the first thing you have to do is let Him change you. Then He will change your situation, then He will change your family, then He will change this church, then He will change this community, then He will change this world.

So we should welcome Christ as our King with as much jubilation and celebration as the people of Jerusalem did but we should do so knowing the whole picture of Easter and the kind of king that he came to be – a king of peace and grace. If Jesus is King of our lives we give ourselves to serve Jesus in everything that we do:

- the work that we do should be in service and as a blessing to Christ:
- the worship that we give to him to praise his majesty and grace
- listening to what he is trying to tell us through his word and the world around us
- telling others of the good news of Jesus so that they may come to know him

Everything that we do should be shaped by the notion of Jesus as King; we should be seeking to do God's will rather than our own in everything that we do everyday, not just on Sunday mornings in church. When Jesus is king of our lives, then that will overflow into the world in which we live; we will want to change the world to reflect Jesus' ways and Jesus' priorities; we will want to make the world a better place for everyone, even those who are poor, to make it a fairer place.

I'm going to finish where I started, because "There's just one more thing ...". According to scholars, Jesus wasn't the only notable character in the Easter story making his entrance on Palm Sunday - also entering Jerusalem at Passover was the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Like the Roman governors of Judea before him, Pilate lived in Caesarea by the sea. In other words, Pilate spent most of his time at his beach house. But with crowds of devout Jews flowing into Jerusalem to commemorate their liberation from Egypt at the Passover feast, the Roman Governors would put on a display of force, to deter the Jews from getting too exuberant about the possibility of liberation from Rome. So Pilate's procession would have been the visible manifestation of Imperial Roman power, in a show of strength designed to prevent any outbreaks of insurgency or violent rebellion against Roman rule. In a show of military force, the parade included, "cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armour, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold." Contrast Pilate's entrance with that of Christ – a display of military strength against a peaceful arrival on the back of a donkey. The crowds recognised Jesus as king but didn't see the big picture of the type of King that he had come to be – they expected a king more like Pilate who would bring down their Roman overlords. The challenge for us today is what type of King do we expect Christ to be? Do we see the bits of the picture that suit us and try to fit Christ into that picture or can we see the full picture of Easter and open our hearts to the suffering servant who went to the cross for our salvation and proclaim him as King of our hearts and King of our lives?