

## Never Meet Your Heroes – A Palm Sunday Story

We all knew it was going to happen. You could feel it in the air, just by the stuff he was saying, the way he was acting. We all knew that now was the time when Jesus was going to be king. Of course, when you think back over the years and the sorts of stuff he was teaching, he was the kind of guy who we'd been thinking could be God's promised saviour. He was different, you know, not like those other guys who, sure, were charismatic and always seemed to know the right thing to say to everyone. They had all the teachings down pat, all the cool catchphrases, all the promises. But not Jesus. He was always just slightly unusual, never really fitting into one group.

Like, you would almost think he was a Pharisee, because he was a man of the people, standing up for us everyday Israelites against the unjust authorities, and bringing the sacred into the everyday, saying you could do things in your everyday life that could be godly without having to go to the temple. But then Jesus was always fighting with the Pharisees about purity issues, so he couldn't have really been one of them.

So then maybe you'd think that he was a Sadducee, because they always like to pick a fight with a Pharisee. They also weren't as that super keen on purity, and they took the written word of God very seriously, which Jesus clearly did too. But then the Sadducees were all in Jerusalem, and Jesus clearly wasn't – he was out in the countryside with us – and if recent events are anything to go by, he was not too keen about the way things were being run in the temple. Jesus has also been having plenty of disagreements with the Sadducees as well, so he wouldn't really fit in there either.

Maybe he could have been one of those other groups, the Essenes or whatever. But you don't see much of an Essene. I mean, he was one for a communal sort of lifestyle, with his ministry being supported by a whole bunch of people, and he was all for charity and teaching against the dangers of wealth. But then Jesus kept doing things on the Sabbath, and didn't live separated from the rest of us, so that would rule him out of the Essenes.

He was just him. You could never tell where he was coming from, never put him in a box. He always had such a fascinating way of speaking, all authoritative, such an inspiring teacher. And, truth be told, us commoners loved the way he made the elite quake in their booties, always a quick answer, and they could never lay a finger on him. So he had to be the Messiah. I should know, I've followed a few.

So when we saw him heading to Jerusalem this time, with that look of resolve on his face, we knew this had to be it. And when the donkey turned up, well, that just sealed the deal. As the Scriptures say [Zech 9.9],

הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ יֹשֵׁב עַל־חֲמֹר וְעַל־עֵיר בֶּן־אֲתָנֹת  
צָדִיק וְנֹשֵׁעַ הוּא

Zechariah's king on a donkey, the prophesied ruler who would deliver his people, bringing peace, and ruling from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth. I can't tell you how excited we were. It was almost like we were in one of those heroic stories from the olden days, the ones that grandma and grandad used to tell us about the war, when Simon Maccabee stormed into Jerusalem with his army of faithful Israelites and chucked out the Greeks, reclaiming the temple. So as we marched onwards towards the city – God's city, with God's king – it was like we were the faithful Israelites following a new Simon, taking back the temple for us, for its right purpose, for God.

The laying the cloaks down really was the icing on the cake. Like from back in the time of the kings, and Jesus was like Jehu, the guy Elisha anointed to deal with evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. There was no denying that everything we were doing, everything that Jesus was doing, was saying, "Look, here's the promised deliverer from the forces of evil. Here's the king you've all been waiting for." Not like these puppets on the throne, Edomites masquerading as Jews; not like these pagan governors. After all, what have the Romans ever done for us?

Jesus was our king, an Israelite born and bred, and one of us, too, just a regular guy, not some noble born in a fancy palace in the capital. Everything that Jesus and us were doing, it really was a triumph for all God's people.

But you know what they say: never meet your heroes, because you'll just get disappointed. You see, as we got closer to Jerusalem, things weren't quite working out like we'd thought. It just didn't seem right. There we were, all cheering and praising God, but Jesus got quieter, and at one stage he was actually crying. He should have been all proud and strong, sitting tall and majestic – well, as best you can on a donkey – but he looked full-on depressed. "If only you'd recognised the things that make for peace," he said. "But now, they're hidden from your eyes because you did not recognise the time of your visitation from God." Then he said some awkward things about Jerusalem getting besieged and crushed, and that really killed the vibe.

But can you blame him? Here he is, coming into Jerusalem, very plainly as king, and you know what he got? Nothing. Where was the house of Aaron saying his steadfast love endures forever? Where was all of Israel saying his steadfast love endures forever? This was no Psalm 118. There was just us. Oh, and the Pharisees were there too, making a fuss like the irascible wet blankets they are. But at least they recognised that something was going on. I mean, they were complaining because they knew what it meant and didn't like it, but at least they had some sort of response. For everyone else, it was essentially business as usual.

I mean, just look around and you'll see who rules this place: the Romans, the chief priests and the almighty denarius. Whatever Jesus was trying to do, it was made very clear that the kingdom of God does not mesh with the real world of the here and now. The chief priests are certainly not too keen with the way he's been talking the last couple of days, criticising them and making them look stupid. We all know that you can't just go around, getting under the skin of powerful people. Look at what happened to John the Baptist. The kingdom of God does not mesh with real life.

Think about what he said about peace. The things that make for peace. You ask anyone around and they'll have ideas of what peace means. Peace means no more pirates interrupting the grain trade. Peace means being able to travel from one side of the empire to the other along good, relatively safe roads. Peace means not having the Romans at all. Peace means not having to pay 50% tax on my goods. Peace means not having to worry about making ends meet. Peace means having everything I want, and being able to provide for me and my family.

I'm not saying that these things aren't nice things to want. But it's not the kind of stuff Jesus talks about. Like there was this one time where he healed a woman who had this bleeding problem or something, and he told her, "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace." And again he was at this banquet, and a woman washed his feet with perfume, and he told her, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." This sort

of peace is deeper than any of those things that we'd normally wish for. It's a peace that meant they were free from suffering no matter what it was they had, and free from whatever stigma was attached to them. It meant they were free to worship God without fear, without rejection, without anything stopping them. It was the kind of peace that we were all waiting for, when God's kingdom would come in and we'd enjoy our land the way it was meant to be enjoyed.

See, I reckon that sounds pretty awesome. But it doesn't really seem realistic. Jesus is supposed to be ushering in this brand new age of peace and prosperity, but how? It's not like he's got an army to take on the Romans. That's what Simon Maccabee had, and David had, and even Moses had. He doesn't even have the Jewish leadership on his side. How is he ever going to make any sort of kingdom happen?

Like I said, the kingdom of God and the world don't mesh. Something's got to give. Something's got to change. Really, it's either going to be us or him, and I can tell you that people don't like to change, even if it's for God. At the moment, his opponents can't touch him because they're worried about what we'll do, in case we'd go all torches and pitchforks, and then the Romans would have to be called in. And nobody wants that, what with Pilate in charge. He's like an iron fist inside an iron glove. Plus we're actually only a small number of people here in the capital, especially at Passover, and he's just one guy. But what with the chief priests aggravated and his inner circle starting to grumble, who can say what will happen.

Maybe all those comments Jesus made about him dying are actually going to come true. But I really hope not, because he's a great guy and he's done so many amazing things for so many people. It would be a shame for his ministry to just end like that. So maybe now is the time that Jesus should play by the rules, just this once, to be the king we all want him to be. Otherwise I can't see this turning out well. From this point, unless Jesus starts toeing the line, I really can't see any victory for our king at all.