

## **Luke 19:28-44 – the King Expected**

### **Introduction: Expectations**

Today I'm going to be talking about our expectations – specifically, what we expect from God, who we think God should be, how we think God should act, and how that shapes how we relate to God.

Once upon a time I was offered a job as national director of a Christian charity here in Australia. It was a big deal, and I went to my church leaders at the time and asked his advice on making my decision. Of course, what I wanted him to tell me was that it was a great opportunity doing God's work, and to go for it. But that's not what he told me. He told me to look carefully at the leadership, the work environment, and the expectations they had. He knew a thing or two about this charity, and he thought once I had done that, I would probably decide not to work there. It wasn't the answer I expected, it wasn't the answer I wanted, but it was probably what I needed to hear at the time. I did what he said, and I ended up not taking the job.

In New Testament times, the people of Judea knew from scripture, from prophecies predicting what was to come, that God was going to send them a king. And so they had some expectations of what that king would be like.

### **Jesus: The King Expected From Prophecy**

He would be born of David's line. A prophet would point him out. There would be miracles. So you can imagine that when Jesus of the line of David hits the scene, announced by John the Baptist, doing miracles all over the place, people are pretty excited. This seems to be a real contender for the promised king. So now Jesus is coming to Jerusalem, and how he enters the city is important. It's important because there is a prophecy that talks about how the promised king will enter Jerusalem.

Zechariah 9:9 says pretty clearly, “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” And so when Jesus gets to the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, and he mounts a colt that has never before been ridden, and starts to ride towards the city gates, everyone knows what that means. It is how God's promised king will enter the holy city. The picture is clear.

### **The King People Expected Would Do What They Wanted**

The people were eager for God's king to come, because life for them was hard. They were under the thumb of a foreign government – they had been invaded, conquered, and were treated as second class citizens in their own country. They wanted their freedom back, and so they thought if ever a time was coming for God to send them this promised king, now was the time. They expected this king to come and get rid of the Romans, give them back their freedom, and that under his rule they would become rich and powerful again, just like they had under king David of old. And so people come out in droves to sing and dance and celebrate, and to lay down their cloaks and other things on the donkey's path, to give this expected king a king's welcome.

Only when this expected king gets to the city walls, he stops and weeps, and says something about the city being attacked, besieged, defeated, destroyed, and the people inside are going to be killed.

That's bad news for the people who laid their cloaks in the mud – they thought they were singing and rejoicing at the coming of a great king who would save their city. Instead, he has just foretold that it will be destroyed. Not what people were expecting at all.

### The King Pharisees Expected Would Be Like Them

Now the Pharisees had been watching and listening to Jesus throughout his ministry. He had been saying things and doing things they did not agree with. He had not just been calling himself a king – he had been calling himself God. He had been forgiving people's sins, which only God alone could do. He had been socialising with prostitutes, tax collectors for the Romans, and other sinners. He had disregarded the Sabbath, God's holy day.

This guy couldn't be king – he didn't fit into their picture of what God's coming king would be like. They were the righteous ones, the ones who kept God's laws to a fault, and even came up with new laws for people to follow. They knew God, so surely God's king would be like them, would agree with them. But Jesus wasn't like them, he didn't agree with them. He wasn't the king the Pharisees expected. So they come up to him while he's riding along and say, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

### The King Jesus Is – The Unexpected God

Jesus' response is not an agreement. He says, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Jesus knows what he's doing. He is claiming to be the expected king. And if he really is the expected king that God promised to send, then he needs to ride that colt, and people need to sing and rejoice, because that's how God's king gets welcomed. If his disciples didn't do it, then the rocks themselves would sing, because God's king is entering God's holy city as God promised. And then when he weeps over Jerusalem, he says it's because when God turned up at their city, the people did not recognise him. Jesus calls himself God again.

If it's bad news for the people with their muddy cloaks, it's worse for the Pharisees, because not only are their expectations wrong of what God's king would be like, but their expectations of who God is are also totally wrong. By speaking those words, Jesus is showing not only is he an unexpected king, he is the unexpected God.

Jesus didn't fit their expectations of a king – he wasn't a military ruler coming to oust the Romans. Moreover, he didn't meet their expectations of God - he wasn't a self-righteous legalist who turned his back on lesser people. God didn't just send his people a king – he came to them as their king. And they weren't expecting that. And that wasn't what they wanted. He wasn't like them. But he is God.

### What King/God We Expect

The inevitable question arises, then: Why wouldn't God give them what they wanted? They wanted freedom, they wanted wealth, comfort and security, they wanted God to be glorified like he was in Solomon's time – are they bad things? Does God not want his people to be free and safe, does he not want to be glorified? We have probably all asked a question like that at one time or another. There are times in our own lives when there is something we really want, and we know God has the power to give it, and sometimes we even know that God wants it too, and he tells us to ask for it, and yet we still don't get it.

Let me give you an example. I have a friend who became a Christian as a teenager, but no-one else in her family believes. When she was just out of university, her father died sudden of a heart attack. For her the funeral was agony, because she knew that her father was not a Christian, and she would never see him again in heaven. For all the family this was goodbye – but for her, it was a goodbye that didn't need to be forever. Why did God not answer her prayers for her father? God wanted her father to go to heaven... so why didn't he believe?

Now these are huge questions that will be talked about forever. But let me just raise three brief points for us to think about and reflect on – three points that I have struggled with my whole Christian life, and probably will struggle with till the day I die.

### *- God is Complicated*

The first one is a big one: God is complicated, and we will never fully understand him. In Isaiah 55:8 it says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” That can make you want to give up and say God is a mystery we will never understand. But it doesn't mean we can't ask these questions, or that we won't get answers – it means exploring God's thoughts is never going to end, that we shouldn't be surprised if we cannot fathom the depths of God's mind. Accepting with humility that we can't grasp the ways and thoughts of God gives us a much better footing for thinking about God realistically.

A Christian worker at my university once told me, “Even if the two of us come to a complete agreement about every point of theology and doctrine, we will still be wrong about something. Why? Because we're human, and fallible.” God is God, and we are not.

### *- God is a Person, not a Problem*

Secondly, we have to ask who God really is, what God is really like, and what God wants. And this isn't just a theological puzzle, it's a real question about a real person. We can't just ask, “If I was God, what would I want?” because we're not God, and God is not us. That's like asking, “If I was Ben, what would I want for Christmas?” It's better to ask me what I want, or look up my “What I want for Christmas” blog. (No, I don't have a “What I want for Christmas” blog.)

This is exactly the problem the Pharisees had – they were looking at God as if God was one of them. But God is not a Pharisee – he is his own person, he is God. God wants things to work in a certain way, and so that is how they work. And the only way we are going to learn more about who God is and what he wants is to read the Bible and learn it, and to walk with God in our lives and see it for ourselves.

### *- God's Actions Cost Him*

The third brief thing I want us to realise is quite often we assume that God can just click his fingers and make things happen at no cost to himself, because God is all-powerful. Why do people suffer when God could just click his fingers and end all suffering? But we have to remember that sometimes, when God wants to do something, it does come at a cost to him.

The people of Jerusalem wanted their freedom, they wanted their problems with foreign occupation to be solved, and so they wanted God's promised king to solve those problems for them. But God wanted to solve their problem of sin – he wanted to free them from their slavery to selfishness and doing wrong. He was sending a king to deal with their biggest enemy in God's opinion, not in their opinion. And it cost God his Son. Jesus came as a king, and died like a criminal. And if you say, “Oh, yeah, but Jesus was raised to life three days later, so it's not a big deal,” then you're saying God doesn't have a right to weep and feel pain at watching the people he loves kill the Son he adores. Jesus himself is God, and felt that pain, suffered that loss, died for our sin.

Why would I think that God doesn't have feelings, and wouldn't be hurt by our sin, by his son's death, by me spitting in his face and saying, “I don't agree with you, God,” or, “I don't want to

follow you in this area of life”?

### The King That Expects Service, But Allows Questions

But I have thought these things. I have questioned why God lets things happen that I don't like. I still question it. I still think about God simplistically. I still devalue God's feelings, because he's so high and powerful, I just figure he should deal with it better than me. I still have questions and doubts, and sometimes they are really, really hard to deal with. I don't understand God. But so far, I have kept serving him, kept coming back to him, kept coming back to the fact that he is God, and I am not.

When I was a brand new Christian, soon after my conversion as an 18 year old man, I sat down in the home of one of the elders of my church - his name was Eric Reid - and had a long discussion with him, asking him all sorts of difficult questions about Christianity. He gave me a lot of fine answers, too. But then he said something that sticks with me to this day, “It's fine having all these questions. But if you wait till you have all the answers before you start serving God, you will never do anything for him.”

When Jesus got to the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, he sent two of his disciples to go get a donkey for him, and so they did. They knew what it meant, just like the people of Jerusalem knew. They knew that Jesus claimed to forgive sins, just like the Pharisees knew. They knew Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to die – he had told them three times! And you know what? They didn't agree – Peter rebuked Jesus for saying it, you'll remember – but when Jesus told them to go get the donkey, they did it. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, they still sang praises to God for all the great things that God had done through Jesus. “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” they sang from the Psalms. They didn't understand, or even necessarily accept, everything Jesus said or did, but they knew he was from God and so they obeyed him, and they worshipped him, and they gave him honour and glory.

I think that's a lesson we have to learn, and keep learning – there is nothing wrong with asking questions, there is nothing wrong with questioning God, and it is completely human to misunderstand God and be unable to fathom his ways. God will always do things we don't expect, and sometimes that we don't like. But at the end of the day, Jesus is still God, and we are his people. He wants us to serve him, so we serve – without all the answers.