

April 14, 2019 – Philippians 2:5-11 & Luke 19:28-40

“We the People of the United States of America...” The preamble of the U.S. Constitution is a pretty remarkable statement. Because it was among the first legal documents to recognize that governments exist by the will of the governed. In other words, we the people have a government because we the people choose to have a government.

And while we were among the first to figure that out and state it in our constitution, that's true for pretty much every government. In the long term, every government is a reflection of the people being governed.

Sure, you'll occasionally have a leader who takes advantage of a situation and swings the pendulum too far in one direction or another. But eventually, it all evens out. And the government ends up right back where the people expect the government to be.

Why am I giving you a civics lesson at the beginning of a sermon? Well, this idea that the government is a reflection of the people was something that was very, very true in ancient Israel. The Israelite kings were always a reflection of the Israelites themselves.

Take their first king, for example. The Israelites thought that a king should be tall and strong and handsome. That he should be a man of self-confidence and swagger who would avenge the Israelites against the Philistines.

So they got King Saul. Who certainly had all of those characteristics. But also, as it turned out, had zero respect for the Lord or his prophets. And a stubborn streak a mile wide. And who, after a really wonderful start to his reign, eventually turned away from the Lord. And so the Lord turned away from him.

The Israelites got exactly what they wanted. Someone who looked the part of a king. But had the heart full of a selfishness, anger, and evil.

And that would be a theme throughout the history of Israel and Judah. King after king who looked good. Who sounded good. Who gave them wealth and victory and prestige among the nations.

But who had hearts turned away from the Lord. Hearts that chased after idols or women or power. Hearts that had no place for God or his Word.

Even David, a man chosen by God himself to be king, a man after God's own heart, had his moments. His adultery. His murder. His failures as a father. Like the other kings of Israel, David was a sinner. With an unclean heart.

The kings of Israel and Judah were all reflections of their people. Sinners, with hearts turned away from the Lord. They looked the part on the outside. But on the inside, they were selfish, self-righteous, and stubbornly unrepentant.

All the way until the last king of Israel: King Jesus. Because that's exactly what Luke wants us to recognize and remember from this story of Palm Sunday. King Jesus. The last king of Israel. Everything about his description of the Triumphal Entry points to Jesus as king.

It all begins on “the mount called Olivet.” The Mount of Olives, in other words. Did you know that all four Gospels talk about Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives? Teaching from the Mount of Olives. There's a reason for that.

Ezekiel 11 prophecies that the glory of the Lord will dwell on the Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14 says that the Mount of Olives is where the Messiah will be revealed. That the feet of the Lord shall stand upon the Mount of Olives. And that from the Mount of Olives the king of Israel will reign over all the earth. If you're looking for the last king of Israel, the mount called Olivet is where you expect to find him.

From the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two disciples into the village ahead of them to find a young colt. And we know from other Gospels that this is the colt of a donkey. Here as well, we have the words of the prophet Zechariah. Promising to Jerusalem that your king will come to you humble and mounted on a colt, on a foal of a donkey.

But this isn't just any colt. No, this is a colt on which no one has ever sat. Which is an interesting thing to note. Something that doesn't really seem all that significant to us. But it probably was to Luke's original audience.

You see, the property of the king was to be consecrated and set aside for the king's use only. There was actually a law written at the time of Jesus that said, "None may ride on a king's horse and none may sit on his throne and none may use his scepter."

These were objects dedicated to the king's use. And so also this colt that the disciple bring to Jesus is dedicated to the king. None has ever ridden on it. It is for Jesus alone.

In fact, to drive the point home, Jesus doesn't simply climb onto this colt by himself. No, Luke says that the disciples set him on it. As a king would be set on his horse or into his chariot.

And then they proceed into Jerusalem, spreading their cloaks and palm branches in front of him as they once had for the kings of old. Rejoicing and praising God. *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

Blessed is this king from the line of David! Blessed is this king who comes with the power of God at his fingertips! Hosannah! Save us, Lord! Hosanna! Save us, King Jesus! Jesus' disciples have just proclaimed him to be their new king. The crowds have just proclaimed him to be their new king. All of Jerusalem has just proclaimed him to be their new king.

Everyone except the Pharisees. Who refuse to accept Jesus as their king. Who tell him to rebuke his disciples. Rebuke the crowds. But how can he rebuke them? They're telling the truth. He is their king.

And yet, he's not the king they think he is. Because he is not in any way a reflection of his people. He is not selfish, self-righteous, or stubbornly unrepentant. He is not sinful at all. And while they may accept him for an hour or a day or five days, in the end, they will reject him.

His priorities were not their priorities. His purposes were not their purposes. They might have claimed that they wanted the return of King David's throne. But what they really wanted, still, was the return of King Saul's throne.

Someone tall and strong and handsome. A man of self-confidence and swagger who would avenge the Jews against the Romans. A man unencumbered by things like devotion to the Lord and His Word. They were ruled by their sinful hearts. And they wanted a king ruled by a sinful heart.

And so they took the last king of Israel and nailed him to a cross. They silenced the Word made flesh until the very stones cried out and the earth shook at his death. They killed the Lord of life and, ironically, laid him in a tomb that no one had ever laid in. Like the colt Jesus rode in on, it was a tomb dedicated to the king.

Dedicated to the last king of Israel. The last king not because he died with no one to replace him. But the last king because he would rise from the dead and live forevermore.

The last king because he was unlike any king Israel ever had before. Because he made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant. Because he humbled himself and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Because he showed us that a man with God's own heart will lay down his life to forgive even those who nail him to a cross. That he will forgive even us, with hearts that are selfish, self-righteous, and stubbornly unrepentant. That he will pour out his life as a ransom for many, whether they cry out, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!*" or they cry out, "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" For he came to save sinners. Of whom I am the worst.

For all this, this last king of Israel has been exalted and bestowed the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus our knee should bow and our tongue confess that he is Lord. He is king. He is our king.

Not because he reflects our sin. But because, through his death and resurrection, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we reflect his righteousness. He died that we may live. To glory of God the Father. Amen.