

“WHAT KIND OF KING?”

Luke 19:28-44

The crowd is ecstatic. They have longed for this moment for ages. At last, their leader is to be recognised as King. What they see as the laxity of their leaders and the influence of foreign ways is to be dealt with. To start with, their leader has tried to play down the news that he is a King – after all, it wasn't something that was really public knowledge – but he almost grudgingly accepts their acclaim and congratulation. There have been prophecies and pronouncements about what he will do and how his reign will bring justice and restoration within Israel, and it seems as if this is finally the time for it to happen.

Once the news catches on, the people hurry and lay their cloaks on the ground for him to pass over. As he moves among them, passing over the cloaks on the bare steps, they shout their words of greeting, acclaim him as King, blow their trumpets and cheer him to the echo. Things will be different now. The corrupt and evil leaders of the regime will be dealt with and all will be well. There's a sense of hope, an optimism, a bright new dawn on the horizon.

So this new King prepares to go and sort things out in the city. He wants to take action, to ensure that his reign begins in the right way. And he leaps into his chariot to ride to Jezreel. He's quite a charioteer, renowned for it. Jehoram, son of Jezebel, and Ahaziah are resting in the city, recovering from wounds they've received in battle. As they look out from the city they see a cloud of dust on the horizon – it's clearly the approach of a small band of soldiers. A messenger is sent out to meet them and as he gets closer he cries out, *“Do you come in peace?”* The only reply he gets from the charging charioteer is *“Fall in behind me.”* This man means business, it seems, and the messenger falls in behind him.

Jehoram, son of Jezebel, and Ahaziah realise that the messenger isn't going to return to them, so they send out another. *“Do you come in peace?”* the second one asks the new King. *“This isn't about peace,”* is the reply. *“Fall in behind me.”* Jehoram, son of Jezebel, and Ahaziah see that they've lost another messenger to the enemy, and as the soldiers come closer to the walls of Jezreel, the watchman recognises the driving style of the King. *“He's driving like a madman,”* he shouts. *“It must be Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi!”*

Jehoram, son of Jezebel, hitches up his own chariot and rides out to meet Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi. *“Have you come in peace, Jehu?”* he asks. *“No!”* is the reply. *“This is war, and it always will be until the idolatry and witchcraft that your mother has introduced are finally done away with.”* With that, Jehoram, son of Jezebel, turns tail with a shout of *“Treachery!”* But before he can regain the safety of Jezreel, he slumps forward in his chariot with an arrow between the shoulder blades – dead.

Jehu rides on into the city and begins his campaign of cleansing – first Jezebel is killed as her eunuchs throw her from an upstairs window to be eaten by the dogs in the street below. Then the seventy sons of Ahab are slaughtered, their bodies piled up and their heads exhibited in baskets at the gate of the city. The priests of Baal, ordained by Jezebel to oversee the worship of pagan deities, are mown down and destroyed. It seems that the saviour has arrived. Things are going to be different. God is moving back to centre stage. *“So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel. However he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit – the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.”* (2 Kings 10:28) There was a brief golden age in Israel, but it wasn't long before things returned to normal – widespread idolatry, civil unrest, immorality and injustice, punishment and retribution. You can read all about it in 2 Kings 9,10.

Move forward in history about 850 years. The crowd is ecstatic. They have longed for this moment for ages. At last, their leader is to be recognised as King. What they see as the laxity of their leaders and the influence of foreign ways is to be dealt with. To start with, their leader has tried to play down the news that he is a King – after all, it wasn't something that was really public knowledge – but he almost grudgingly accepts their acclaim and congratulation. There have been prophecies and pronouncements about what he will do and how his reign will bring justice and restoration within Israel, and it seems as if this is finally the time for it to happen.

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So this new King prepares to go and sort things out in the city. He makes his way towards the Temple area and the market stalls that have sprung up in the outer courts – money changers, stalls selling animals and birds for sacrifice, religious knick-knacks and all kinds of other stuff: traders who are profiting from the pious poor. He strides in and turns over their tables, roundly condemns those who are desecrating the house of prayer.

And as he does so, you can imagine the Roman officers and the Jewish leaders each saying in their anxious Aramaic and Latin, “This must be war. Is this an uprising?” They want to do away with him, but the people hang on his every word. And they remember that this is the man who has just ridden in to the city on a donkey, the sign of peace. And anyone who was close enough to hear his sobs as he paused

outside the city would have heard Jesus, son of Mary, son of God, crying out for peace (*Luke 19:42*). This was no warlord, no pretender to the throne. This was the Prince of Peace.

His campaign of peace and righteousness begins with the cleansing of the Temple. He strikes at the roots of injustice and apostasy, and then leaves to continue teaching his disciples and questioning his critics. And as he keeps the Feast with his friends, observing the rituals of the Passover, he finds his way to an upper room a few days later to recline and share the bread and wine of remembrance with them. And at the heart of that deeply sacred meal, he is the one who calls “Treachery!” *“The hand of the one who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.”* (*Luke 22:21*)

And within a few short hours of that meal, Jesus, son of Mary, son of God, was nailed to a wooden cross, his back raw from beating, his face dripping with sweat and blood. The king had been crucified. It was all over. The gentle teacher who seemed only to want peace had been brutally liquidated. Those who had accompanied him into the city with such high hopes now found that they were left with no dreams, no bright future to share. The optimism they had shared was all gone, replaced by despair. The old order would still hold sway. Injustice, unrighteousness, inequality, idolatry – it would all go on as before. Or so it seemed.

But a couple of days later, the tomb of Jesus, son of Mary, son of God, was blown open and the King was alive again, walking around, teaching encouraging, motivating, restoring hope and faith. And as the tomb was found to be empty, so their hopes were alive again. There was to be no war, and the promise of peace was once again something to hang on to. He had been *“obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”* Jesus, son of Mary, son of God was now the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords.

Jehu’s disobedience had led to the same cycle of idolatry and violence and instability and war that had dogged humanity throughout the centuries. Jesus’ obedience broke that cycle once and for all as he brought the promise of an eternity reconciled to God, a kingdom of justice, righteousness and worship. Jehu died as his kingdom began to shrink and he became little more than a footnote in the broad sweep of world history. Jesus died and his kingdom has been growing ever since. One day *“every knee will bow at the sound of his name ... and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”* That’s something well worth looking forward to – and he’s a king well worth taking seriously.