

## Jesus Our King

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Rich Nathan  
March 24 & 25, 2018  
The Real Jesus  
Matthew 21:1-11

How many of you like mysteries – maybe the old Sherlock Holmes stories or the TV version of Sherlock?

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Picture of Sherlock

Or the Maltese Falcon with Humphrey Bogart

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Picture of Maltese Falcon

Or Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*

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Picture

I like some of the PBS Mysteries. I got into watching "Grantchester" because he's a mystery-solving pastor.

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Picture

But maybe your taste runs to "Luther"

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Picture

Mystery is one of those words that Christians must become comfortable with. In fact, to be a Christian is to embrace mystery. Here is what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:16,

SLIDE 1 Timothy 3:16

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

Mystery – that word appears a number of times in the New Testament and it refers to something that we human beings could never figure out on our own, something that God had to reveal to us.

One of my favorite hymns is one by Charles Wesley called

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And Can It Be That I Should Gain?

It goes this way:

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*And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain –  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*'Tis mystery all th' Immortal dies:  
Who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the firstborn seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds inquire no more.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;  
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

Died he for me who caused his pain - for me, Him to death pursued?

Even the angels can't fathom on their own the depths of God's being, or God's plan. Think about Jesus Christ whose coming to Jerusalem this Palm Sunday we are celebrating. One theologian said,

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*We may say of Christ that he is finite and infinite; that he is ignorant and omniscient; that he is less than God and equal with God; that he existed from eternity and that he was born in time; that he created all things and that he was a man of sorrows.*

One of the great historians of the church, Philip Schaff, said,

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*The Incarnation or the union of the infinite divinity and finite humanity in one person is, indeed, the mystery of mysteries. ~Philip Schaff*

Again, to be a Christian is to become comfortable with mystery. When you read the gospels, the biographical accounts of Jesus, what do we find out about Jesus? We find out that he was David's son, yet he is David's Lord. That he was chosen of God and elect, yet despised by men. Christ was born King of the Jews, yet he was rejected by the Jews. He was the chief cornerstone, yet he was a rock of offense. He was priceless, yet sold for 30 pieces of silver. He was wounded and pierced, yet not a bone of his was broken. He died, and yet he lives forever!

During this discipleship campaign, we've been looking at the Real Jesus in a multi-faceted way. Jesus is our teacher, but he's more than that. He's also our healer. But he's more than that. He's also a social revolutionary and a suffering servant. Today, we're going to look at another role that the Real Jesus assumes. We're going to consider Jesus as our mysterious King. Let's pray.

Let me give you some background to the text. This is the last week of Jesus' life. A week that in Christian tradition is called Holy Week.

- On Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem. That's what we read in this text.
- On Monday, he curses the fig tree and cleanses the temple of its moneychangers.
- On Tuesday, Jesus teaches the crowds in the temple while continuing to debate with religious leaders.
- On Wednesday, he is anointed by Mary of Bethany at Simon the leper's home.
- On Thursday evening, Jesus hosts the Last Supper. He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane and is arrested and taken before the Sanhedrin.
- On Friday morning, Jesus is tried before Pontius Pilate. Then he is crucified on the day we call Good Friday.
- On Saturday, his body remains in the grave.
- On Sunday morning, Jesus is raised from the dead to new life.

That's the chronology of Holy Week. Fully one-third of the gospel stories – 29 out of 89 chapters – took place in a one week timeframe. Let's read the text:

Slide Matthew 21:1-3

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If

anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

Bethphage is about a mile east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. So the Mount of Olives is at about 2,700 feet. Jesus would have come down from the Mount of Olives into the valley of Kidron and up a winding road to Jerusalem which is at about 2,600 feet, crowds lining the road.

I want you to see this statement in verse 3.

Slide Matthew 21:3

<sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

If you have your Bible open, I’d like you to circle the phrase “The Lord needs them”.

Here, we catch a glimpse of the mystery of Jesus as our King because this story tells us about

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The mystery of our King’s self-limitation

Kings in our world do not limit themselves and they do not limit their appetites.  
Vladimir Putin,

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Picture of Putin

who has been in the news a great deal in recent months, may be the world’s wealthiest man. His son-in-law acquired billions of dollars of shares in a Russian petrochemical company after marrying into the family. Putin is said to have access to 46 different jets and planes. He’s got an enormous estate filled with rare works of art. He’s said to have billions and billions of dollars squirreled away in various secret accounts around the world. No one knows exactly how wealthy Putin is because dictators never disclose their finances.

So the 31-year old Saudi prince who met with the President last week, Mohammad bin Salman,

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Picture of prince

is extraordinarily wealthy. No one knows exactly how wealthy he is. His father, King Salman, is reported to have taken 506 tons of luggage on a recent trip to Asia, including two limousines and two elevators as well as an entourage of 1,500 people with him. Some of you may complain about how much your wife packs for a trip. I know I've complained over the years. Marlene always says that she likes to have "options". She's never taken 506 tons of luggage with us so I guess I need to stop complaining!

Kings never restrict their indulgences or appetites – not only in terms of how much they believe they're entitled to, but even their approach to people. As the #MeToo movement has underlined over and over again, powerful men believe that they are entitled to grope or grab any woman that they choose. Jesus, in contrast, always treated women with incredible respect and value. Women never met a man like Jesus. That's why so many women became followers of the real king.

Consider how different the Real Jesus our King is from all the other kings in terms of his self-limitation. Jesus borrows a colt and a young donkey. What a strange thing. What a mystery. The God who created everything reveals himself in Jesus our King having absolutely nothing of his own. Doesn't it strike you as strange that in the gospels, Jesus is constantly borrowing something? When Jesus performs his miracle of multiplying food, when he multiplies five loaves of bread and two fish, and feeds a crowd of 5,000, the gospels say that the five loaves and the two fish weren't even his. He got them from a little boy. And before that, he borrowed a boat to speak in. Five days after he borrowed this donkey, his dead body would be placed in a borrowed grave.

The Creator and owner of everything possesses nothing and borrows everything. I don't think you can move very far in your relationship with the Real Jesus unless you lay hold of this great mystery of his self-limitation in the world. Here's a question: how does God do whatever God does in the world? If God wants to heal someone or feed someone or save someone, how does God normally work in the world? The normal way that God works in the world to accomplish his will is by partnering with us human beings.

I think to myself, it would be so much easier if God just did what he wanted to do apart from us, without us, away from us. And yet, he chooses to limit himself by partnering with us in the world. This is the struggle that so many of us have regarding Christian faith. We look at the world and we say, "Why doesn't God do something regarding global hunger or gun violence or the murder rates in our city?" The mystery of Jesus' Kingship during this age is that he chooses to partner together with this church in transforming the world. That's why here at Vineyard Columbus our mission statement is this:

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We seek to develop a community of disciples who experience God, love one another and partner with Christ to heal the world.

So, friends, when you look out at the Columbus community and you think to yourself why doesn't God do anything about so many kids in Columbus who end up going astray?

So many end up dropping out of high school or using drugs or barely graduating high school, not going to college. Why doesn't God do anything about so many kids ending up in jail? You know what the Lord says. "People, my church, why don't you do something to come alongside kids in your own city?" Vineyard Columbus takes this partnering with Jesus really seriously. We 180 mentors mentoring kids in Columbus Public Schools.

Two weeks from now on April 7, there is an all hands on deck service project in Columbus Public Schools that we would like to have at least 1,000 Vineyard Columbus attendees participate in. Each of our campuses is going to be serving at different schools around our community. But I'm asking you as pastor of Vineyard Columbus to take a few hours on April 7 from 10:00am to about 1:00 in the afternoon to serve in an area school. You can easily sign up today in the lobby or go online.

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[Vineyardcolumbus.org/therealjesus/service](http://Vineyardcolumbus.org/therealjesus/service)

The Real Jesus works in the world by partnering together with his people. Let's read on.

Slide Matthew 21:4-8

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> "Say to Daughter Zion,  
'See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

What we see in this text is

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The mystery of our King's hiddenness

Jesus purposefully arranges the details as he's entering into Jerusalem to fulfill Old Testament prophecies, specifically those about the Messiah in the prophet Zechariah. Nowhere else in the gospels does Jesus ever ride on an animal. Whenever we see Jesus traveling, he's always walking. The city's population would have swelled to a few

hundred thousand. On the Sunday before the Passover, the crowd hears that Jesus whom they believed to be the Messiah is riding in to Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, fulfilling that old prophecy from Zechariah written 500 years before which foretold this famous ride.

So the crowd rushes out. They take palm branches and begin to wave them. Now this is a hugely important and symbolic action, the waving of palm branches. We don't understand the waving of palm branches today. On Palm Sunday, we give palm branches out to kids to swing around. And all of us say to ourselves, "Isn't that cute? The waving of those palm branches probably symbolizes the coming of spring because the branches are green." Waving them in Jesus' day was a revolutionary act! It would be like waving a Palestinian flag in Tel Aviv or in Jerusalem today.

A couple of centuries before Jesus, when the Jewish General Judah Maccabee defeated the Greek invaders of Israel and cleansed the temple from all the Greek idols that had been erected there, his followers waved palm branches in this gigantic act of revolution. What they are saying by the waving of palm branches is that Jesus is King, not Caesar. They throw their cloaks on the ground because that's what people did in the Old Testament to herald the coming of a King. Jesus is getting a royal welcome. Even though the King's coming was a very public thing, there was a mystery in the Real Jesus' coming. There's an ambiguity in it. Let's read:

Slide Matthew 21:5

<sup>5</sup> "Say to Daughter Zion,  
'See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The word gentle is actually a bad translation. A much better translation would be humble or meek. Zechariah's prophecy uses the Hebrew word:

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Ani = afflicted or oppressed

The word "ani" means afflicted or oppressed. But it often refers to the poor, a person who is reduced to begging. Jesus comes to Jerusalem as a King, but as an afflicted King. He's a King, but he still identifies with people's suffering and pain. He comes as a humble King, a beggar King.

You know, I think about how different the coming of the Real Jesus was from all the advertising and hype machines today. The problem people had in the first century with the Real Jesus is he never shouted from the housetops "I am the Messiah!" People in his day kept saying, "If you are the Christ, show yourself more self-evidently. Give us a

sign!” Instead he offers a cryptic response to their demand for a sign. The only sign you’re going to get is the sign of Jonah.

Slide Matthew 12:40

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

What does that mean, Jesus?

It is this hiddenness that always presents a challenge for our faith. The Kingdom of God is described by Jesus as being like a mustard seed. We don’t want it to be a mustard seed, we want it to be a redwood tree! Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like leaven hidden in a loaf of bread. We don’t want leaven in a small loaf of bread, we want a Wonder Bread factory. Make it really obvious that you exist, God. Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field. We don’t want the treasure hidden in a field. We want the treasure to be like the crown jewels – on display all the time.

Jesus doesn’t act like any King or any powerful person we know. He works more quietly. He works more ambiguously. Everything that God does in this world has to be apprehended by faith.

Someone recently wrote me a great question after my message on Jesus our Healer. I talked about a nurse who was healed of bone cancer and he very legitimately wrote and said, “How do you know if she had cancer at all?” And the truth is that I don’t. Doctors often make the wrong diagnosis. Lots of cancers go into spontaneous remission. This is the challenge of faith. There still may be other explanations. Short of growing a limb on an amputee in front of your eyes, every miracle can always be doubted when viewed from a different angle. Until we see the Lord in his second coming, we walk by faith and not by sight.

There’s a mystery about our King’s self-limitation. There’s a mystery regarding our King’s hiddenness. And there’s

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The mystery of our King’s answers to our prayers

Here’s what we read in Matthew:

Slide Matthew 21:9

<sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

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

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”



The word “Hosanna” is a Hebrew word. It’s a shout of distress or a cry for help. It literally means “Help!”

What do you think the people were expecting when they shouted “hosanna, save us, Lord?” They call Jesus the Son of David – it couldn’t be more explicit. For 500 years, the Jews were waiting and praying for a king like King David to arrive and save them from oppression. They were expecting Jesus to lead a revolt against the Romans. They were expecting something like what their ancestor Judah Maccabee did two centuries before when he overthrew the Greeks, and set up a Jewish run state in the Promised Land. Save us, Jesus. Fulfill our national hopes. Restore the nation of Israel to its former glory.

And what is it that they got? A few days after Palm Sunday, this Messianic King was arrested. He was humiliated. He was beaten by the Romans. This Jesus, who the crowds called the Son of David, their last best hope, Rome decided to make example of this Jesus, and crushed him under their feet.

And in a mark of stunning irony, whereas just a few days earlier, people were taking off their robes and spreading them on the ground in front of Jesus, hailing him as King, in the early hours on Friday, Jesus is stripped of the robe that the Romans put on him when they mocked him as king. Instead of a crown of gold, he wears a crown of thorns. Then Jesus is further humiliated by being stripped naked and crucified.

Have you ever prayed and prayed and prayed for something and gotten exactly the opposite of what you prayed for? Have you ever thought to yourself, “What’s the point of praying when instead of my dreams being realized, what I am experiencing is my worst nightmare. Everything that I feared has come upon me.”

I think what you see in this story is the mismatch of our expectations and God’s answers. The mismatch of what we pray for and what God actually delivers. Because I see here a paradigm, a model, for much of our life as followers of Christ. We pray, “Save us, Lord. Do this particular thing – find us a spouse; heal a loved one’s condition; grant us a job; get us into this graduate school.” And the absolute opposite happens – our loved one gets sicker; we remain single; we get a rejection letter in the mail.

But you see, that’s not the end of the story. Because God always hears our prayers and he answers this Palm Sunday prayer of these Passover pilgrims, “save us” in a way that went so far beyond what the people knew or understood. God had something so much better in mind, so much greater than saving the little first century country of Judea from its particular national enemy. God intended that this Messianic King save the entire world and rescue all of humanity from what ultimately oppresses us. And what ultimately oppresses us is not a horrible government. What ultimately oppresses us is

sin – our own sin; the sins of other people towards us. And on Good Friday the Real Jesus died to save us from the oppression of sin.

It is because of sin that we experience alienation from God. It is because of sin that we experience broken relationships. It is because of sin that we find ourselves addicted and in bondage to powers and forces too great for us. It is because of sin that we find ourselves addicted to alcohol and drugs and broken sexual practices; addicted to food, and work. Sin keeps us from being able to express love to each other. Sin breaks us down psychologically. Sin breaks down our families. Sin breaks down our emotional life. Sin keeps us from being able to forgive other people. Sin keeps us from being willing to ask for forgiveness from God.

God sent Jesus into the world to answer the prayer, “Save us.” But God answered the prayer in a way that was so much better than the people ever imagined.

You know, the Bible says in Ephesians 3:20-21 – listen to these words:

Ephesians 3:20-21

20 [God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Friend, are you in a situation now where you’ve been praying and praying and you feel like you are getting exactly the opposite of what you sought God for? I would like you to consider today that God may be wanting to grant you something that is immeasurably better than anything you could ask for or can imagine. The people who are crying out, “Save us,” couldn’t imagine that this Jesus truly was going to save them in a way that went so far beyond what they were seeking.

I’d like you to hide this truth in your hearts, Jesus our King hears our prayers and he has something in store for us that is so much better than what we presently know or can imagine! Maybe just maybe – if we knew everything Jesus knows about the past and the present and the future – we would want him to answer our prayers exactly the way he did.

There’s a mystery of King’s self-limitation. There’s a mystery of our King’s hiddenness. There’s a mystery of our King’s answers to our prayers. And finally, there is

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The mystery of our King’s suffering

Kings don’t suffer. They have Secret Service agents to take bullets for them. They have press people to handle difficult questions from the media. They have schedulers and drivers and cooks and butlers and tailors and servants who take care of every little detail

of life. They don't mess around with suffering. They have people who suffer for them. They send young men and young women off to war while they remain safely home.

Here's the difference with our King. Our King is sovereign over suffering and yet – this distinguishes Christian faith from every other major religion – our King made himself vulnerable and subject to suffering. The main reason why you can trust Jesus your King during times of pain and suffering is because he has firsthand experience of suffering.

Tim Keller wrote this:

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“Yes, he is the Lord of history, but he is also the vulnerable one who entered that history and became subject to its darkest forces. Yes, God often seems to be absent, but Jesus himself experienced the searing pain of that absence when he cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Yes, Jesus is a King, but he's a King who came to earth and went not to a throne but a cross. Yes, God is glorious but there is no greater glory than this – he laid his glory and power aside and became weak and mortal.”

Virtually every kind of evil was thrown at Jesus our King. He was abandoned and left utterly alone. He was betrayed by someone he completely trusted to protect him, to watch his back. Instead he was stabbed in the back. He was denied by friends. He was tried unjustly. People spit in the face of Jesus our King. He was beaten. He was tortured. Jesus our King was stripped naked and nailed to a cross, a victim of injustice. Every kind of evil caused the cross – cowardice, lies, injustice, violence, nationalism, racism, Satan himself – yet Jesus our King bore all of that to save you and me.

I want to close today by reading you a poem by Sylvia Dunstan written in 1991 titled “Christus Paradox”

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You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd.  
You, Lord, are both prince and slave.  
You, peacemaker and swordbringer  
Of the way you took and gave.  
You the everlasting instant;  
You, whom we both scorn and crave.

Clothed in light upon the mountain,  
Stripped of might upon the cross,  
Shining in eternal glory,  
Beggar'd by a soldier's toss,  
You, the everlasting instant;  
You, who are both gift and cost.

You, who walk each day beside us,  
Sit in power at God's side.  
You, who preach a way that's narrow,  
Have a love that reaches wide.  
You, the everlasting instant;  
You, who are our pilgrim guide.

Worthy is our earthly Jesus!  
Worthy is our cosmic Christ!  
Worthy your defeat and vict'ry.  
Worthy still your peace and strife.  
You, the everlasting instant;  
You, who are our death and life.  
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.  
You, who are our death and our life.

## **Jesus Our King**

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**Rich Nathan**

**March 24 & 25, 2018**

**The Real Jesus**

**Matthew 21:1-11**

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- IV. The mystery of our King's suffering