

The Preeminent King — Colossians 1:15-20  
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**Palm Sunday's Misguided *Chutzpah***

*Chutzpah*. That's what the crowd had on March 29, AD 33.<sup>1</sup> It was rather brazen of them to so boldly and prominently usher Jesus into the City of David as the promised heir to David's throne. It was quite the political statement to declare, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). This was a praiseworthy moment as God's Anointed One was entering the Holy City in triumph to establish his kingdom. And all of this taking place under the nose not only of the powerful Jewish Sanhedrin but also the world-dominating Romans.

So, yeah, the crowd had some *chutzpah*, some profound confidence that Jesus of Nazareth—the one born in Bethlehem according to the prophecies, the one who was a prophet like Moses, the one descended from David—that this Jesus was God's Promised One who would usher in the Jubilee Isaiah had foretold. Here he was, the long-anticipated preeminent King who was coming to take his rightful throne. The crowd got Jesus' identity and status *right* ... sort of.

Every year on Palm Sunday, I feel this tension. I want to grab a palm branch with the kids and boldly declare the praise of King Jesus. But then I also want to just yell at the Gospels as I read the "Triumphal Entry" narratives, kind of like how you yell at the TV. "No! No! No! You're getting it wrong! Don't you see!? He *is* the King, but *not* in that way! Didn't you also read that Isaiah said he would be a suffering servant??" As we relive or reenact, as it were, this Holy Week, my heart wants to jump to the unfettered praise of Resurrection Sunday, but my head knows that Jesus must walk the Calvary Road first, that this entrance into Jerusalem will result in a very different kind of exaltation and triumph than the crowd expected.

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Final Days of Jesus* by Andreas Kostenberger and Justin Taylor for an explanation of this dating.

And so this morning, we're going to look at the passage that was read, which is perhaps one of the clearest articulations of the right identity and status that the Palm Sunday crowd tapped into, though their understanding of it was a bit premature or misguided. What Paul captures here, in what is understood to be an early hymn of the Church, is that Jesus is indeed *the* preeminent King who reigns over everyone and all things. He is the only king who truly is worthy of all adoration, homage, and praise. He *is* the King to whom we must humbly and joyfully submit. But he isn't just some royal figurehead; as the preeminent King, he is so much more.

### **He is the Revealer (v.15)**

At the beginning of our paragraph we see that Jesus is the Revealer. Verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." The beloved Son of God—who has a kingdom where he ushers in the saints through their redemption, the forgiveness of sins (v.13-14)—this beloved Son *is* the image, the icon of God. This Son is the visible revelation of the invisible God. Or as Hebrews puts it, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). We can know who God is and all that he accomplishes for us *because* Jesus has made him known. Jesus has revealed God and his saving purposes.

And Jesus reveals God not like a magician who reveals what's behind door number two or like a news anchor who makes known the news. Jesus reveals God as one who is true God of true God. He reveals that God is sovereign as Jesus himself is sovereign. When Paul says that Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation," he by no means intends to communicate that Jesus was the first thing God created. Rather, he means that Jesus holds the prime position of status and honor; no one else can lay claim to the favored place at the Father's right hand.

But in what way does Jesus reveal or “image forth” the invisible God? Jesus “images” God in the way anticipated by the first human image of God, namely Adam. Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” So how does humanity—how did Adam—image God? “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion ...” (Genesis 1:28). That’s what God commissioned Adam to do with the help of his bride. Adam was to image God, revealing him in and to the world, by exercising dominion, displaying God’s sovereign reign. All creation was to see Adam and Eve as a king and queen and say, “Whoa! That is what God is like. What a mighty, benevolent Sovereign!”

And where Adam failed to image God, being dominated rather than exercising dominion, the Second Adam succeeds. We see Jesus and say, “Yes! *That* is a king. *That* is our God. I didn’t know what the invisible God was like, but now I see clearly! I see the kindness, the mercy, the justice, the righteousness, the humility, the power of my God!”

### **He is the Creator (v.16)**

And Jesus holds such a rightful place of authority and esteem over all because he is the Creator. He reveals God’s glorious reign *because* “by him all things were created ... all things were created through him and for him” (v.16). It makes sense that Jesus would be King over that which was created by him and through him and for him. If you compose a song or write a story, you are sovereign over that creative work. You are in a position of supreme authority over how that song will go—what instruments will play when, which section will carry the harmony, the tempo. You exercise perfect dominion over the story—what the characters will be like, how the plot will go, the ploys of the villain. Being the creator entails an implicit authority.

So of course Jesus is the preeminent King over creation *because he created it*. He is the agent, means, and purpose of creation. He is the beginning, middle, and end of it all. One of the things the Palm Sunday crowd did is that they sold Jesus' kingship short. They were just throwing a ticker tape parade for the new hometown hero. They thought they had their new national executive. They missed that this one riding on a donkey was the Eternal Word that brought his humble steed into existence. They didn't think that he was king *enough*; his kingdom was too small in their conception.

What about you? Do you minimize the sovereign authority of King Jesus? "Sure, he can save me and address my 'spiritual life,' but no way is he going to tell me how to live. No way is he or his Word going to speak into what I should or should not love, where I spend my time, or what I use my money for." It is so easy to relegate Jesus' sovereignty to being over just "spiritual" things or over global or cosmic things, but to live with *all things* in submission to Jesus is a whole other ball game.

Not so with the Apostle. He can't seem to emphasize the all-encompassing nature of Christ's kingdom *enough*. "By him *all things* were created, in heaven *and* on earth, visible *and* invisible, whether thrones *or* dominions *or* rulers *or* authorities—*all things* were created through him and for him" (v.16). It does not matter who or what it is; Jesus made it and reigns over it.

This week I was talking with friends about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>2</sup>—an assessment that categorizes your personality along four continuums. I used to hate this kind of stuff, feeling like it was just a way to put a label on me or put my personality in a nice little box. But now I kind of geek out over it from time to time. If you know about Myers-Briggs, the fourth continuum looks at how you like things structured—are you more of a "Type A" or "fly by the seat of your pants"? Well, I'm in the former category, a pretty high "J." That means I'm pretty

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<sup>2</sup> See [myersbriggs.org](http://myersbriggs.org) for a fuller description.

strongly inclined towards having all my “I’s” dotted and “T’s” crossed. I like routine and structure and having things all orderly.

Or to put it more bluntly, I like being in control. However, Colossians 1:16 does not say, “By *Brett* all things were created ... all things were created through *Brett* and for *Brett*.” So I’ve got a little problem. I like being sovereign, but ultimately I’m not. And so I’ve got this issue where this all-surpassing lordship of the preeminent King calls for me to submit my wants and desires and plans, and in my sinful flesh that is the last thing I want to do. Jesus is Lord over all creation, not just what I feel like relinquishing. And he demands that all be brought into submission to him. Whatever the personality, whatever the idols of the heart, whatever areas where you clamor to maintain independent sovereignty—all of it will be submitted to the Lord Jesus. It will be submitted one way or another, whether in joy or judgment.

### **He is the Sustainer (v.17)**

Yet we are not left without help. We never are. Jesus is the Sustainer. Verse 17, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Or put a little more woodenly, “In Jesus all things go on being united.” The preeminent King does not absently reign over his all-encompassing kingdom nor does he create and let it go. Our King intimately preserves that which he has formed. “He upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus’ sovereignty is for the good of his creation and creatures.

If Jesus were not “before all things,” as Paul states, he would not have the ability to hold together all things. If he were not preexistent, he would not be qualified to sustain all things. He would need to be sustained himself if he could not exist independent of everything. And, therefore, he would be unable to hold all things together. He can’t sustain something that he himself needs in order to be sustained.

And if Jesus were not “before all things” in the sense of having primacy over all, then he would lack the ability to sustain all things. If he were second, there would be something else that was greater than him and could function apart from him—he would then not be sustaining all things. But Paul eliminates any doubt about Jesus’ qualification and ability to hold all things together. He is a powerful presence to sustain. And that means he is not just a powerful sustaining presence for all quarks and created matter but for his people. He is not a distant despot but a very present help in your time of need.

### **He is the Incarnater (v.19)**

We confidently rest in his present help for us because he has indeed drawn near to us. Jesus is the Incarnater, or as Paul puts it in v.19, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” Jesus of Nazareth was and is fully God. The one who is before all things and sat on a donkey’s back amidst the waving palms was very God of very God. He was not fifty percent God and fifty percent man. He was one hundred percent God and one hundred percent human. He did not empty himself of any deity when he took on the form of a servant.

This is what theologians call the “hypostatic union.” And while that sounds fancy, it presses us to respond to who we say that Jesus is. It cannot be denied that there was a man in history named Jesus who lived in first century Palestine and was crucified. You can deny his claims or dismiss him, but you cannot ignore him. He claimed to be God incarnate, God in the flesh. That’s why he welcomed the praise and adoration of the crowd on the first Palm Sunday. They correctly understood to *some* degree who he truly was.

But what is so astonishing and hopeful about the hypostatic union, about the incarnation, is that God himself has drawn near *to us*. Or as John states at the outset of his Gospel, he “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The God who created and sustains all things did not remain far off nor

did he create some ladder by which we come *to him*. Rather, God Almighty took the initiative to come to us. He didn't meet us halfway; he came right to our doorstep. He dwelt among us. The same God who dwelt in Israel's wilderness tabernacle made a home among humanity. The God who formed man from the dust and breathed life into his lungs "enfleshed" himself.

Consider this astonishing feat in light of what we have already seen about the preeminent King. Jesus reveals the invisible God not with a FaceTime call or a series of Snaps. He didn't ultimately just send a proxy or some mystic message. Jesus revealed the infinite God in flesh and blood. The preeminent King who was the spoken Word of creation then wrote himself into the story, as others have observed.<sup>3</sup> And he does all of this while still sustaining the very creation in which he resides. The incarnation, the fullness of God dwelling in human form, is utterly confounding.

And it is utterly comforting, is it not? The preeminent King is not unaware of the toils and struggles of his people. He lived through the very same things. He grew up in a dysfunctional home. He experienced relational issues with his siblings. He was betrayed. He was abused. He was misunderstood. He was abandoned. He was sinned against. He was thought a fool. He was derided. People sought to manipulate him. He was tempted. He was wrongly accused. He was pushed to the brink of despair. He experienced profound suffering. He lost loved ones.

He understands. He understands what you are going through. He understands the garbage you have experienced, not in some distant, clinical sense but by personal experience. So when you consider Jesus enthroned and highly exalted, don't fall into the mistake of thinking he doesn't get you. He is the only person who truly does. The preeminent King is not inaccessible; he has drawn incredibly near.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Doug Wilson, Joe Rigney, C.S. Lewis

### **He is the Reconciler (v.20)**

And what is even greater is that he has drawn near as our humble King in order to bring us near to himself. He came and sought us. He pursued his Bride. For Jesus is the Reconciler. Verse 20, “Through [Jesus, God was pleased] to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.” Just as Jesus’ sovereign reign extends over all things, so also his reconciling work is all encompassing. He *will* make all things right. He *will* undo the effects of the Fall. He *will* bring an end to unchecked rebellion against him. It matters not if it is on earth or in heaven—that phrase is what is called a “merism” and communicates the entirety of creation. It would be like saying “from L.A. to New York,” meaning the whole U.S. *All things* will be reconciled through Jesus.

And Jesus inaugurated his reconciling work by “making peace by the blood of his cross.” And this, friends, is what the palm-waving crowd didn’t get. The way to the throne was through a bloody cross. Aloft his beast of burden, Jesus set his face like flint to Jerusalem, coming to bear a seemingly insurmountable burden. This is what he and the Father had intended on from before the foundation of the world. He would make known God’s perfect dominion by crushing the head of the Serpent and conquering death. He would reveal the very purpose of creation in communicating the full expression of the glory of God. He would sustain all things by no longer letting sin break down and destroy. He would bring about what his very incarnation was intended for. He would reconcile all things to himself . . . all through the blood of his cross.

So the celebrations of Palm Sunday are intricately related to the events of Good Friday. The declaration, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13), was truer than the crowd knew. Jesus was not some petty prince entitled to some fiefdom. “Hosanna! Save us!” O, yes, Jesus will save you, not just from Rome’s oppression but from sin’s due penalty. “The King of Israel!” O, yes, Jesus was the promised Son



of David to reclaim the promises made to the monarch, but his kingdom would be so much more. This king would be preeminent over all.

### **What a King!**

Can you fathom your king?! He is far greater than you can ever imagine. Jesus is the Revealer, Creator, Sustainer, Incarnater, and Reconciler. And we ought rightly see that Palm Sunday is penultimate, that there is a bittersweet irony to it. He indeed was entering Jerusalem to assume his throne. He indeed was the long-expected king. But it wouldn't go down that way. He wouldn't ascend to his throne for another six plus weeks after entering the Ancient City.

But the way of the cross was an exceedingly better way. And so Jesus became “the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame [—all so that he might be] seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). The throne he now sits upon as the preeminent King is exceedingly better.

Five Points, behold your King. Bow down in adoration before him. Humble yourselves before him. He reigns perfectly for your good, as one who draws near for your good. May you be so satisfied in submission to him.