

WHAT WE LEARN FROM A KING! Steps to a New Life:

Matthew 25:31-46

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Bethany Church

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This past week in amazing Technicolor we have witnessed regime-change. We've watched the violent confrontation. We've seen the suffering, the sacrifice, the terror and the tears. We've also watched the celebration. We've seen clapping, shouting and dancing. We've seen smiles as broad as Texas, and we've continued to see fighting and victories.

The events of Palm Sunday carry some parallels. First, it took place in the Middle East. Second, it signaled a regime change. Third, it celebrated liberation. Fourth, it did not end the fight. The fight continued. However, Palm Sunday carried wider implications. Centuries earlier Zechariah prophesied:

Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey--even on a donkey's colt. I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and I will destroy all the weapons used in battle. Your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10, NLT)

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem as a prophesied king. "Celebrate!" exhorted the prophet. "Shout in triumph!" Zechariah urged. This is what the people were about that Sunday. "Your king is coming," Zechariah declared. In lockstep with the prophecy, Jesus came

not on a warhorse. He rode a donkey's colt. Donkeys were burden-bearers. Jesus rode into Jerusalem not in self-exaltation, but in humility as a burden-bearing, servant king. Ambassadors of this regime would be marked by the same humility: not with wishy-washiness, lack of conviction, confidence or determination, but with hearts to serve. Jesus' mission was to remove the battle chariots and warhorses, destroy all the weapons, and bring peace to the nations. In accomplishing this, Jesus' realm would stretch from sea to sea, from the cradle of civilization, at the Euphrates River in Iraq near Baghdad, to the ends of the earth. In other words, it will extend wherever humanity goes. That is the mission of our king. That is what was signaled as disciples cried and children waved on Palm Sunday.

Shortly after that experience, Jesus warned people what was coming: a time of accountability and weeding out. That's beginning in Iraq. Soon the instruments of the old regime will be separated from the rest of the population. If this does not happen, the peace will not be secured. People's lives will continue to be threatened as long as holdouts from the former regime perpetuate their terror. Likewise, God's children won't always suffer from their enemies. Peace will come only when the enemies are removed: the warhorses, battle chariots and other weapons of Satan. This is the picture Jesus gave us when he said:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on the right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:31-34, NLT)

Jesus speaks of himself sitting on a throne with his angels and all the nations gathered. He then employs the metaphor of a shepherd separating sheep from goats. I am not an expert, but I understand that goats are not easily moved. They tend to be stubborn, rebellious animals.

They have their own agenda and trust no one. A shepherd moves goats by enticement and coercion. That happens to be two staples of the devil: enticement and coercion. Sheep, however, develop trust and move at the bidding of their shepherd. Consequently, you don't have to check the DNA to know whether you are dealing with goats or sheep. Check their behavior.

Listen to Jesus.

Then the King will say to those on the right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me."
(Matthew 25:34-36, NLT)

After explaining that they were caring for him when they cared for others, he said:

Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, "Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me." (Matthew 25:41-43, NLT)

Look what the sheep did and the goats didn't do. The sheep cared for the afflicted. That is the shepherd's agenda. It's natural the sheep will be where the shepherd is. The goats, however, had a different agenda. They're off doing their own thing.

Some people read Jesus' words and think, "I have to believe and do six more things to be saved: 1) feed the hungry, 2) water the thirsty, 3) host the stranger, 4) clothe the naked, 5) serve the sick and 6) visit the inmate." They live with a sense of guilt, wondering if they did enough. Others think, "All I got to do is these six things once and awhile and I'm fine." They work through their checklist and feel very righteous. God must accept them now.

Jesus confronted that mindset early in his ministry. Teaching from a mountainside, he warned:

Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as “Lord,” but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me, “Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.” But I will reply, “I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.” (Matthew 7:21-23, NLT)

The real issue is not whether you are religious, or whether you have done some good things. It is not whether you are on the parade route of Jesus yelling hosannas. It is irrelevant whether you admire certain images of him. What is relevant is whether you've welcomed the regime change and become a lamb that trusts him. Then you'll find yourself awakened by his love, grateful for his mercy, impassioned for his cause and at work in his service.

Has the regime of Jesus' over taken your heart? That's not a question of religious piety. The prophet Jeremiah (7:21) told his people: ***“Away with your sacrifices. Eat them yourselves.”*** Their religious behavior was no substitute for their disobedience. They did not heed the voice of God like sheep that follow their shepherd. Instead, they worked God over with their religious formulas. Jeremiah said: “That doesn't work.” Jesus said, “That doesn't work.”

The heart of a goat is one that is proud, stubborn, bitter, self-centered and deceived. Since goats move along only as they are enticed or coerced, they become the instruments of God enemies. They become the battle chariots, warhorses and weapons that oppose God's regime. Unless they repent and welcome the one anointed to rule, the Christ, they will be removed.

Life is not in a new law but in a relationship with a liberating king who begins his liberation of you when you recognize the tyranny of the old regime and invite him to rule your heart and life. Have you recognized the old regime? Have you welcomed King Jesus? Have you asked him to cleanse you from your rebellion, to forgive your sin, and to come with his Spirit to change your heart from that of a stubborn goat to a trusting lamb?