

**+ Philippians 2:5-11 + Victory Is Ours Through a Humble King +
+ 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday + 29 March 2015 +**

At some point in all of our lives, we want glory. Maybe it's recognition from the boss or notable achievement in school or victory on the athletic field or simply the attention of mom and dad. For glory people have done heroic things in war, in sports, even in life. For glory people have done foolish, self-centered things that ended in failure and ruin. Deep inside each of us burns a desire for glory, for honor, for recognition.

...But it's not just glory that we want. No, we want it now. We don't want to wait for it. We don't want to work for it. We don't want to suffer for it. We want to be able to claim all the glory for ourselves our way or no way.

That yearning for glory is truly tragic, because your sinful nature and mine are so naturally selfish, so self-centered, so me-focused, so unlike the King we watch marching into Jerusalem today. He wears no shining armor. He wields no battle gear. No great and glorious army follows behind him. No mighty war horse bears him into the city. In fact, not even a look of pomp marks this man of sorrows, even though he is rightly praised as the King of kings. We see a man empty of glory, one who set aside what was rightfully his. We see a servant, a human being just like you and me. We see humility and how the shadow of the cross looms large before him.

So we follow. You can't pull your eyes away from what seems like a great, big train wreck. The King rides on to become a crucified criminal, a humble servant to die. You can't stop him, because through that cross and blood and suffering and death comes eternal, glorious victory.

Yet there's nothing glorious about a cross. Our natural tendency is to clean it up, to make it beautiful, but there's really nothing pretty about it at all. It was an instrument of torture reserved only for hardened criminals and political rebels. In fact, Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion.

If Rome wanted to make a statement about a rebellion or a crime wave, crucifixion usually did the trick. The victim had to carry his own cross to the place of execution, where he was nailed to two rough wooden beams with sharp spikes the size of railroad ties expertly driven through nerves in his hands and feet. His arms were stretched out slightly above the head causing the victim to slowly suffocate over the course of several days. The cross was planted in the ground just outside the city gate where people could not miss it. The victim was ridiculed, stripped of his clothes, and given sour wine to deaden the pain. There was nothing glorious or beautiful or honorable about it.

So why in the world would the Lord of heaven leave everything to endure that? Why would Jesus allow himself to be humiliated in such an awful way? Why would he degrade himself, when **"equality with God"** was something he already possessed?

You would expect Jesus to grasp that **"equality with God"** and assert it with all his might. After all, he's the true God. He created and controls the universe. He had everything there in the comforts and glories of heaven. He could have come into this world as the amazing, powerful, mind-blowing God of gods. With one snap of his fingers, with one single word, he could have conquered Satan and established a glorious kingdom on earth. You would expect Jesus to do that, to seek such glory, but that's not what he came to do. That was neither his purpose nor his motivation. **"Christ Jesus...who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing..."**

The King willingly came in lowliness. He put himself in that position. He deserved the glory that comes with being the true God, but he set it aside to be humbled as a human being. He possessed the power that only God himself has, but willingly set it aside to place himself under his own holy Law. **"Christ Jesus...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."**

Now that should take your breath away! We heard something like that at Christmas—**"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..."** (John 1:14) yet what do we find on Palm Sunday? Not a cute baby cradled in his mother's arms, but instead we see a lowly king riding an unbroken donkey, sitting on coats and being praised by fishermen and tax collectors and common sinners. What's glorious about that? The King sets aside his glory and power to become nothing, a servant, an ordinary human being.

Jesus humbles himself, but why? **"...Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"** The King rides on to die in humility and ridicule, pain and suffering. The King is about to become the crucified criminal rejected by the world, but why? As he rides

that donkey into Jerusalem, Jesus goes forth to fight the forces of hell, but this is no tragic, suicidal heroism without any hope. This is the humble Servant-King come to save you and me.

Jesus comes to bring peace between you and the holy God. He comes to save us who deserve it not. He comes to willingly bear the cross that we could not. He comes because you and I are selfish people by nature, conceited and self-centered, disobedient rebels who deserve to be thrown headlong into hell. Why would Christ endure all that for people who love him not? Why would Christ become the lamb of sacrifice for sheep who love to wander, for sins he did not commit? Why would he humble himself to be **“stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted”** (Isaiah 53:4)? Why would he be so willing to be forsaken for you and me?

The Apostle Paul explains in Romans 5(:8), **“...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Out of love for you, Jesus became **“obedient to death, even death on a cross”** to unite you with God, to reconcile you with your heavenly Father, to declare you not guilty before the holy God, to make you holy in God’s sight so you would enjoy the comforts and glories of heaven with him for all eternity.

Now none of this makes rational sense. It even offends your sensibilities. You see, that glory-hungry sinful nature inside of you wants to put you in the right situation so you can get the glory, the honor, the recognition, the attention. Being selfish, it’s naturally offended by Christ, the humble King, and the cross he bears for you. Your sinful nature seeks the glory and triumph of this life, but such glory is always fleeting. In reality, true glory and eternal victory can only come after the cross. Cross now. Glory later.

Jesus was humiliated for you, rejected by his own people, and forsaken by his heavenly Father, but his story didn’t end at the cross. **“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”**

Three days after Christ’s dead corpse was placed in a borrowed tomb, that tomb stood empty—not from grave robbers, not from hallucinating disciples, not even from angels in heaven. No, the tomb stood empty because it could not hold the glorified Christ. Death could not contain him, so God raised Jesus to the position of power and authority over all things.

Now the One who bears **“the name that is above every name”** is our Savior Jesus Christ—the same lowly Child of Bethlehem, the same humble King riding on a donkey, the same sacrificial Lamb of God, the same risen Lord who received the glory because he bore the cross for you and me.

By that resurrection, God placed his seal of approval on what Jesus accomplished for each of us on that cross. In doing so, he now leads us to trust and worship Jesus. **“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”** By faith, we humbly bow before the King and follow him beneath the cross, seeking not our glory, but his until Christ returns.

In these verses, the Apostle gives us a glimpse of the glory that will be revealed on the Last Day. Everyone without exception will humbly bow before the King of kings recognizing him for who he really is, even those who rejected him. For us who are his own, however, who follow him beneath the cross, the scene will be far more glorious. The apostle John describes it this way. **“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”** (Revelation 7:9-10)

The hosannas of that first Palm Sunday crowd show the humble nature of our King—even as they rightly praise him. One day, however, those hosannas will be shouted with great glory from our lips and the lips of countless others around the heavenly throne of that King. Jesus is that King who went to the cross and who rose again that we might have eternal, glorious victory. So, my Friends, raise your hosannas today and prepare for the final journey this Holy Week. Follow the King beneath the cross because **“the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!”** (John 12:23) **“Hosanna in the highest!”** (Matthew 21:9) Amen.