



# THE KINGDOM

## THE KING WE WANT AND THE KING WE NEED

**Sunday 28 March 2021**

*EXTENDED SERMON TRANSCRIPT*

This message follows straight on from the bonus sermon I released last week online covering the Torah, so if you missed that make sure to watch it and read the notes [[www.grlc.org.au/grlc-hub/](http://www.grlc.org.au/grlc-hub/)]. After the first five books of the Bible, we then see Joshua lead the Israelite nation into the promised land - the promise of Genesis 12 seems to have finally come true. The kingdom looks back on track: a nation in a land with clear blueprint for life, and now if they could just keep the law they would be able to show the world what God is like, and be the blessing to the world they were meant to be... But based on the narrative so far, how well do you think this is going to go?

After Joshua's generation, and the generation that remembered Joshua's generation died, we read in Judges 2:10-13:

*After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.*

So early on in Judges we see the tragic progression that send the nation far off course. When Israel entered the promised land they were supposed to drive out the inhabitants, because to blend the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Canaanites was to be a fatal mistake (such was moral corruption, the religious syncretism, and barbaric practices - like temple prostitution and child sacrifice). So a group of tribal leaders called 'Judges' arose in this

period. But this is a very dark time Israel's history, when they were ruled by judges, and you read about it in the book of Judges.

Judges is a violent story of increasingly corrupt people and bad leadership; really bad leadership! And they go from not bad to average to terrible; and I mean terrible. This is some of the ugliest parts of the Bible. The book ends with, *"in those days Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes"* (Judges 21:25)

It's worth watching this video from The Bible Project, explaining the book of Judges in some detail: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYy8iCfIJ4>

**Pause a minute:** When you have no one external authority who tells you what is right and wrong, then what happens? You do what is right in your own eyes. Is that not how society works today? *Truth is what I feel it is. It's my truth. I'm the king. My moral compass is based on what I desire. If it feels good, if it's not hurting anyone else, what's the problem? I'll do my truth and you do yours...* What happens when everyone determines for themselves what is the truth regarding what is good and what is evil? Confusion ensues and someone always loses.

So, then we come to a significant moment where Israelite tribes come to Samuel, the prophet, and say, "we want a king to lead us like the other nations have."

*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."* (1 Samuel 8.4-5)

Samuel enquires of the Lord and God says, "it's a bad idea. The 'king' will be about the wrong kind of kingdom. They will use their power to take your sons, daughters, and land."

*But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."* (1 Samuel 8:19-20)

This second part is important because it reveals where they are really at, why they want a king: they look at the other nations and see that everyone else has a king, which equals status, and must be the standard by which every credible nation should be.

**Again, pause:** They want a king to be like the nations around them - to have the status of military power, royal status, success. We want stuff to be like the culture around us - to have the status symbols of the culture: brands, suburbs, cars, qualifications, careers, influence, sex appeal, money. And worse still is when you try and package the attaining of those things into a theology of 'prosperity'. We have to guard our hearts against wanting

what society says we need more than what God says we need.

God says to Samuel, "they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting me. They want a king because they don't want me to be their king... They want a kingdom of their making - not the kingdom of God."

What's interesting is that God lets them have it, even though God knows its going to work out badly and He warns them. But they have to learn that by experience.

So you first have Saul, David and Solomon as you read through 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel - and what you will discover is that each of them are on track for a time, then go off the rails; and each for different reasons, as if each is teaching you a lesson, but all with massive character flaws and therefore bear the consequences.

But a really significant moment is recorded in 2 Samuel 7: David, at the height of his success and power, wants to build a house for God; he wants to upgrade the tent to a temple. And, like the king idea, God says that is a bad idea. God doesn't want that. He says, "you want to build me a temple? I've never needed one before. It's not like you can contain me... But David, I'll build *you* a house - a dynasty - and a throne that will be established forever, pointing to a future king, building a temple and an eternal kingdom.

*"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."* (2 Samuel 7:16)

This reveals, again, God's desire to advance His kingdom and an affirmation of David as king. But God is making this promise to a guy who He knows is going to become a first-rate moral failure when David sleeps with Bathsheeba, covers it up, has her husband killed, covers it up some more, until he is eventually found out. And God still chooses David! But, that doesn't negate the consequences of David's sin - and the great kings' life ends back in dysfunctional families and much groaning. His son, Solomon, also starts well but ends badly: he marries way too many foreign wives, adopts their gods, and institutes slave labour just to name a few sins.

After Solomon, the kingdom splits into two under Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and about 20 kings in each kingdom follow. Most of them were terrible - they just kept getting worse and worse. Just read your way through the depressing saga of 2 Kings to get the gist...

Basically, just like we found in Genesis and Exodus, there are glimpses of glory which are quickly eclipsed by human corruption, sin and idolatry. Everything God had asked Israel to be and to follow, they can't do. Everything becomes corrupted wherever they are. It's the same story on repeat over and over and over and over, from Kings to commoners.

But it's also the same story of grace over and over. Grace in God's faithfulness to the covenant even when we aren't. God keeps working for His redemptive purposes, slowly, playing the long game.

And by the time Israel lands in exile, this yearning and longing that is part of the national story is at fever pitch. Longing for a good king, harking back to the golden age of David, yearning for it to come again. I don't know if it was that David was 'a man after God own heart'? I suspect it was that David was a king in a time when Israel held it's head high, but has been in the dust since.

Isaiah is jam packed with anticipation of the fulfilled promise we heard back in 2 Samuel 7 from God about an everlasting throne in the house of David. Isaiah 9:6-7 will prophesy:

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Daniel 9 prophesies about successive evil kingdoms which will be defeated, and then will come the Messianic Kingdom and the math is really interesting...

The most quoted psalm in the New Testament is Psalm 110:

*The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."*

Isn't this fascinating? This is David looking to a king who will be a direct descendent, but He will be over David and at the right hand of God. And this king is also a priest, but not of the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant; rather, in a unique priesthood in the order of Melchizedek in Genesis 14. This is impossible: David saw a coming messiah who is the king and priest.

So, for hundreds of years there is this growing prophetic expectation that the Messiah would come, a king; but because they had become so polluted by the surrounding cultures and kingdoms, their picture of the king was horribly distorted. The king they thought they wanted was powerful like the surrounding nations, a military general, someone to restore fame and fortune, to kick out the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Medes and Persians, then the Syrians eventually the Romans. There were some hopeful contenders: Judas Maccabeus (160bc) looked promising - but it did not last, and such was the slide

again into the old ways that a movement known as the 'Pharisees' would emerge at this point as custodians of the pure Jewish vision of the kingdom. The thing with Judas Maccabeus was that he started a revolt, but he did not restore the kingdom. Earthly power was never going to accomplish that...

And so, for four centuries there is prophetic silence and longing, groaning and waiting and hoping for the return of the 'king'. God's timing is often not ours!

But at just the right time, the king we need comes:

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: "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 disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:1-10)*

When Jesus entered Jerusalem that final time, the narrative shows us that He is clearly orchestrating this moment. Everything is a fulfilment - a signpost to His messianic credential. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is repeatedly hosing down His messianic identity because people would try to make Him the kind of king they wanted, not the king they needed. But now it's time.

Imagine hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years of oppression, disgrace, servitude, groaning and longing for someone to lead you out of this hell hole that you and every generation before you have known, and thinking will this be your children's fate too - can anything ever really change? You've been disappointed so many times. And then the whisper of messiah.

Jesus enters Jerusalem this final time differently - accepting the title as a son of David as the crowds laid down palm branches and shouted "hosanna (save us)". It sounds triumphal, and yet Jesus is gentle and riding on a borrowed baby donkey - not a war horse, no swords drawn or militias behind Him; just a few disciples. This is not a revolt, this is the king being the only kind of King He would be. He is the king we need.

We've journeyed through 800 years of kingly history today. Witnessed an endless pattern of failure and grace. **So, let me conclude and ask you?**

**Do you want a king or do you want to be the king?** How you answer that will change your life. We live where many want the kingdom, but not a king. We want what God intended that His kingdom brings - righteousness, justice, blessing, beauty, purpose, flourishing - but we want that without submission to the will and way of the King. We want to be the king. *It's my life, it's my choice.*

**But if you want a king:**

**What kind of a king do you really want?** Jesus will only be the kind of King He will be in the kind of kingdom He will bring. He will not be the political leader, the statesman, the general, the revolutionary, or even just the prophet that many mistook Him for. For us today, it may be more relevant to say we want a king that makes life better, that I can consult, that I can call on when I need Him. But Jesus will be the only kind of king that He will be: a servant king, who gives His life so you might live, a king who lays it down so you can take it up. But also a king who says, "come die with me, take up your cross, stop living for yourself, live utterly surrendered." **Do you know Him as He is, not as you'd like Him to be?**

If you want to know Him, it begins with surrender. It begins with saying, "I'll stop being the king, I'll stop looking for the king I want, and let you be the King I need." This king will love you all the way down to the bottom of your failure, and all the way to the top of the cross as we celebrate at Easter.

**Reflection and Application:**

Take time to think about this idea of the king we want verses the King we need. Can you identify any areas of your life where there may be a gap between the two?

Over the past 5 sermons in this series we have travelled over 1000 years along the storyline of human history and the kingdom.

- What patterns have you noticed in the story?
- What have you learnt about humanity?
- What have you learnt about God?
- How might God want the big story to shape your own story as a disciple?