

J.R.R. Tolkien’s epic story “The Lord of the Rings” features a character named Aragorn, who is a kind of king in disguise. You first get to know him as a scruffy wilderness Ranger nicknamed Strider, but in the course of the story you learn he is the rightful heir to the throne. This unlikely hero leads an army in battle against a great evil force and prevails, which results in his being crowned King. For this reason, the third book in the series is called “The Return of the King.”

Today we hear about another King in disguise. Jesus of Nazareth comes to town, but He’s riding on a colt, born of a donkey—not exactly a war horse. He wears no suit of armor. He wields no weapons of any kind. He looks like the wandering teacher He is. Yet He really is a King. As that colt took him up the road, the people were shouting, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.” And Jesus was letting them say it. He would not silence those who were saying it, even after He was asked to.

There’s a good reason for that. His arrival fulfills a prophecy spoken by Zechariah, a priest who lived 520 years before Jesus. That prophecy reads as follows: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

This parade is no accident. It is an intentional statement on Jesus’ part. By doing this, He is sending the message: “I am the King who brings salvation.” The people waving palm branches and shouting out “save us now” (which is what hosanna means) have no idea how right they are. Jesus really is a King, but here’s the deal: He’s not just the King of Jerusalem. He’s not just the King of Israel. He is the uncreated, living God, the Maker of the universe, a King in disguise, if you will, but a King nonetheless--and not just a King but The King.

And to be sure, this is a warrior King who is riding into Jerusalem. He is coming to do battle with evil. He is coming to go toe to toe with death itself. The hope that He would end Roman oppression was setting the bar way too low. This unlikely King will conquer in a most unlikely way—not that anyone along the parade route had any clue about what was going to unfold. It didn’t matter. At that moment in time, the shouting crowds were right. He really was the King, righteous and having salvation. And you know something? The shouting crowd is still right. Because of Jesus’ death, He has salvation to give. Because of his triumphant resurrection, he has righteousness to give away. He has proven himself to be King, whether we fully grasp his mission or not; whether we give him our honor and praise or not; whether we serve him with our lives or not, He is King. It’s the truth underneath everything. Jesus is ruling right now. Do you believe that?

This is a side of Jesus that you may not spend much time thinking about. We’re used to thinking about Jesus as our Savior, of course. We are used to Jesus as our Shepherd; Jesus as our Friend. And there’s nothing wrong with any of those ideas. They’re absolutely Biblical.

However, we need to hold those images of Jesus together with this: Jesus is The King. His willingness to drink the cup of punishment...His courage in going to the cross...the valor it took for Him to lay down in your grave means He now has been given the throne of his Father. He rose from the dead to rule over all things, and He rules—this is the best news of all—He rules purely for the sake of His people. He rules with your best interest in mind. That deserves a careful response, don't you think? Let's walk through our response to King Jesus.

If Jesus is King of your life, then to deny Him is treason. And yet we flirt with that denial all the time. We make small decisions to hide our allegiance to Jesus. We downplay our connection to Christ. We make those decisions out of a sense of self-preservation, but that sense is faulty. Denying Jesus is self-destructive. Just ask Judas. Or better yet, ask the apostle Peter, whose threefold denial of Jesus led to a dark night of the soul. He would've been lost in despair were it not for the forgiveness and threefold restoration of His risen King.

If Jesus is King of your life, then refusal to listen to his Word is defiance, and disobedience is rebellion against His rule. Yet how often do we refuse to listen to His Word? How often do we replace time we could be spending with the King's Words with other things? We cannot pretend that we are living under the rule of King Jesus if we don't even know what He says. But then, what if I *do* know what he says, and choose not to do things his way? Then I'm simply a rebel who is choosing a new King and the new King is me. The funny thing about Kings, though, is there can really only be one.

But now you will see what makes Jesus totally unique as a King. He will not force you to accept his rule. He does not demand to be the authority in your life. He will not command you to worship Him at the point of a sword. He will not bend you to His will against yours. No, this King simply asks you to watch Him. He asks you to see how he operates. He knows it's pointless to try to coerce you into relationship with Him. So He just wants you to watch, as he rides into the city where he will die as a criminal, to watch as he gathers his disciples for a final meal and a new expression of mercy, to watch as he is mocked with a kingly robe and a hideous crown, to watch as he surrenders to the fists and the whip and the nails and the spear. He wants you to watch as they lay his lifeless body in the tomb. He wants you to watch, because as the warrior King, He willingly did all this to protect you. Do you understand? If Jesus had never descended from his heavenly throne to do those things, you would be facing the punishment for your sins alone, with no defense. You would be separated from God's grace forever. But Jesus says, watch what I do! I'm the King! I subject myself to suffering and death to keep you safe. I'll take the fall. I'll drink the cup of wrath. I'll enter the grave for you, because My crown means nothing if I don't have you. My kingdom is empty without you in it.

How could you not love a King like that? How could you not pledge yourself to someone who would do that? Doesn't he deserve your loyalty and honor and devotion? Doesn't he deserve your allegiance and the shout of praise from your heart? Here he comes, completely humble, riding his little donkey, fulfilling every last detail, so that you would have no doubt. He really is the King.