

# Body of Christ: Acclaiming God

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5:4-14; John 12:12-19; Col 1:15-25



God often gets lost in the shuffle of life. We keep our schedules busy, running at a hectic pace. At times, it may seem there is just no way to fit God into our daily planners. How do we find the appropriate time, place, and energy to acclaim God—to hail and praise Him as king and lord of our lives? Can we do better than scheduling appointments with God?

How do our claims of Christ's kingship stack up against the actions of so many who sacrifice their lives to defend their faith from what they understand as ungodly Western aggression? While we correctly acknowledge that those we call terrorists do not follow mainline Islamic teaching, we forget their integrity and understanding that they do indeed serve Allah. Does our acclamation of Christ measure up to their standards of integrity and service to God?

The crowds lined up on what we now call Palm Sunday to acclaim Jesus as their king. They praised Him and hailed Him as their hope and redeemer. They did not recognize Jesus as God, but they hoped that He would bring about their dreams of a messianic golden age. They had seen the way crowds had been fed and had heard Jesus' teaching on God's rule. They did not understand all that He had taught, but they were ready to acclaim Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah—the Christ, the Anointed One.

In recognition of Jesus as Messiah, they spread clothing and palm leaves before Him on the ride into Jerusalem. They hailed Jesus as the King of Peace, paying homage with the palm branches as they recognized Jesus as the victorious king. We might easily overlook the gospel evidence that the crowds were hailing Jesus as their king. This is not the first time that they had looked upon Jesus with the desire to crown Jesus. While there is opposition to Jesus as Messiah, it comes from the ruling class in Jerusalem, not the crowds who had followed Him.

The disciples did not want Jesus to go to Jerusalem. They wanted Him to become king in a more rural setting, where He would be safe from clashes with the powerful in Jerusalem. From their perspective, Jesus needed to consolidate support that would enable his protection and rise to power. Jesus refused to accept kingship in their terms. He allowed the crowds to acclaim Him as the King coming in peace to Jerusalem, but not as a military leader who would bring war. They wanted to acclaim Jesus king and dictate expectations for His rule. Jesus only accepted their acclamation in accord with his own definitions. He would be king, but king of peace. He would direct them to God in honest worship. He would have them refocus their hearts and lives away from the externals of popular Judaism and onto the outflow of their relationship with God.

Leprosy was an extremely feared disease. Because of this fear, the term was applied to more than one specific condition, so as to protect the population from contracting the disease. There would be no cure available for leprosy, and subsequently no hope. When Naaman heard that there was a chance to be cured of his leprosy, he went to Israel and found his way to Elisha. While there is no compelling reason for him to have believed his wife's servant girl, he chose to travel to Israel on the outside chance that there might be a cure.

The king assumed well that Naaman's arrival was a provocation to war by the king of Aram. As the people understood that sickness and disease was brought about by the gods, Naaman's request for cure was correctly understood as a request for the king to intervene with the gods on Naaman's behalf. While the king tore his robes in protest at Naaman's words granting the king divine authority, Elisha sent word for Naaman to be brought to him—"that he might know there is a prophet of *Yahweh* in Israel."

After balking at Elisha's words, Naaman accepted the prescription to bathe in the Jordan. On being cleansed of his leprosy, he recognized the action of *Yahweh* on his behalf and made haste to express his thankfulness to Elisha. In his words, we find not only an external cleansing of body, but the transformation of Naaman in relation to *Yahweh*. Naaman found out not only that there was a prophet of *Yahweh* in Israel, but that *Yahweh* was the only God worthy of service, adoration, and praise.

It is this quality of Christ to which Paul points in Colossians. Christ Jesus' singularity and supremacy remind us that only Jesus is worthy of our acclamation, praise, honor, and service. If we acclaim Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and King, we must lay our lives down in service to the Lord we acclaim. Paul states that God's call upon him included the extension of Christ's suffering in order to proclaim the good news of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. His was not lip-service to Christ, but the laying down of his own life to serve others with the gospel of grace, love, and reconciliation.

Paul accepted that the fullness of God dwelt in Christ Jesus. As such, he accepted that if he were to acclaim Jesus, he must accept service to the gospel of grace to take living hold of his life. To acclaim Christ would have to be more than to recognize the grace of God for personal redemption and comfort. To acclaim Christ includes accepting Christ's claim upon all of one's life, even if it were to mean that Christ's suffering were to continue through one's own experience.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, accepting the people's acclaim as King, the Messiah coming in peace. They hailed Jesus, albeit with inappropriate expectations of what Christ's rule would mean. Naaman went before Elisha seeking a cure and left with an unexpected recognition of *Yahweh* as the only true God worthy of service, adoration, and praise. Paul wrote of the supremacy of Christ—the fullness and expression God's very presence, grace, and love in our midst. For Paul, recognition of Christ's supremacy gave validity to accepting the personal cost involved in giving his life to mediate the gospel before others.

What will happen with our acclamation of Jesus as the Christ, Victor, King, and Redeemer? Will our lives bear out the truth of God's claim upon our lives? Will the expression of our faith in Jesus match the claim of Christ upon our lives? Will our lives back up our claims of the truth of the gospel and the supremacy of Christ Jesus? It is so easy to allow the rush and hectic pace of life to crowd God out. Will we allow God time and space for our acclamation of Christ Jesus to become reality?

It is so easy to water down the claims of the gospel on our lives. Is a watered down gospel worth dying for? Is it worth living?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*