

No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 5 - PARENTHESIS

TEXT: REVELATION 19:11-16 (ESV)



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Parenthesis

The focus of this series is on the five days Jesus spent in Jerusalem prior to His arrest, tracing His triumphal entry into Jerusalem to His last supper in the Upper Room, watching as He tells His last parables, performs His last miracles and engages in His final debates with the Sanhedrin. So far we've made it to early Tuesday, three days before His death. The tension around Him is escalating, and today I wanted to take a moment to pull back to take a panoramic view of the unfolding tension between Jesus and the religious leaders—a parenthesis before returning to the running Gospel narrative.

The theme of this series so far has dealt mainly with a struggle between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem over the issue of authority. Who was acting on God's behalf? The religious leaders presume they are, since they've been installed as authorities in the temple. But Jesus acts independent of their authority, ministering without permission. In this study, we'll ask what positions of authority Jesus claims for Himself and why is His behavior so upsetting to the religious leaders?

There were essentially three "offices" God's people recognized as God-ordained to preserve, protect and oversee the life of His covenant people—prophets, priests and kings. Prophets were those appointed and inspired to speak God's word to His people. Priests offered sacrifices and prayers on Israel's behalf. And kings represented God's people before God. These were the heroes of Israel's national stories—their leaders, their examples of what it meant to walk upright with God.

The New Testament recognizes Jesus as all three. The Gospels acknowledge Him as a prophet. ^(ex. Lk 24:19, Jn 6:14) The epistles present Him as a priest. ^(ex. Heb 2:17) Revelation focuses on His kingship. ^(ex. Rev 19:16) Studying Jesus through the lens of these offices became popularized during the reformation through the teachings of men like John Calvin, who recognized we find assurance of Jesus as the Messiah through seeing His perfect fulfillment of these three anointed offices of the Old Testament.

As prophet, He not only brought the word of God's salvation, the apostle John says He was the word—the **prophet was the message**. ^(Jn 1:1) As priest, He not only brought a sacrifice before God on behalf of God's people, **He was the sacrifice**. As King, **He not only accomplished peace in His Kingdom, He personally absorbed every warring assault against His people and every treacherous act of treason from within**. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. ^(Isa 53:5)

These offices were ordained of God for Israel, and they carried great authority, since all three stood as mediators between God and His people. In three days time, Jesus publicly assumed the authority of each of these roles, and did it in such a way as to present Himself as superior to all others who currently or historically filled these roles—superior in the sense that after Him, there would be no need for any others. And He claimed

all three roles at the same time. So how did He do this in these few days leading up to His arrest? And how has He presented Himself as the last prophet, priest or king God's people would require? We'll begin by looking at Jesus as the superior prophet.

The Prophet is the Message

When first century Jews thought of their prophets, men like Abraham, ^(Gen 20:7) Moses ^(Dt 34:10) Elijah, Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah came to mind—a who's-who of men who shaped their nation, who brought the comforting news of coming victories and the foreboding warnings of coming exile. But like priests and kings, prophets were understood to be limited their office. No priest could actually be the sacrifice for Israel, no King could single-handedly ensure peace and strength, and likewise, no prophet could bring to pass the promises God put in his mouth.

But God told Moses, "I'll raise up a prophet like you from among your brethren; and I will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." ^(Dt 18:18) This future prophet would be superior. The people anticipated His coming. Peter, in Acts 3:22, quoted this verse in reference to Jesus. And the writer of Hebrews spoke of Jesus as superior when he said, "in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world." ^(Heb 1:1-2)

Prophets were God's mouthpiece, so there was a necessary authority which came through not only in their words, but in the way they spoke. Early on, one thing that made people regard Jesus as a prophet was how He taught with authority greater than the scribes. ^(Mt 7:28-29) We've seen this authority in pretty much every word Jesus has spoken since Palm Sunday.

But the real difference between Jesus and other prophets was that when the other prophets spoke, they spoke of who God was and what He'd do. Jesus spoke of *Himself* and what He'd come to do. When He entered the city to the praises of the people, He accepted their praises as one not there merely to talk about God's salvation, but to be God's salvation. In fact, when the Pharisees told Him to silence the people elevating Him, Jesus said they were right to praise Him and if they didn't the stones would. ^(Lk 19:40) Another time, when children were praising Him with a Psalm that was clearly directed to God, Jesus said they were right to praise Him as God. ^(Mt 21:15-16, cf. Ps 8:2)

The prophets came, one after another, to tell God's people about their Holy God, their separation from Him because of their sin, and their need for a savior. Jesus came claiming divinity, on a mission to address their separation from God by becoming their perfect sacrifice—their Savior. He didn't just bring a message. He was the message. He didn't just tell them they needed salvation, He accomplished their salvation Himself.

From here on out, Jesus takes one Old Testament prophecy about God's redeeming grace after another, and says they refer to Him. This is the behavior either of a lunatic, a liar or the most superior prophet ever to come to the people of God. And at the time, no one was calling Him crazy. There was too much evidence of a supernatural connection between Him and God. As the only prophet actually accomplishing the word He delivered, Jesus was the most superior prophet ever known.

The Priest is the Sacrifice

Jesus carried in His priestly ministry an air of superiority which certainly ruffled the feathers of the others. When the people of Israel spoke of priests, they thought of Aaron, Moses' right hand man. They thought of the long line of Levites set apart by God to oversee the Holy Place, to preserve and expound God's word to the people and to enter the Holy Place once a year in hopes of making atonement for the sins of a nation. They were the bloody ones, those who brought the offerings of the people to the altar of the Lord. I imagine they had a certain smell unlike anyone else in their community, a mix of smoke and iron blood.

Priests were called to a holy life because when they entered the Holy Place, they stood as a representative of the people whose sacrifice they offered. The expectation was they'd at least be holier than the ones they represented. They'd labor their entire lives to bring the most perfect sacrifice in the most perfect way, yet they'd spend their careers never actually accomplishing this.

During Jesus' last week, He presented Himself as a priest with authority over what happened in the temple, even over the religion of the people of God as a whole. The clearest example of this came when He entered the temple the day before and turned over the money changer's tables. He acted as though He was the steward of the temple—it was *His Father's* house! Once He upset the current system, He remained, ministering to and healing the lame and blind who came to Him, while receiving the praises of children. When He disrupted business as usual in the temple and then stayed to minister, He set Himself up as the priest with authority over that temple.

Through the lens of hindsight, we see that He was, in fact, the superior priest that week—and remains so today. How? **First**, the sacrifice He'd offer on the people's behalf was superior. It was not a lamb, calf or pigeon for a man, but Himself—a human life for human lives. **Second**, the priest bringing the sacrifice was perfect Himself. In the Old Testament, the priests were required to offer a sacrifice on their own behalf before offering sacrifices on behalf of the people, since they themselves were unworthy to be in God's presence because of their own sin. ^(Lev 16:6) This system taught that all were guilty and the only hope of redemption must come through the death of an innocent victim.

Because Jesus lived a perfect life, He was innocent in the sight of God. And since the sacrifice He meant to offer was Himself, it would be the first and only perfect sacrifice offered for sinful people. And since He was the sacrifice He offered, it too was perfect. It was a perfect sacrifice offered by a perfect priest. In fact, the perfect priest became the sacrifice. He represented the people perfectly as one without sin and offered a sacrifice perfectly comparable to those for whom it is offered—a life for a life. Because of this, it was not a display of bravado, but a point of fact that Jesus was the greatest priest in the temple that week, and forever more. He was right to act in a superior way.

The King is the Servant

When the people of Israel thought of kings, it's probably safe to suggest two came to mind first—David and Caesar. David was all that a king should be—kind, brave, artistic, strong, blessed with grace, adored by his people. Caesar was the King who ruled them now, and he was everything they despised—a gentile pagan blasphemer who not only permitted but *insisted* his people regard him as a god, and who ruled Israel as part of a conquest to make the entire world his kingdom.

We live in a democracy where we elect new leaders regularly, so kingship is not an everyday concept in America. Kings were meant to reign for a lifetime. A kingdom very much reflected the personality and conviction of its King. So the people very much wanted a strong, wise, good king, because it was his Kingdom, they were only living in it. But a king was called to build his kingdom with an eye toward what his people needed. When he shirked this responsibility, he and his leaders would inevitably be corrupted and his people would suffer. But a good, wise king meant a good, peaceful life for his people. And when peace wasn't an option, a good king would fight for justice and he'd win. A good king was more than a ruler. He was a servant.

And Israel knew such a king, in a distant memory. There was a tacit hope lingering in the hearts of God's people that one day they would have another king like David—one who would be more "David" than David was. This king would be the superior king because His reign would go on forever. And these were the words spoken over Jesus before he was even in the womb—"The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end." ^(Lk 1:32-33)

Your King will Come Again

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that colt on Palm Sunday, it was as a servant king, meek and lowly. He rode to shed His blood. It was the coronation of One come to extend mercy and grace toward sinners. In this last week of His earthly ministry, though His time was fraught with tension, conflict and injustice, His purpose was to secure for you justice, mercy, patience and God's grace. And this is how our King still rules now—extending mercy, grace and forgiveness to any who would rely on Him. But He is coming again, and when He does it will be very different than how He came to Jerusalem the last week of His earthly ministry. I want to close by reading about His return.

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. – Rev 19:11-16

He will come again. When our King returns, it will not be on a donkey's foal, but on a white horse of war. Not on a makeshift road of coats and palms, but with fire in His eyes, a crown of glory upon His head and a robe saturated in His own blood. He will be called the "Word of God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords." And justice will come from His mouth. That kingship will look very different from the one we're under now. Now there is still time. Now there is mercy and grace. But then, when He comes again, it will be to judge the world—to judge what we did with His mercy and grace extended to us. For now there is amnesty. Can you hear the word of Jesus our prophet who is the message of salvation? Can you see Jesus our priest becoming the sacrificial lamb for your sins? Will you run to the amnesty, the refuge of His kingdom of mercy and grace? Until He comes again, there is still time for you. Will you yield?