

“Enter The Lord’s Glory”

Glittering Coronation

On December 5, 1977, Jean–Bedel Bokassa crowned himself Emperor Bokassa I of the Central African Empire. At 10:10 a.m., trumpets and drums announced the approach of His Majesty. The beginning of the parade had eight of Bokassa's 29 official children proceed down the royal carpet to their seats. They were followed by the heir to the throne, Jean Bedel Bokassa II -- dressed in a white admiral's uniform with gold braid. He was seated on a red pillow to the left of the throne. Bokassa I's favorite wife, Catherine, one of nine of his wives, paraded next to her throne wearing a \$73,000 gown that was hand sewn with pearls.

Bokassa I then arrived in an imperial coach decorated with golden eagles. His coach was drawn by six matched Anglo–Norman horses. The Central African Empire Marine Band struck up the hymn "The Sacred March of His Majesty," a song written especially for the event. Emperor Bokassa I strutted proudly to his throne. He was bedecked in a 32 pound robe decorated with 785,000 strewn pearls and embroidered in gold. The emperor wore white gloves and pearl slippers on his feet. On his head, he wore a gold crown of laurel–wreaths, similar to those worn by Roman consuls of old and a symbol that he was favored by the gods.

As the "Sacred March" ended, Bokassa I seated himself on his \$2.5 million eagle throne. He took his gold laurel wreath off and placed a crown on his own head that contained a seventy–carat diamond in the shape of Africa. The lavish coronation ceremony cost \$200 million and all but ruined the country's economy.

Triumphant Entry

Almost 2,000 years before, Jesus made an entry into Jerusalem, a few days before the Passover (Luke 19:29–40). His joyful entrance into the city already hinted at the humiliation he would endure. How ironic and tragic that within a week of Jesus' triumphal entry he would be left on a cross to linger and die like a broken branch trampled by the crowd. Many yelled, "Hosanna!" with no more conviction than a parting, "God bless you." They did not understand that this Godsend was truly Emmanuel (God–with–us) sent for a deeper purpose. Jesus had no "hero complex," and so, he rode on a colt (not a stallion) into Jerusalem. He knew that many in the crowd shouting out his praises would eventually join the Friday crowd crying out for his blood.

Many of you already know how the story goes: Jesus spent much of the week teaching the people about the Kingdom of God, then shared the Passover meal with his disciples. Luke 22:14–20.

Last Supper

In offering his disciples the bread that represented his body and the cup that represented his blood, Jesus gave of himself at his very best at the Last Supper, even though he knew his disciples would be at their very worst in deserting him. Even as they shared that important meal he predicted that one of them would betray him. They asked one another who would do such a thing. Who would? Would you? Maybe, like me, you have in many small ways.

He gave them some words of exhortation and prediction, including a prediction that the stalwart disciple Peter would betray him. Then Luke 22:39–42

The Power of Prayer

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane was a passionate plea for a last minute release from a mission headed for his own pain and suffering. And yet Jesus still had a desire to follow whatever instructions God now would provide, even if the request to "opt out" would be denied. An angel appeared and gave him strength even as his praying became more intense and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

Suddenly a crowd appeared, led by Judas. They were armed and angry, accompanied by the chief priests, the temple guard, and the elders. This crowd's attitude toward him was a foretaste of the crowd that would condemn him — before the next sundown they would shout, "Crucify him!"

If Jesus is indeed "our precious Savior," it is because human life at its lowest and cheapest level was, nevertheless, precious to him. And so he tolerated both the flowery hosannas and the vicious cries of "Crucify him!" because he had come to cherish and reclaim human life even at its lowest and cheapest level.

He was taken into custody and mocked and slapped around, then put on trial with trumped up charges, found guilty, and then dragged before the governor — Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the representative of Caesar, the Roman Emperor, and all the power and might of the Roman state. Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so," knowing that Pilate and all the others did not understand him or his kingdom at all. His kingdom is not organized as society is: on the basis of unbelief. Nor did He mean his kingdom had no practical or political implications.

What Makes a King?

His kingdom has no subjects or servants, but disciples, who hear the truth and understand his kingship. He asked his followers to share his kingdom, the rewards and the responsibilities, based on belief in God's power. He did not sweep them out of his path but washed their feet. [As the letter to the Hebrews says, Jesus, now crowned with glory and honor, is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. He formed a community to share his kingly and priestly functions. He made us all members of the royal family, and we ought to respect ourselves, and each other, as such. If we just put that little idea into practice, in our family, in our church, in our business, we would have fewer problems, fewer enemies, and more joy in our lives.]

Within the space of a few hours he was mockingly examined by Herod, ruler of Galilee, then sent back to Pilate — to face the power of the state. Instead of boiling over with the angry spirit of retaliation or cracking at the seams under the pressure of fear, Jesus persistently clung to his mission and poured out the character of his heavenly father with love, forgiveness, and pity ("Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34). How would you and I have reacted? Would we be boiling over with rage and bitterness or "pushing the panic button" if: (1) one of our closest friends resorted to a sickening kiss and a phony show of affection in order to let our worst enemies track us down, (2) our so-called friends ran off and left us holding the bag, as a band of hired hoodlums took us into custody, (3) the respectable "powers-that-be" and "pillars of the community" made us go through a shoddy, shameful "kangaroo court" showcase trial followed by the inevitable outcome of an outrageous verdict of "guilty without any established guilt," and (4) a goon squad, skilled in terror and torture, took us into a back room where we were taunted, tormented, and given a brutal going-over? How would anyone react to such treatment?

Redemption in Suffering

Jesus never turned away from suffering. If anything, he walked towards it, ready to tackle the problem of suffering. By embracing it Jesus showed that suffering, though bad, can be redemptive. Jesus knew why he was on earth and why he must go through agony and humiliation to redeem us. Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi speaks eloquently of how Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave—he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross."

Jesus was God, yet emptied himself of divine power in order to become not just a human being, but the lowest form of human being — a slave. Then he humbled himself even beyond that; he accepted the worst form of death as it was thrust upon him, death on a cross. It was the worst form of death not only because of the physical torture involved, but also because anyone who died on a cross was known to be dying under God's curse. So God's own Son

died as a slave under God's curse in order that we human beings might be free from all that enslaves us and separates us from God.

Understanding who God is, through the actions of Jesus Christ, is the basis for Christian living. God is revealed through what Christ does — in his refusal to exploit his rights, in his self-emptying, in his self-humiliation, in his obedience, even to the point of death. God's glory, unlikely as it may seem, is found in Christ crucified. Those who confess this Jesus as Lord (Jesus crucified for our sins) will seek to imitate him since he shows who God really is. Therefore says Paul, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

Humility shows God's glory.

Those who attain heaven will be the ones who never thought themselves good enough to deserve it. It's always refreshing to find true humility in others. God wants us to be humble so that others can be refreshed. With reservations, I offer several thoughts on humility: First, we remember that compared to God's holiness, we appear as dirty, unkempt creatures; second, Jesus Christ, Son of God, became one of us so that he could overcome all that is unholy in us; third, he sends us to serve, as he was among us "as one who serves;" lastly, when we cling to him, trusting in his power to overcome our failings, we *will* walk humbly with our God.

Gladys Aylward was born in London in 1904. She worked for several years as a parlor maid, and then attended a revival meeting at which the preacher spoke of dedicating one's life to the service of God. Gladys responded to the message, and soon after became convinced that she was called to preach the gospel in China. At the age of 26, she became a probationer at the China Inland Mission Center in London, but failed to pass the examinations. Then she heard of a 73-year-old missionary, Mrs. Jeannie Lawson, who was looking for a younger woman to carry on her work. Gladys wrote to Mrs. Lawson and was accepted if she could get to China. She did not have enough money for the ship fare, but did have enough for the train fare, and so in October of 1930 she set out from London with her passport, her Bible, her tickets, and two pounds nine pence, to travel to China by the Trans-Siberian Railway, despite the fact that China and the Soviet Union were engaged in an undeclared war.

Gladys Aylward, parlor maid from England, became one of the most famous missionaries of the twentieth century, a woman that has been called "the most noted single woman missionary in modern history." A popular biography about her was made into a movie and she dined with Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

But the most notable thing about Gladys was her brokenness, her humility, and her willingness to be available to God. She once said, "I wasn't God's first choice for what I've done for China. There was somebody else ... I don't know who it was -- God's first choice. I don't know what happened. Perhaps he died. Perhaps he wasn't willing ... And God looked down ... and saw Gladys Aylward."

Luke 24:13-25

We began this morning's worship in memory of the great "high" of the triumphant entry to Jerusalem and now we end on a low note [so often the highs in life are followed by lows]. But thanks to God it is not the end of the story, for we anticipate what God will do. Three days after the tragedy, God raised Jesus from the dead, highly exalting him, and giving him the name that is above every other name.

God did this so that eventually every knee (including the knee of Caesar) will bend at the name of Jesus, and every tongue (including the tongue of Caesar) will confess that Jesus (not Caesar) is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.