

Good morning,

OK can anyone tell me where this music is from?

It's from "Lord of the Rings".

As a young man this book captured my imagination.

Not only was it full of incredible creatures and different races

But it was also "full on" – in terms of intrigue and fear and battles and power

In fact the whole book is about power.

It's about "what power is for", and "how to handle it" –

and most supremely (in Lord Acton's words) how "*power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely*".

Tolkien's premise was:

give Power to Men and, despite their best efforts and despite their **most noble** intentions, it will destroy them.

In Lord Acton's letter to Bishop Creighton, he said: "*powerful men are usually bad men*".

And whereas that may be going a bit too far,

our newspapers are full of people misusing power:

whether its:

Bosses making employee's lives hell; or

Bullying at School; or

rigged elections in Africa; or

rogue traders in the city; or

husbands beating wives; or

Nations going beyond their UN Mandates or

Our world is full of "misused power" on a national and personal scale.

And sadly the Church is no different.

The misuse of power in the Church is the greatest scandal in the Kingdom of God

History tells us that whenever leaders in the church get themselves power corruption often follows.

In Medieval times when the church acquired political influence it sponsored wars and became corrupt.

In the Middle-ages, when the church sold Indulgences to grant time off in purgatory it became corrupt.

In modern times when it hitched its wagon to the expansion of Empire "for the glory of God" it became corrupt.

Atrocities, slaughter and abuse all followed in the wake of Indulgences, Crusading Invasions, Inquisitions, Institutional Wealth and the Imposing of ideology upon others...

The misuse of power in the Church is the greatest scandal in the Kingdom of God and it too happens on a national and personal scale.

So I want to talk about power this morning...

the Problems, the Purpose and the Possession of power.

because the reality is, we **all need power**, we can't live without it.

We need power to carry out our jobs

to look after people

to do what needs to be done -
We all need power!

And therefore, from the least to the greatest, we can all misuse it!

So this morning, I want us to look at Jesus, the most powerful person in human history (the Son of God) and see how he uses power in his life

And it would help me, if you would turn to John chapter 12, p1079 ,
To the account of him entering Jerusalem as we look at
The Problem , The Purpose and the Possession of Power in our own lives...

1) So firstly - The Problem with Power.

In John 12v12 we read that

"The next day the great crowd heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. So they took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" ", "Blessed is the King of Israel!""

The people in Jerusalem heard that Jesus was coming to town and so they stripped the Palm trees and went out to meet him.

Now I have no idea why they did that...

I mean when I enter church no-one ever raids the Daffodil beds and throw them at my feet...

*I have no idea why the people waved Palm branches,
but they did, it was their custom, it was the way they celebrated!*

Rumour must have been rife about Jesus:

I imagine that the gossip on the street was that he had power:

power to raise the dead v18,

power to take on the Pharisees v19,

power to threaten an entire nation's stability! (chapter 11v48),

Jesus had power

And so they went out to meet him **by the thousands**.

They lined the streets ,

they waved braches in the air,

they threw their cloaks on the ground,

they sang songs and ran ahead shouting "Save us!"

And Matthew tells us, that the whole city was in turmoil because of Jesus, this "Man of Power".

And here is the problem with power

It is attractive; it is magnetic; and it promises much to those that can tap into it

So like moths to a flame so people are attracted to those with power.

Power IS attractive...

If our boss is bullying us – then we need power to protect ourselves

If we're in debt then economic power is our way of escape

If we have a whole load of political ideas then power lets us put them into play

In other words: power can be used to meet our needs.

And that can be good!

But power can also be very bad...

Because

We can use power to boss people around.

We can use power to make people think we're important.

We can use power to make others look small

In other words

We can use power for our own glory!

Boys use their muscles to make others look weak

Girls use their tongue to make others look inferior

We can use power for our own glory!

And it's this that corrupts us....

We can use power to get others to do what we want

We can use power for our own glory

We can use power to say "My will be done"

... and when we do it corrupts us.

Isn't that what Tolkien was saying?

"When we use power for our own glory it corrupts us."

So here is the problem with power,

if we use it for our own glory,

if we use it to serve our needs

if we use it to say "my will be done"

it has every chance of destroying us.

That is the problem with power.

So second idea... how IS power to be used then?

2. What is the Purpose of Power in our lives?

In John 12 we read that they all went out to see this amazingly powerful person,

this extra-ordinary man of rumour - and

when they got there

v14 *"they found Jesus, riding precariously balanced on top of the foal of a donkey".*

and v16 *"even the disciples at first did not understand this"*

They didn't get it!

I can't help thinking, that when they saw him many were a little disappointed ☺

You see, I don't know about you, but when the hero rides into town, I'd expect them to do it in a blaze of glory.

How would Clint Eastwood ride into Dodge City?

Surely atop a black horse? Reigns in his mouth, riding like the wind and guns a blazing?

How would a new President enter New York?

Surely with a spectacular Ticker Tape parade, riding in an open topped limo?

How will William and Kate arrive at Church? Coach and Horses? Pomp and Circumstance? Horse and Guards?

You bet!!

The entrance people make (the approach they take when encountering people) says a lot about how they will use their power.

A Sheriff says – I'll deal out justice;

A President says – I will run the country;

A Prince says – I will be splendid.

It would have been no different in Jesus' time.

There would have been people hoping Jesus would use his power to overthrow the Romans and usher in a new political era.

"Jesus! enter riding a white Stallion at the head of a revolutionary army – that's the way I'd do it".

There would have been people hoping Jesus would create a land flowing with economic milk and honey –

"Jesus, enter riding a Camel at the head of a merchant caravan – that's the way I'd do it".

There would have been people hoping Jesus would heal all their sicknesses

"Jesus enter held aloft, on discarded stretchers at the head of the miraculously healed – that's the way I'd do it".

If you want to use **power to serve your ends** then a "spectacular entrance, big vision and marvellous claims" is the way to do it!

Yet the most powerful Human who has ever lived, the Kings of Kings and the Lord of Lord enters precariously, comically even, on top of a wonkey donkey, v15.

Why?

Because he is modelling to us how to use power –

You see Power is NOT given for our glory – but for others...

It is to be used NOT to **serve** ourselves – but to serve others

It is given not for "me" but for "you"

It is given not for "my will to be done" but for "thy will to be done".

In other words,

the Godly purpose of "power",

the way "power" is being modelled here by Jesus

is to help us become better servants, helpers, enablers (saviours even!) of others

This is what power is for.

Not for ourselves – but for others

Not for me but for "you"

Not "my will to be done" but "thy will to be done".

So, given this, and applying it to us, how would that change the way

a manager might talk to their staff, or

how a teacher might talk to their students; or

how a sales assistant engages with awkward customers or

how a dad might talk to their children

If we use our power to be servants, enablers, helpers?

Or if we could teleport Jesus to be here today and we made him leader of our church...
how would he dress?

Would he dress differently, in a way that says “I am special”, “I am your leader”?

You know I've struggled with this for a long time:

But if we teleported Jesus and his 12 disciples into this room do you think,

We'd be able to tell - by how they dressed – who Jesus is?

would he be wearing a tee-shirt with a big “J” and “crown” on it?

I don't think so!

Isaiah says “there was nothing in his appearance that we should desire him”.

I don't think he would have worn a big gold ring to show he's the leader

He wouldn't have worn a dog collar

He wouldn't have dressed differently to everybody else.

I am sure he just wouldn't...

He wouldn't have conducted a worship service dressed in finery and embroidery and gold thread

And what I struggle with is this

If the Son of God didn't do it then, then why do we “mere mortal church leaders” think we should?

Why do we want our leaders to look special when in fact we are just servants?

What message are we trying to give?

Now I over-state my case to make my point...

But what I am trying to say is this: we are servants,

We use the power we have as leaders to serve

we should have no special privileges,

no badges of honour,

no fancy houses called “palaces”.

We are servants ...

And if we are... then so are you.... so are we all!

We all have power in our lives and

Every day you and I have the chance to enter OUR own Jerusalem's;

to model how we plan to use our power....

Every day we ride into meetings with people; and

Every day we encounter friends; and

Every day we choose how we are going to use the power that we have when we are under pressure,
threatened or treated rudely.

Will we ride a White Stallion – wanting to show our strength?

Will we ride a Merchant's Camel – wanting to be important?

Will we be held aloft by all the great things we have done – wanting to be seen as “something”?

(And everything the world has taught us will scream – AND WHY NOT! - “That's the way I'd do it”.

And too many people in the church will tell you – that’s the way we have done it for ages” - WHY NOT!)

Why not ?

because its not the way of the Donkey.

its not the way of a servant

its not the way of the cross

its not the way to use power

It not about “my will” but “thy will be done, O Lord”.

Look, we are coming up to the Annual Church Meeting in a 10 days time

when amongst other things I want to talk about where we are going as a church and I hope that everyone of you can make it for there is so much to do and so much ahead of us...

But I have been looking at all the people who do so much at Southover who have been given the power to serve...

to serve coffee and

wait at tables and

teach our kids and

tidy up afterwards and

organise events and

pray quietly and

man the crèche and

to spend our in preparation

You guys don’t do it for the glory;

You DON’T do it because it is convenient

You do it because you are serving others – even if its just one person – you do it.

Thank you!

That’s the way to use power...

The problem of power is that we can use it for our glory

The purpose of Power is serve others....

3. And finally, so how do we Possess true Power? –

For as I’ve already said, we all need power in our lives!

Well in v16 we read

“At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise...”

They didn’t understand.

They saw this spectacle, but they didn’t understand.

Only until after they had seen Jesus captured and crucified,

Only until after they had seen him risen and glorified did they realise how to possess real power

You see Tolkien realised that

In the end the Ring (which you remember represented absolute Power)

*could only be possessed by those who really **didn’t want it.***

Victory against evil was only achieved when the hero (Frodo) was ready to give up the Ring of “Ultimate Power”.

Isn't this a picture of Jesus?

Do you remember when Jesus, right at the beginning of his ministry, was tempted to use his power to serve his own needs?

It was only when he refused to do it, that his public ministry begun

Only when Jesus showed that he didn't want the power for himself – only when he showed he wanted to serve God that his ministry begun.

Only when the hero of the world was willing to lay his power down was evil defeated.

It seems this is the fundamental mark of anyone who would be used by God and entrusted with real power.

And the reason why Jesus could do it was because he already knew who he was

He already knew that he was absolutely secure in the hands of His Father

AND THEREFORE

He already knew that earthy power could NOT make him *any more* secure

He already knew that earthly popularity could NOT make him *any more loved*

He already knew that earthly achievements could NOT give him *any more fulfilment*

Jesus was worthy to wield all the honour and power in the universe because he already counted himself completely fulfilled, secure and loved. He didn't need power for himself - because he already knew who he was!

Do you see?

You don't need power for yourself when you already have your sense of security, value, purpose from your relationship with God.

We don't need power when we already know who we are!

You see when we understand who we are in Christ then
your dream house: becomes a room in heaven,
your best friend: is the God of eternity,
your most intimate companion is the presence of the Holy Spirit,
your greatest ambition is to fulfil the purposes of God in your life
your highest hope for fame: is the smile of God
your greatest wish for health: a resurrection body like Jesus

All of us can have this power when we know who we are.

And therefore, we become...

strong enough to be vulnerable to others and so find peace (does it matter what they say??);

rich enough not to mind being poor (does it matter if we don't have??);

important enough to God not to worry about being rejected by others;

loved enough in our soul not to condemn, judge or look down on others;

whole enough to be able to take risks and fail;

secure enough to cry;

victorious enough to lose and

honoured enough by God to serve others.

This is the power that comes from knowing who we are...

I came across a story a little while ago it's called Palm Monday.

And I'd like to finish with this...

On Monday the little donkey left the house incredibly excited

he rushed out into the street and waited for the crowds but nobody took any notice of him.

He ran into the Temple and looked for the cheering but they just shooed him away;

he pranced before the children but no-one ran on ahead.

Confused and deflated he went home and said to his Mother,

"Yesterday, the crowds cheered and the people danced, and my feet trod only on the softest cloth",

"Today, the crowds have gone, the people ignore me and world pushes me away".

"Foolish child", said his Mother,

"did you not know it is not about you,

it was never about you,

you are only great when the King rides on you and guides your footsteps to the cross".

I want power

I want all the things power can give

But I will only find it with Jesus in my heart as he takes me to the cross.

And so will you.

May we let Jesus ride into our hearts this morning,

may he guide our footsteps,

sit in our saddle,

take us to the cross so that we might understand

"glory is in giving", "victory is in sacrifice" and "power is in service".