

## Jesus' Triumphant Entry 26 February 2023

Over the the last three years we have been going through all four Gospels in chronological order, meaning that we read the Gospels in the order that the actual events took place. We are entering our fourth year in this message series. If we were to continue in the same way, it would take over a year from now to complete. So, I've made the call to wrap our Gospels Series up sooner. The plan is to focus on the Passion Week, the final days of Jesus' life, over the next nine weeks. This is good timing because the messages will line up with Good Friday and Easter Sunday. **Today, we are picking up the story with Palm Sunday, the day Jesus made his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem on young donkey. Luke 19:28-44**

Before we read the story, we need to talk about some important details surrounding this story to help us better understand and appreciate what was happening. **There's a big difference between reading about a place and experiencing it firsthand.** As I mentioned last week, my family recently traveled to Puerto Rico and we had a fantastic trip. Before we went, I looked at maps and travel guides and talked to a lot of friends who had been there, who gave me some good travel tips. They told me where stay, where to eat, how the weather would be and to watch out for the traffic. But no one could really explain what it was like to actually experience Puerto Rico firsthand. When you step off the plane and feel that tropical air hit your skin in January, it changes you. When you drive in San Juan you realize just that driving in PR makes no sense. It doesn't make sense to put a stop light on a highway where traffic is driving 70 mph. But to really understand, you have to experience this for yourself.

**The same is true with trying to understand what the city of Jerusalem was like in the year 33 AD, almost 2000 years ago.** The closest thing we have to firsthand experience is visiting Israel and taking a tour of the land. I've never done this, but I can imagine it would be incredible to walk where Jesus walked and lived. But even this experience would come up short, because Jerusalem today is completely different than it was then. So to get a better understanding of what it was actually like to be in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, we have to rely on scholars who have devoted their lives to studying the Scripture, historical documents and archeology. So let's talk about some of the important details surrounding the story of Palm Sunday.

The first thing you need to know is at the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was only .34 square miles. For comparison, Wrightsville Beach is 2.25 square miles, with a population of 2,400 people. During the Passover Festival, the week we are talking about, people from all over Israel would have traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, making the population between 500k to 700k people. That's about the population of Raleigh, NC. **Jerusalem was literally overflowing with people!**

The second thing you need to know is that during the Passover Festival, Jerusalem was full of animals. People would buy lambs and goats for the Passover offering. Scholars estimate that somewhere between 50k to 70k lambs and goats were sacrificed, maybe more according to The Talmud and historian Josephus. **Think about how this many animals would have affected the city the week leading up to the Passover sacrifice.** Imagine the noise and the smells of all these animals!

The third thing you need to know is that **the power players in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover Festival were the Sadducees, Pharisees, Sanhedrin and Rome (via Pilate).** During a normal Passover

Festival the situation was already a tinder-box of tension ready to ignite at any moment, but when you add Jesus into the mix, the situation became a powder-keg ready to explode. Here's why.

The Sadducees were a Jewish group within Judaism, made up of aristocratic families who were wealthy and powerful. They were friendly with Rome and they were in charge of running the Temple. The Pharisees were another Jewish group within Judaism, made up of mostly middle class Jews. They were known for being "full of zeal for the laws, strict guardians of ancestral traditions," and they believed that by strict obedience and holiness they could "create the conditions necessary for the arrival of the The Messiah and The Kingdom of God," (NT Wright). The Sanhedrin was the Council of 35 Sadducees and 35 Pharisees that made legal decisions for all Jews. The Sanhedrin Council forced the Sadducees and Pharisees to cooperate with one another. Rome occupied and ruled over all the people of Israel, including the Sadducees and Pharisees. Pilate was the Governor of Judea, where the city of Jerusalem was located. His job was to maintain order for the Roman Government at any cost, usually by using intimidation or force.

As a result, all Jews despised Rome. The Sadducees however, figured out a way to maintain financial and political power by working with Rome. This is why the Pharisees despised the Sadducees and saw them as sellouts and morally liberal. And the Sadducees hated the Pharisees because they saw them as uptight conservative rednecks that took the Law too seriously, who were constantly getting in the way of the Sadducees' political agenda. And on top of all these groups there was a Jewish group called the Zealots who were not waiting for God's Kingdom to arrive, they were trying to usher it in by using force to overthrow Rome. This is why there was so much tension in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival week.

Now, the scene is set for us to try to understand the significance of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on donkey during the Passover Festival. Let's read the story...

*Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. "Go into that village over there," he told them. "As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying that colt?' just say, 'The Lord needs it.' So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying that colt?" And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it." So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on. As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. Luke 19:28-44 NLT*

What was the significance of the crowds spreading out their garments on the road? **Laying down their garments was an act of humility that meant something big was taking place.** We also see this happen in Acts, when Stephen was stoned to death, and the crowd laid down their garments at Saul's feet. Same idea.

What was the significance of Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem? **Matthew tells us that this happened to fulfill the prophecy about the arrival of the Messiah King, of the line of David, in the book of Zechariah 9:9,** "Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a

donkey's colt." Also, we know that during the time of David donkeys were the royal transportation for Kings during times of peace.

How does Jesus' arrival compare to Pilate's arrival? Pilate lived at the beach on the Mediterranean Sea. The only reason he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival was to maintain peace and order among the surging crowds. ***Pilate would have arrived in glory and power on a warhorse with thousands of centurions ready to use force. On the other hand, Jesus arrived in humility on a donkey, followed by hundreds of common people, ready to establish peace by love, not force.***

How did the crowd respond to Jesus? Luke 19:37-38 NLT says, ***"When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!"*** Matthew says, "The city of Jerusalem was in an uproar." The scene was electric, full of tension! This reminds me of the energy you feel in a sports arena during a big game. Think Duke versus Carolina basketball game. Everyone in the crowd, the Roman soldiers, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, all wondered what Jesus would do next. Was he about to start a revolution like others before him? Remember Jesus was a threat to everyone's power, because he had the hearts of the people!

How did the Pharisees respond? Luke 19:39-40 NLT says, "But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" Jesus replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

How did Jesus to the political tension in Jerusalem? Luke 19:41-44 NLT says, "As he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. "How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you. ***Jesus wept because the people of Israel didn't understand his message or his kingdom. He didn't come to overthrow Rome or to establish an earthly and temporary kingdom at that time. He came to rescue and save broken and sinful people, and to bring peace on earth by establishing his eternal kingdom.*** So many prophets before him proclaimed Jesus' message and moment. The book of Zechariah, written six hundred years before Jesus, said, "I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth." And because they rejected him, he prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which actually happened 50 years later.

Can you believe all of this took place on Sunday, the first day of the Passover Festival?

As we wrap this up, I want to leave you with some good news that you can take away from this story.

***BECAUSE OF JESUS YOU CAN EXPERIENCE REAL AND ETERNAL PEACE!***

***Because of his life, death and resurrection, you can have peace with God.*** This means that you no longer have to clean yourself up to be acceptable to God, you simply have to believe in Jesus, and trust that you are forgiven because of His sacrifice for your sins. The Bible says it this way, "We can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus...Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19,22 NLT

***Because of Jesus' way of life you can have peace with others, even your enemies.*** Can you imagine your relationships with people, even difficult people, being marked by peace? This is possible if you practice the way of Jesus, his humility, love and forgiveness. The problem that we face, is that our natural way of relating with people looks more like the ways of Rome, The Sadducees and The Pharisees, than the way of Jesus. Rome used intimidation and force to get what they wanted. The Sadducees had to be politically savvy to work with Rome and maintain their power, so they used manipulation to get what they wanted. Manipulation has many faces. Sometimes people are nice in order to get what they want, sometimes they are deceptive or misleading, and other times they lay on a guilt trip. The Pharisees were passionate about obeying the rules and traditions of Judaism, and so they would use criticism and judgement to motivate people to obey. If we want to experience peace in our relationships, we have to lay aside using force, manipulation and judgment to get people to do what we want, and instead, put on humility, love and grace. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit helps us. Paul says, "Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy." Ephesians 4:23-24 NLT

***And when Jesus returns we will have peace on earth forever!***

Prayer— Thank you Father for sending your Son Jesus Christ into the world, to bring us the good news of love, forgiveness, your kingdom come and peace on earth. We are eternally lost without you. Help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to believe and experience your peace in our daily lives. Amen.