

## **Palm Sunday '03**

### Choose Your Lamb

Luke 19:35-44 (NIV) *35 They brought it (the donkey) to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." 41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*

It was June 13<sup>th</sup> 1927 when Charles Lindbergh was given a ticker-tape parade in New York City in honor of his solo flight of the Atlantic Ocean. 750,000 lbs. of ticker tape poured onto the streets. But the biggest ticker-tape parade was on March 2, 1962, for astronaut John Glenn after he became the first American to orbit the earth in a spacecraft. The sanitation department cleaned up 3,474 tons of ticker tape, confetti and other paper along a 7-mile route of jubilation. Everybody loves a parade. And it was no different when Jesus came to town. Josephus, a Jewish historian, estimated the crowd to be as high as 3 million! That's a big crowd! SOURCE: Steve Shepherd in "Only One More Week" Let me give you a little background to the event.

Jesus had been ministering on the other side of the Jordan to large crowds. Philip the Tetrarch was one of the few rulers that was not hunting Jesus, thus it was a safe place for Jesus to bide His time until the Passover. When Martha and Mary called for Him, He made an excursion to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Seeing this miracle, the Jewish leaders were all the more determined to kill Him. Their jealousy had blinded them to the truth. It is not absolutely clear from Scripture, but I believe Jesus retreated again to Philip's region until it came time for the Passover. From the beginning of His ministry, He seemed to be aware of a specific time in which He was to lay down His life, and this was it. He would have crossed over the Jordan River near Jericho. This is when He healed the blind man, Bartimeus, who called out to Him, "Have mercy on me, Son of David." Then He traveled up the Jericho road for the last time. It was the region of the wilderness where Satan first tempted Him when His ministry began just three years earlier. Jesus had already warned the disciples that He was on His way to die. (Mark 10:32-34)

The road from Jericho comes into Jerusalem at Olivet Ridge. The street down into the Kidron Valley is the same place it has been for thousands of years. It is called

**Commented [notes1]:** 32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." Mark 10:32-34 (NIV)

the Hosanna Road today. As that road reaches the crest of that ridge, a magnificent view of the city of Jerusalem opens up before you. In Jesus' day, one could see the beautiful Temple on the other side of the valley where the Dome of the Rock stands today.

The day would have been a Sunday. There were four days until Passover. The Jews had many special traditions about this day. Rabbinical tradition says that the doors of the Temple were left open, awaiting the coming Messiah. False messiahs would present themselves on this day, so the Roman army was on high alert, ready for an uprising. In Exodus 12, the Lord instructed the people to choose a sacrificial lamb on this tenth day of the month.

Let us read the Lord's instruction at the first Passover about selecting the lamb. Exodus 12:1-7 (NIV) *1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 4 If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. 5 The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. 6 Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. 7 Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.*

The road into Jerusalem would have already been crowded with pilgrims coming into the city to purchase their lamb in keeping with this passage. Caring for the lamb those five days would serve two purposes. It would give you a chance to be certain that the lamb was without blemish, and it would give you time to grow attached to the lamb. The very day the crowds were coming to select their lamb, God presented the Lamb He had provided for the sins of the world. At first glance, you would think the people had made the right choice. They were shouting "Hosanna!" and throwing their cloaks before the donkey Jesus was riding and waving palm branches. The words they were quoting were from Psalm 118 and referred to the Messiah. Had Israel finally found the Lamb of God?

As Jesus reached the crest of this ridge, looking over Jerusalem, He began to wail. Our English word 'weep' does not do this word '*kaid*' justice. In Greek there are two common words for weeping. In John 11, when Jesus came to raise Lazarus, we see both words used. The word used for Jesus weeping in verse 35 means for tears to flow down your cheeks. The word used for the mourners is more of an audible wailing for the loss of a loved one. The latter is the word used in Luke, mourning of the death of someone close to you. It was how the folks in John 11 were crying. It would include loud sobs. The crowds are cheering Jesus entry into Jerusalem, hailing Him as king, and Jesus starts sobbing loudly. What is wrong with this picture? The people are shouting praise for all the miracles they have seen, but what does Jesus see? Let's read the passage again.

Luke 19:42-44 (NIV) *42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*

The Lord wept aloud because they were choosing the wrong lamb. "If you had only known on this day what would bring you peace...", He said. I wish we could hear it from His own lips. Hearing the way Jesus said it would break our hearts. The Lamb that God offers to the world is a Lamb that will save the soul, not the physical conditions of man. He'll get to that in time, but that is not His main purpose. He is here to save us from our sin, our rebellion that separates us from God. He has come to free us from the weight of guilt by paying our sin debt for us, opening a way for us to walk with God. He was presenting Himself as a way to have our purpose and dignity restored. But the lamb that the people were choosing was a king of earthly empires, a deliverer from taxation, not a deliverer from sin. Jesus knew this celebrated entry would be followed by a mournful exit on His way to a Roman cross. They were choosing someone to set them free from Rome. Hosanna means 'save us now'. The palm branches being waved were like a national flag of the Jews. It was the same sentiment in John 6, when after being miraculously fed, they developed a plan to make Jesus king. "Jesus, You lead us to victory over these Romans, and we can live in freedom from their oppression." Physical freedom is a wonderful thing, but it is nothing compared to the salvation of the soul. We rejoice with the Iraqis in their liberation, but we know that without Jesus they are never truly free.

Jesus looked ahead in time 40 years and saw the destruction that General Titus and his army would bring to Jerusalem. It was the result of their current choice of a lamb. Let me read to you just a bit of the horror Jesus could foresee, as recorded by Josephus. "All hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city. Then did the famine widen in its progress, and devour the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and infants that were dying by famine, and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged, the children also and the young men wondered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. For a time the dead were buried; but afterwards, when they could not do that, they had them cast down from the wall into the valleys beneath. When Titus, on going his rounds along these valleys, saw them full of dead bodies, and the thick putrefaction running about them, he gave a groan, and spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to witness this was not his doing."

Jesus can see even farther ahead than 40 years. He can look to Judgment Day, when the sheep are separated from the goats. As He does, His body convulses with the sobs for those who will not come to Him for peace, peace with God, and peace of conscience. He lamented, "How often I would have gathered you like a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you would not." (Luke 13:34) Do you hear the heart of the Son of God? He longs to draw us close to Himself - for our good.

**Commented [notes2]:** 34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!  
Luke 13:34 (NIV)

In case you are wondering, could it possibly be, that God became a man, consider His response to these times when man tried to make Him a king. Any normal man would seize the moment of fame and popularity, of acceptance, and ride it for all it was worth. Jesus escaped into the mountain the first time, (John 6:15) and wailed in grief the second. Sound like any man you know?

**Commented [notes3]:** 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. John 6:15 (NIV)

Instead of milking their fickle acceptance, He cries! Hear His heart. His tears show His good intentions for you. Could you doubt the sincerity of a man who is convulsed from head to foot with tears for you? That is the kind of man you can place your trust in. You know He is in earnest. He doesn't want to use you for His support; He wants your heart! That you did not come long ago grieves His heart. You have already missed years of sweet companionship with Him. Let His tears banish your fears. If you have not come to Jesus for peace with God, He weeps for you like this. Won't you run to Him this morning and tell Him you will accept His peace.

He not only shed tears for you, but He shed His blood as payment for the penalty of your sin. Tell Him you will not be like the Jews, for you do recognize the hour of His coming to you. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and He will remove them as far as the east is from the west. He will even come and live in you!

Surely some of the disciples wanted both the liberation in the physical and the liberation from the sinful nature. They were almost shouting appropriately. But when it came down to saving the body or the soul, they chose to save their body. This people draws near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, Jesus said. (Matthew 15:8) We fool ourselves sometimes, thinking Jesus is our priority. Crisis will show you what is really first in your heart.

**Commented [notes4]:** 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. Matt. 15:8 (KJV)

Fellow Christian, we need to let this compassion of Jesus for the lost break our hearts, so that He can cry for the lost through us. Once we are brokenhearted over our own sin, we will begin to be brokenhearted over the destructiveness of sin in others' lives. There is nothing that will break through the veil of delusion as powerfully as genuine love and compassion. Share in His grief for the lost. Look ahead and see the results of their choice of the wrong lamb and see the pain it will bring, and weep! We should never look out over Sedona without this same sense of brokenness for all those who have chosen the wrong lamb, like Jesus did over Jerusalem.

"Did Christ o'er sinners weep,  
And shall our cheeks by dry?  
Let floods of penitential grief  
Burst forth from every eye." CH Spurgeon

Some have chosen the lamb of addictions, some have chosen affairs, and some have placed their trust in a lamb of wealth. There are many lambs that can be chosen today. We all pick one kind or another, but the only lamb that is acceptable with God and can make you whole is the unblemished Lamb of God. If you live with

any of these other lambs for a short time, and if you are willing to be honest, you will see they are all blemished. Trusting in them will not give you peace. They will let you down sooner or later in devastating way.

It is lamb selection Sunday. Our compassionate Savior presents Himself to us this morning. He presents Himself to redeem us from our sins. He presents Himself as the Lamb of God to set us free from desires that have ruled our lives. He offers Himself to give us eternal purpose, and like the mother hen, He offers protection and care if you will be gathered to Him. He comes as a liberator. Just as the USA has no intention of controlling Iraq, but rather to see them free, so Christ comes to you. He sees you have been oppressed and enslaved by the dictator, sin. He doesn't want to be your new oppressor, but your liberator so that you can live in the greatness of all your Creator has planned for you.

A few days later, the crowd that cried "Save us!" would be crying, "Give us Barabbas." Barabbas was a zealot who murdered some Roman soldiers. He was a first century terrorist. The salvation he offered was physical. The hope he offered was in this life, not the next. He did no miracles, but he could kill Romans.

Hearing the request for Barabbas Pilate asked, "What shall I do with Jesus?" That crowd that once sang Jesus' praise cried out, "Crucify Him!" Acceptance of the Lamb of God must be more than a personal hope for things in this life to get better. It has to be a forsaking of this world, and a clinging to the Lamb as your only hope. We can want the Lamb to be our king to accomplish our purposes, instead of His own wonderful plan for our lives. It is lamb selection Sunday. Do you recognize the time of God's coming to you? Which lamb will you choose?

If you have waited too long, and you know you are ready to choose Jesus, do it this morning. Turn His mourning for you into great joy. There will be someone on the front pew to pray with you and encourage you in your decision. If you are wondering if Jesus is the right Lamb, I have a challenge for you. Just like the Jews picked their lamb and watched to see if there were any blemishes, why don't you open your heart and mind to Jesus this morning and spend the time until Easter looking at the book of John in the New Testament, checking out the Lamb? See if He is blemished. See if He is whole. I guarantee that if you spend the week with Him, you will grow attached to Him, just as the Jews did with their lamb. Next Sunday we celebrate the day He did more than cry for you. Next Sunday we celebrate the day He bled and died for you, but even more than that, the day He conquered death for you.

Fellow Christian, this week leading up to Crucifixion Friday and Resurrection Sunday, will you let Jesus share His heart with you for the lost? Will you cry with Him for those who have chosen other lambs that only bring pain and destruction? I believe that if we let our heart be broken, they will see Jesus' heart for them and come to the Lamb of God. Then our mourning will be turned into joy! There is more joy in heaven over one that comes to Him than over the 99 that are safe. (Luke 15:9)

**Commented [notes5]:** 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.  
Luke 15:7 (NIV)