

Palm Sunday 04-08-01

During the last few months Ray Vander Laan has given us a different perspective on what was happening that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem. The account of what we call the Triumphal Entry is in all four Gospels. To get a fuller picture we'll borrow from all four.

First let's consider the setting. Once Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead the Sanhedrin had decided they were going to kill Jesus. The High Priest Caiaphas without realizing it uttered a prophetic expression, "It is better for one man to die, than the whole nation to perish." In his mind he was thinking that the popularity of Jesus would incite the Romans to take away the power of the Saducean Temple rulers, and any rights that the Jews still had. In reality, he unwittingly prophesied that Jesus would die for our sins so that we would not have to face the wrath of God. So with that mind set they were watching for a chance to catch Jesus at something which they could accuse him of before Rome, and so crush Jesus, their competition. The real motivation was envy. After Lazarus was raised the crowds of followers were on the increase.

Jesus had been out of their reach in the area beyond Jordan ruled by Philip the Tetrarch. We don't know how long, probably at least a few weeks. He was wanted by Herod Antipas in the region of Galilee, and by the Sanhedrin in Judea. This was the last region where he could continue his ministry. The Passover was approaching.

Jesus left the area and headed toward Jerusalem. Mark 10:32-34 (NIV)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. -

Fear and astonishment seemed to permeate the group that followed Him. They had heard He was a wanted man. Now Jesus tells them plainly that He knows what will happen. -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."

On the way they still have questions about power and position when Jesus reigns. That makes us wonder if they heard Him at all. Who is going to sit on the right and left hand when He sets up his throne? He just told them He is going to be murdered and they still have dreams of an earthly kingdom.

As they leave Jericho blind, Bar Timaeus – probably situated at the narrow entrance to the path that winds up the canyon from Jericho to Jerusalem – asks

the Son of David to have mercy on him. Jesus heals the man's sight and he joins the crowd along that narrow trail up the ravine. No longer is he anxious to hit each one up for a coin, but now anxious to tell each one the wonderful thing Jesus did for him.

The trail ends near Bethany and continuing on toward Jerusalem you would come over the Mount of Olives. Some in the crowd ahead of Jesus on that narrow path have announced his coming. "Here comes Jesus, the Son of David, the One who raised Lazarus and He just gave sight to blind Bar Timaeus." They cut palm branches and begin to wave them in the air. That was reminiscent of the last time they were a free nation under the Macabbeans and had palm branches on their own coinage. They were waving what to us was the flag of their nation. Patriotic zeal was beginning to rise.

We have some difficulty with the timing here because the Gospel writers seem to disagree. I say 'seem to' because the Word of God is never in error; our understanding is incomplete. There are as many as three ways of reckoning the time. The Essenes had their own calendar and so did the Pharisees and Saducees. To some this is four days before Passover. That meant it was the day the lamb was selected for sacrifice. It was then kept with the family until the Passover to be sure it was unblemished. The Saducees believed this was the day the Messiah would appear and a rabbinical tradition tells us the gates of the Temple were left open this day to receive Him. That concerned the Romans and extra troops would be placed on guard. The day was full of importance.

As you stand at the top of the Mount you can see right across into the Temple courtyards. He may have even heard the merchants hawking their animals from the court of the Gentiles. At Jesus instruction the disciples had brought a foal of a donkey. Zech 9:9 (NIV)⁹ Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

When a Davidic king came on a donkey it meant he was coming in peace. The crowd would have preferred a war stallion. The noise began with the disciples praising God for the miracles they had seen. Luke 19:37 (NIV)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:

Mark 11:8-10 (NIV)⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" (That means 'save now' – but what is on their minds when they say, 'save us'? Hear the rest of what they shouted.) "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

They are quoting Psalm 118 from verse 25: ²⁵ O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. ²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

In this passage they reveal what is really in their hearts, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David." The prophecies say that a son of David would reign forever. They are in the same mind frame as the apostles who were arguing about their positions in the coming Kingdom. They saw Jesus as Messiah and Savior- not as Savior of their sins, but Savior from Rome and their present worldly circumstances.

The religious leaders try to get Jesus to quiet the crowds. They are afraid of exactly what Caiaphas warned of – a Roman intervention. But Jesus tells them that if He was to quiet them the stones would praise Him. What happens next shows that Jesus understood where their hearts were. Luke 19:41-44 (NIV)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 must have been very strange to them to see Jesus stop and weep and pronounce tragedy. Here they are shouting "save us! Set up the Kingdom of David! You're the one!" and Jesus stops and cries. Instead of telling them of the coming grandeur of their nation, He tells them of its total destruction. As much as that Psalm sounds like they understood what was happening, He told them they did not understand what would bring them peace or recognize the time of God coming to them.

Jesus visits us too, but sometimes we make the same mistake for the same reason. We are looking for something else. We think we will find peace in something physical. We have an expectation that our time and culture has impressed on us. That so dominates our mind that we become unreachable by what is really happening. We are praising God and quoting verses but our interpretation of what is happening is completely worldly.

I want you to consider why they couldn't recognize that God had come to them. What God is after is broken and contrite hearts that love Him for who He is. He can speak plainly to us like He did to the disciples, but we set it aside because we just don't want to hear those difficult things. Betrayal, conviction, delivered to

Gentiles, brutalized and murdered, ... it is much easier to ignore that and believe He is about to establish a kingdom like David's and we can all feast at his royal table. We want to hear He's going to heal us, solve that problem, restore that marriage, make things easier for us, but He is after a heart that is yielded to Him as Lord, a heart in which He is the first love. He's after hearts that will set aside their hopes and the world's expectations and just say, "I want You, to know You, to die to my self daily and let You mold and shape me by what ever means You will. Not my will but yours be done in my life."

I got a junk mail magazine this week that had on the cover, "It's God's will for everyone to be healed." Then why did David say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn your statutes"? And why didn't Jesus heal everyone around the pool of Bethesda? I'm not getting off on the issue of healing but using that to illustrate how we have a desire for a God that serves us regardless of how our heart is affected. He's after much more than the physical.

'Lord' means 'Sovereign', One who has the last word in everything. The crowd on the Mount of Olives was not saying, "Come reign in our hearts and save us from our sins!" They were saying, "We've got a problem with taxation and forced labor and the humility of being an occupied nation. Come fix it so we live like we want." Change our circumstance not our heart.

That is why a few days later when the choice is Barabbas or Jesus they chose the one that wielded a weapon instead of the Prince of Peace. Pilate says, "Then what shall I do with your king?" And in affect they say, "If He's not going to be who we want Him to be – crucify Him!" If He's just gonna raise the dead and heal the blind who needs him? The dead and the blind do. They just didn't realize they were spiritually dead and blind. Do we? Our great need is not something physical but eternal and spiritual. Without Jesus we are dead and blind. We could have the whole world but lose our soul. We could have health and wealth and every desire of man but what would that mean if we were blind and spiritually dead? Jesus comes to us in the same spirit today, in gentle humility and asks us what we will do with Him? You can try to use Him, but He wont be used. Or, you can make Him your King, your Lord, the One who makes the decisions in your life. Do you recognize the time of his coming to you? What will you do with Jesus? He comes to you in gentleness, recognize what will bring you peace.