

INTRODUCTION

People are often confused when they read the Bible. Some people seem to be confused about everything. I recently read some actual accident explanations that insurance clients turned in to their insurance companies. Here are five of my favorites:

1. “The other guy was all over the road and I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.”
2. “In my attempt to kill a fly, I ran into the telephone pole.”
3. “I had been driving my car for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and ran off the road.”
4. “The pedestrian had no idea which direction to go, so when he hesitated, I ran over him.”
5. “I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law and drove over the embankment.”

People are often confused about Palm Sunday as well. We call this Palm Sunday because it is the Sunday before Easter when Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the residents waved palm branches as He approached. This is commonly called the Triumphal Entry, but when you read the scripture, you discover it wasn't a triumphal entry; instead it was a tearful entry.

Luke 19:28-44. “After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’ Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They replied, ‘The Lord needs it.’ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 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: ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 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. 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. 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.’”

Christians recognize this next week around the world as Holy Week. As we approach Easter, we remember the events in the life of Jesus on the way to the cross and the empty tomb. After entering Jerusalem, Jesus went into the Temple area and drove out the dishonest merchants who were price gouging the pilgrims visiting Jerusalem for Passover. He said, “My Father’s House shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” Every evening, He

walked back over to the Mount of Olives to the village of Bethany where he stayed in the house of Mary, Martha, and their recently resuscitated brother, Lazarus. Then every day Jesus walked back over the Mount of Olives into the Temple courts where He taught while the Jewish leaders plotted His arrest.

Tradition says He gathered with the disciples on Thursday evening for the Passover meal, which He transformed into a new observance we call the Lord's Supper. It's called Maundy Thursday from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means "commandment." It was at this meal that Jesus gave us a new commandment—that we should love one another just as He loves us. After the meal Jesus and His disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the bottom slope of the Mount of Olives. After spending some time in agonizing prayer, He was arrested. The next day, Good Friday, is the traditional day that we remember His trial before Pilate, His torture and His crucifixion.

On the first day of the week, Easter Sunday, the disciples discovered that the tomb was empty. The angel proclaimed seven words that have changed the course of human history. He said, "He is not here. He is risen!" And next Sunday we're going to celebrate that Jesus is alive. Let's go ahead and practice our Easter greeting: "HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN, INDEED!"

On this Palm Sunday, I want us to understand what really happened when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Let's focus on four important details from that day, and learn a life lesson from each one.

1. CONSIDER THE COLT: Jesus needs people who may seem unqualified

Jesus sent the disciples to fetch a particular colt. The Bible says in verse 33, "As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They replied, 'The Lord needs it.'"

John points out that this was a young donkey that had never been ridden before. Years ago a rancher told me there is nothing more stubborn and wild than a young, unbroken donkey. He said that for Jesus to ride this unbroken donkey was a miracle that ranked right up there with walking on water.

It's like the dude ranch that advertised they had all kinds of horses for all kinds of riders. The ad said, "For big people, we have big horses. For little people we have little horses; for fast people we have fast horses; for slow people we have slow horses; and for people who have never ridden a horse, we have horses that have never been ridden!"

Jesus chose this donkey intentionally. A beautiful horse is a magnificent animal. It has large beautiful eyes, a flowing mane, a shining coat, and long graceful legs. A donkey isn't a thoroughbred horse. It's a plain, small, ugly animal. Nobody ever called a donkey beautiful. They have floppy ears that are too large, and sad eyes, like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. And when a donkey lets out a loud bray, it usually makes us laugh. In Jesus' day, horses were the Ferraris; donkeys were the used Ford Pintos.

But Jesus chose this steed to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. About 500 years earlier Zechariah predicted, “Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)

That unnamed donkey fascinates me. I believe God created this colt for the specific purpose of carrying the Messiah into Jerusalem. Some of us can identify with that little animal. You may think God can’t use you. You say, “Pastor, I’m no spiritual thoroughbred. I’m more like a spiritual donkey than a racehorse. Surely God doesn’t need me.”

If you never starred on a sports team, or made the honor roll, or was named who’s who, or most likely to succeed, or had your picture in the paper, congratulations. You are EXACTLY the kind of person God delights to use. The Bible says, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong—so that none could boast before Him.” (1 Corinthians 1:27). God calls the unqualified, and then He qualifies them to serve Him so that He gets all the glory.

The disciples said to the colt’s owner, “The Lord needs him.” I’m a disciple of Jesus and He sent me here today to deliver a message to you: “the Lord needs you.” It’s like that old picture of Uncle Sam pointing his finger with the message, “Uncle Sam Needs You.” Jesus is looking at you with eyes of love today, pointing His finger at you saying, “I need you.” Just as God created that colt for a special purpose in life, He has a purpose for your life. When you surrender your life to Him, that’s when you discover His plan and purpose.

2. CONSIDER THE CROWD: Jesus has a lot of fans, but not really many true followers

The Bible says, “The whole crowd began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.” (Luke 19:37)

Everyone loves a parade. During the 25th anniversary of I Love America this June, our choir will be singing, “We need a parade. We need old glory flying high. We need a parade; Confetti falling from the sky.” Whether it’s the Rose Festival Parade or the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, there’s something special about a parade.

And during the Passover season the Jews had a Passover parade. Thousands of pilgrims lined the road leading down from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. They waved palm branches, and laid them on the ground. It was like rolling out the red carpet for important people. The reputation of Jesus had spread as a teacher and miracle worker, so they sang His praises as He rode the donkey down the pathway to Jerusalem. They welcomed all the VIPs this way.

But I don’t think Jesus was overjoyed at His parade. He knew that after the parade, He would be betrayed. He realized that the same fickle crowd crying “Hail Him” on Sunday would be shouting “Nail Him” later that same week. The same ones yelling, “Crown Him” would be the same ones yelling, “Crucify Him” only a few short days later.

Earlier Jesus made this observation about the Jews in Jerusalem: Jesus said, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’” (Matthew 15:7-8)

What changed in a just a few short days? Let’s put Palm Sunday in historical context. About 200 years earlier, Judas Maccabees, nicknamed “The Hammer” had raised a Jewish army and led a successful rebellion to overthrow the Greeks and reclaim Jerusalem. In 163 B.C. he rode into Jerusalem on a magnificent stallion. People lined the streets waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” The Temple was re-consecrated, and to this day, our Jewish friends celebrate Hanukkah to commemorate this victory. Many of the Jews believed Judas the Hammer was the mighty Messiah. But three years later Judas was killed in battle and was buried. And he’s still dead and buried. In fact, tourists can visit the Maccabean graves in central Israel today.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the Jews were looking for another military Messiah to deliver them from the iron fist of the Romans. But Jesus rode a donkey to show that He wasn’t a hammer; He was a Redeemer. A radical revolutionary kills others for his cause but a loving redeemer is lays down His life so others may live.

I think the crowd turned on Jesus because He didn’t fulfill their expectations of a real Messiah. They were still looking for a military hero to deliver them from the hated Romans. They missed the point that He was riding a lowly donkey. They were looking for a general like Judas the Hammer. Over the next few days, it became obvious Jesus wasn’t a military revolutionary. He was a suffering servant who was going to be handed over to the Romans. He failed them, and they turned on Him in vicious rejection.

Jesus has a lot of fans today. A fan is an enthusiastic supporter. A Dallas Cowboys fan will wear a shirt or hat for their team; they’ll attend or watch every game, they’ll buy memorabilia, and they might even slap a bumper sticker on their car for the Cowboys.

A fan of Jesus acts the same way. They are an enthusiastic supporter of Jesus. They can sing the songs, attend or watch the worship services, wear a Jesus shirt, shell out some money, and maybe even slap a Jesus bumper sticker on their car. But Jesus is looking for followers who will die to self and live the way He lived and love the way He loved. Are you a fan or a fully devoted follower of Jesus?

3. CONSIDER THE CRITICS: Religious people don’t appreciate heart-felt worship

Even though there were some fickle fans in the crowd, there were some people who were truly worshipping Jesus. And the religious leaders criticized them. In verse 39 we read, “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’” But Jesus refused to pour cold water on the enthusiastic worship.

Some people think “religion” is a good thing. I don’t. I’m not a religious person. I’m a person who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Religion is humanity searching for God and trying to satisfy Him through all kinds of rituals and regulations. Christianity is God reaching

down to humanity to save us and forgive us through His Son. Religion kills; just look at the Middle East. But Jesus gives life.

The Pharisees were professional religionists. Jesus made a joke about them when He said they were like the blind leading the blind and that they strained out a gnat but swallowed a camel. They were miserable, and made everyone else miserable.

How can you recognize religion? Whenever you see people trying to make themselves more miserable to please God – that’s religion. Last year I visited Bogota, Colombia to teach the Healthy Church series. Bogota is a beautiful city surrounded by mountains. There is a white monastery on top of a mountain called Montserrat. Every day, hundreds of people walk and even jog up the steep two-mile trail for the view from 1,600 feet above the city. There is even a cable car that carries tourists and worshippers to the top. But on this next Friday, Good Friday, hundreds and thousands of pilgrims will climb to the top of the mountain on their knees.

It will take five to six hours and when they get to the top, their hands and knees will be bloody. But this self-inflicted pain makes them feel more holy. Ask them why they crawl to the top and they will tell you that they are doing this for penance, to earn forgiveness for their sins. I’ve got good news for you; you don’t have to crawl on your knees until they are bloody to find God’s forgiveness. It can’t be earned; it’s a gift. That’s why the Bible calls it grace. These pilgrims have the misguided idea that the more they hurt, the holier they are. That’s religion.

And lest you think I’m picking on any group, I’ve met hundreds of Baptists who have a misguided idea of what holiness is. They think holiness is keeping a bunch of man-made rules and regulations. And if it’s fun, it must be sin. These legalists have perfected what I call the Baptist Holy Look. It’s an expression that is a cross between acid indigestion and a migraine headache. They think, the more miserable I am, the holier I am; and smile, and sing, and laugh? No way, that’s not holy. How sad!

Worship should be infused with joy unspeakable full of glory. Just look at little children when they worship God. In Matthew’s account we find this exchange, “When the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they were indignant. ‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ they asked him. ‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘have you never read,’ ‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?’” *Matthew 21:15-16*

When the joy of the Lord fills you and you really start worshipping, get ready to be criticized. This jubilant scene is reminiscent of something that happened 1,000 years earlier. David was king and the Ark of the Covenant, representing the glory of God, was being brought into the city. 2 Samuel 6 says there was great rejoicing, shouts of praise and loud trumpets. Every six steps they stopped and offered a sacrifice. David was so overjoyed the Bible says, “He danced before the Lord with all his might.” (2 Samuel 6:14) His wife, Michal (one of Saul’s daughters) had a Pharisaical spirit and she criticized him and said he was making a fool out of himself. David, thoroughly rebuked, told her he would not stop celebrating before the Lord, but instead, would be even more energetic in his praise.

For years I didn't know what it meant to dance before the Lord with all your might. But since I've been to Pastor Emmy's church in Uganda, I can tell you I have danced before the Lord with all my might! If you want to see it, come with me some trip!

4. CONSIDER THE CRYING: Jesus wept because people rejected the peace He offered them

Jesus stopped halfway down the Mount of Olives and looked at the city of Jerusalem and broke into tears. In verse 42 He said, "If you, even you, had only known on THIS DAY what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."

In the midst of the shouts and songs of praise, suddenly there was the eerie sound of a single voice sobbing with grief. When Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, a word was used that meant that a tear slid down His cheek. But this word, *klaio*, is a strong word that means loud weeping and wailing. His heart was broken.

What was so special about this day? In Daniel 9, God gave an amazing countdown to the exact day when the Messiah would enter Jerusalem. We're studying this prophecy now in WEBS. Daniel predicted that from the decree to rebuilt Jerusalem until the Messiah would be revealed would be exactly 483 years. The day Jesus wept over Jerusalem was the exact day God had predicted through Daniel. Jesus said, "Here I am! You should have been expecting me. And if you had recognized Me, I would have given you peace, real peace. But your eyes are closed." And that made Him weep.

Jesus said, "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)

CONCLUSION

I've walked down the same trail from the top of the Mount of Olives many times. It would have been the exact path Jesus took, but it's paved now. Halfway down the trail, there is a small chapel built by the Franciscan order called Dominus Fleuit, which is Latin for "The Lord's Tears." The chapel roof has a teardrop design. Inside, on the floor there is a beautiful mosaic of a hen with chicks under her wings, with this verse inscribed in Latin. It says, "I wanted to shelter you like a hen shelters her chicks under her wing—then these words in red—but you were NOT WILLING."

As I studied for this message I was amazed to learn just how protective a hen is of her chicks. If a chicken hawk flies near the chicken yard, the hen will squawk furiously to call her chicks to settle under her wings.

A Canadian farmer who raised chickens relates an amazing story about the protective nature of a mother hen. One day his chicken coop caught on fire. He was able to extinguish the fire before too much damage occurred. Many of the hens had scampered to safety. As he searched through the ashes, he found a dead hen near her nest. The hen's feathers were scorched from the smoke

and fire. As he lifted the burned hen from the ashes, he was surprised to see movement below the mother hen. Six tiny chicks scurried out from under her outstretched wings. She could have escaped herself, but she chose to die while protecting her young.

There's a great spiritual truth here. Jesus made a way to shelter us from eternal judgment—and He died in the process. When God's judgment against sin is given out, the safest place to be in the Universe is under the peace and protection that Jesus offers.

As Jesus looks over the landscape of your life, on this Palm Sunday He is offering you the same thing He offered that day: peace, protection, shelter, and salvation. But He won't force you to accept His loving care. Jesus is still weeping for people in the 21st century who don't recognize that only He can give them peace. Is He weeping for you today? Will you invite Him into your heart?

On Palm Sunday Jesus made a tearful entry into Jerusalem. If you open your heart to Him today, He will make a triumphal entry into your life!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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