

Rowland Hussey didn't quite know what to do. His Wholesale and Retail Dry Goods Store was, well, it was drying up. Haverhill, Massachusetts was not a thriving town and his store was in the worst part of town. If something didn't turn around quickly, he would have to shut his doors. Hussey decided that something dramatic was needed. He would organize a 4th of July parade. The parade would begin before a cluster of the most successful stores and would cross town and end right before his store. In that way, he reasoned, he could bring customers right into his store. Hussey hired an 8 piece band and an experienced orator from Boston named Wilkins who would make a patriotic speech at the end of the parade from a small, temporary platform right in front of his store. This just had to work or his store was doomed.

July 4th rolled around and it was a scorcher. But then Hussey's parade rolled by, the townspeople began to tag along just as planned. By the time they reached his store, there was quite a crowd. But where was Wilkins? He was nowhere to be seen. Hussey tugged at his sweat drenched collar. Something had to be done - he had promised a speech. Then he remembered a speech on George Washington that he had given in grade school - but that was a long time ago. Slowly the storekeeper ascended the small platform that he had made. He turned to the crowd and gave a short speech on George Washington from the few facts that he could remember. It was a disastrous let down and he knew it. After the brief talk was over, the crowd applauded politely and then dispersed. Nobody came into his store. And a few months later, a large *closed* sign hung in the store window.

The defeated owner would have certainly left the store business for he took his failure very hard. But there was one businessman in that parade crowd who was impressed with his creative mind and spunk. His name was Caleb Hunking. And he came to Hussey with a proposal. He would build the store if Hussey would manage it. It would be in a far bigger city - New York City. And it would be in a good location - on 6th Avenue just south of 14th Street. But he needed a good manager to commit himself before he was willing to make the investment. 140 years have now passed since that new store was built and it is still thriving. And one of the ways in which this store has become well known is through its parades. Not 4th of July parades - no Hussey found out by experience that this is far too hot a time of year for a parade. No, Rowland Hussey Macy decided to move his parade to the fall - to Thanksgiving Time. And it has been a big hit ever since. In fact, Thanksgiving Day wouldn't be the same for many people without the bands and large floats of the annual Macy's Store Thanksgiving Parade.

There is something about a parade that interests people. Perhaps it is the lure of the crowds. Perhaps it is the excitement of something happening. Perhaps it is the curiosity of anticipation. But even on a hot day, people will flock out to see a parade. Every June, our city of Rockford has its Start of Summer Parade, and hundreds of people line Main Street just to get a glimpse of what's happening in the parade and, of course, to see our church float and receive the candy that we give out.

We are certainly not surprised by the events of that first Palm Sunday. As the Lord Jesus began his descent from the Mount of Olives through the Kidron Valley and then back up into Jerusalem, people crowded along the path attracting more and more others to the scene. Remember, this was the Passover season. There were thousands of pilgrims who had journeyed to Jerusalem just to be there for the special holiday season. Many were in a festive mood. The first harvest season of the year was over and they were having a family vacation in addition to coming to Jerusalem to commemorate God's delivering them from their former slavery in Egypt. The excitement of the King's parade would certainly have been an attraction to them. Yes, this triumphal entry of the Lord Jesus Christ was a unique event in his earthly ministry.

Every gospel writer gives an account of this event that we celebrate on this Palm Sunday. And, taken together, we see that this special drama in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ falls into 3 major scenes. We would like to look at these scenes this morning for each one has some special lessons to teach us.

Scene #1: The Preparation for the Lord's Trip into Jerusalem.

Now we have some unusual preparations made for Christ's Kingly Parade into Jerusalem. Listen to Luke description of it.

29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "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. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' "(Luke 19:29-31)

Now this was a very unusual instruction from the lips of Christ. It was not His common practice to borrow someone else's property without first asking permission. And, predictably, the owners of this colt were concerned with these strangers coming and taking away their property. Jesus, of course, anticipated their concern and prepared His disciples for it. And true to His word, the owners were appeased when the disciples told them that the colt was for the master's use. Now why did Jesus order such unusual preparations choosing to ride into the city of Jerusalem on this borrowed colt? There are at least 3 reasons for this strange preparation:

a. Matthew, the gospel writer who presents Jesus as the King of the Jews, states a prophetic reason

very clearly. Listen to his words recorded in Matthew 21:4,5: ^{MT 21:4} *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

^{MT 21:5} *"Say to the Daughter of Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "*

The Lord Jesus Christ realized the prophetic significance of this event. So He was very careful that all of the prophecies that had been foretold by Zechariah were carried out in every detail.

b. But Luke adds an interesting little detail that reveals another reason as well. In verse 30, Luke lets us know that the donkey that Jesus rode had never been ridden before. The Lord Jesus Christ was the first person to ever sit on its back. Now anyone who has ever ridden a donkey before knows the significance of this simple fact.

When I taught at Cornerstone University, they had an annual donkey basketball game with the Faculty playing against the Student Council members. This game took place on the basketball court in the field house. And as the name implies, all participants rode on the backs of donkeys. In fact, you couldn't touch the ball unless you were seated on your donkey. You had to shoot the ball into the hoop while riding the donkey in order to score a basket. Now I understand that donkey basketball games have been outlawed today because of the protests of animal rights activists - but anyone who has ever played in one of these games knows that it was not the animals that were abused. My donkey had a favorite trick. He would trot quickly for several steps and then stop abruptly lowering his head near the ground. It was just impossible to stay on him. It was just like a slide at the playground. Since that game, I have often thought of the challenge of riding a donkey that had not been broken - one who had never had a person on its back at all.

You see, it would not be natural for any person to get on the back of a donkey that had never been ridden and then journey peacefully down a steep road into a valley and then up an equally steep road into a bustling city with large crowds around. It would be natural for the donkey to buck and kick and do anything in its power to get this person off its back. The miracle that is often overlooked in this story is Jesus immediately breaking this donkey for riding with his touch. But such is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ over nature. He created all things, and all things are under His power and control. So in riding this donkey, Jesus was demonstrating His Lordship over nature.

c. The third reason for Christ riding a donkey was to show the character of His coming and His kingdom. It was not an unusual practice at all for a king to ride into a city in a parade. In fact, the triumphal

procession was a common practice. But kings normally rode into cities on stallions that represented their power and authority. Years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem, Alexander the Great rode his fiery stallion named Bucephalus into city after city as conquests were made. You can bet that if the Roman Emperor would have ridden into Jerusalem it would have been on the finest animal available to him.

But not the Lord of all glory. He chose an animal which represented humility. He chose a beast of burden, one which was used to serve. Jesus had openly said before that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for others, and now he pictured that spirit of humility as he entered the city where He would soon be giving that sacrifice for the human race.

So it is even to this day that God comes to us often in unexpected ways. With Elijah, we often expect God in the great demonstrations of power - the rushing winds, the raging fires, the explosive volcanoes, the violent earthquakes - but God most often comes to us in that still, small voice. Are we ready to recognize Him and receive Him?

Scene #2: The People who Acclaimed Him to be their King

LK 19:37 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:

LK 19:38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

LK 19:39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

LK 19:40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:37-40)

Now we must remember the historic setting to realize the significance of what was happening here. These people had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Passover was the remembrance of the greatest deliverance that the nation of Israel had ever experienced - the time when God freed His people who were slaves in Egypt. Egypt was the most powerful nation on the earth at the time of the original Passover. And the Israelites were in the most unfavorable position possible when that original Passover occurred. Humanly speaking, there was no hope that they would ever be freed from their slavery. But then God began to work in bringing plague after plague upon the nation of Egypt. And by the time God was done, that proud and arrogant Pharaoh was begging Moses to get these Israelites out of Egypt. The Passover was connected with the last plague - the death of all of the firstborn in Egypt. So the occasion that had brought all of these people together was the celebration of the most miraculous deliverance by God in all of their history. Now they were under the oppressing hands of the Roman Empire. Like the Egyptians had been, the Romans were

now the dominant world power. But if God had delivered His people in the past, could He not bring plagues on the Roman Empire to bring it to its knees? And this one who was riding into Jerusalem on the back of the donkey had demonstrated God's power in so many ways. He had healed the sick; he had cast demons out of people; he had fed thousands of people with just a handful of food; in fact, he had just raised a man back to life who had been dead in the grave for 4 days. Could not this one be a modern Moses, executing God's power in plagues to bring the Roman Empire to its knees and free the enslaved Israelites again?

Both the words that these crowds used and the spontaneous ceremony that erupted show that these were the thoughts that were racing through the minds of many. 3 of the Gospel accounts depict the crowds crying out *Hosanna*. *Hosanna* literally means *Save us*. *Save Us, Save Us* they continually cried over and over again to the Lord. The Palm Branches that were used were also rich with symbolism. The Palm Tree was the national emblem of an Independent Israel. To wave Palm Branches in Israel would be like Americans waving the Stars and Stripes at one of our patriotic parades.

150 years before, a similar scene to this one had featured Simon Maccabaeus. The Maccabaean Revolt had brought a measure of Jewish autonomy from the Greek Empire for a brief period of time. When Jerusalem had been freed, Simon Maccabaeus had ridden into Jerusalem in great celebration, with palm branches being waved, with musical instruments playing, with people cheering and yelling.

Now this scene was being replayed, but this time, Israel would be freed from the Roman Oppression. There can be no doubt that these were the thoughts that were going through the minds of the majority who were crying *Hosanna* and *Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord*. And this brings us to our 3rd and final scene.

Scene #3: The Pity which the Lord expresses for the city

LK 19:41 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. (Luke 19:41,42)

Just as this drama begins with an unusual instruction from the Lord to go and borrow a strange donkey, so it ends with an unusual response from the one who is being honored. Kings didn't break down and cry when they made their triumphal entries. Kings smiled and laughed. Kings basked in the glory of triumph. Kings waved their hands to the crowds and acknowledged the adulation that was being shown them. But not this King. Not the Lord Jesus Christ. Because unlike other Kings who could only see outward expressions, who were drunk with the wine of fame and popularity, this King could see right through to the hearts of people. And He knew that these people just didn't get it. They didn't understand what His mission was. They didn't understand what He had come to do. They didn't understand what they needed spiritually. They were

looking for a quick and temporal fix. They were willing to sacrifice all that was of eternal significance for the far inferior temporal blessings.

As beloved as this capital city was to them, it was not going to last. Within another generation, the Roman General Titus would come with 80,000 soldiers and lay siege to Jerusalem trapping many pilgrims inside the city during the Passover season. After they refused to surrender after several assaults, Titus would siege the city with his army, determined to starve them out. To intimidate and strike fear into the hearts of those quivering inside, Titus would bring others that he captured in outlying areas and crucify them around the city walls - up to 500 at a time on some days. Famine would eventually strike the citizens inside the city walls. People would begin to starve to death. When there was no longer any strength to bury their dead inside the city, they would just throw the bodies over the city walls. And finally, in August of 70 A.D., the city of Jerusalem would fall to the Roman Army. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that well over 1 million people were killed during the entire siege. Jesus knew what awaited the city of Jerusalem - and His heart grieved and ached for the pain and suffering that would have to be endured.

But I am sure that it was more than just His foreknowledge of what was going to happen to the city of Jerusalem physically that grieved the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus knew that these people were missing the point to His mission and coming. He was not riding the conquering stallion into the city. He was riding the humble donkey. He had not come to incite a revolt against the Roman Empire. He had come to defeat a far greater enemy. For the Lord Jesus Christ had come to meet the Depravity of Man, the Devil and Death itself in battle. And He fought that battle and won it on the cross of Calvary so that we could be freed from sin, freed from the oppression of the enemy and freed from the fear of death. Christ had come to give us far more than a temporary freedom from physical slavery; He had come to give us eternal freedom and fellowship with our creator. And the Lord Jesus Christ continued that journey to the cross - even though the crowds didn't understand why He was doing it. His assessment of their spiritual condition was confirmed as these adoring crowds become mocking crowds demanding his crucifixion within the week. But Christ made that journey to the cross so that all those who would become His spiritual followers and disciples might know salvation through His name.

There is an interesting historical anecdote that I would like to end with that pictures what Christ did for us spiritually upon the cross of Calvary. I have recounted just a bit of the Fall of Jerusalem to the Roman General Titus and his armies in 70 A.D. We know most of the details of this event from the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus who was a contemporary of these events. But there is another interesting sidelight that comes from another historian named Eusebius. Eusebius was the pastor of the church in the Israeli city of

Caesarea who lived a couple of hundred of years after this event. So Eusebius was not an eye-witness like Josephus. But he was a good historian and actually gives to us the first history of the Christian church. By 70 A.D., there was, of course, a very stable church in the city of Jerusalem. The church had started on the Day of Pentecost there around 30 A.D. so it was now in its second generation. According to Eusebius, the leaders of the church of Jerusalem received a special revelation from God that the Roman armies were coming and that Jerusalem would fall. So they all left the city taking the members of the church with them and journeyed to a small town in Jordan called Pella where they were spared all of the hardships and atrocities of that war.

What a picture this is of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. The devastating Fall of Jerusalem is a picture of the time of tribulation and the ravages of sin. But God has provided salvation for His people. That salvation comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. It was because sin and Satan were defeated upon the cross of Calvary that we can experience victory in our lives and eternal fellowship with God. And it is because of Christ's resurrection from the dead that we celebrate next week that we can have confidence that we will live and reign with Him forever. Yes, God has promised to either spare us from tribulation or keep us safe through trials in this life. But He has also promised to do so much more. The people would have been satisfied with a temporary deliverer. But God in His wisdom gave us a Savior forever. *Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.*