

*In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.* I, along with many other school mates, learned that little historical ditty in elementary school. And while some historical revisionists are trying to belittle the courage and accomplishments of Christopher Columbus today, he is still respected by most for helping to open a new world. Certainly when he returned to Spain after his discovery of the New World in 1492, Columbus was his nation's hero. He was in his mid 40's - the prime of life. He was given the title *Vice-King and General Governor of the Islands and Terra Firma of Asia and India*. I don't know if anyone before or after Columbus has ever been granted such an exalted title - Administrator of all the islands and continents of Asia and India. I mean Columbus was given preeminence over half the world. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella also granted him 1/10th of all of the revenues that would be generated in the future from the New World. Yes, during that last decade of the 15th century, Christopher Columbus had it all - fame, power and financial security.

But fortunes changed quickly for the courageous explorer. He made 3 more trips to the New World, but each one was less successful than the previous one. And by this time, many other captains were leading ships across the Atlantic as well. Within just a decade of his great moment of glory, Christopher Columbus was imprisoned by the same king who had formerly given him dominion over half the world. Now, penniless and scorned, nobody wanted to identify with Christopher Columbus. Crowds did not chant his name. Nobody wanted to hear the stories of his trip. So he wasted away in a jail cell. Month after month, year after year. Finally, at the age of 58, Christopher Columbus died. The man who is commonly recognized as holding the key that unlocked the Americas died penniless, despised and rejected by all.

History is filled with examples of famous individuals whose fortunes drastically changed in a short period of time. These examples remain a testimony to the fickle nature of fame and of people in general. But I don't believe that there is a case in all of human history of a person descending from the heights of human popularity to the pits of public scorn more quickly than the case found in the events that we will commemorate this week.

For on this Sunday almost 2,000 years ago, a man named Jesus was escorted into the city of Jerusalem amidst the adoring cries of the thousands of pilgrims who had gathered for the annual Passover feast. *Hosanna*, they cried as one. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. This is our Messiah. He indeed is the Son of God who has come to save us.* What greater tribute could be given to a man - to be

acknowledged as the Messiah, the Son of God?

But it wouldn't be more than 5 days later that those cries of *Hosanna* would become *Crucify. Do away with this man. He is a devil. He claims to be the Son of God falsely. Kill him. And kill him in the most torturous and painful way possible.* 5 days between the greatest fame and popularity conceivable to the most pronounced scorn and rejection imaginable. Just think of the mood swings that the Lord Jesus Christ endured during this period of less than a week.

We come this morning to the celebration of the first great event of the Passion Week of the Lord Jesus Christ. It occurred on the day that we commonly refer to as Palm Sunday. We call this Palm Sunday because it was on this day that the Lord Jesus was welcomed into the city of Jerusalem as he rode a donkey colt over a carpet of palm branches and garments that adoring people laid down before him.

The central figures in this Palm Sunday Theater, of course, are Jesus himself and the donkey colt. So we immediately assume that at least part of the significance of this event is associated with the manner in which Christ entered the city - riding on the back of the donkey. What was so significant about the Lord Jesus riding into the city of Jerusalem on the back of that donkey colt?

1. Well, first of all, Christ's riding into the city on the back of a colt was significant because this was the traditional manner for the coronation of a king. Now, it is true that most kings didn't ride into the capital city on the back of a donkey colt. Most rode into the capital city on a great stallion. But it was customary for the anointed king to ride in a triumphant processional into the capital city to the adoring adulation of his subjects. It was like a ticker-tape parade. It was a public time of recognition for the king by his subjects.

Realizing this tradition, we can see both the theological significance of Palm Sunday in the life of Christ and the obvious consternation that this event caused the Jewish religious leaders. Palm Sunday was the time when the Messiah was officially recognized by the Jewish people. As the people laid palm branches and garments along the road and shouted *Hosanna! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David,* they were recognizing the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Messiah, the Son of David who had been promised by the ancient prophets. This is of supreme importance for there now can be no doubt that when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, the people knew that was the Messiah, the one sent from God. They had just recognized him as such 5 days earlier.

But this Palm Sunday celebration also gives us insight into the consternation of the Jewish religious leaders. This is only the 3rd event in the life of Christ that all 4 gospels record. All of the gospels don't even record his birth, but they do all have an account of the triumphal entry. Luke, in his account, carefully

records the reaction of the Pharisees. *The Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. I tell you, Jesus replied back, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. Lu. 19:39,40.* John adds some of their reasoning. *So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him." Jn. 12:19.*

The indication is clear. The worst nightmare of the Pharisees had come true. They had at first hoped if they just ignored Jesus, he would go away. When that didn't work, they tried to discredit him as being just the illegitimate son of Joseph and Mary. When that didn't work, they tried to trick him into embarrassing himself by asking him hard questions. All the while they were talking behind his back trying to convince the people that he was a fraud. But now, their worst nightmare had come true. Jesus Christ was being recognized as the Messiah formally, by the people. In their minds, there was only one thing left that they could do- that was to arrest him, frame him for a crime worthy of death, and execute him. But there can be no question that they organized this plot with the full knowledge that they were dealing with God's Messiah. For he claimed that position and he was recognized as such by the people.

2. In the second place, it was appropriate for Christ to ride on the back of a donkey colt because of his stated mission in life. Now as we recalled briefly the traditional practices of the coronation of a king, you might have wondered - if other kings usually rode into the capital city seated on the back of a mighty stallion, why didn't Jesus choose a similar animal? If it was appropriate for an earthly king to display himself with such glory and power, how much more appropriate would it have been for God's son, the Messiah, to ride into Jerusalem on the most glorious steed available? Certainly, no one can deny the assertion that it would have been appropriate for God's Son to be received with all of the majesty and display of power available.

But I believe that a consideration of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ reveals to us the reason for his choosing a donkey's colt. We must remember that the donkey colt was Christ's choice - not his disciples, not the peoples, but Christ's choice. For the Lord Jesus Christ had not engaged in an attempted military coup of the Roman Empire. That is what his disciples desired. That is what the Jewish people longed for. But Christ was not known as a military conqueror. Rather the Lord Jesus Christ had come to minister as a servant. He had healed the sick when they had come to him for help. He had fed the hungry when there was no other way for them to get food. He had taught the crowds God's truth even when they had thronged around him all day long and into the night. And on numerous occasions, the Lord Jesus had clearly stated his purpose in coming to be a servant.

Just a few minutes ago, our Worship Team read Mark's account of the triumphal entry from the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel to bears his name. But notice with me a statement that Jesus made near the end of

Mark 10, just a few verses before Christ rode into Jerusalem. *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45.* How appropriate it was for this one who came in order to serve to choose an animal associated with service upon which to ride into the capital city on his coronation day. For make no mistake about it - that is exactly what a donkey was back in these days. The donkey was an animal that was taken for granted. The donkey was an animal that was used as a beast of burden. The donkey carried produce to the market and supplies back to the house. The donkey pulled the plow when the ground was being prepared for planting the crops. The donkey was always the servant. And that was the purpose for Christ's coming - to serve others even to the point of laying down his life for them. How appropriate it was for Christ to ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey colt.

But lest we get a distorted view of the Messiah, let us not forget that there is coming yet another entrance of the Messiah into the city of Jerusalem. There are many today who are only too happy to accept the concept of God as their servant. This is what they have always wanted. An Aladdin in a lamp who is dedicated to granting their every wish. As long as God just gives to them everything that they want, they are perfectly happy to believe in Him and accept Him. But, even though the Lord Jesus Christ came to serve, we do not see him realistically if we distort that image selfishly. For the Lord Jesus Christ did not come to just give us everything that we think we want - he came to give us that which we desperately need but cannot give ourselves. The miracles of Christ were important for they evidenced his claim for Messiahship - but they were not the main purpose for his coming. The ultimate service of Christ was found in his giving his life as a ransom for us. The Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross of Calvary to lay down his life as a sin sacrifice for us. He died so that our sins might be forgiven by God. He died so that we might live spiritually. It is as we accept God's free gift of forgiveness in Christ that we can have the assurance that our sins have been forgiven - that we have been born again into the family of God. How thankful we are for Christ coming the first time as a servant so that we can know fellowship with God and eternal life.

But we must never forget there is coming a day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the city of Jerusalem. On this great second coming, he will not be riding a donkey colt - but he will rather be mounted upon a great white horse. On this day, he will not be coming back to earth as the servant, but he will rather be coming as the conquering King. Listen to the description of this coming given in Revelation 19:11-16:

*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses*

*and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*

The Bible says that when Christ returns to earth the second time, his feet will touch down on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem and he will enter into the Eastern Gate of the City. He will enter not as the suffering servant this time, but he will enter as the conquering King.

Now whether or not we will return with him on that glorious day depends upon how we relate to his first coming. If we have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as the suffering servant, we will reign with Him as the Conquering King.

3. Finally, it was appropriate for Christ to enter the city in the same miraculous manner that had characterized his entire ministry.

Two features that are often overlooked when we study the Palm Sunday scene are the miraculous elements. There are 2 major miracles right here in this scene.

The first is connected with the securing of the donkey colt in the first place. As Jesus planned his entrance into the city of Jerusalem, he knew that he needed an animal to ride. Christ didn't own a donkey - so he would have to borrow one. So Jesus instructed 2 of his disciples to go into the city of Jerusalem and borrow a donkey for him. Now Jesus told them exactly what to expect and how to secure this donkey. Even though he was a couple of miles outside of the city, Christ described the whole scene that these 2 disciples would find in every detail. They would enter the city and find a donkey colt tied up. This was the colt that Jesus wanted to ride - they were to bring it to him. But the owner of that donkey would object to the disciples taking it. Christ even anticipated this objection raised by the owner and gave to his disciples the answer that they were to give. Obviously, donkeys were valuable in these days. The owner of the donkey would not just let anyone walk away with his animal. But when the owner objected, they were to simply say; *The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.* And what happened? The disciples found the donkey just as the Lord had envisioned it in their minds. The very objection that Christ anticipated came to pass, but they were allowed to bring the donkey for the Lord Jesus Christ to ride into Jerusalem.

Now this was a miracle - pure and simple. And while it is probable that the owner of the donkey was a believer in Christ, and did, therefore, recognize the disciples and was very willing to allow them to take the donkey for Christ's use, this doesn't minimize the miraculous elements. Perhaps, it was even John Mark's parents who owned this donkey. For tradition tells us that the Passover supper was eaten at John Mark's house. Perhaps, Christ used his family donkey to begin this Passion Week. But whoever's donkey it was is

not really the issue. What is significant is that this one who had performed so many miracles during his 3 years of public ministry presented himself on a miraculously obtained donkey.

But there is yet another miracle which I want to focus your attention on in conclusion. There is a little descriptive phrase that Jesus gives about this donkey which is most interesting. It is found in verse 2. Jesus told the 2 disciples to go and find a colt *which no one had ever ridden*. Now isn't this interesting. This was not just a donkey colt - but it was a colt that no one had ever ridden before. Matthew in his account tells us that the disciples actually brought both the colt and its mother to Jesus (Matt. 21:7). We can understand why - the young colt would be much less jittery if the mother was brought along with it.

Now let me ask you this question? What normally happens when a donkey colt is ridden by a human being for the very first time? It's hard enough to ride a donkey at all. When I taught at Cornerstone College, they used to have an annual donkey basketball game to raise money for athletics. The teachers vs. the student counsel. The donkey I rode would go very fast for a few steps and then stop abruptly and put down its head. It was impossible just to stay on it, let alone play basketball. But this donkey had never yet been ridden at all. Naturally, it would have not allowed a human rider until it would have been broken for riding.

But the Lord Jesus Christ got on the back of this donkey colt and rode it straight into the city of Jerusalem in a miraculous way. How appropriate for the one who had demonstrated his claim to Messiahship in performing innumerable miracles during the 3 years of his public ministry to ride on his coronation day in a miraculous manner. How appropriate for the one who had demonstrated his power over nature by calming storms on the Sea of Galilee to again show his power over the natural world by riding a colt that had never been ridden before. Even the donkey colt on this day recognized the Lord of all creation and immediately submitted itself to his will.

And by the way, there is a great lesson to be learned regarding the blessing of giving to the Lord here. We will not go into this in detail because it is different sermon. But what an example is to be found in the generosity of the anonymous owner of the colt. He willingly gave that which was deemed to be of great value to the Lord for his use. But in the end, he received far more than he ever gave to the Lord. For in the end, the Lord Jesus Christ gave back the donkey colt - and it was not only blessed by being the vehicle that Christ had used to ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but it was even better trained for use in the future. For the master wouldn't have to break this donkey - Christ had already done it for him.

Yes, it was appropriate for the Lord Jesus Christ to ride into Jerusalem on the donkey colt that first Palm Sunday:

\*it was appropriate for he was being recognized as the Messiah, the Son of David, the King of all creation - have you acknowledged the Lord Jesus Christ to be the king in your life?

\*it was appropriate for he had lived his life as a servant, and he was starting the week of his passion in which he would perform his greatest service to mankind - the service of going to the cross of Calvary to give his life as a sacrifice for sin - have you received the gift of forgiveness that God offers to you through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for your sins?

\*and it was appropriate for Christ rode into the city of Jerusalem in a miraculous manner just as he had lived the totality of his public life in a miraculous manner demonstrating himself to be God's Messiah sent to earth - have you experienced the miracle of being born again into the family of God?

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was presented as King on that first Palm Sunday, and just as surely as the Lord Jesus Christ will return as King and Kings and Lord of Lords some day in the future, He is king today, and he deserves His rightful place as King in our Lives. Is the Lord Jesus Christ the King of your life this morning?