

“Making a Messiah”: Closing Arguments

3: The Triumphal Entry / March 17, 2019

Key Texts: *Luke 19.28-40, Zechariah 9.9, 14.4*

Key Words: *Messiah, Triumphal entry, Donkey, Palm, Pilgrim, Crown me or kill me, MIGA*

Summary: *Up till now, Jesus has been quelling public speculation that he was the messiah. Now he goes public, in a remarkable fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecies. Now he forces their hand: Crown me, or Kill me!*

Have the church family stand for the reading of the text ...

From the Gospel of Luke: “As Jesus came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. “Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?” And the disciples simply replied, “The Lord needs it.” So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on.

As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!”

But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!” He replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!” (Luke 19.29-40)

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You can be seated ... Here is a tale of two kings ... Not quite 1400 years ago a man by the name of Mohammad rode a warhorse into the city of Mecca. He was surrounded by 400 mounted men -- warriors, and 10,000 foot soldiers. Everyone who converted to Islam was spared. Those who did not were either killed, or enslaved. That's how Mohammad became Mecca's new religious, and political, and military leader. And, of course, Mecca became the holiest city in the Islamic world. Today, you can still see Mohammad's swords on display in the Topkapi palace in Istanbul, or so they say.

The entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem 600 years before that was just slightly different. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, not on a warhorse, but on a young donkey. There was no cavalry to protect him, there were no legions of soldiers behind him; just a few Galilean peasants ... his 12 disciples. Many of those who greeted Jesus were waving these palm branches, because some of them were quite enthusiastic about the arrival the one they hoped would be their messiah, their king. But others laughed at him. And as for those who laughed ... Jesus had none of them killed, or enslaved; in fact, a few days later he let them kill him. And today, what is regarded as Jesus "sword" (the cross) is on display everywhere. It's on the wall behind me. Some of you are wearing it as a tattoo, or as jewelry.

Now, Mohammad's entrance into Mecca we kind of get. It was brutal, it was barbaric, but what an entrance! It was a gamechanger, a defining moment - in that city, and in that world, and even today - for many. Jesus' ... "triumphal" entry?! It was full of weird ... but infinitely more consequential. ... So ... here's where we are in the Jesus story. Jesus is done with all the prep stuff. He's been with these 12 guys for about 3 years - doing all these miracles, teaching them, convincing them he is their Messiah, even though he isn't doing the kind of stuff they expected their Messiah to do.

... Now, we figure Jesus was in his early 30s - humanly speaking, a pretty young guy by our standards. So, the walk from his home in Galilee to the temple in Jerusalem wouldn't be hard for him. He had done it many times: a little over a hundred miles, on foot; just a few days walk. You see, back then, those Jews who could would make these pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the big festivals; maybe even 3 or 4 times a year, if

possible. So, Jesus had made these trips to Jerusalem maybe dozens, maybe 100 times before? But never before - not once - had he entered town like this. This time was different!

Probably every other time Jesus entered Jerusalem on foot. In fact, during the festivals it was customary for a pilgrim to enter Jerusalem on foot. Even those who had been riding from distant places dismounted to enter the city. But not this time - for Jesus. Right before entering town, Jesus said, "Get me a donkey - make it a little one." He wasn't tired or anything. He just wanted this entrance to be different. And it was! Because this was his ... "coming out," his taking it public, his switching to cognito ... so to speak.

You see, up till now whenever someone would start spreading it around that Jesus might be the Messiah, he'd tell them to hush up. It's almost comical! Jesus would heal someone, or cast out a demon, and they'd get all excited, and Jesus would say, "Shhh! Don't tell anyone! Not yet!" ... Do you know why? Because he knew that once he started claiming to be the Messiah out loud ... they were going to have to kill him. And he wasn't ready to die yet. He still had prep work to do: things to show them, things to teach them.

But now everything changes. Now Jesus goes public. This is his "coming out" as God's Messiah. He's ready to say it out loud now: "I am the one you've been waiting for ... believe it or not!" ... because now his prep work is done, and now he's ready to die. So instead of walking into town, like the rest of the pilgrims during this festival time, Jesus gets a donkey. We'll see why in a couple minutes. And he plots his route through the Mount of Olives. We'll see why in a couple minutes. And when the people get excited and start waving these palm branches and saying these messiah things about Jesus, and the Jewish leaders try to hush them up, Jesus says, "If you hush the people up, the rocks are going to start praising me!" Huh?!

Because ... Jesus went to Jerusalem to pick a fight ... a fight he intended to lose ... kind of, it seemed, at least for a couple days. Jesus rides into Jerusalem and it's kind of like he tells them, flat out: "You either crown me your king, or you kill me. Those are your options, the only options I will permit you." In fact, the only options he permits us. So, let's dig a

little deeper. Let's walk through Luke's account and see if we can understand what's going down.

Now, it's about a week before their Passover feast, one of their "pilgrim feasts." Tens of thousands of pilgrims are making their way to Jerusalem to commemorate Passover: Moses, the Exodus, all that. Jesus and his disciples are coming down from the north, from Galilee, but the road most often used would take them through Jericho (it was still there), and then right by Bethany (a couple miles east of Jerusalem), through one of the suburbs called Bethphage, and then down the slope of the Mount of Olives, and then up to the temple on the other side of the Kidron Valley. It looks like Jesus and his disciples got to Bethany on a Saturday, where he stayed at the house of Lazarus - the guy he had raised from the dead. And then on a Sunday - or maybe Monday -- somewhere near what we would call the 1st of April, probably 30 A.D., Jesus says, "Let's go; let's get this party started!"

Luke 19, starting at verse 28: Luke says, "Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. "Go into that village over there," he told them. "As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying that colt?' just say, 'The Lord (the Lord ... God) needs it.'" So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying that colt?" And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it; God needs it." (And they let them go!) So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on." (Luke 19.28-35)

Guys, Jesus had never done it this way before. I doubt anybody had ever done it this way before. But the details are important ... they are huge! Every piece was choreographed by Jesus to make a point, and to make them choose: "Crown me, or kill me ... but I won't let you ignore me!" Crown him or kill him, guys, ... but he will not let you ignore him ... forever.

Jesus tells his disciples to get him a donkey, a young one. Do you know why? Why not a horse? A warhorse? Why not a mule, like King David

rode, or a big donkey even? Well, about 500 years before Jesus there was a prophet by the name of Zechariah. And this is what Zechariah prophesied. He says, “Rejoice, O people of Zion! (That’s what they called Jerusalem. He says,) Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! (Do you know why? Because) Look, your king is coming to you. (Your Messiah is coming to you; the King is coming!) He is righteous and (he is) victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a ... donkey — (in fact, he’s) riding on a donkey’s colt.” And here’s what the Messiah will say to you. He says, “I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations.” His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.”... So ... Do you know why Jesus told his disciples to get him a young donkey to ride in on? Because, Jesus says, “Zechariah was talking about me! That’s me! He was predicting me!” (Zechariah 9.9)

Five chapters later Zechariah says this, “On that day (the messiah’s) his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.” (Zechariah 14.4) You see, the Jews knew these prophecies. And they believed Zechariah was talking about the Messiah, standing on the Mount of Olives, right across the valley from the Temple. So Jesus is like, “Let’s take that road; let’s go that way!” Do you think they didn’t know what Jesus was doing?!

So when Jesus comes riding into town on a young donkey ... I suspect, in one way, he looked kind of silly! Kind of like riding one of those midget horses at a fair! But they knew what he was doing; they knew what he was claiming! So here’s what some of the people started doing, verse 36: “As Jesus rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him.” That wasn’t normal! You don’t know what a donkey is going to do to your coat! Do you know why they were doing that? Because back then that’s what you did when a King was riding into town. In fact the other gospels tell us that some of them were cutting palm branches and waving them, and throwing them out on the road too. Because that’s what they did, back then, when a King was coming into town. And they were hoping big time, that he was the King they’d been waiting for, the Messiah who would rescue them, and make Israel great again!

And, Luke says, “When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. (And here’s what they were saying,) “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” (Luke 19.37-38) In fact, Matthew, Mark, and John, in their accounts of this scene, they tell us that some of them were saying, “Hosanna (Hosanna) to the Son of David!” Do you know what Hosanna means? It means, “May God bless us,” “May God save us.” “Save us, Jesus!” “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Because “Son of David” was one of their names for ... God’s Messiah! And Jesus just takes it all in, this time! “That’s me!” he says.

Instead of telling them to hush, like he had been doing, he stirs it up! (Luke 19.39-40) Which ticks off some of the Jewish big-wigs. They are kind of like, “Settle them down, Jesus! This thing could turn ugly! You start prancing around like a king and the Romans will kick all our tails!” And Jesus says, “Not a chance! In fact, if these people were to shut up, the stones themselves would start praising me!” Was he serious?! ... “So, crown me your king, or kill me!”

What a weird scene! What a way for Jesus to come out, to go public as Messiah, to eliminate the “in” in incognito! And, I suspect, just like today, different people responded differently. Some of them were just curious - the casually curious. “What’s going on? What all the commotion over there?” “Well, I hear it’s that Jesus guy. The guy who’s supposed to be doing all these miracles and making these wild claims. He’s over there, coming down from the Mount of Olives on a donkey, believe it or not! Like he’s the Messiah or something! Let’s go look!”

You’ve been there; you’ve done that. Julie and I got to go to Dallas on Thanksgiving weekend. We got to see the Cowboys play in the greatest stadium on earth! After we parked we saw all these people gathering around one of the back entrances. So Julie and I went over to check it out, and the were players arriving. And people are yelling, and cheering. It was cool ... a little gawking, a little rubbernecking. You’ve been there, done that! I have. And some of them were like that with Jesus, I suspect. Maybe some of you are kind of like that, with Jesus.

Others, I suspect, well ... they thought Jesus looked really kind of stupid! Have you ever seen a baby donkey? They are pretty little. A full grown man, riding on a baby donkey! And instead of soldiers, warriors, this so-called Messiah-King is surrounded by these dorky looking peasants, from Galilee. And everybody is getting all worked up! Really? A few days later they'd beat a crown of thorns into his head, and put a robe over his bloody shoulders ... his "royal robe"! And they'd put a reed in his hand like it was a scepter. And they'd laugh at him ... again. And when they nailed him to a cross, they put this sign above his head: "Jesus of Nazareth, the "king" of the Jews." And they'd laugh ... again. In fact, it almost makes you wonder whether Jesus looked kind of dorky intentionally. He was making a king's entrance ... kind of, but also like the kind of king no one expected. ... And some ... maybe some of you ... still laugh at him?

Others ... watching Jesus ... they just got scared, and then mad. This Jesus was always pushing the edges, but this time he was crossing the line. This was Jerusalem; this was Passover; all these tens of thousands of people were pouring into town, and Jesus is stirring them up, claiming to be their King, their Messiah! Jerusalem was a powder keg. They were under Roman control, and Romans didn't tolerate demonstrations, and riots. So they ask Jesus to settle things down a little, and Jesus refuses ... this time. "Crown me ... or kill me!", he says. So ...

And for some ... Maybe this was finally it! Maybe this finally was the time! If Jesus really could still a storm, and heal the sick, and cast out demons, and raise the dead, and feed the whole town with a couple McDonald's Happy Meals, maybe this really was him ... the one they'd been waiting for. Maybe Jesus really could make Israel great again. You know, MIGA - Make Israel Great Again! Maybe Jesus really could kick out the Romans, and clean out the swamp, and clean up their wall street, and bring justice back to their courts, and empty their hospitals, and put a chicken in every pot. Maybe he really is the one! And maybe finally ... finally this Jesus is going to get done what they'd been expecting their Messiah to do. He's got the power, doesn't he? And he's yanking off his mask, isn't he? And pulling off his glove. He's come to pick a fight ... right? And they are ready! Let's go!

And everyone there ... everyone except Jesus ... was clueless. Everyone there was cheering or jeering a figment of their imaginations, an illusion. They had no clue! They had no idea what Jesus had really come to do. They had no idea how the world would change forever, in less than one week ... just 7 days later.

Now, we have a different perspective, 2000 years later. We know what happens on Thursday, when Jesus is arrested. We know about the sham trials they put him through. We know that on Friday they tied him to a post and whipped him to the bone; and then they nailed the lamb of God to a cross... at about the same time they were killing the lambs in the temple for the Passover meal. And we know the disciples claim he rose again ... 3 days later.

Let me tell you guys, if you are not a Jesus follower ... yet ... you'd better hope his disciples were wrong about that. And if you are a Jesus follower ... Well ... What if by some miracle you could go back in time and be there, you could be in that crowd. You are standing there on the Mount of Olives watching Jesus make his entrance on young donkey ... knowing what you know now? What if you knew, like Jesus did, what he was planning to do? What if you knew he was actually planning to die ... brutally ... for you? Would you be waving a palm branch and cheering him on? "Yeah God! Go God! I'm so glad you're getting it done!" Or would your heart break ... with shame ... and with gratitude? Hmmm ... weird scene ... for us ... isn't it?

Okay, three takeaways. Takeaway #1 is about him, it's about Jesus. It's about the kind of man-God he is. Tim Keller (a great pastor up in New York) ... Tim Keller says that Jesus was the only person ever who was both unbelievably humble, and not at all modest; incredibly humble, but not modest, at all. Just look at the kind of guy he is, the way he treated people: his tenderness, how sweet he is, how gentle he is with women, with children, with the poor, with prostitutes, with tax collectors, with people of other races ... anybody who was marginalized in that world. He was willing to serve them, not be served by them! He'd come to serve! Unbelievably humble! But modesty? None! He'd say things like: "Before Abraham was (centuries ago), I already existed!" Things like, "I am going to come back and judge the whole earth; all of you will answer to me!" Things like, "I am the power behind the whole universe."

Modest?! He claims to be God's Messiah; he claims to be the Son of God even. But humble?! Riding on a young donkey, surrounded by an entourage of peasants, on his way to die ... for us ... a humble God!?

Listen guys, don't let the fact that he is a shy, and humble, and gracious, and gentle king fool you. He is God; and he is your path to God; and he does demand our unconditional surrender ... and allegiance. No brag, just fact! You can't just pass him off as a great man, a great teacher; you can't just "like him," but no more. You certainly can't ignore him, or live like he just doesn't matter. He is either the most sinister liar who ever lived, or the craziest lunatic who ever lived, or he really is God's Messiah, God's Son, your Savior, and your Lord.

Takeaway #2: Takeaway #2 is about his mission, about his offering us what we need, not what we want. You see, there was this immense chasm between what the people wanted from their Messiah, and what Jesus came to give them. They wanted someone to make Israel great again! They wanted their messiah to kick out the Romans, and clean out the swamp, and clean up their wall street, and bring justice back to their courts, and empty their hospitals, and put a chicken in every pot. And Jesus didn't come to do that ... yet. Do you know why? Because they needed way bigger than that. They were sinners, they were separated from God. They were flailing around missing the life with God they were created for. And Jesus came to make that right!

We're still kind of like that, aren't we? "Come on God! You are supposed to be so powerful, so good, so smart! I need you to get with it!! There are bodies to heal, marriages to fix, prodigals to straighten out, bills to pay off!" There is this chasm, this mismatch between what we want from God and what he wants to give us... Do you have any idea what your sin has done to you and to the people around you? Do you have any idea what it means to be separated from God and to miss the life he made you for? Do you have any idea what it's worth to have peace with God, to have a purpose for living, to have a hope that transcends any fleeting troubles we might experience now? Guys, he's come to give us all that!

What we think we need is almost always so shallow; and God will always - always - exceed our expectations ... in the end. We know so little!

They thought the cross was his failure. They had no clue! Listen: this is huge; you need to hear this. God always gives you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows! (repeat) And if you can start to get that, you will live an increasingly contented, non-anxious life. And if you don't ... you won't.

One more takeaway, takeaway #3. This one is about us: We - you and me - we still have to crown him, or kill him ... or try! Good luck with that one! Coming down that mountain, on a donkey; some of them all excited, some of them are laughing, some of them are just getting mad, trying to shut the people up. And Jesus says, "If these people hush, the rocks will start praising me!" "Worship me," he says, "or kill me. And then you'd better hope I stay dead!"

So which is it? And guys, if you are going to crown him, go all the way! Keller tells of a teacher he listened to as a youngster. Her words still grip him. She said, "My name is Barbara Boyd. If you say, "Come in Barbara, but stay out, Boyd" ... that wouldn't work! (She says,) I don't have a Barbara part and a Boyd part that I can separate out. You either get all of me, or none of me."

It's like that with Jesus. You can't say, "Come in Savior, but stay out Lord." You can't say, "Come in Helper, but stay out King." It's all or nothing. You give him everything, or nothing - because he won't accept just a part of you. Make him the center of your life. All in, guys! And discover what doing life with God, for God, God's way ... what that does for you!

Prayer

One month, April 14, Baptism Sunday
Bright green ards in the pockets in front of you ...

Think:

- Is there someone in your life who has drifted?
- Is there someone who has never tasted?
- Someone you care about who needs Jesus?

Take a moment, write down a name, or two, or three

We are going to have a quiet time, a quiet time with God

- Don't just go to the table and taste his grace
- Let him nudge you with the name of someone who needs to be there with you ... write that name down on your card

We'll let you know in a few minutes what to do with that card ...