

INTRODUCTION

Most of us have been singing the beloved hymns of the faith for many years. It's also true that we're all getting a little older. Somebody emailed a list of revised hymn titles for those of us who are chronologically challenged:

1. "Precious Lord, Take my Hand ... and Help Me Up!"
2. "It is Well with my Soul ... but my Knees Hurt!"
3. "Go Tell it on the Mountain ... but Speak a Little Louder!"
4. "Just a Slower Walk with Thee"
5. "I Love to Tell the Same Story"
6. "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah ... I Forgot Where I Parked!"

There are a couple of more, but I've forgotten them.

In our passage today, we're going to read about a parade. When I mention the word "parade" what comes to your mind? I enjoyed The I Love America presentation when the choir sang, "We need a parade; We need Old Glory flying high." And we had our own parade.

What's your favorite parade? The Rose Festival Parade here in Tyler? Or maybe you like The Rose Bowl Parade on New Year's Day. Lots of people love the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.

I was curious to discover where the world's largest parade is held. It's not the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade; it's not Mardi Gras or Festival in Rio. According to Google, the world's largest parade takes place every year in Germany. It's the Hanover Schutzenfest Parade. Shutzenfest means a festival of shooting. It's a marksman competition that has been held annually since the 16th century. The parade is 7 ½ miles long with 10,000 participants, half of which are marksmen there to compete. There are 100 marching bands and over 1.5 million spectators. That's what I call a parade!

Today we're going to talk about a Passover Party Parade. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, the roads leading to Jerusalem were filled with spectators watching the thousands of visitors who came to Jerusalem. In the Gospel of John we read, "The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem." (John 12:12) Every Jewish man and his family was expected to attend the Passover festival. So every spring, Jews from all over the world flocked to Jerusalem. But Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem to commemorate the Passover Lamb who was slain. He was entering Jerusalem to become the Passover Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Mark 11:1-11. "As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just 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 doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!' 'Hosanna in the highest!' Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve."

The Romans often conducted a census so they could collect the right amount of taxes. We know from Roman records that Jerusalem had a population of about 20,000. That's about the size of Corsicana, Texas to give you a point of reference. But during Passover, many thousands of people flocked to Jerusalem.

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian who became a Roman sympathizer and he wrote about how many people crowded into Jerusalem. He writes: "Cestius, the Roman governor of Palestine, attempted to impress Emperor Nero that the Passover was an important feast for the Jews, and to do this he ordered the high priest to count the actual number of lambs that were sacrificed at Passover in the year A.D. 65. Cestius quoted the high priest as giving him a figure of 256,500 lambs that were offered for sacrifice." (*Antiquities of the Jews*)

That's one lamb per family, so you have to multiply that by a factor of two or three. It's possible there were over 750,000 who came to Jerusalem for Passover. That's about the population of Denver.

Are you still trying to get a picture of the crowds? Think of First Monday at Canton. Canton's population is about 3,500 and sometimes 100,000 during Trade Days. That's about the same factor, but the difference is Canton shoppers usually come for one day and go home. The Jews who came for Passover stayed for eight full days. So they were crowded into the city and onto all the land surrounding Jerusalem.

Let's gather with the disciples and follow Jesus. There are four important lessons we can learn from the Passover Party Parade.

1. JESUS SHOWS THE VALUE OF TEAMWORK BY SENDING TWO DISCIPLES

I've read this passage many times, and I never paid attention to that small detail. Going and getting a colt sounds like an easy job for one man, but Jesus sent two disciples. As I thought about this I studied the other passages when Jesus sent disciples out on a job. He never sent them alone; He always paired them up. He sent out seventy disciples two-by-two; and on another occasion he sent out the twelve two-by-two. In Mark 14 He sends two disciples to make preparations for the Passover meal.

Jesus sent them out in pairs for a very practical reason. One of the pair would be older and more experienced and could teach and mentor the younger one. When you go out with another disciple there can be accountability and encouragement.

When we get in the Book of Acts, we see this same model. Paul and Barnabas went out together as the first missionaries from Antioch.

There are some beautiful words in Ecclesiastes usually only read at weddings, but the truth applies to every area of our lives. Solomon observed, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

Every Christian should have a prayer partner or a ministry partner. You should seek out a wiser, older Christian and ask if they will mentor or disciple you. And you need to seek out a younger, newer Christian and take them under your wing to disciple them. In the Christian life there are no Lone Rangers—and even the Lone Ranger had Tonto!

2. JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AS THE MESSIAH BY RIDING A DONKEY

This was an unusual entrance for Jesus. Jesus visited Jerusalem many times during His life. There were three festivals a year every Jewish man was supposed to attend: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. But before this Passover Parade, Jesus had always slipped quietly into the city without drawing any attention to himself.

But he knew that this was the time he would be entering the city the last time during his humanity. He gave careful instructions for His disciples to bring him a particular colt. Matthew points out that this colt was the foal of a donkey.

Jesus chose this donkey intentionally. Why didn't He ride in on a stallion? 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.

Why did He ride a donkey? I actually had a man tell me once that He rode a donkey to identify with the Democratic Party. That's NOT the reason!

But Jesus chose this donkey to make a statement. He was fulfilling scripture. About 500 years earlier Zechariah predicted, "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." (Zechariah 9:9)

A real king would arrive in great pomp and circumstance. Three centuries earlier, Alexander the Great swept through the region, conquering all the surrounding cities. When he arrived at the outskirts of the city, the High Priest and Jewish leaders went out to meet him. According to

Josephus, the priests showed Alexander the scroll of Daniel where he predicted that a mighty Grecian king would defeat the Medes and Persians. Josephus wrote that Alexander entered Jerusalem with much fanfare. One picture shows Him in a golden chariot pulled by an elephant—and that didn't make Alexander a republican, by the way. Alexander visited the Temple and spared the city and only demanded tribute be paid for seven years.

But Jesus didn't enter the city in a golden chariot or on a mighty stallion. He entered the city riding on a lowly donkey. He was showing the city he was coming not as a conquering king, but as a prince of peace.

3. JESUS RECOGNIZES EMPTY PRAISE

You might have noticed this week, the new Saudi King, Salman, visited Washington. He landed in his luxury jumbo jet at Andrews Air Force Base. There were about 100 brand-new Mercedes lined up to transport his entourage to the Georgetown Four Seasons Hotel. This past month the Four Seasons underwent a \$13 million facelift in preparation of the visit. The king has booked all 222 rooms of the facility. There was so much red carpet rolled out that the manager of the hotel said that the king's feet would never touch concrete or asphalt.

That's what these people were doing for Jesus. They were rolling out the red carpet because they believed he would be the next great king. As he entered the city they shouted, "Hosanna!" which means "save us NOW!" They shouted, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David." The crowd expected Jesus to deliver them from the iron-fisted rule of the Romans. They believed this miracle worker could perform his biggest miracle ever and restore Israel to the greatness it enjoyed when King David sat on the throne. They were looking for a military and economic king.

They were celebrating His arrival. But I don't think Jesus was experiencing any joy. I don't think He was smiling and waving to the crowds. Because He knew these same people yelling "Hail him!" would be crying "Nail him!" in just a few days. The same fickle crowd shouting, "Crown him!" would be crying, "Crucify him!" in a few days.

Jesus recognized that it was empty praise. In Matthew's account, he quotes Isaiah's warning, "The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'" (Isaiah 29:13)

Some people think they are honoring God when they obey a set of religious rules. They can sing songs from memory and quote the Bible and the creeds, but if it is only lip service, God isn't honored. God wants your heart. He wants you to express your love for Him from your heart.

This really wasn't the triumphal entry many people call it. I call it a tearful entry. Because Luke tells us in the middle of the Passover Party Parade Jesus stopped on the road and looked across the Kidron Valley at the city of Jerusalem. I can imagine the crowd got quiet and wondered why He had stopped. And then Jesus began to weep loudly over Jerusalem. He said, "If you had only known on this day what would bring you peace," Not peace from the Romans but personal

peace. The end isn't going to be pretty, "because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:42-44)

4. JESUS CAME TO CHANGE LIVES, NOT A POLITICAL SITUATION

About 200 years earlier, Judas Maccabees, nicknamed "The Hammer," 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.

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 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.

When Jesus was arrested and handed to Pilate, Pilate asked Him if He was a king. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)

Jesus is a King of an eternal Kingdom. And those of us who follow Him are His subjects in the Kingdom of God.

Over the next fourteen months, we are going to be immersed in a huge political process. I've told you before that I don't like politics. It comes from two words, "poly" meaning many and "tics" which are blood-sucking pests. Have you ever wondered about the politics of Jesus?

There were plenty of political parties during the day of Jesus. The Pharisees were the staunch ultra-conservatives who hated the Romans. The Sadducees were the liberals who got in bed with the Romans so they had all the prime appointed positions. The Essenes were the true independents who thought both the Pharisees and Sadducees were of the devil.

Jesus' enemies tried to get Him to speak out against the Roman government. When they asked Him about paying taxes, He took a coin and said, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." He said, "If a Roman soldier compels you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles."

Jesus refused to get involved in man's politics. That's because He was God in the flesh. Lest you misunderstand me, I think every follower of Jesus should be engaged in the political process. We need believers to run for office, and to vote for people who can restore morality to our culture.

But we need to know revival in our land won't start in the White House; it will start in the Church House. Our salvation isn't coming in on Air Force One. Our salvation is Jesus Christ who will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

CONCLUSION

So, I have a personal application question that I'd like for you to answer: When Jesus enters your life, what are you willing to lay down before Him? When I studied this passage again, God showed me something else I'd never seen before. At the Passover Parade, people laid things down on the pathway before Jesus. Some people laid down palm branches. Other people laid down their coats. Those who laid down palm branches didn't sacrifice much. They just cut a palm branch off and laid it on the trail. But what happened to those who put their coats down in front of a parade? You try that next month on October 17 at the Rose Festival Parade. Take your nicest coat and lay it down on the street in front of the parade. You won't have much of a coat left after the parade passes. The people who laid down their coats before Jesus were making a sacrifice; the others just laid down branches.

Jesus doesn't just enter your life when you are born again. He enters your life every moment. He wants to be your constant king. He doesn't want your coats but the Bible does teach that God appreciates any kind of sacrifice we make for Him.

Do you know why God created you? He created you to do what those people in Jerusalem were doing that day. He created you to praise Him. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

What is keeping you from praising the King? Is it pride? Lay it down before Him today. Is it fear? Lay it down before Him. Is it pain? Lay it down before Him. Is it apathy? Whatever it is that keeps you from offering Him the sacrifice of praise, lay it down before Him today and don't pick it up again. Will you make a commitment to honor the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Jesus was the focus of two parades that week in Jerusalem. First, there was the Passover Party Parade where he was praised. The second parade would be the *Via Dolorosa*, the way of suffering. Jesus would be carrying his cross, and instead of a day cheers; it would be a day of tears and jeers. And over the next few weeks we're going to follow Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem and he heads toward a cross and an empty tomb.

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Personal Application: When Jesus enters your life, what are you willing to lay down before Him?

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
