

“The Last Parade”

Luke 19:28-48

4/8/2001 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

A week before Jesus would be murdered, He entered Jerusalem for the last time with His disciples. He was aware of the mounting conflicts and the trouble He was in with the Jerusalem temple authorities. He was aware of their plot to kill Him and had often referred to His coming death with those who were close.

It was a Sunday morning and He asked two of His friends to go on ahead to get a donkey in the Jerusalem suburb of Bethphage. They were in Bethany, at the time, with several friends. Bethany was the suburb in which Lazarus lived – you recall that he was the one raised from the dead.

Jesus was spending some of His last trouble-free days with His close friends Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha. Because of the popularity of His raising Lazarus back from the dead, there were many people trying to catch up to meet with Jesus and His disciples. Wherever they went, people would flock to Him.

The two disciples had returned with the donkey and it happened just as He said it would. The owners apparently knew Jesus because all they had to say was that *the Lord had need of it*.



His entry into Jerusalem started out simple enough. As they proceeded into town, they found several hundred already on the road headed downtown. This week thousands of Jewish people, who had moved away from Palestine, were visiting to celebrate Passover. In large groups, people were traveling into the city to take part in one of the most important Jewish holidays. This was the celebration of when God led Israel out of their slavery in Egypt.

Ironically enough, they would use this week to remember the Passover sacrifice and how the first born Egyptians had died. Yet later this very week, they would put to death their Messiah, God incarnate.



Most of Jesus’ followers went into Jerusalem with Him. There were probably a hundred or so who found a way to travel with Him. Many of them had seen Lazarus brought back from the dead before their own eyes.

Along the way, some began to sing. Others began telling the people around them what they had seen Jesus do. Some began to quote hymns out of their national hymnbook, the Psalms. Still others called out “Alleluia” (which meant *Praise the Lord*) or “Hosanna” (which means *may you help us*.)

At one point, the singing grew more unified. One of the songs they sang went “Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the Lord, . . . Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” First a few, then many more began to throw their clothing down on the road ahead of the donkey to keep the dust down. Others snatched palm branches from nearby trees and bushes, putting them on the road as well.

A few kids and their parents carried the branches upright just as some of us wave pennants and pinwheels at parades or fairs. The entire scene had become rather exciting so that now there were hundreds of friends and traveling pilgrims coming into the city surrounding Jesus.

This mass of people moving festively into town became a lot of fun for the participants and many thought this was the moment Jesus might be taking to make His move. They felt, finally we have someone who will lead us politically against

the Romans to take over the capital; gather everyone to oppose Rome and bring about what the Zealots have wanted to do for so many years. They were thinking about a peace which would come through change of government. They had forgotten or hadn't heard what Jesus taught about His kingdom not being of this world. Those who had heard Him hadn't understood that it was a peace that would begin within our heart.



As they were coming to the bend in Main Street,¹ several upset religious leaders quickly came over to move along side Jesus. They said "Teacher, You've got to stop this; quiet down your followers. We can't have any trouble here. If the Roman soldiers think this is a march against the capital and a riot, there will be bloodshed."

What bothered them most, though, was that the people were treating the One they hated with respect. They were treating Him like the Messiah.

Jesus knew their hearts. As they spoke with pious concern in their voices, He probably glanced over at them from atop His donkey and looked right into their eyes. He saw the hatred and their faces clenched – not with true concern but in anger and internal resentment – that always surfaces to form true expressions with your facial muscles.

So He knew their cunning and phoniness. He knew their hearts and how they were riddled with hatred so He spoke over the shoulders and heads to just within their earshot – despite the singing and jeering of the crowd. He said, "You know, even if all these people were silent, the very stones would scream out and celebrate."

Some of these same Pharisees were the ones who had gone out to investigate John the Baptist a few years ago. They heard him tell them that they shouldn't feel so important in God's eyes. That God would raise up the stones on the ground to become followers if God wanted. And these Pharisees didn't dare to try to stop the crowd.

¹ figuratively speaking

Everyone seemed to be behind Jesus. This just might be it.

Zechariah had talked of the Messiah coming on a donkey hundreds of years before. The donkey was an indication of peace, humility and somehow hinted of suffering. Jesus had come to give inner peace. He came as a Servant. He came to town to die.

But Jesus wasn't just living it up, caught up in the crowd celebration. He was gracefully permitting the people to worship Him, briefly, as He deserved because of the Holy One Whom He was. If Jesus had ever *fully* shown Himself and all of His astonishing supernatural magnificence were to be unveiled, it would have been too much for any of them to take.



Even though Jesus was surrounded by friends and followers, people who were even singing and shouting in praise, He was greatly saddened. He was recalling the years when the Jews were wandering in the wilderness. The years they were protected and led by Abraham, Moses and the many prophets.

He remembered how there were famines, wars and generations rising and falling. He remembered how most of their customs were looking forward to a day when they would finally have the Messiah come to them. He loved these people, His own people, but He was tremendously saddened that they just couldn't see Who was now in their midst. That He Himself was the Messiah, the One for whom their poets had longed, generation after generation.

Jesus knew that in a matter of days, He would be rejected and killed. He knew that they were so cock-sure of their own agenda and expectations that it had to be a political and military change to bring about peace – that they just could not see or hear or be open to the way God was now offering it.



If Jesus walked through our lives here in Buffalo, we'd miss it as well. It just doesn't fit into our personal estimation of how things should

be done. As they did, do we totally focus only on our own sense of things

Jesus knew that most all the people (who were now in that crowded street – the ones between the buildings, the ones holding children in their arms with smiles on their faces; . . . the clergy and their foolish extra ornamental clothing to somehow make themselves feel special) – Jesus knew most all of them would be outright slaughtered and their wonderful temple leveled brick by brick in only 40 years.

In 70 CE Jerusalem was stormed by General Vespasian, who had been sent by Nero to finally shut down the Zealot Jewish rebellion against Rome. By then, Nero in Rome had already killed Paul and probably Peter.² So thinking about their history, their suffering and now their tragic blindness to Who was right in their midst, Jesus wept. Right in the middle of the movement of all those people and the informal parade, Jesus wept. He was sitting on His ride through the parade and was openly weeping.

Jesus came into Jerusalem with not only a profound sadness, He came with judgment upon their religious establishment. He had spent more than the average amount of time in the temple and the neighborhood synagogues as a devout Jew. He had noticed that through the years, the temple cult had turned into more of a business than a place of worship and learning. On this high holyday, there were hundreds of animal cages and merchants selling their sacrificial animals and religious trinkets. Josephus and other historians tell us that not only did the temple money changers charge for the conversion of the foreign money, the Priests had insisted on people paying for their sacrifices in coins that were minted by the temple. So the temple was making a percentage on selling the temple coinage and the money changers were making money on the exchange.

² We obtain much of our history of the Roman massacre of men, women and children from the first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

Jesus was livid. There is no getting around it, Jesus went wild. He violently turned over the tables and threw everything all over the floor. He grabbed a whip and started snapping it at the merchants and the animals, screaming at them and chasing them out of the temple. He yelled, “My house is to be a house for prayer but you’ve turned it into a den of robbers.”

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In the closing verses of this section, Luke says that Jesus spent the next few days teaching in the temple, just as He had done in the last few years. All the authorities earnestly tried to figure out how to kill Jesus but they couldn’t just yet. But the people hung on His words. They were hungry for the truth because they were looking for the reality of the presence of God in their lives. All the clergy and religious leaders had given them was organized religion and a wall of bureaucracy separating them from God.

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It seems that today, God must be looking at organized religion and weeping at the drivel it has become. I speak to students at UB during the week and I regularly hear how alienated they feel from organized religion. They tell me of the phoniness, the pettiness and the shallow emotionalism (when they hear people get around to talking about God.) They’re absolutely sick of the niggling judging of others and the legalism that drives them away.

They want to somehow see God in people who claim to be Christians but they’re saying that they don’t see God in people of the church. They tell me that they’re not hearing anyone in their churches say anything about God that has anything, whatsoever, to do with their lives. These students are being exposed to an enormous amount of knowledge and they’re trying to figure out what to do with all this information in order to make decisions on their personal futures.

They say they’re not being taken seriously at home or in their home churches and they’re not being asked what they think about things. People are talking *at* them but they’re not listening to them. They claim there aren’t many folks in their lives who seem to have a sense of settling joy –

nor are there many people around who act like the Holy Spirit of God lives in them. That somehow their faith *is* making a difference in the way they're handling the challenges and tough times they face.

They tell me privately and share in their class discussions that very few people seem to be signed up for class with God. They don't see many people involved in a serious attempt to learn more about God. Instead, they say they see people showing up at church, if the weather is good and passively listening to the authority figures tell them what to think.



Perhaps your take home question for today is simply this: are you signed up for class? Where in your life are you intentionally opening yourself up and exposing yourself to hear from God about the ministry to which you are called to do? Where is it in your life that you are reading or studying or intentionally discussing something spiritual that makes you reevaluate your thinking and your behavior.

If Jesus walked into your living room, would He be crying at all the opportunities you've missed to grow? Would He have cause to become angry about what you keep choosing to do with your life – how you have used or not used the resources you were given? If He started teaching and talking, would you stop to listen? Are you signed up for class? 🙏