

Has anyone here ever marched in a parade? For years, our high school band was bussed into Chicago, where we marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade. It was a fun experience as we marched by thousands of people, saw the river dyed green, and had pizza.



Today is Palm Sunday. There are two foundational word pictures to understanding today's story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The first is a parade. Jesus' entrance is like ...

1. The Roman parade of triumph. It was a parade of the 'highest military distinction.'¹ Only the Roman Senate could award this honor. The one honored entered the city ...

- In a chariot drawn by four horses.
- He wore a crown of laurel branches.
- He held a scepter in one hand and a laurel branch in the other.
- He was preceded by the Roman Senate, magistrates, musicians, the spoils of war, and captives in fetters.
- He was followed by his army.
- The procession went to Jupiter's Temple where a bull was sacrificed, and incense was offered.

Jesus' entrance was also like ...

2. David's Return to Jerusalem after defeating Absalom (2Sa 19-20). David returned as a triumphant king, the victory brought now peace, but David was greatly humbled.² The great fiasco was because he did not deal with Absalom earlier.

The second foundational word picture is a coded message. Think of the Enigma machine of WWII that sent messages that



¹ Arthur Walwyn Evans, 'Triumph', in James Orr, ed., *ISBE* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), pp. 3022-23.

² R.T. France, *NICNT The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 775.

could be read by all but only understood by those who had the code.

- Jesus' bold entrance was designed to send a message, but also to hide that message from the Romans, the Pharisees, and those who had already made their mind up. If the message was too obvious there would be trouble.
- Jesus often used coded messages, like parables. After the parable of the four soils, 'His disciples came and asked him, "why do you always use these hard to understand illustrations?"¹¹ Then he explained to them that only they were permitted to understand ... others were not (MT 13:10-11 LB).'

Jesus' entrance is designed to get the people's attention, but not to appear as an anti-Rome, or military in any way.³ He wants them to reflect on who he is.

Today, let's look at the triumphal entry from different perspectives.

Triumphal Entry Perspectives



While there are some differences between the four biographers,⁴ the story is basically the same. Some highlighted certain parts and ignored others, but we have a pretty good picture of that day.

I am led to try a different approach, to look at the event through the eyes of some of the participants.

Let's start with the disciples.

1. Disciples.

'As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. ² "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them." ... They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it (Mt 21:1-3, 7 NLT).' We don't know which two disciples were sent but let's imagine it was Peter and Simon the Zealot.

³ France, *Matthew*, p. 775.

⁴ Edward Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus: A Guide to the Four Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), pp. 11-13.

- I can imagine Peter thinking, 'here we go again. first it was "fill the jars up with water." Then it was, "feed this multitude with just a handful of bread and some fish." And the scary "step out of the boat," or "catch a fish, open its mouth and pay our taxes with the coin you find." There always seems to be weird requests with Jesus.'
- Simon the Zealot's thoughts may have gone like this, 'A donkey? It should be a white horse. For three years we were told to keep quiet about our suspicions that Jesus is the Messiah,⁵ and today he is making his big entrance into Jerusalem ... on a donkey? Donkeys are for civil officials not military leaders.'⁶

Perhaps they were used to doing weird things for Jesus, but they knew that he had a plan. They obeyed and even put their own coats on the donkey so that Jesus could ride it.

If God asked you to do something crazy, would you do it? 'Go talk to that young man sitting on the bench.' 'Give \$1,000 to the missionary.'

Be obedient to God's calling.

Jesus chose to make a dramatic entrance into Jerusalem.⁷

- Jesus did not need a donkey. It was just a mile or two and Jesus normally walked everywhere, but he chooses to ride it for a reason.
- With all the crowds they could have easily slipped into Jerusalem without drawing attention to themselves.

We are supposed to ask ourselves, 'Just who is this Jesus?'

In three ways, Jesus is subtly announcing he is the Messiah.

- The identified him as 'Jesus as the Son of David.'⁸
- Overturning the tables at the Temple implied authority to do so.

⁵ The 'Messianic secret,' Mt 8:4, 9:30; Mk 1:44, 5:43, 7:36; Lk8:56.

⁶ Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 2nd edn. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Academic Press, 2014), p. 97.

⁷ This is 'designed to draw attention and to provoke people to think about Jesus' messianic claim', R.T. France, *NICNT The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 770.

⁸ France, *Matthew*, p. 773.

- The explicit quote from the prophet Zechariah 9:9. 'This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,⁵ "Tell the people of Jerusalem, 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey — riding on a donkey's colt (Mt 21:4-5 NLT).'" The prophet foresaw a king entering Jerusalem on a donkey to 'bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch ... to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:10 NLT).'

This prophesied humble king would bring peace to the world - if you knew the prophecy, it was powerful.

Let's turn to the donkey's owner.

2. Donkey's Owner.

'So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. ³³ And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying that colt?" ³⁴ And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on (Lk 19:32-35 NLT).'

I've got so many questions for this owner.

- 'How did you know to lend it?'
- 'Was it difficult to give something to Jesus?'
- 'Did you know that your generosity would be used for such a noble purpose?''⁹

When we sense God wants something from us, do we try to reason our way out of generosity?

- 'God can do anything, why does he need me or what's mine?'
- 'God owns everything, and I have so little, he can sell some of the cattle on a thousand hills to take care of this.'

The owner could have reasoned, 'what kind of Messiah doesn't even have the money to own a horse? He must borrow a donkey?'

Scholars give three possible reasons for the owner's generosity. When the disciples stated,

'The Lord needs them,' could be ...

- Hospitality extended towards Jerusalem's guests.¹⁰ Jesus was nobody special.

⁹ Max Lucado, *The Final Week of Jesus* (Multnomah Press, 1994), pp. 37-38.

¹⁰ Keener, *Background Commentary*, p. 156.

- A 'royal levy.'¹¹ Jesus was the Messiah gently commandeering it.
- A password for a prearranged plan.¹² Jesus is the messiah working his plan.

Of these three, I believe it is a royal levy, because the owner stood up for his property. Donkey's cost between two months and ten months wages.

If the Lord asks you for something, will you be generous, like our donkey owner?

Now, let's put ourselves in the crowd going into the city for the Passover.

3. Galilean Crowds.

'A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven (Mt 21:8-9 NLT)!'"

- These were disciples not bystanders, 'The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen (Lk 19:37 NIV).' They believed and were caught up in the moment (though they would quickly abandoned Jesus).¹³
- Imagine that we are country people from Galilee.¹⁴ We cannot read or write and are dependent upon the priests have read to us.
- Jesus fits with what we have been taught about the Messiah. We saw the miracles.
- Who is this Jesus?
- Is this a prelude to the revelation of the Messiah?

What the crowd yelled is pretty much the same in all four biographers.

- 'Hosanna' is the transliteration into Greek, of the Hebrew 'save us now.'¹⁵

¹¹ Joel B. Green, *NICNT The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 684. 'An ancient law which required the citizen to render to the king any item or service he or one of his emissaries might request', Max Lucado, *The Final Week of Jesus* (Multnomah Press, 1994), p. 38, c.f., Mt 5:41.

¹² France, *Matthew*, p. 776.

¹³ Jn 12:16, 'Its meaning was concealed even from the disciples', William L. Lane, *NICNT The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1974), p. 393.

¹⁴ Outside of a few trips to Jerusalem that John records, Jesus' ministry was primarily outside of Jerusalem, France, *Matthew*, p. 767. 'John records frequent visits of Jesus to Jerusalem', fn. 1. Outside of his childhood, this is the first visit in the synoptics.

¹⁵ France, *Matthew*, p. 780. Over time it morphed into praise rather than a prayer, like Hallelujah.

- 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' is from Ps 118:25-26, the Hallel sung at Passover. It was originally sung 'as a hymn of royal entry' for the annual 're-enthronement' ritual.¹⁶
- 'For the crowd Jesus was not just any king, but the expected Messiah, whose "coming" the prophets foretold.'¹⁷
- He is victorious, just look at the miracles, even raised Lazarus from the dead.¹⁸

Jerusalem did not have a king at this time but was ruled directly from Rome through a prefect.¹⁹ King Herod ruled nearby, but Jerusalem was a separate jurisdiction.

As we pass by the Roman garrison guarding the entrance to the city, our shouts are not as loud. They see no weapons, and the guy on a donkey does not appear to be a threat. We intuitively know that if the Romans 'recognized the implications of Jesus' claim, they would have arrested him.'²⁰

Recently, I went to a Red Sox game, and a guy in front of me caught a foul ball with a funnel cake. It was the craziest catch I've ever seen. My eyes followed the ball to a puff of powdered sugar. The group who saw it cheered and yelled. Those who did not see it wondered what we were excited about. In the same way, the Galileans were 100% confident – they saw it - but they received a mixed reaction from the residents of Jerusalem.

4. Jerusalem & Pharisees.

'When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee (Mt 21:8-11 NIV)."'

I hope you see Jesus as the Messiah today. Ask yourself, who is this?

The strong support outside of the city walls is changed to a mixed reaction within the walls.

¹⁶ Green, *Luke*, p. 686.

¹⁷ France, *Matthew*, p. 781.

¹⁸ Green, *Luke*, p. 682.

¹⁹ France, *Matthew*, p. 781.

²⁰ Keener, *Background Commentary*, p. 156.

- The sophisticated Jerusalem residents may have heard of Jesus the prophet or his miracles. Some joined in throwing down their coats, while others turned away.
- There is doubt and opposition.
- Cautious and curious are the two best words for the Jerusalem crowd.
- But ‘any suggestion of a Jewish “king” could only mean trouble with the Roman government.’²¹

And then there were the religious authorities: ‘The Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him (Jn 12:19 NIV)!”’ The Pharisees are afraid of losing their power and position.

So ‘Some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”’⁴⁰ He replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers (Lk 19:39-40 NLT)!”’

- John the Baptist said that God can raise up as children of Abraham from the stones (Lk 3:8). God can do anything, so even stones can vocalize praise to their creator.
- These Pharisees have set themselves against Jesus, like an oppositional child.
- Earlier, they clearly said, ‘We do not want him to be our king (Lk 19:14 NLT).’

If you had to choose right now, based on what you know, is Jesus the Messiah who brings peace to your heart?

Is he worthy of praise or is he a fake?

Finally, let’s try to look through Jesus’ eyes.

5. Jesus.

‘But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep (Lk 19:41 NLT).’

- Wow. Jesus stops on the way and begins to cry.
- Jerusalem has failed to receive its true king with praise.
- It has failed in its mission to bring salvation and peace to all nations.
- Jesus is moved emotionally. He prophesies a powerful lament.

“‘How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.’⁴³ Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close

²¹ France, *Matthew*, p. 781.

in on you from every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you (Lk 19:41-44 NLT).”

Peace is hidden from their eyes; they lack the key to decode who Jesus is.

Jesus wants everyone to believe. He does ‘not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2Pe 3:9 NIV).’

Who is this Jesus? You must decide.

Mark records ‘So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After looking around carefully at everything, he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples (Mk 11:11 NLT).’

He looked around at the Temple, but it was too late.

He saw ...

- The moneychangers, those selling animals inside when they should have been outside.
- A religious institution that oppressed people rather than point people to God.

The next day, Monday, Jesus would overturn the moneychanger’s tables and teach in the Temple until he was betrayed Thursday night during prayer.

Then, Friday night from the cross Jesus would say, ‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23:34 NIV).’

The triumphal entry was the beginning of Jesus’ passion week – the triumph over sin and death. On the cross and from the tomb Jesus would destroy the shackles of sin and death on you and me.

Jesus won the victory by taking our place: ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2Co 5:21 NIV).’

Pray for healing.

‘The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (Is 53:5 NIV).’

Communion.

‘While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” ²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they

all drank from it. ²⁴“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. ²⁵“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God (Mk 14:22-25 NIV).”

Conclusion.

If you see it, the Holy Spirit has given you the code to understand the hidden message. Please put your faith in Jesus. Jesus’ death and resurrection destroyed sin and brings salvation to all who believe.

I think of Paul’s end times imagery here:

- ‘And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Col 2:15 NIV).’
- Death and sin are paraded before the angels in heaven. They are bound with brass shackles. They have no power; they are defeated. We used to be in the front, bound up in sin, but we were set free.
- In fact, we are now behind Jesus as a part of his army. We are victors who share in the triumphal celebration.

Prayer