

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

The Donkey Whisperer – Fools! For I Also Had My Hour

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Matthew 21:1-17

When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,² saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me."³ "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:⁵ "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them,⁷ and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.⁸ Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.⁹ The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!"¹⁰ When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"¹¹ And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant¹⁶ and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF?'"¹⁷ And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

This is Palm Sunday... next week is Easter...I read a funny story this week (Michael Wilkins) about how we forget the meaning of holidays and how children are often fuzzy about their meanings.

A preschool teacher asked her Sunday School class the meaning of Easter. A little girl said, "We eat turkey and all my uncles play football" Teacher knew the girl was thinking of Thanksgiving.

Another little girl said, “We wake up and there are lots of presents to open...” (evidently, thinking of Christmas). The teacher was a little discouraged and wondered “What are we teaching these kids?!”

Then a little boy said, “It’s when Jesus died on a Cross and they put Him in a cave”... and the teacher was so relieved... and then the boy raised his hand again and said... “Then He came OUT of the cave...and if He sees His shadow we have six more weeks of Winter...”

Well, when it comes to Palm Sunday...we may have it kind of right...but also very wrong. We may see it as a happy day...but it’s also a day for weeping.

It was the case on the original day too... It was a kind of coronation day (happy!)...the disciples saw it that way...the crowds got some of it right...and others just got it all wrong... evil and murder emerge...

It was a MOMENTOUS day...and something is going to happen – it’s like pin taken from a grenade and it can’t be put back now... It is a moment for us to SEE Jesus Christ as King over a New Creation, the New Adam and also to see ourselves and ask, “Have I really GOTTEN this? And how DO people ‘GET’ it? How is faith born in believers? And has faith been born in my own life and heart...what causes it; what prevents it?”

Let’s look at this Happy Day and Terribly Sad – 1) The Destination of the Story 2) Everything Comes Together and 3) Some Get It/Some Don’t and WHY

Have you ever noticed how unbalanced the four Gospels are? Have you ever seen how they can’t REALLY qualify as biographies because they treat the years of Jesus Christ’s life so unevenly?

Scholars will tell you, for instance, that a full 30% of Matthew’s account is devoted to the last week of His life...And all that is just to NOTE: THIS is the POINT. If you read a book about Alexander Graham Bell, I’m sure a good deal of it would be devoted to his inventing the telephone...it was his great achievement. AND what takes place in THIS FINAL SECTION of the book (30%) is THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENT of the main character.

Some people are known for their discoveries... their works of art...their words...their battles but THIS MAIN CHARACTER is known for His death. It’s not even so much the teaching of Jesus Christ, informing us how to live the right way or how to get to Heaven or be blessed... HIS great achievement is His death...His passion/suffering and His resurrection from the dead.

He’s like salmon swimming upstream to give birth and then to die...He ascends...upstream...to the summit, to Jerusalem to die so that others might live.

AND this is the start of our celebration of Holy Week or Passion Week...this is the crucial focus of the Story... "When they approached Jerusalem...when He had entered Jerusalem...and Jesus entered the Temple..." As I've said before, it's as if all Biblical history up to this point, is moving like a whirlpool, all compressing, condensing, concentrating to an infinitely heavy Point, a Vortex, a single Representative.

That's the second point today, that in this well-known scene, it is all visibly COMING TOGETHER. Everywhere you look in this scene, it's telling; it's fulfillment, significance, clues, signs, symbols.

He comes to "the beautiful city of God" to Zion, to Jerusalem, so prominent and special in all of Biblical history, of prophecy – significant. Then, the vehicle tells, a donkey as prophesied by Zechariah, the foal/colt of a beast of burden...signifying that this is a King who comes in peace, who comes with terms of surrender to a people who have been vanquished. He comes NOT to humiliate or shame the defeated army but to say, "if you put down your arms you have protection and peace under My dominion."

The disciples are told to go GET this colt and it's mother and they (QUOTE), "Did just as Jesus had instructed them" – even that TELLS of His authority.

Most of the crowd, spreading their coats for this donkey and this King of Peace to walk on like a carpet and cutting branches, palm branches (John) a telling gesture, an acceptance of royal dominion and a people willing to submit. Everything is telling! This is all the clues converging...all the breadcrumbs have led to this BAKERY...all the strings are tied here!

The people greet Him with words from the Psalms, "Hosanna to the Son of David...Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD...Save Us...Hosanna!"

You can feel it – our questions are being answered and the people feel it: "all the city was stirred saying 'Who is this?'" And we get the feeling that we finally KNOW, "This is the Prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee!" And it may not be the whole truth but so-far-so-good and then He does indeed PLAY the PROPHET – it's a sign! He goes into the Temple ("And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple" - Mal 3.2) another fulfillment! If there was any doubt WHO this person was...if the picture quality was once kind'a spotty... if it was ever, "I see but...I don't SEE...I believe but help my unbelief" THAT TIME IS NOW PAST! It's all come together!

And then, the King of Peace – who is also acknowledged as Prophet as He again drives out the evil of "quid-pro-quo" commerce from the Temple which was to be the great alternative, the seat of grace for all Gentile Nations to see the contrast between manmade religion and God's grace – He stands in the Temple as King and Prophet.

And then (see – it’s all telling! It’s all converging here) He welcomes in to His own healing hands, the weak – the blind and the lame are brought to Him in the Temple. He’s showing Himself to BE the Great High Priest.

The blind and the lame shouldn’t even be IN the Temple according to the Holiness Code of Leviticus 21... but here is a Priest who can MAKE the unclean whole and clean – He can sanctify as no other priest could do!

And now we see Him... it all ties together at this point. The question He asked, “Who do people say that I am ...who do YOU say that I am?” – THE answer to that question is unavoidable! “He is Prophet, Priest and King – He is God who comes to His Holy Temple and He is Man who rides a donkey... it all comes together now...

And THEN... sitting a little smug from OUR safe perspective, 2000 years removed from the original events... we notice... SOME GET IT and SOME DON’T.

And the ones...we might expect to get it are the ones who seem least aware of what looks so obvious to US and the seemingly LEAST qualified... are (once again!) the ones who see most clearly.

The religious leaders, studying all the time, the Hebrew Scriptures that told of His coming...who must have been primed and prepped and schooled to recognize Him... but in that moment, when He comes RIGHT to their door (AND WE CAN’T MISS MATTHEW’S deliberate irony here!) “When the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done and the children who were shouting ‘Hosanna to the Son of David they rejoiced and praised God”

Nope! “...they became indignant...” That doesn’t make any sense... It’s like saying, “When she saw the lovely sunset she screamed in pain and hid her eyes in horror...” It’s a sentence that doesn’t fit together!

And Jesus Christ cops to the charge (as we’d say) “Yes...the children are getting it ...have you not read the Eighth Psalm, 'Out of the mouth of infants and babies You have prepared praise for Yourself'?

He comes right out and says it, “Y – E – S...They are calling Me ‘Son of David’ because I AM...They are praising Me as if I were God-incarnate because I AM!”

The children unknowingly acknowledge what the leaders KNOWINGLY deny.

The disciples are, I imagine, just star-struck. What they thought they saw, they now see clearer than ever. Though Jesus Christ will still have to prepare them for what they are NOT prepared to see.

The crowds?...They ...like so many people...see some aspects of Jesus identity (that He's a prophet) but to the exclusion of the others – they DON'T SEE HIM as the embodiment of Israel or the King of the New Creation or the High Priest over the House of God or the Incarnation of God that He is...And the crowd is sort of... "going along with the crowd"(Fickle/Afraid). Maybe some of these same people would change their minds completely in just a few days.

The chief priests are about to be denounced by Jesus Christ in the next FIVE chapters... and they'll make it clear that it's NOT information they lack...it's heart, it's will and humility. The priests and religious leaders show us that MOST often when people reject Jesus Christ it's NOT because they don't know enough; it's because they don't want Him as Prophet, Priest and King... but why not?

He comes into Jerusalem to take the place of the guilty... He comes in this Passion Week to suffer for the sins of guilty, needy people who will admit their sin and receive Him...as Zaccheus last week who welcomed Him gladly because He seeks and saves.

About the only people who DO get it in this wonderful passage are the children... and the lame and blind who maybe for the first time went to the Temple and found One greater than the Temple (Mat 12.6) ...the One who was both Priest and Sacrifice.

The children, the lame and the blind and...of course... the DONKEY... I like to picture, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, the Rightful King over the New Creation... I like to picture Him coming up to that skittish, high-strung, nervous colt...that had never been ridden (Mark AND Luke!) and as the True King, the Center of the Story, the Main Character of the WHOLE Story of the Universe...as the Perfect Man comes up to that JUMPY COLT ...I picture Him touching it and then tenderly whispering in its ear, "Don't be afraid – it's ME... the Man you've been waiting for...the One who will never kick or abuse you... Though YOU and your kind have been cruelly starved, scourged and derided by the sons of Adam, I am the King you can trust..."

"And just to make it easier on ya', (and Matthew's the only one who records this) just to make it easier on ya', why don't we have your mom walk beside us?...She can come too!"

The donkey got it...the unbroken colt...joyfully submitted to the King who was come to die for His people and rise again to make all things right and new...and (as Chesterton wrote)...after centuries and millennia of abuse...finally the DONKEY had His day... He got his revenge, "Fools! For I also had my hour!" He walked on a carpet and carried the King of Glory.

Sometimes a book is published or a so-called scholar is interviewed and confidently asserts, "Jesus, never claimed to be God...or Unique...He was just a Prophet..." Well, that doesn't square with the source material. It was gradual, giving His followers ONLY what they could handle...leaving breadcrumbs and clues on the trail...but eventually...when He's laid the groundwork (for OUR sakes) eventually He brought all the threads together and said, "Yes! I am the King of Creation – taking flesh, becoming physical, come to take YOUR place – God Incarnate, Prophet, Priest and King..."

"AND", says Jesus Christ, "You can trust Me...you MUST trust Me (like the donkey did!) You must trust Me...like you trust NO OTHER, NOT EVEN YOURSELF... If you do, I'll vindicate you (like I did that donkey) and I will make you all you were meant to be."

The Donkey - G. K. Chesterton

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.