

“Two Entrances”  
by Rom A. Pegram (2/28/16)

Let me read our scripture for today (which sounds like it should be Palm Sunday already), then I'll get into it (Mark 11:1-11, NLT)...

As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. <sup>2</sup> “Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks, ‘What are you doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon.’” <sup>4</sup> The two disciples left and found the colt standing in the street, tied outside the front door. <sup>5</sup> As they were untying it, some bystanders demanded, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” <sup>6</sup> They said what Jesus had told them to say, and they were permitted to take it. <sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many in the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others spread leafy branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, “Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! <sup>10</sup> Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Praise God in highest heaven!” <sup>11</sup> 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.

How many people gather in Times Square in NYC on New Year's Eve to watch the ball drop? 'Over a million? Or Mardi Gras in New Orleans? Or the Super Bowl? Big events aren't they?

Well, in Jesus' day, *Jerusalem was famous for its history, its location, and its ceremonial significance*. Roman soldiers, Jewish priests, political leaders, merchants of all kinds, and a constant stream of tourists lived there. In addition, during the festival of Passover (which is where we're at in today's story), Jews from all over the known world were required to return to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the Temple. Whenever it was Passover, it's safe to say *crowds of people gathered* during this time in Jerusalem. *It was huge... And Jerusalem—especially the Temple complex—was the talk of the known world!*

Now, let me briefly mention one more community in the area you need to know about. It's a village called *Bethany*—just a couple miles southeast of Jerusalem. That's where Jesus' friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived—a place he often stayed while in the area...

So, this is the context of today's part of Jesus' journey. Jerusalem at Passover—*nothing else like it!* A small village called Bethany, where Jesus hung out occasionally with friends. And now we get to today's story. But, how well do you think you know the events of that first Palm Sunday there in Jerusalem? Here're some things you need to know...

**On Palm Sunday, there were two triumphal entries!** The entry from the East is the one we're familiar with...

Christians always remember Jesus' humble, yet dramatic, entrance into the city of Jerusalem. We call it 'Palm Sunday'. Jesus' entry was clearly prophetic, pathetically humble, and carefully designed to be a real teaching moment. Jesus was meticulously fulfilling the prophecy of OT Zechariah (9:9):

"Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt."

Surrounded by his disciples, folks yelling & waving palm branches, and people shouting 'Hosanna,' Jesus came to emphasize peace, humility, and gentleness. The king was coming to the capital—not with sword & shield, but unarmed ... in love & meekness. And what a strange king he was—not at all what they expected... Jesus rode on the most humble of critters—the colt of a donkey, unbroken, unriden to that point ... and I can almost see Jesus' feet touching the ground (*Stan in Jordan*)! How comical in some ways! Yet, this is the 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem that we Christians remember...

The entry we don't remember so well is *the secular one*, yet it happened on the same day we celebrate as 'Palm Sunday'. The entry from the West is the one often overlooked...

Again, we call it 'Palm Sunday,' but it was *actually the first day of Passover*. That meant not only were hundreds of thousands of Hebrew people walking in, but much more dramatically ... another huge procession was also entering the city!

The Church—*focused on Jesus*—tends to overlook the secular side. But, believe you me, *Jesus knew all that was happening on that day!* You see, Passover was a dangerous time—not only because hundreds of thousands of Jews gathered from all over the known world, but because they were under the Roman rule ... and *they hated the Romans*. Many of the Jews were 'zealots,' ready to take up arms at a moment's notice and strike down the Roman authorities. If you remember, even one of Jesus' disciples is referred to as 'Simon, the Zealot' (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). And, as history now bears out, a major revolt was only a few years away (66 A.D.); the Romans had every right to be cautious...

So, on this first day of Passover (Palm Sunday), Pilate and a huge, showy military procession came into Jerusalem from the West—from Caesarea by the Sea. (This was the Roman 10<sup>th</sup> Legion, for you history buffs.) And they came in force! In your mind's eye, take a moment and picture these things...

- The entrance of a vast military force marching from the Roman seaport city of 'Caesarea Maritima'—over on the Mediterranean...

- Imagine Pilate riding in a chariot, pulled by six or eight powerful stallions...
- Imagine Roman officials in chariots or riding strong steeds right behind Pilate...
- And Roman troops—troops by the thousands—would be following, armed soldiers with spears, swords, full gold-encrusted armor glistening in the sun...

*It was an occupation army of mighty magnitude.* And residents of Jerusalem would have observed their entrance in both awe ... and bitterness. Passover visitors might turn away and sneer, or spit on the ground, but they wouldn't dare shout out a curse; if they did, a soldier might very well cut off their head...

So, while a peasant preacher was riding on a little donkey through the East gate of the city, a procession of powerful imperial cavalry on horses, foot soldiers with helmets, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles (symbol of the Roman 10<sup>th</sup> Legion), and drums beating, was at the same time coming through the city gates from the West. Folks, I don't only want you to observe the entrance as a contrast in political power, but look at the theological differences!

- The Emperor (Caesar Augustus) was called 'Son of God' (God = Apollo); inscriptions have been found that back this up. So, Pilate and his procession embodied not only a radically different social order, but also a rival theology—something Jews in Jerusalem didn't take lightly...
- Then, there's Jesus. He knew exactly what he was doing. He was ushering in—in contrast—a *Kingdom of Peace*; no more chariots, warhorses, spears or swords. Against the power, glory, and violence of the Roman Empire, Jesus was bringing a godly kingdom of righteousness, forgiveness, fair play, and peace...

The OT prophet, Zechariah, prophesied years before about what kind of king Jesus would be (Zech. 9:10a, NLT):

"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."

So, *we have the 2 entries into Jerusalem on this day*, but folks ... what was Jesus really up to? What was his life, at this point in his journey to the cross, all about? Well...

### **On Palm Sunday, Jesus dealt [directly] with problems in the Church!**

Now, the sequence of events—at first—seem somewhat stalled. Jesus actually entered into the East gate of the city (which is near Temple Mount), he went to the Temple and simply looked around (Mark 1:11). Since it was late in the day, he turned and walked to Bethany for an overnight, and then returned the following morning. And immediately upon his return the next morning, he begins with:

- Confrontation – He confronted those who were buying and selling in the Temple; Mark 11:15 tells us he tipped over the tables of the money-changers and pushed aside those who were selling doves for sacrifice!

What's the problem here? *Integrity* (or lack thereof)! The official currency of the day was the Roman coin, but they had images of *pagan deities*—*images not allowed in the Temple*. So, the money-changers were making money off of people's exchange to Jewish coin (without images). *They were ripping the people off ... and that ticked Jesus off!* The vendors selling animals for sacrifice (doves=traditional offering of the poor) were basically doing the same thing, taking advantage of those who were guests of the city...

So, Jesus threw them out and quoted 2 prophets—Isaiah & Jeremiah (Mark 11:17, NLT): “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”

*Cheating is a terrible thing ... but especially bad when it's done in the church!* And, unfortunately, it happens! *Our God, folks, is a God of truth and of integrity!* So, Jesus confronted the ways of the world (i.e. lying, cheating, stealing, anger, violence, hatred, commercialism in the Temple) with the ways of God (i.e. integrity, compassion, gentleness, peace, and forgiveness). The Temple (Church) was to be a place of prayer, not a place for mercenary concerns... And there was another problem in the Church:

- Community – The Temple was segregated—into various sections or courts ... for Gentiles, women, Jews (men), and the Holy of Holies for the High Priest; and our OT—their scriptures—taught about restrictions on worship in the Lord's assembly (Deut. 23:1-4), but *Jesus was in the tradition of prophets who called for justice and mercy and care for the poor over and above 'right' ways of worship ... like the prophet Amos (5:21-24):*

“I hate all your show and pretense—the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.<sup>22</sup> I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings.<sup>23</sup> Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps.<sup>24</sup> Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living.”

So, *now the love of Jesus takes over ...* as he confronted those who used religion for personal gain—the “I'm better than you are” group! Jesus called to accountability those who interpreted religious law in ways that made it difficult for ordinary people—again, *justice was the name of his game ... and finally...*

- Challenges – Jesus was always dealing with those who would challenge him & his teachings, all along the way to his final destination—the cross:

According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus spent much of his daylight hours in Jerusalem discussing, debating, and teaching God's truth to the Pharisees & Sadducees—sophisticated, educated, scholarly Jewish leaders who ran the Temple, but walked hand-in-hand with the Roman authorities. Mark continually reports that supporters of King Herod tried to trap Jesus, like (Mark 12:14-17, NLT): “‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we

know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You teach the way of God truthfully. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? <sup>15</sup> Should we pay them, or shouldn't we?" Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, 'Why are you trying to trap me? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you.'<sup>16</sup> When they handed it to him, he asked, 'Whose picture and title are stamped on it?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. <sup>17</sup> 'Well, then,' Jesus said, 'give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.' His reply completely amazed them." That was the Pharisees...

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. So they went after Jesus by telling a story about a woman who had seven husbands. Her husbands kept dying and she kept marrying the brothers, just as Moses Law told them to. So they tried to tell Jesus that *it'd be a real mess in heaven if there was such thing as a resurrection!* But Jesus threw the scriptures right back in their faces ... and told them this: in heaven, people will be like the angels and marriage won't be necessary...

This is what Jesus was dealing with in the Church of his day, especially with the religious leaders. So what does all we've talked about today have to do with us? Let me close today with these thoughts:

- Evil still flourishes today in high places and low; in our world, social structures debilitate the poor, political and religious leaders still use their offices for their own gain instead of for the good of all, daily we hear on our television or read in our newspapers about people who've lined their pockets with money stolen secretly somehow from good working people...
- And what would Jesus have his people do about it? It strikes me, in light of today's part of Jesus' journey ... that **we have the choice of two entrances too!** We have a choice of dealing with any variety of situations we face in our lives—whether personal or professional—in one of two ways:
  1. *We can enter into the situation ... like Pilate and the 10<sup>th</sup> Legion—with merciless force, knowing that we have the upper hand, taking advantage of the situation simply because of our position—whatever that is (i.e. boss, dad, mom, oldest child, etc.).*
  2. *Or, we can enter into the situation ... like Jesus ... without spear or sword, yet still being firm, yet loving, about injustices we experience in our lives...*

So, *how are you going to approach that situation you've been concerned with this week?* You've noticed some things at work ... or at home ... that just aren't right. You feel a responsibility to speak up about it, but *how do you approach it?* With selfish anger, because you're being inconvenienced? With force ... like Pilate and the 10<sup>th</sup> Legion? Or will you approach it without spear and sword, in a loving, yet firm way? Folks, with Jesus' help, we can live life Jesus' way ... and it's so important we do!

Remember Jesus' words from Matthew 10:24-25a (NLT): "Students are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master. <sup>25</sup> Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master." So, *which entrance will you take?* How will you choose to approach the circumstances of your life this coming week?