

**WELL, WHAT WERE YOU EXPECTING?****Matthew 21:1-11****Read Matthew 21:1-11**

**Intro:** Some of you may have listened over the years to Steve Brown's radio and online show called Key Life. I first discovered him in my early years of ministry when he was the pastor of Key Biscayne Presbyterian. I found him to be a good Bible teacher who was extremely engaging. Perhaps one of the things that made him so was his extraordinarily booming voice. It was a voice made for radio. In fact, before he became a Christian and later a pastor, he had actually been in radio personality – so he had plenty of experience. But that voice! Oh, to have such a voice!

I listened to Steve on the radio and subscribed to his preaching tapes for quite a number of years before I ever knew what he even looked like. I knew that he described himself as a “little guy”, but in my mind's eye he stood 6 and half feet tall, was muscular, and had a full head of black hair. So when I saw Steve for the first time I was blown away – instead of 6' 6" he's probably less than 5' 5" and skinny, bald and gray bearded. Where did that voice come from? Where was the big guy who preached those powerful messages with such gusto and confidence? He was NOT what I expected!

So often we have our expectations shattered. We voraciously read a Christian writer and when we hear he or she is coming to town for a speaking engagement we jump at the chance to go hear them speak, only to find when we hear them speak that they really need to keep their day job – they are a far better writer than a speaker. Or there is a sports figure or actor you really like and when you get the chance to meet them you find they aren't very nice people. It can go the other way too – they might seem like real jerks on the field of play or in a movie, but you discover they are quality people in real life.

It comes down to this, we form impressions of folks and very often those preformed thoughts are drastically different from reality. This had to be the case on that first Palm Sunday. Jesus's reputation preceded him even 2000 years before a 24 hour news cycle. People had heard about this man from Galilee who preached such powerful sermons and performed amazing miracles. They were no doubt forming some preconceived notions about what he looked like and what he sounded like and, more than that, what he intended to do with his growing momentum as an agent of change. After hundreds of years of subjection to conquering foreign powers, they were looking for freedom. They had also been on radio silence from God for hundreds of years and Jesus sounded like the end to that too. People were tired of pagan conquerors and hard driving religious leaders who drove a bargain too hard live by. They wanted change and Jesus sounded like just the guy to do it.

And then he came to town, on a donkey. This didn't fit expectations. And often Jesus still doesn't fit expectations. Well, what DID you expect? It depends. We can see from the scripture account I read a bit ago . . .

**It depends on who the Lord is**

- Jesus sent two disciples to retrieve a donkey and her colt they would find in the adjacent village. If they would be accused of donkey rustling they were simply to reply “*The Lord needs them.*” (v. 3) and that would be good enough.
- Well, which Lord are we talking about? Was it an earthly lord? Was it a lord-to-be who was on his way to Jerusalem to kick the Romans out and institute a Jewish kingdom, or was it THE LORD. It's pretty certain the people expected an earthly deliverer. It was wishful thinking for sure. They were tired of being subjected to foreign rule and it was time for freedom.
- But Jesus was ushering in a new kingdom – one referred to in our text and predicted in the reading from Zechariah's prophecy that Sharon read earlier, and numerous others, I might add. This is the Kingdom of God. This is a kingdom not of this earth. The Lord of that Kingdom is who requires this donkey and her foal. This is the King of kings and Lord of lords who needs a steed.
- And speaking of steeds, what were you expecting Jesus to ride in this triumphant procession? Well, it depends, because . . .

**It depends on your mode of transportation**

- Pontius Pilate, whom we get acquainted with later in the week, was the governor appointed by the Roman Emperor to oversee the Province of Judea. His headquarters, or better yet, his governor's mansion, was in Caesarea about 80 miles away on the Mediterranean coast. Most of the time he stayed there. It was much more pleasant to be at the sea, because, and my bias is showing here, it's always better at the sea. But it was also a

relatively new city where Herod had built deep water port. Best of all, it was free of those pesky Jewish people who populated the region and were in profusion in their holy city named Jerusalem.

- Pilate came to Jerusalem from time to time for inspection tours and for times when unrest might happen and he needed to be there for some hands-on leadership. Passover was just such a time. It's estimated that the population of the city grew to 6 times its normal size during the Jewish high-holiday. And when he came to town, it almost certainly was with an entourage. He may have come by chariot, but more likely he would be riding a warhorse that befit his station as the commander in chief of the Roman garrison in the province.
- Pilate's arrival would no doubt be with great flourish. After all, it was a show of force just to keep the people of Jerusalem in their place. Kind of like the parades of weaponry the North Koreans and the Russians have to show the world, and convince themselves, the military might they have. It's like they're saying, "Look at what we have, don't mess with us." We know that Pilate had his wife with him from what we read in the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday account in Matthew when she warns her husband not to condemn Jesus because of a dream that had frightened her (Matthew 27:19). But even if he traveled with her in some kind of carriage or sedan chair, he probably transferred to a warhorse to make the biggest statement possible. A charger was good for that. Horses are what important people ride.
- On the other hand, Jesus rode into town on a donkey colt. Pilate rode a weapon of war, Jesus rode a beast of burden. Pilate was mounted on a prancing charger, Jesus on a plodding burro. The contrast is huge and it's striking and it's completely intentional on the part of God. The world roars in on strife but Jesus promises shalom. Over the years I've heard and read sermons explaining that Jesus rode a donkey because they were the royal mount. In fact I think I've included that in some of my own 25 or so Palm Sunday sermons. But the truth is, the royal steed, if it wasn't a horse, it was a mule like the one Absalom rode when he tried to escape from David's army, or the speedy African wild ass called the Onager. This clearly was not what Jesus was riding as he rode into Jerusalem surrounded by a happy throng. He was astride a gentle animal because he is the Prince of Peace, both victorious and gentle.
- So, what were you expecting? It depends, . . .

#### **It depends on what you are delivered from**

- As Jesus entered into the Holy City, he was accompanied by fellow Galileans and verse 10 tells us, *the whole city was stirred*. I've often discussed, and already have this morning, the fact that the Jews were looking for deliverance from Roman domination. The people of Galilee also were looking for validation. They were looked down upon by the people of neighboring regions. All the way back at the time Jesus was calling his 12 disciples, Philip had excitedly found his friend Nathaniel and invited him to come and meet the Lord. When he found out that Jesus was from Nazareth, which is in the region of Galilee, Philip snorted, *Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?* John 1:46. It was plain Jesus's Galilean friends wanted deliverance from obscurity.
- Others caught the excitement as they realized here was an opportunity for deliverance from the Romans. There were real possibilities with this guy they had heard the rumors about. He could be the answer.
- And he was the answer. And he could bring deliverance. But the deliverance he brought was not political – it was, and is, spiritual. Deliverance from sin. Deliverance from fear. Deliverance from strife. He promised deliverance from all earthly subjection. Freedom is what they expected, but what kind? Well . . .

#### **It depends on who is providing your freedom**

- About 5 days later as Jesus was before Pilate, the Roman governor quickly saw that this man was no revolutionary. It was obvious that the Jewish preacher in front of him was a man of peace and he also had his wife's warning ringing in his mind. So he offered an alternative to the people who were clamoring for an execution: "Since I always free someone from prison as a Passover gift, how about I give you a choice? How about you choose between this man of peace, or that freedom fighter named Barabbas?" The alternative was a no-brainer for people who valued politics over peace – they chose Barabbas. Barabbas provided the best option for what they wanted most – that's what they thought.
- But they were overlooking what they needed most – they needed the Prince of Peace. They needed what Jesus offered, true freedom. But that was part of the plan. The plan was for Jesus to go to the Cross as the ultimate sacrifice. He was the only truly perfect sacrificial Lamb who would provide only true freedom.

- As Jesus rode into town, he knew all this, but they didn't. They had different expectations. Little did they know, he exceeded all expectations – and he still does. Amen.