

When you read the various Palm Sunday accounts in the four Gospels, you learn that there were a wide variety of responses to this figure riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Some were friends. Some were enemies. Some were people who wondered what all the fuss was about. Some people expected big things from Jesus. They had heard Him preach and seen His miracles.

Jesus had performed all the signs of the Messiah. *The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. (Matthew 11:5)* It is not too surprising that people were looking for more of the same. Some of the crowd were big fans of Jesus because they were looking for someone to use divine power to make their lives easier here on this earth.

Then there were the enemies. These enemies came from the full spectrum of the politics of the day. There were the Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, chief priests, Herodians, and others. Many of these groups were mortal enemies with one another during normal times. It says something about their hatred of Jesus that they were able to overlook their intense differences to come together against Jesus. It is not surprising that they wanted Jesus dead. Some of these enemies had a vested interest in the religious establishment of the day. The activities at the temple provided them with both comfort and prestige. They were very comfortable with the status quo.

Then some were just there because it was Passover. The Law of Moses instructed devout Jewish men to spend the days of the Passover in the temple areas in Jerusalem. There were probably thieves and other criminals who took advantage of the large crowds. Then there were the extra Roman soldiers who were out in force just to keep the peace during this great Jewish festival.

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Few, if any, of the people who witnessed the palm procession knew that this figure riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is the Messiah ... God’s anointed warrior prince ... the very Son of God in the flesh on His way to do battle for the souls of mankind. Few understood that eternity hung in the balance as this humble figure rode into Jerusalem and up to the temple. Few understood the battle that waited for Jesus in Jerusalem.

This is a different kind of glory. The Passover Pilgrims think glory would be for Jesus to usher in a new age of prosperity for Jerusalem and Israel. Jesus’ enemies think that they can destroy Jesus’ glory by killing Him. Jesus states that it is His death that will glorify Him. It is His death that will bear much fruit.

How strange it is that both Jesus and His enemies see death as the eventual outcome. The enemies see Jesus’ death as a way to put an end to this troublemaker. Jesus knows that His death will be a victory over sin, death, and the devil.

This is where Satan, the great deceiver, deceived himself. Jesus regularly and plainly said that He was to suffer, die, and rise on the third day. The prophets were clear as well. When Jesus encountered demons and cast them out, they knew He was the Son of God. Despite all this, Satan still saw death as the solution for getting rid of Jesus ... for putting an end to God’s mission to save mankind from sin. Somehow, the devil did not see that his plans to put Jesus to death would backfire so Jesus would use death itself to defeat Satan.

Jesus knew that everything was in place for His sacrifice. Before He rode that donkey into Jerusalem, He had always said, “My hour has not yet come,” but afterwards, He said, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains*

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*alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* He also said, *“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”* The final events that would lead to His death had begun. The climax of his mission was mere days away.

This plan of salvation is alien to the sinful human mind. The idea of salvation coming from one who suffered the shame of death on a cross just doesn't make sense. We don't like to admit that we have sins for which someone must die. We don't want to look at the reality of the cross and realize that that should be us up there. We don't much care for a Jesus who tells us that we are born spiritually dead in trespasses and sins and that we need His forgiveness to come to life.

Nevertheless, God still loves us and sent his Son to ride into Jerusalem to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. This one who rode into Jerusalem is *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)* The donkey carried Jesus and Jesus carried the sins of the world for *the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)*

The one who entered Jerusalem in majesty on Sunday would carry a wooden cross out of Jerusalem on Friday. Just as surely as He carried that cross, He also carried the sin of the world. His death on that cross would earn forgiveness, life, and salvation for all people. His death on the cross is life for all who believe in Him. The cross becomes the visible reminder of the victory He won over the sin that He carried.

From a worldly standpoint, the procession into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday seemed a lot more victorious than the procession out of Jerusalem on Good Friday. Nevertheless, the true victory took place on that Friday. There on the cross, the King who rode in majesty will battle sin and defeat it with His death. The victory

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that He won with His death will enable a new procession, a procession that began three days later and has not yet ended. This is a procession up out of the grave and into eternal life. Jesus led the way with His resurrection from the dead and all those who believe in Him will follow Him into eternal joy. Amen