



Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church
Sanford, North Carolina

Dr. Mark E. Gaskins
Senior Pastor

The Lord's Day
March 28, 2010

www.jhbc.org

© 2010

If You Had Been There . . .
Luke 19:28-40; 23:1-25

Palm Sunday—that's what we're marking today, this first day of Holy Week, our remembrance of the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

On Palm Sunday, we remember what's usually called the *triumphal entry* of Jesus. It's really more accurate to call it the *royal entry*, since Jesus received a royal welcome as he entered Jerusalem as the peaceable king. The sons of David who became king rode to their coronation ceremonies not on white stallions, but on humble donkeys. While Luke and Mark refer to the animal Jesus rode on simply as "a colt," John and Matthew both make it clear that he rode in on a donkey, fulfilling what the prophet said in Zechariah 9:9.

And what a welcome he received! When the disciples he sent to get the colt brought it back, they "threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it" (19:35).¹ As he began to make his way from the Mount of Olives toward the city of Jerusalem, people were spreading their cloaks on the road ahead of him to prepare the way. It wasn't just his twelve disciples who were with him this day; it was a multitude that had followed him on his way to Jerusalem. And they were excited—exuberant, even! Luke tells us in 19:37 "the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen . . ." They were singing from Psalm 118:26—

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

And to that they added,

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Now if you had been there in Jerusalem that last week of Jesus' earthly life, you might have been confused. Those who were following Jesus were ushering him into Jerusalem as the king who comes in the name of the Lord. They were declaring that he was the promised Messiah! That much we understand. What might have been confusing was how he was received, especially by the religious leaders.

I mean, if anyone should have recognized the Messiah, surely it would have been the Pharisees, wouldn't it? They spent so much of their time studying the Jewish Scriptures and the long tradition of interpreting the Scriptures that had been passed down through the elders. They

¹ Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

were looking for a Messiah.

But when they heard how Jesus' disciples were praising him, some of them said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" (19:39). How could they not recognize him? They had seen what Jesus had done. They had heard him teach. They had witnessed his miracles. But they wanted him to quiet his followers.

Jesus refused and told them, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (19:40).

If you had been there, you would have seen Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. He knew what was coming, how they would reject him and eventually rebel against Rome as they did in A.D. 66-70, and how that rebellion would lead to the destruction of the city.

You'd have seen Jesus go into the temple and drive out those who were selling animals for the sacrifices. They were supposedly offering a needed service to pilgrims who had come to worship and had no animals to sacrifice. In his estimation, though, they had made the house of prayer a den of thieves (19:45-46).

You'd have seen Jesus teaching at the temple each day that week, at least through that Thursday. And you'd have seen how the people were just hanging on his words as he spoke to them (19:48).

If you had been there, you'd have seen the Jewish religious leaders trying to question Jesus' authority and catch him in what he said. The chief priests and the teachers of the law, along with some of the elders (members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council), directly challenged Jesus as he was teaching in the temple courts. "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things" (20:1-2). And you would have seen Jesus baffle them when he responded by asking them whether John's baptism was from heaven or from men. Knowing that they would have problems with either Jesus or the crowds no matter how they answered, they simply said, "We don't know where it was from" (20:7). And Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things" (20:8).

If you had been there, you'd have heard Jesus tell the people a parable about a man who planted a vineyard and rented it out, and when he sent his servants and finally his son to get his share of the produce, the renters mistreated and beat the servants and killed the son. The religious leaders knew he was talking about them, and they looked for a way to arrest him without causing an uproar among the people.

So you'd have seen them send spies to Jesus—some to try to catch him in his answer to a question about paying taxes to the Roman emperor, and some to try to discredit him with a question about a hypothetical situation in the resurrection at the last day. But they couldn't trap him.

If you had been there, you'd have heard Jesus praise a poor widow for her sacrificial offering at the temple. And you'd have heard him tell his disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and about how they were to be ready for his return.

If you could have been there watching everything that was going on, you'd have seen the chief priests and the teachers of the law "looking for some way to get rid of Jesus" (22:2). They were afraid of the people, so they had to concoct some kind of justification for arresting him, or else do it when most people wouldn't know what was going on.

And what you'd see next would break your heart, because you'd see one of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot, coming to the chief priests and the officials of the temple guard to work out a plan

to betray Jesus to them for a price. Luke tells us that they came to an agreement, and that Judas “watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present” (22:6).

If you had been there, you’d have seen Jesus gather with his disciples for the Passover meal that Thursday evening in a large upper room that he had sent Peter and John to prepare. You’d have seen him reclining around that low horseshoe-shaped table with his disciples, and heard him say to them:

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds its fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (22:15-16).

Then you’d have seen him take the cup and the bread, give thanks for each of them, and give them to his disciples as tokens of his body and blood that he would soon give for them. And you’d hear him warn them that one of them was going to betray him.

You’d have heard Jesus settle the petty argument that started around the table about which of the disciples was the greatest by telling them that the greatest among them must be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves, just as he was among them as one who serves. And you’d have heard Jesus warn Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the night was over.

If you had been there, you’d have seen Jesus lead his disciples out to the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane, leave them at one spot, then go on about a stone’s throw and kneel down to pray. You’d have seen him agonizing in prayer to the point that “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (22:44). You’d have seen him come back to his disciples and find them asleep while they should have been praying for him and themselves.

And then you’d have seen Judas—Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, the treasurer for the group as John tells us, who had been with Jesus for three years—you’d have seen him lead the Jewish authorities to Jesus in the darkness, and kiss Jesus on the cheek—a kiss of betrayal rather than greeting.

You’d have seen Jesus stop his disciples when they tried to fight back to protect him, and even heal the ear of the servant that one of the disciples had cut off in the fray.

If you had been there, you’d have seen Peter following Jesus at a distance after they arrested him and took him to the high priest’s house. You’d have seen Peter deny Jesus, not just once, or twice, but three times; and then you’d have heard the roster crow.

During the midnight hours, you’d have seen the temple guards blindfolding and mocking and beating Jesus. At daybreak, you’d have seen the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, assemble to try Jesus. When he told the truth about who he is, they led him off to Pilate, the Roman governor, accusing him of sedition and trying to lead a rebellion against Rome.

You’d have seen Pilate question Jesus and find no fault in him. You’d have seen him try to get out of having to deal with this situation by sending him to Herod. But after he examined him and he and his soldiers had mocked and ridiculed Jesus, he sent him back to Pilate.

You’d have heard Pilate say, “he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him” (23:17). And you’d have heard the chief priests and the rulers of the

people cry out for Pilate to release instead Barabbas, who was in prison for insurrection and murder, and to crucify Jesus. You'd have heard Pilate try to convince them otherwise, only for them to keep shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" until finally Pilate gave in "and surrendered Jesus to their will" (23:25).

If you had been there, you'd have seen Jesus, already bloody and beaten probably beyond recognition, being led away to be crucified. You'd have seen him fall beneath the load of carrying the cross beam that probably weighed nearly 100 pounds, so that the soldiers grabbed Simon of Cyrene off the street and made him follow Jesus, carrying his cross beam. You'd have seen the crowds following him, and women mourning and wailing for him.

And you'd have seen them come to the hill outside the city of Jerusalem called the Skull or Golgotha or Calvary. And there, along with two others who were *real* criminals, you'd have seen them nail his hands to the cross by driving long spikes through his wrists, hoisting him up to attach the cross beam to the stake, then nailing his feet to the stake.

You'd have seen the charge against him posted over his head: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (23:38). You'd have seen him hang there in agony from about 9:00 that Friday morning until about 3:00 that afternoon. You'd have seen the Jewish leaders and the other criminals mocking him. And you'd have heard Jesus say just a few things as he hung there—

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (23:34).

To the thief who repented: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43).

And finally, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (23:46).

And then you'd have seen him *die*.

What was it that you would have been watching?

The perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

The absolute obedience of the Son of God.

The redemption of the world.

Our salvation!

No, you and I weren't there. But those who were have borne witness to what happened down through the ages. And *by trusting Jesus and what he has done for us, we can experience his salvation* and be in a right relationship with God!

He did it for us, for you and for me.

Will *you* trust him this morning?

†MEG