

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor David Bennett
20 March 2016
Key verse: Luke 19: 29-31

“Faces in the Crowd”

Good morning Fil-A, it is so good to see so many of you here this morning, we do not take your presence for granted, in fact turn to the person on your right and say Thank You for being here today!

Well today is Palm Sunday, so for time's sake let's get into the word of God, more importantly let's get the word of God into you!

I wish simply to remind you this morning of a familiar story from the Bible. It began early Sunday morning, what we now call palm Sunday!

We all know that Jesus rode into Jerusalem, however he was not the only one heading into the city for the Passover, there were a few others that day for starters there was...

Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor,

In the year 30 AD, Roman historians record that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, led a procession of Roman cavalry and centurions into the city of Jerusalem to occupy the Antonia Fortress & the Praetorium with a full complement of elite & battle-hardened Roman soldiers ever ready & willing to suppress any attempted uprising against Roman rule that might occur.

Imagine the spectacle of that entry. From the western side of the city, Pontius Pilate leads Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot.

Each soldier was clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss. On each centurion's head, hammered helmets gleamed in the bright sunlight.

At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; and, in their hands, each centurion carried a spear; or if he was an archer, a bow with a sling of arrows across his back.

Drummers beat out the cadence of march for this was no ordinary entry into Jerusalem.

Pilate, as governor of the region which included not only Judea, but Samaria, knew it was standard practice for the Roman governor of a foreign territory to be in its capital for all religious celebrations.

It was the beginning of Passover, a strange Jewish festival that the Romans allowed. However, the Romans must have been aware that this festival celebrated the liberation of the Jews from another empire, the empire of Egypt.

So, Pilate had to be in Jerusalem. Since the Romans had occupied this land by defeating the Jews and deposing their king about 80 years before, uprisings were always in the air.

And so on this occasion, Pilate had traveled with a contingent of Rome's finest from his preferred headquarters in Caesarea-by-the-Sea, to the stuffy, crowded, provincial capital of the Jews, Jerusalem.

The Temple would be the center of Passover activity. Antonia's Fortress, the Roman garrison built adjacent to the Temple compound, would serve as a good vantage point from which to keep an eye on the Jews.

Pilate's entry into Jerusalem was meant to send a message to the Jews, and to those who might be plotting against the empire of Rome.

The spectacle was meant to remind the Jews of what had happened the last time of a wide-scale uprising. And, it was meant to intimidate the citizens of Jerusalem themselves, who might think twice about joining such a rebellion if it was slated to fail.

The next entry into Jerusalem was that of...

Herod Antipas, Tetrarch (King/ruler)

He had been the Ruler of Galilee & other provinces, the one who had imprisoned & beheaded John the Baptist.

He had also arrived with great pomp & ceremony, undoubtedly occupying the palace of his late father, Herod the Great.

The last major uprising, long before Pilate's reign, which happened shortly after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. That's Herod Antipas' father.

The uprising started in Sepphoris, about 5 miles from Jesus' boyhood home of Nazareth. Before it was over the city of Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee, and the town of Emmaus had been destroyed by the Roman army.

After putting down the rebellion there, the Romans marched on Jerusalem. After pacifying the city, they crucified over 2,000 Jews who were accused of being part of the rebellion.

The Romans had made their intolerance for rebellion well-known throughout the area.

Of course, this was the beginning of the great 8-day Passover Festival. This is a time when the Jews remembered God's deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian slavery.

Jews from all over the world were gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate, & the city was filled to overflowing, with both Jews and Romans.

So obviously, Jesus wasn't the only one coming to Jerusalem for the Passover.

If Pilate's procession was meant as a show of military might and strength, Jesus' procession was meant to show the **opposite**.

The two processions could not be **more different** in the messages they convey. Pilate, leading Roman centurions, asserts the **power and might** of the empire of Rome which crushes all who oppose it.

Jesus, riding on a young donkey, embodies the **peace and tranquility** that God brings to His people.

Those who watch that day will make a choice. They will either serve the god of this world, might and power; or they will choose to serve the king of a very different kind of kingdom, the kingdom of God.

OK getting back to Palm Sunday, Jesus was walking toward Jerusalem. He stops for a moment & sends 2 of his disciples into a nearby village to carry out a special errand.

Here is how Luke 19:29-31 records that event: *"As He approached Bethphage & Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, & as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it & bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'"*

Disciples wondered

The 2 disciples must have wondered about what Jesus told them to do, because none of the Gospel accounts about the ministry of Christ ever mention Him riding any animal to get from one place to another.

He must have walked hundreds of miles up & down the land we now call the "Holy Land," but there is no mention of Him ever riding, except in a boat across the Sea of Galilee.

But now, He gives this unusual command to go into the village to get a colt that had never been ridden, & to bring it to Him. It must have seemed strange, indeed.

He even tells them the exact words they are to use should anyone question them. They are to say, *"The Lord needs it."* Was this prearranged? Did the owners know what Jesus was going to do? That we don't know.

It is obvious, though, that Jesus knew what He was going to face in the city of Jerusalem. So His decision to go into Jerusalem must have been one of the most difficult Jesus ever made.

And on top of that, to ride into the city on a colt, rather than to walk into it as He had often done many times before, must have been an even more difficult decision, because riding a colt into the city was a public declaration that **He was King**.

Five hundred years earlier, the prophet Zechariah had proclaimed that fact when he wrote,

Zechariah 9:9, *“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous & having salvation, gentle & riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Illustration

You see, in times of war conquerors would ride in chariots or upon prancing stallions, however in times of peace, the king would ride a colt to symbolize that peace prevailed. So, for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem upon a colt is to declare that He is a **King proclaiming peace**.

This was the beginning of the Passover

Such power & pageantry the people were seeing that whole week - & then here comes Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah: “See, your king comes to you, righteous & having salvation, gentle & riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)

For the crowds lining the road that day, Jesus riding a colt into the city was a public declaration that He was the promised King!

HOW WOULD THE PEOPLE RESPOND TO THAT?

How would the people respond to that?

Would they recognize that His Kingdom was not of this world that it was a spiritual kingdom, & He was to be a spiritual King? He had been teaching them that for over 3 years, & still they had not learned who he was and what he meant to do.

✓ **Some of the crowd would greet Him with laughter.**

Maybe they would be amused by what Jesus was doing. After all, it was a rather ridiculous picture. Here is a carpenter declaring Himself to be a King!

✓ **Some of the crowd would think, "He is a lunatic,**

He is living in a world of fantasy imagining Himself to be a King!" And they would laugh at him.

✓ **Some of the crowd would greet Him with anger**

They would be upset because they would interpret His riding into the city as arrogance & blasphemy against God.

✓ **Some of the crowd would greet him with Joy**

They would hail Him with joy, welcoming Him as an earthly King, come to reestablish the throne of David, & overthrow the Roman Empire. They were ready & eager to place a crown upon His head.

- ✓ There must have been many within the crowd that had healed by him
- ✓ There must have been many within the crowd that had been among the thousands He had fed.
- ✓ There must have been many within the crowd that had seen some of His miracles
- ✓ There must have been many within the crowd that had listened as "*He spoke with authority.*" They had listened, & their lives had been changed.

Jesus knew all of this. He knew that just over the horizon was the cross, looming like a monster ready to consume Him.

Luke 9:51 tells us that in spite of it all, *Jesus still "...resolutely set out for Jerusalem."*

Jesus rides toward the gate of the city...

As Jesus rides down toward the gate of the city, the crowds are growing, & there is a festive air, for it is Passover & pilgrims are gathering from far & near for this greatest of all Jewish holidays.

Even before Jesus arrives, the news has spread that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. You can imagine the excitement that prevails.

"Have you heard the news? Lazarus died, & was buried in a tomb so long that his body was starting to decay.

This teacher from Nazareth called out, 'Lazarus, come forth.' & Lazarus came forth. I saw him! They stripped away the grave clothing, & he actually walked & breathed & lived again! Surely only the Messiah could do that!"

The news travels from one person to another, until finally when Jesus was ready to enter the city, great crowds had collected on both sides of the road. They were there! They had cut palm branches & were shouting, "Hosanna to the king!" Excitement prevailed throughout the whole city!

Then Jesus looked over the Faces in the crowd, and when he did he must have seen the mixture of expressions on their faces.

For starters there were those among the crowd that ...

1. There were faces in the crowd that loved Him

- ✓ Perhaps Bartimaeus was there, a man who had received his sight, no longer in his beggar's clothes.
- ✓ Perhaps Zacchaeus was there, as he paid back his debt to society, & had made his peace with God.
- ✓ Perhaps the lepers were there, their skin had been cleansed & now they were rejoicing for the healing that the Lord had given them.
- ✓ Perhaps Jairus' daughter was there, after being brought back to life again after experiencing death.

- ✓ Perhaps Lazarus & Mary & Martha & Mary Magdalene they were all there! Their lives reflected the love that was in their hearts for this man who had taught them, & molded them & changed them.

As said there were those among the crowd that ... Loved Him and there were other faces in the crowd...

2. There were faces in the crowd that were sinister.

- ✓ There were faces within the crowd that had squinty eyes, waiting for Him to say one wrong word to make one mistake, always looking for a slip up or to catch him in a contradiction.
- ✓ There were faces within the crowd of the Sadducees & Pharisees. They were supposed to be keepers of the law, the spiritual leaders. But Jesus had gained so much popularity that they felt threatened. So, full of jealousy, they watched Him.
- ✓ There were faces within the crowd that were Romans, fearing revolt & watching for any sign of rebellion against Rome. They were ready & waiting to crush any uprising.

Jesus realized all of the various faces within the crowd, as He listened to their "*Hosannas*," that soon the sinister voices would drown out the voices of love that those crying for Him to be King would soon be crying, "*Crucify Him!*" or simply standing aside, saying nothing at all.

Now Jesus is descending along the road from the Mt. of Olives, across the brook, toward the gate, the crowds thronging around Him.

I wonder how the apostles were reacting to all this?

✓ **Within the crowd could have been the disciple Peter,**

Who walked with chest expanded enjoying the cheers of the crowd maybe with one hand on his sword just in case something went wrong thinking to himself, "Maybe it was worth it to leave the fishnets & boats. Maybe at last we are going to get what we deserve."

✓ **Within the crowd could have been the disciple Thomas,**

A bit skeptical about everything that was going on wondering what is going to happen next.

✓ **Within the crowd could have been the disciple Andrew,**

Who might have been a little overwhelmed by it all. He was so used to bringing people to Jesus one by one, or in small groups & now look at them all!

✓ **Within the crowd could have been the disciples Andrew James & John?**

You could almost imagine that they were thinking about Jesus being crowned King so that they could be on His right & left hand in positions of authority & power?

✓ **Within the crowd could have been the disciple Judas,**

Looking with excitement that it was finally here and now Jesus would set up his kingdom and usher in his earthly kingdom.

They were all there in Jerusalem, faces within the crowd, many...

- ✓ Loving faces
- ✓ Sinister faces
- ✓ Anxious apostles.

Crowds trampling almost one upon another when suddenly the whole procession stopped.

Suddenly the procession STOPPED

Do you suppose it could have been a little like rush hour traffic I95 or 395 during rush hour traffic?

The people who were closest to Jesus could see & they realized that it was He who had stopped the parade.

Then they saw His body begin to shake then they saw His face, & saw sorrow & tears. He was crying.

Scripture tells us that Jesus reacted emotionally many times from different scenes that He saw.

- ✓ When He saw the poor.
- ✓ When He saw the hungry.
- ✓ When He saw people sinning.
- ✓ When He saw the ill.

The Scriptures say repeatedly that "...He had compassion on them."

Scripture only tells us of two times that Jesus cried.

The first time he cried at the grave of Lazarus.

Mary & Martha were both weeping, & it says that Jesus wept with them. He wept for them. He entered into their grief with compassion & He identified with their sorrow & despair.

Now the **2nd occasion.**

He looked at the city of Jerusalem. He saw the mixture of faces within the

crowd & the masses of humanity crowding there & He realized the emptiness of their lives.

They had not heard his message of peace. They did not understand the purpose of His coming.

Luke 19:41-44. *"As He approached Jerusalem & saw the city, He wept over it & said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace but now it is hidden from your eyes. 'The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you & encircle you & hem you in on every side. 'They will dash you to the ground, you & the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.'"* (Luke 19:41-44)

- ✓ They had eyes, but they didn't see.
- ✓ They had ears, but they didn't hear.
- ✓ They missed the whole point of the message that God had given to them.

Matthew 5:44, Jesus said, *"I didn't come for that purpose. I came to show you a more excellent way. I came to show you the way of love."* He had said, *"Love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you."*

Matthew 5:39-41, *"If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you & take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two miles."*

Those people who listened to Him must have thought, "Well, those are beautiful words, but surely He doesn't mean Rome?"

He doesn't expect us to love Rome? Only a lunatic would command you to love Rome. We can't love Rome!"

But don't you see that was exactly what He was saying? "Love even Rome because Rome with her mighty army has seen the power of the sword. But Rome has not seen the power of love. Show them love!"

The nation of Israel had the opportunity to show Rome something new & different. But because they didn't understand Jesus because they completely misunderstood His mission Jesus wept over them because the opportunity would be taken away & they would never have it again.

These were God's people God's chosen people. God had loved them & led them across the wilderness & into the Promised Land. But they did not understand the Messiah when He walked in their midst. Because of that, Jesus wept.

What a contrast! As He sits upon the beast of burden, He sees the towering Temple of God silhouetted against the sky.

They didn't recognize the Messiah when He came! How different their lives could have been.

How different the history of Israel could have been if they had only recognized the one who came into their midst, riding on a colt.

Both Matthew & Luke tell us that sometime earlier Jesus looked down upon the city & had cried out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.... how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." (Matthew 23:37 & Luke 13:34)

Today, just like the city of Jerusalem, what would happen if we find ourselves in the presence of Jesus?

I wonder if he were to look over the Faces in this crowd what would he find in those faces?

Does He see people concerned about so many things?

- ✓ Worried about income taxes
- ✓ Worried about job security
- ✓ Worried about their health, or lack of it?

Does He see people who are so busy doing things here & there

- ✓ So busy that they never bother to consider those things that are eternally important?
- ✓ Never looking at things eternally, just carnal in nature

Does he see people who recognize Him for who He is...

- ✓ The Messiah,
- ✓ The Christ,
- ✓ The Son of God?

When He turns & looks into our lives, I wonder, will He weep once again because of what He sees?

Or will we have the joy that passes all understanding as we respond to His outstretched arms & hear Him say, "Well done, good & faithful servant."