

[1]
Great Expectations
Mark 11:1-11
April 13th, 2014, Jeff Germo

We are taking a short break from our Sermon on the Mount series. We are at the beginning of Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter Sunday. Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, which commemorates the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. These are the final few days before he would be crucified. They are packed with a huge number of monumental events. As a matter of fact the Apostle who wrote the Gospel of John has the last nine chapters of his book dedicated to these last few days of Jesus from the time he enters Jerusalem, to his resurrection. It's fast moving and full of action. There is intrigue, suspense, espionage, murder plots, deceit, and all the elements that make a sit-on-the-edge-of-your-chair kind of movie.

There is the full range of emotions in the various events in these last few days too. There is anger, jealousy, fear, pain, hostility, despair, grief, hopelessness, failure, regret, elation, joy, sympathy, and any other emotion that you can think of. But, before all these things happen, Jesus must get to Jerusalem. And his whole life on earth was meant for these final days, the climax, of course, being Friday and Sunday, his death and resurrection.

Now, we call his ride into Jerusalem, *The Triumphal Entry*, but really, it was not very triumphal — not, at least, from a human perspective. The Jews had great expectations for their Messiah. When they saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey they thought he was *The Man*. They hailed him as their king, but they soon changed their tune when he didn't live up to their expectations. Let's take a look at the event as told through the eyes of the evangelist Mark.

[2]

Mark 11:1–11 (ESV)

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem,

Let me just start off saying here that Jesus knew ahead of time what was going to happen to him. He foretold many times in each of the Gospels that he was going to go to Jerusalem and he would be arrested, and tried, beaten, and ultimately crucified. There was no doubt in his mind.

[3]

In Luke 9:22 Jesus predicted this and then in the next verse he says that anyone who wants to follow him must follow all the way and ***“deny himself and take up his cross....For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for [him] will save it. [For] what good is it to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his very self?”***

Jesus was calling his disciples to **take up their crosses**, and go all the way in following him. This wasn't a metaphor for putting up with some difficulty in their lives. He was telling them that they would all have to literally give up everything for him.

And then in verse 51 of Luke 9 it says,

[4]

Luke 9:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

The NLT says that he ***“resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”*** Can you picture this in your minds? He has just finished telling his disciples, ***“Ok, we are going to Jerusalem. I am going to be arrested, tried, beaten until I am unrecognizable, and then crucified on a cross.”*** And then he set his face and resolutely went to Jerusalem knowing what he would experience. This was the purpose of his life.

I wonder, if the disciples knew ahead of time, before he called them to follow, what this week would bring, if they still would have followed. They had other expectations of Jesus. They believed he was the Messiah, the Anointed One. But, what they were expecting was some glory for themselves, some fringe benefits for being a part of his inner circle. If they followed Jesus, they thought, they would get places of power and honour when he ruled as king. They'd get company cars, and a big expense account. They have people serving them. They would be on top of the world looking down at the little people.

Jesus knew from the beginning that his life was meant for one purpose, and that would be to suffer. And those who want to follow him would have to suffer as well.

I wonder if the disciples would have followed him so willingly if he told them that right off the bat. ***“Hey boys, come follow me to Jerusalem where I am going to die a painful death. Follow me and I will teach you how to deny yourself the pleasures and comforts of life that everyone else around you has. Follow me and I will show you how you can graciously experience unthinkable pain and suffering.”***

What do you think? Would they have followed Jesus? Well, we don't know the answer to that, but we can ask ourselves the same question. Would we follow? “Yes, but that was the apostles. Jesus isn't calling me to suffer. This is the 21st century.”

[5]

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

[6]

Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

²⁹ *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.*
[7]

1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

²¹ *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

That is just a small sampling of scripture on the theology of suffering. I don't want this to be a downer this morning, but if we were told this right from the start that if we follow Jesus we can expect suffering would we have followed?

What do you expect of Jesus? The disciples, in the beginning, in their minds, had great expectations. They thought that they would follow Jesus and they would become *somebody*. Although there is an element of truth to that, Jesus said that the way to become great is through humbling oneself. *"Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* *"If you want to be great in God's kingdom you have to be a servant of all."*

The way of Jesus is opposite to our natural expectations. God's economy is flipped on its head.

Jesus resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and then he called his disciples to follow.

[8]

Mark 11:1–11 (ESV)

¹ *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives,*

Both Bethany and Bethphage were on the East side of Jerusalem. Bethany was about two miles from the city, up and over the Mount of Olives, and Bethphage was between Bethany and Jerusalem down the slope of the mountain. From reading the account in the Gospel of John we know that Jesus, on his last week, stayed each night in Bethany with his friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. And on the way down the mountain they come to Bethphage.

[9]

Jesus sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"

[10]

⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go.

Now, I have heard some say that Jesus prearranged with someone in the village to have a donkey ready for them. I suppose that's possible, but it really does devalue Jesus' authority and his messianic power. Jesus knew all along what was going to happen. He foretold it. Many times in the Gospels Jesus knew before hand things that would happen. Why is it so hard to believe that Jesus could foreknow that there would be a young donkey at a certain place in Bethphage and that a conversation would ensue with the owner? Mark was trying to show that Jesus was not a victim here. He is the sovereign God.

A few chapters later, in Mark 14, Jesus told his disciples to go into Jerusalem to prepare a room where they could celebrate the Passover meal together. Once in the city, Jesus told them, they would see a man carrying a jar of water and they were to follow him to where he was going and tell the owner of the house that The Teacher wants to use one of his rooms for the Passover meal.

How do you pre-arrange a man carrying a water jar at a specific time? Jesus, in his sovereignty, foreknew what would happen. He was not a helpless victim going to the cross. He was a willing participant, and was divinely involved. He had a supernatural knowledge of the events of the future. And actually, to simply say that he had foreknowledge of the coming events is somewhat of an understatement. He was making very definite moves to provoke the events that would bring about his arrest and crucifixion.

It's interesting that all through Jesus' ministry he tried to keep people from publicizing his true identity, because he knew that they would try to force him to be king before his time. In Mark 8:29 Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, and in verse 30 it says, *"And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him."*

But, now, for some reason, everything changes. He is actually taking steps to reveal to the Jews who he is.

[11]

⁷ *And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.*

What's with the colt? It was the foal of a donkey. Why did Jesus insist on riding into Jerusalem? He could have walked. It's an easy walk. I've walked it several times. When we go to Israel in 2015 we will walk that same road.

Turn to Zechariah 9:9.

[12]

Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)

⁹ *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

This prophecy about the coming Messiah was written over 500 years before Christ. By riding the donkey into Jerusalem he was signifying his Messianic title. He is the Anointed One. And there was no doubt in the mind of the Jews who witnessed this that this is what Jesus was doing.

[13]

⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

Do you see what’s happening here?

Let me give you a bit of background as to the political and societal climate of the time. If you know Old Testament history at all, you know that the Jews did not have a peaceful existence. Theirs was a history of being captured, exiled and dominated by other very cruel nations. Peace was something they were promised by God through his prophets, but had yet to be fulfilled.

About 90 years prior to Jesus riding into Jerusalem, in 63 BC, Pompey, a Roman military leader, was sent to quell a civil war in Judea. He captured Jerusalem, and for the most part, the Jews, again, were dominated, by the Romans this time. They were an oppressed people longing for their promised Messiah to put together an army and overthrow the Romans so they could once again be a free people.

By now Jesus was extremely famous. He could go nowhere in peace. Everywhere he went the crowds would follow. Just prior to this he raised Lazarus from the dead. The Jewish religious authorities, fearing that news of this would increase the fame of Jesus, put a hit on both Lazarus and Jesus. Things are very tense.

And to top it off, it is just before Passover. People are flocking into Jerusalem. The population of the city, over the next couple of days, would swell from about 50,000 to 125,000 people. The streets are packed. There are all these religious Jews expecting something. There is a heightened sense of anticipation. People are celebrating in the streets.

Jesus mounts the donkey. This act was so apparent to the religious Jews. None of them could miss it. It could not have more clear if he had bellowed it out from a megaphone. “I am the Messiah. I have come to set my people free.”

The people start laying branches and their cloaks on the ground in front of his donkey creating a sort of royal carpet for the donkey to walk on. That act was an act of submission, surrendering everything to Jesus their king.

They start shouting, ***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”***

There is mayhem in the streets. There is no doubt what is happening. They are hailing Jesus as their king. The word hosanna, is actually a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word, *hoshiya na*. It’s used only one time the whole Bible, Psalm 118:25.

[14]

Psalm 118:25–26 (ESV)

²⁵ Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The word *hoshiya na* was originally a cry for help. Sort of like if you were on stranded on a deserted island and you wrote S.O.S. in large letters on the ground and when you saw a plane come by in the distance you light the letters on fire hoping to be saved.

Over the centuries the meaning of the word changed. It became more like a hopeful cheer. Like if you saw the plane change its direction after noticing your S.O.S., and land to pick you up. Instead of “save us”, your shouts would change, to “We’re saved. Finally, we are saved.”

That is what is happening here. The people are jubilant. Finally, the long awaited Messiah has come. They are waving branches in the air, shouting, singing, whooping and hollering. They are celebrating their deliverance.

What they expect, of course, is that he is going to raise up an army and overthrow the Romans. Look what happens.

[15]

¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

The gate he likely went through was what we now call the Golden Gate, near the Temple Mount. Actually, it wouldn’t have been through the existing gate, but one that is buried beneath the current one. The one we can see today has been sealed off since 1541 AD. Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Sultan, sealed it to prevent the Messiah from entering Jerusalem when he returns.

Jewish tradition holds that the Shekinah glory, or the Divine Presence of God would enter through this gate and would once again appear when the Messiah returned. Turn to Ezekiel which was written about 600 years before Christ.

[16]

Ezekiel 44:1–3 (ESV)

¹ Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east. And it was shut. ² And the LORD said to me, “This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it. Therefore it shall remain shut. ³ Only the prince may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD. He shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way.”

All of this sets the scene for an expectation that Jesus would at this time overthrow the Romans and reestablish Israel to its former glory. You can’t really blame them can you? If we were Jews in that era I’m sure we would have had the same expectations. Let’s see what happened.

[17]

And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

In the same account in Matthew and Luke, because the events run concurrently, it seems like the first thing Jesus does upon entering the Temple is, in a fit of rage, to clear it of the money changers. But Mark makes it clear that the cleansing of the Temple happened the next day.

What really happened is, he walked into the Temple, looked around, and then walked back up the mountain with his disciples to Bethany. Talk about anticlimactic. It's almost laughable.

There is an expectation in the air. It is electric. Everybody is expecting that Jesus is going to make his move. He has set this up perfectly. He enters Jerusalem on the donkey, which says loud and clear, "Hey I am the Messiah. I am your only hope." He gets off the donkey, walks into the Temple, scans the courtyard. Looks at his disciples and says, "Hmmm. Let's go home." He does nothing, absolutely nothing.

I would imagine that those who were hailing him as their saviour were supremely disappointed. He didn't try to draw a crowd and stir anything up. The next day he did cleanse the Temple, but he did nothing against the Romans. All of his teaching and acts, in the next chapter, were against the religious Jews, not against the Romans.

As a matter of fact, after he cleared the Temple the religious leaders were obviously ticked off at him and began trying to trap him up in his words so they would have reason to have him killed. In Mark 12 they came with some Herodians, meaning that they were in cahoots with the government of Herod, and tried to trap Jesus into saying that he doesn't pay taxes.

Instead of rallying people against the Romans, what did Jesus say?

[18]

Mark 12:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

You talk about Jesus being a colossal disappointment. Not only does he not attempt to overthrow the government, he actually seems to support them. Its no wonder that in a few short days the same people who hollered their hosannas would be shouting for Jesus to be crucified, and the Roman government would find him innocent.

Jesus did not live up to their expectations. Does he live up to yours?

What do you expect of Jesus? I think we are sometimes guilty of the same things as those who were waving the palm branches and shouting their hosannas. Yes, he has saved us. His death paid the penalty for our sins. His resurrection has assures us of life after death. His Spirit lives in us and is transforming our character as we surrender our will to his. Our relationships should be getting better as we humbly walk with him. He has promised to give us peace and joy and hope in the middle of the storms of life. We should be filled with inexpressible thankfulness because of all these things.

If you are really honest this morning, as you look at your heart, are there some disappointments? Was there something else you were expecting? Did you expect that God would magically restore all your damaged relationships, or heal your illness, take away the emotional scars that you carry with you, rescue you from financial disaster, or give you that promotion, or whatever?

I don't want to end on a low note this morning. But, I do want us to realize that God is under no obligation to meet *our* expectations. He is God and we are not. And besides our expectations of God are not too high. They are way too low.

Jesus has given us something far more valuable than health or wealth. When we set our sights on the things of the earth we miss out on the thrill of a real relationship with him. We miss out on being a part of his kingdom work. We miss out on partnering with him in what he is doing on this earth. Jesus triumphantly rode through the eastern gate of Jerusalem knowing that he would end up on the cross. To the world it looked like he was a colossal failure, but in reality, they set their sites too low. He won. And because of his victory, we have the privilege of being victors with him.

[19]

We get to be a part of what he is doing on earth. It's not what we would naturally expect from a king. It's much better. Once you have experienced walking with Jesus there is no going back. It is much better than riches, or anything this world has to offer. He offers joy, hope, peace, and unconditional love. **It's ours because Jesus rode triumphantly through that eastern gate in Jerusalem and willingly gave himself for us.**



Great Expectations
Mark 11:1-11
Week of April 13th, 2014

Object of this study: To allow the Spirit of Jesus to test our hearts to see if our expectations of him are in line with his goals and desires for us.

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 62:1-8 meditatively to the group. (after each phrase pause and let the Lord speak to you before reading the next)
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

Recall a time when you stubbed your toe.

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

1. Read Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:22-29; Luke 9:51; Mark 11:1-11
2. What do you notice in these passages, especially the narrative in Mark. Mention anything that strikes your attention. Let this be a time of observation, paying attention, noticing.
3. ***“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem”*** (Luke 9:51). And when he got there, ***“he made very definite moves to provoke the events that would bring about his arrest and crucifixion...Jesus was not a victim here, but sovereign God”*** (sermon quote). Point out ways that Jesus was being purposeful, not a victim, passive, or helpless. Why does this matter?
3. The sermon referred often to expectations of what the Messiah would be, and do. What were the expectations of: the Jews? Jesus’ disciples and followers? What did Jesus’ actions do to these expectations?

Work (30 - 40 minutes)

1. What about your expectations? If you had known that your walk with Jesus would include suffering, would you still have chosen to follow him? What did you expect? What do you expect? How have your expectations changed as you’ve gotten to know Jesus better?
2. Sermon quote: ***“If you are really honest, as you look at your heart, are there some disappointments? Was there something else you were expecting?”***

This can be a very painful thing to look at, but very important. Read Romans 9:33, Ps. 62:5-8, and Ps. 66:10-12. What in your walk with God has been unexpected, painful, confusing? These things can be a ‘stumbling block’ to us, causing us to move away from intimacy with God if we don’t trust him with our pain. Take a few minutes to write a short letter to God expressing your disappointments, questions, and feelings.

3. ***“The way of Jesus is opposite to our natural expectations.”*** God, the creator of the universe, came to earth to suffer, serve, and die. This is not what we expect of a king. But God’s plan is so much better! In a word (or three) God’s ways are different, worse, and better than ours. His ways catch us by surprise, they seem so abysmally worse (like loving our enemies), and then turn out to be so profoundly better, beyond comparison.

What are these BETTER things, the true and lasting blessings of his suffering, death and resurrection?... and the blessings of walking with Jesus even through suffering? Which of these have impacted your heart the most? Spend some time talking about these, and responding in worship and thanks to Jesus.

For ideas, look at the final five paragraphs of the sermon if you have it handy on your computer. Also, you can read the following passages, either now or during the week for further study:

John 15:1-17; Romans 8:28-39; Galatians 5:22-25; Hebrews 12:1-13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and Isaiah 51:12; 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:18