

Sermon Palm Sunday 2023 Confounding Contradictions Scripture John 12:12-19, Luke 19:37-40 (2 readers – one at lectern, one at pulpit)

Introduction

Things are not always as they seem. They may confound us with their contradictions- the opposite of what someone else has said or what goes against the “facts” of another’s perception or belief. Yet, what can appear as a contradiction from one viewpoint may actually be two different perceptions of the same event. Consensus comes when we can merge the contradictions into a coherent whole or discard the part that is not true to reality.

“ A lady went to her pastor and said, Pastor, I am terribly in need of counseling. I ‘s got this sin. I can’t seem to shake it. The sin is messing with me, but I can’t seem to get rid of it. (All ears perk up for what is next, right!) The pastor replied, :What seems to be the problem?” Well, I come to church every Sunday and I can’t help thinking that I am the prettiest woman in the church. I look at all the other ladies, and they can’t even hold a candle to me. What should I do, Pastor, about this sin?”

The Pastor said, “Honey, that’s not a sin, that’s a mistake” (Tony Evans book of Illustrations, p. 238)

The contradictions in our story today came from mistaken assumptions and beliefs as far off as that “pretty” woman’s self-assessment was! **Let us pray.**

Confounding Contradictions

It’s important to understand the confounding contradictions in Christ’s entrance to Jerusalem on the part of the Pharisees because their misperceptions drove them to kill Jesus. From their perception He was a threat to their whole religious system. They rejected Him to save their system and all their people from Him because, in their words, the “whole world” seemed to be going after him. Jn.12:19.

So, let me summarize a few of those contradictions and then bring us to the true reality of the story. **(PP)**

- ❖ First, Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, a common beast of burden
- ❖ Second, the people all throwing their coats on the path before him, treating him like the promised Messiah
- ❖ Third, the children shouting Hosanna - a Messianic chant - even in the temple
- ❖ Jesus’ clearing all the moneychangers and animals related to the sacrificial system out of the temple
- ❖ And finally, the issue of Christ’s authority, which rivaled and threatened the leaders’ own religious authority.

Confounding contradictions that are still in people’s assessment of the Palm Sunday event today. With these polar opposite views of what actually happened, what reality do you embrace?

Contradiction 1 - A donkey?

Popular views of the Messiah in Jesus’ day were that the Messiah would be Israel’s Deliverer from all Israel’s oppressors. He would come in as a warrior on a huge white horse – the symbol of a victorious ruler. And by his power he would free Israel from all her oppressors. So this donkey, a common beast of burden – perhaps the lowest on the equine totem pole – and the Messiah together made absolutely no sense. What the religious leaders didn’t know or conveniently forgot was the messianic promise quoted in both Matthew’s and John’s gospel: *“Rejoice, O people of Zion!^[a] Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious,^[b] yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey’s colt.”* (Zechariah 9:9) Jesus knew that scripture and knew He had to fulfill it, so

Jesus had explicitly told his disciples to get a donkey for his procession and they did (Mt. 21:1-4).

Also, His processional appearance with the people acclaiming Him as Messiah was a package deal, as is the contradiction of his authority and that of the Jewish leaders. Matthew actually weaves all the Old Testament scriptures Jesus fulfilled throughout his gospel – since his target audience was the Jewish people who lived by the Old Testament. So if you want further verification of how Jesus DID fulfill God’s blueprint for the Messiah, I suggest you take the next few weeks and read Matthew’s gospel on your own and mark each place Matthew inserts the phrase *“this was to fulfill the scripture.”* It is actually these scriptures that Jesus used in his risen appearances to the disciples to authenticate his being the Messiah. Luke 24:44-45: ⁴⁴ “Then Jesus said, *“When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”* God still does this, beloved, so bring your questions and doubts to Him in this area and allow the truths of His Word as you study it with the Holy Spirit guide your thinking.

The Faith of a Child

However, the one area of seeming contradiction I want to focus on today is the contradiction of the faith and wisdom of a child vs childish behavior. Jesus lauded the children’s shouts of Hosannah. Yet many of us who are parents or teachers know the selfishness, the pettiness, the vulnerability and the naughtiness of children! 😊 We might have silenced those children too since they were acting outside the prescribed behavioral rules in the temple!

We are wise enough to resist the romanticized notion of what little angels children are. My sister-in-law broke her wrist when she was trying to spank her agile young son. When he ducked, her hand and arm slammed down on the kitchen counter instead of his behind. I can remember one time when our middle school age son was deserving of a thorough thrashing for the way he had treated his sister, and I was racing through the house to catch him and give him his due! I couldn’t catch him (at this point he was already a budding young cross-country runner), so the discipline was administered to him later that day when his father came home from work! Innocent angels? NO! Even the book of Proverbs notes that *“folly is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him”* Prov.22:15

But appreciating the children’s entrance shouting hosanna in our service, I want to take Jesus’ side on this childhood issue for a moment. Jesus welcomed children into his presence even when the disciples wanted to shoo them away. He (PP) celebrated the times their heart and their faith was simple and right on, and he lauded that child-like (not childish) faith. In fact, when the adults following him asked, *“Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”*, He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, *“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes Me.”* (Mt. 18:5) That’s the basis of this prayer (PP) *“Lord, give me the faith of a little child who trusts without questioning, who simply and gladly believes Your Word without doubt.”*

To illustrate the kind of childlike faith Jesus celebrates, let me tell you three children's stories. Two are actually prayer stories. Jim and Sandy Wheeler told me about how their granddaughter Summer prays. Whenever she is involved in a family intercession time, she will end it by raising up her hands and face to heaven and say loudly: "Please, God!!" That kind of simple faith goes far in heaven's annuals.

The next story is of a little boy on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippine. He lives in a small coastal barrio called San Jose. A number of years ago an evangelist called Gonzales founded a church in the barrio and many people believed in Jesus as Savior and Lord. When Gonzales died, his son Alex took over the ministry and convinced the people that the age of miracles had NOT ceased and they could participate in the miracles God could make possible.

One day at the school in this village the second-grade teacher told the children to be sure and bring a pencil and paper to school the next morning because they would have a test. The next day all the children arrived with their pencil and paper but one 8-year-old boy. He came from a very poor Filipino family. They lived in a palm thatched hut; he had no shoes or shirt – only a ragged pair of shorts to wear to school. He had found a single piece of note paper but he had no pencil. The teacher told him he was sorry, but the boy couldn't take the test without a pencil.

Heartbroken, the eight-year-old boy walked out the door and sat on the front steps of the little school building, which was also used for church on Sunday. He remembered Pastor Alex Gonzales' sermon on miracles, on the great God who did impossible things. "Dear God," he prayed closing his eyes and raising his face toward the sun, "Please send me a pencil. I want to take the test." He opened his eyes and looked around, expecting a pencil to drop out of the sky. Nothing. . . His eyes filled with tears as he sat, his arms folded around his knees, his single sheet of notepaper in his hand.

As children will do, he rolled the notepaper into a small cylinder, rolling it back and forth between his open palms, tears dripping down his cheeks. Then, as he twirled the paper in his hands, he felt something hard – round and hard – inside the paper. **(PP)** He quickly unrolled the notebook paper, and there in the middle was a bright shiny yellow pencil. It had a brand-new eraser on one end and the other end was machine sharpened - even though there was not a pencil sharpener within 30 miles. He quickly ran into the schoolhouse waving his pencil. The teacher asked him where he had gotten such a magnificent pencil, and the little boy paused, thought and finally said, "The impossible God gave it to me!"

The third story is about D.L. Moody, as a young man. He was challenged by someone who said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with one man who is totally committed to him." Moody was an unlikely candidate. His English was atrocious. He had no formal education. He made his living as a shoe clerk. But he had a dream, and he said, "I'll be that man." Twenty years later he stood with one foot in Chicago, the other in London and shook two continents with the gospel of Jesus Christ! (Jamie Buckingham, *Where Eagles Soar*, Zondervan, Chosen Books, 1980, pp.66-68)

Childlike faith that believes **(PP)** nothing is impossible with "the impossible God!"

This holy week and all the way through the 50 days of the Easter season till Pentecost, we have 6 areas where I believe together, we can see God move among us.

❖ This Thursday we will sit together at a Passover meal and speak out the words Jesus told his disciples at His last supper. These words are life-transforming if we let them take root in our hearts.

❖ Then Second, we have the Easter service on Sunday with a trumpet and the bell ringers and the chancel choir, and the children's Kids at the Cross participation as we shout together. "You are looking for Jesus. He is not here. He is risen, just as he said!" Please pray with me that many in that service who don't know the Lord or have one foot in the secular world's values and the other foot in religion would encounter Jesus personally and be transformed.

❖ Third, we have 7 new members joining our church on the Sunday after Easter – a great joy and help as our church continues to grow!

❖ Fourth, I will open up another Mending class to the community for May and June and talk about this class to the Prime Timers this month.

❖ Fifth, we are beginning an Art Class for Kids ages 5-11 starting Sat. morning May 20th. That class will happen on the 3rd Saturday of every month until Thanksgiving. Several of the teachers, the administrator for the class and the Bible storyteller are all from the new member's class!

❖ And finally, sixth in May, we will have our semi-monthly jazz worship service with Given Tanri and our jazz ensemble for Pentecost. That jazz service will happen every other month.

❖ All these events are ones you can invite your neighbors and friends and family to.

What do you believe the Lord can do in these opportunities, beloved? Naturally, there will be obstacles to overcome, finances to provide, and people to be reached. But Nothing is impossible with our Impossible God!!!! Let's go forward with God in each of these opportunities and see what our Lord will do. Let us pray.

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