

LUKE 19:28–40. (EHV)

After Jesus had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ahead, saying, “Go to the village ahead of you. When you enter it, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you will say this: ‘The Lord needs it.’” Those who were sent ahead went and found things just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their robes on the colt and set Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their robes on the road. As he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! [Ps. 118:26] Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” He replied, “I tell you, if these people would be silent, the stones would cry out.”

What is necessary?

I think we would agree that, in a fallen world, law enforcement is necessary. But if we had no law enforcement officials available, it’s not like the stones would do it.

I think we would agree that shipping and delivery services for things like the mail, food, clothing, and medicine are necessary. But if we had no truck drivers, it’s not like the trees would do it.

I think we can all agree that when the church council serves breakfast next Sunday morning, bacon is necessary. But if no one brings bacon, it’s not like we’ll get a knock on the east door and some squirrels will be waiting there with a special delivery.

In other words, these things are necessary, but their necessity is not so absolute that if there was no human to do them, we could still count on them getting done somehow.

But when some of the Pharisees in the Palm Sunday crowd told Jesus to rebuke his disciples for their praises, Jesus replied, “I tell you, if these people would be silent, the stones would cry out.” In other words, the Palm Sunday praises of Jesus were absolutely necessary. Jesus was going to be praised that day one way or another. Why was that so necessary?

1. Jesus entered with power

It was necessary, first of all, because Jesus came with such power. While that power isn’t on obvious display when Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem, the crowd of disciples knew that Jesus possessed great power. “The whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles that had seen.” The word for *miracles* in Greek literally means *powers* or *demonstrations of power*.

If you were to flip back through the pages of Luke, you would read that Jesus had healed people of fever, leprosy, demon possession, blindness, and other illnesses, diseases, and disabilities. He had raised the dead. He had calmed violent storms. He had fed crowds of thousands by multiplying very limited provisions. When the people of Nazareth took him out to a

cliff and tried to throw him off, he walked right through the middle of them and went on his way. No one had ever before shown the kind of power Jesus had shown, and no one has ever done so since. Jesus needed to be praised.

But some of the disciples in the crowd, those in the know, knew that Jesus was showing power even as he rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. You see, two of them had retrieved that colt for him after Jesus told them to go ahead of the group into the small villages and told them what they would find, exactly where they would find it, and even some difficulties they would encounter as they were retrieving the colt and what they could do in response.

Not only that, but they also knew what Jesus had told them about this donkey colt—that no person had ever sat on him before. The only way Jesus could now be riding him into Jerusalem without incident, without getting bucked off, without someone getting hurt, even as people were spreading robes and palm branches on the road in front of them and shouting praises all around them, was if he was not just this donkey's owner and master, but the Lord of the universe.

Jesus entered Jerusalem with power that needed to be praised.

2. Jesus entered with humility

Yet despite entering with such power, he also entered with humility. The founding fathers of this country set up the government of our country on the basis of the principle that absolute power corrupts absolutely. That is, the more power is concentrated in a single individual, the more corrupt that individual is likely to be. That's why we have multiple branches of government to keep each of the others in check. But what power could have been more absolute than the power of Jesus, the Son of God? Yet instead of seeing corruption, we see humility and gentleness.

First, there is the fact that he is not already in Jerusalem, that he is not already enthroned and ruling there. He is not here to exercise earthly, governmental authority with absolute power. His kingdom is not of this world.

Then there is the fact that he comes riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and not just a regular donkey, but a donkey's colt. The prophet Zechariah foretold that this would be a sign of his gentleness.

We don't hear Jesus egging on and encouraging the people's praises. The praises were initiated by the people, not by Jesus.

When some of the Pharisees rebuked Jesus, he didn't ignore them or yell at them or use his power or the support of the crowd against them. He responded to them simply and firmly.

And as he continued his descent down the Mount of Olives and saw the city of Jerusalem across the valley, he wept over it. "If you, yes you, had only known on this day the things that would bring peace to you. But now, it is hidden from your eyes." He isn't angry at them for their rejection of him. He is sad for them. His heart breaks for them.

Yes, and he continues into the city. He is riding into a city whose population was estimated to be about 2.7 million people at the time of the Passover, which would be celebrated later that week. He is riding into a city where the Jewish leaders hold sway, the type of men like the Pharisees who told Jesus to rebuke his disciples for their praises. He is riding into a city not to take control of that city, but to have its authorities take control of him and to do with him as

they wish. He is riding into that city to be put to death by execution, and not just any execution, but crucifixion.

Part of me wonders if that's why Jesus chose a donkey in the first place. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a donkey is that they have a dark band of hair that runs along their back, and then two dark bands of hair that run down along their withers. From above, those dark bands look like a cross. Now I don't know enough about donkeys and animal genetics to know if donkeys have always had that characteristic. But certainly at the very least, Jesus knew that donkeys would have that trait for many years and that people would take note of it.

If you knew in advance that you would die by crucifixion in a certain city, would you ride into that city? If you did, would you ride into it calmly and gently? Would you ride on an animal that would bear the mark of the instrument of your torture and death?

But Jesus does. Because his humility and gentleness are in fact his greatest miracle, his greatest demonstration of power. He hadn't just healed the sick and calmed storms and fed thousands. He had also forgiven sins: "Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven," he said to a paralytic. "Daughter, your sins are forgiven," he said to a woman with a notably sinful past. He could only make such pronouncements in light of what he was about to do. He was about to be obedient to his Father's will all the way to the point of death, even death on a cross. He was about to pay the awful and infinite price for all of mankind's abuse of power, for all of mankind's corruption, the awful and infinite price for all of their sins. He was about to win "peace in heaven and glory in the highest," to still his heavenly Father's wrath and to reconcile him with rebellious humankind.

And after paying that price and rising from the dead and ascending into heaven, he would come not to Jerusalem, but to us. He would come in words, he would come in water, he would come in a bite of bread and a sip of wine, which is why we sing, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," as part of our Communion liturgy. He comes to us not in blinding glory and overwhelming power. He comes to us in humility and gentleness. He comes to forgive. He comes to bring peace.

He needs to be praised for such humility, for such gentleness, for such obedience. But those praises are not for his benefit, not to stroke his own ego. Jesus wants the people to hear about him so that they will know who he is and believe in him. Then they can enjoy the peace in heaven and glory in the highest he came to win.

So don't leave these necessary praises to the stones. Join with the Palm Sunday crowd: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" Amen.