

*“Risking Reputation”*

Brett Blair wrote, “Some years ago a book was written by Gene Smith, a noted American historian. The title was **‘When the Cheering Stopped’**. It was the story of **President Woodrow Wilson** and the events leading up to and following WWI. When that war was over Wilson was an international hero. There was a great spirit of optimism abroad, and people actually believed that the last war had been fought and the world had been made safe for democracy.”

Blair continued, “The cheering lasted about a year. Then it gradually began to stop. It turned out that the political leaders in Europe were more concerned with their own agendas than they were a lasting peace. At home, Woodrow Wilson ran into opposition in the United States Senate and his **League of Nations** was not ratified.”

Blair concluded, “It’s a sad story, but one that is not altogether unfamiliar. The ultimate reward for someone who tries to translate ideals into reality is apt to be frustration and defeat. There are some exceptions, of course, but not too many.”

**“It happened that way to Jesus”**. (“When the Cheering Stopped” by Brett Blair posted on sermons.com)

As we seek to get back into the story of Jesus’ Passion – place ourselves into the picture of the strange event of Jesus’ Entrance into Jerusalem, there are a few questions, the answers to which are very important for us. **Why did the tremendous crowd gather to welcome Jesus? Who were they? What was the nature of the setting in Jerusalem as the Passover Festival was approaching? Why did Matthew say Jesus was riding two animals? For that matter, why did he ride a humble creature instead of a horse or a chariot? What was Jesus’ Purpose for Entering Jerusalem in such a way?**

First, **“Why did the tremendous crowd gather to welcome Jesus?”** Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not give us an answer to that question. However, the account in the Gospel of John did give an explanation. It was written in **John 12:17-18**, *“The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had happened. That was why the crowd met him — because they heard that he had performed this miracle.”* The crowd was motivated to welcome Jesus because they had been told about the wonderful demonstration of his true identity – **Jesus is the Lord of Resurrection!**

**Who were those multitudes of people in the crowd?** It is helpful to remember what John reported in verse 19, *“The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!’”* A sample of the worldwide impact from what was happening through Jesus was then immediately provided in the Gospel of John’s account of how some Greeks were wanting to see Jesus.

**Further, not only were there people from all over the world in Jerusalem, such as the Greeks, but the crowd, which sought to see Jesus, also included many of the powerless and the vulnerable of Jewish Society – the Poor, the Outcasts, the Rejected, the Hated.** Those filling Jerusalem for the Passover, additionally, included those, who were more than ready for a violent revolution against their oppressors – the Roman Empire.

Addressing the tensions with Rome, Andrew Prior wrote, “Passover was a problem for Rome. To not allow Passover to be celebrated would probably cost more, via a general civil uprising, than it was worth. Yet the festival was a celebration of escape from Egypt which always seemed on the edges of a rebellion against Rome. It was not hard to imagine that all that innocent asking of questions by the children: Why is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights, we eat either unleavened or leavened bread, but tonight we eat only unleavened bread?

On all other nights, we eat all kinds of vegetables, but tonight, we eat only bitter herbs? and so on, was a thinly veiled reference to events that it was hoped would one day involve an escape from Rome, and, hopefully, something not too far distant from the drowning of Caesar's armies so, to keep things under control extra troops would be sent into Jerusalem for the duration. They would march in from the west, probably from Caesarea Maritima, and make a great show of military might with war horses and columns of marching troops while entering the city, in an effort to dampen the enthusiasm of any Jewish activists." ("Tell the story" by Andrew Prior posted on onemansweb.org)

**Why did Matthew say Jesus was riding two animals?** According to Carl Gregg, New Testament scholar, John "Crossan writes that Matthew: wants two animals, a donkey with her little colt beside her, and that Jesus rides "them" in the sense of having them both as part of his demonstration's highly visible symbolism. In other words, Jesus does not ride a stallion or a mare, a mule or a male donkey, and not even a female donkey. He rides the most unmilitary mount imaginable: a female nursing donkey with her little colt trotting along beside her."

**Why did Jesus ride a humble creature instead of a horse or a chariot?** Gregg's answer to that question was, "I find Crossan's reading compelling because Jesus riding an unmilitary mount matches the rest of the Zechariah prophecy — that the one who comes riding on a humble donkey into Jerusalem will nonviolently bring peace. Remember the language from Zechariah about 'cutting off the chariot, war horse, and bow to command peace.'"

Gregg continued, "Crossan similarly highlights that the custom likely would have been for Pilate to make a similarly militaristic triumphal entry to Jerusalem — with war horse, chariot, and weapons — each year in the days before Passover to remind the pilgrims that Rome was in charge. Such a demonstration would have been especially pertinent at Passover since Passover was explicitly a celebration of the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Thus, Jesus' subversive donkey ride reminded all those waving Palm branches that Rome was the new Egypt, and the Emperor was the new Pharaoh."

**What was Jesus' purpose for entering Jerusalem in such a way?** Gregg answered, "Suddenly, we find Jesus making broad, increasingly public and controversial demonstrations in the big city of Jerusalem in the middle of Passover (the height of the pilgrimage season) in contrast to merely making controversial teachings in the small towns and villages around Galilee." Gregg continued, "**I do not think that Jesus wanted to die, but his passion for justice and his anger at injustice — a passion and anger he inherited from the Hebrew prophets before him — led him to take increasingly large risks to show the contrast between the status quo (where Herod was king) and the kingdom of God. These risks led directly to Jesus' tragic death.**"

**What is our response? How do we see ourselves in Jesus' purpose – in Jesus' Passion – in the Picture of Jesus' Entrance into Jerusalem to die and be raised for us?** Gregg wrote, "**Rosa Parks** is an imitator of Christ, not because she suffered for taking her stand (or keeping her seat, in her case), but because she had the courage to believe in her own dignity and fought for it in spite of the conflict that resulted. **Nelson Mandela** is an imitator of Christ, not because he suffered in prison, but because he held out for peace and justice, and led a nation to resurrection." Gregg concluded, "**In each case it is not the suffering that is redemptive, but the courage to pursue justice in the face of pain and evil.**"

As we enter the Picture and Story of Jesus' Passion during this Worship Series, let Jesus' Entrance into Jerusalem lead you to follow his example of pursuing **Justice, Peace, and Agape Love** "in the face of pain and evil." **Yes, Enter Jesus' Passion!** Amen.