

Riding the Wave on Palm Sunday! Sunday 13th April 2025 John Gay

‘So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.’ (Luke 19:32-37 ESV)

One of the questions that we might ask ourselves about this passage is: ‘Why did Jesus choose a donkey?’ Of all of the ways he could have come into the Holy City of Jerusalem, why a donkey?

It is an interesting question. When we think of the expectations of the people about a Messiah, we might think it a very odd choice indeed. Jesus had spent three years wandering around the area of the Jordan Valley, and the area now known as Palestine, teaching, healing and preaching miracles. The people had seen what he had done and heard what he had said.

They sensed that here, at last, was the one that the prophets had spoken of, the Messiah who would come to liberate their people; Jesus’ own people. Could there would be true liberation at last? They were right to ask themselves the question and judging by what they had seen and heard, they had made up their minds. This was the one who would come to bring freedom from the Romans and usher in a new era to the people of God.

So far, so good, but there was a problem. The problem was that you had two groups of people in this account, or at least in this particular situation. You have those who had heard and seen the things Jesus did, but they are nearly all based outside Jerusalem. The farmers, the country folk, those...less sophisticated; less ‘street-wise’. A few of them will have come back into Jerusalem, of course, because people do go in and out of the city to trade, but most were the ‘salt of the earth’, living less complicated lives in their villages and small communities.

The city dwellers tended to be of a different sort, city dwellers used to stay in the city and didn’t often go anywhere else; they had no need to. There was everything they needed within the city walls and so they rarely wandered too far from the city gates. Why would they go out ‘into the sticks’ where was nothing for them to see or do there? Jerusalem, after all, had all the greatest monuments to see and all the best shopping. What was there to do elsewhere?

So, when it comes to a liberator of God’s kingdom, city dwellers who had hardly ever knowingly seen Jesus ‘in action’, so to speak, outside the city, would have a very different impression from those who knew of Jesus already and had seen and heard him first-hand. Those from the city were expecting a liberator who was going to advance on the city and re-establish the kingdom of Israel, and the throne of King David, while conquering the roman occupiers and driving them out of the land. The Law and statutes of God and the kingdom of Israel would be properly re-established; It had not been so for 600 odd years.

To a certain extent, those from outside Jerusalem were expecting the same. Yet, from what these people had heard and seen, they had a sense that the restitution of the kingdom was not going to happen in quite the way that everyone else in the city was thinking. Jesus does not disappoint, when he arrives on a donkey. Even so, as Jesus enters the city, those from outside who had seen and heard him, knew that this was something to behold and celebrate, because this was still ‘their man, their champion, the one who brought them hope’ and who would usher in this new kingdom. Those inside the city were caught up in the excitement of it all. Hearing chants of “Hosanna in the highest”; Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord”; well, as a city dweller, who doesn’t get out much, you would be excited to see the conqueror coming triumphally through the gates, wouldn’t you? And then, you see him! The conqueror, the Messiah, the saviour of the nation, the

re-establisher of throne and kingdom entering the city to the acclaim of all...on a donkey. I am not sure that is what they had in mind, to be honest. It was a little 'underwhelming'. Where is the charger, the great horse, the flag and the armour for battle? Where is the army? Has he even got an army? Has he even got a sword and shield?

There was of course, the line of peasants in their plain clothes, rags and crutches, waving a few palm branches but somehow it doesn't really...How is this guy going to drive out the Romans?

Now there is something very important to remember here as we approach Holy Week and particularly that which occurs on Good Friday. Yes, everyone is cheering now, and rightly so, for Jesus is a king, the King of Heaven. But those city dwellers, who do not know him like the others, will be thinking: 'Is this some kind of joke? This guy on the donkey? C'mon man, tell me how HE is he going to drive out the Romans?'

So, here, we have the dilemma. Yes, the people wanted to be liberated from Roman rule; yes, they were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, the one who would lead them to the glory of God. It is just that this guy doesn't look like him. The problem for the city dwellers was at heart, they didn't want the kind of kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming. They wanted a liberator, right enough, but not a liberator from sin and death, by the resurrection of the living Christ and the forgiveness of sins leading to eternal life; No! They wanted a liberator from the Romans, so that things could go back to the way they were before the Romans came, when Jerusalem was at least a sovereign city and not a Roman outpost.

Unfortunately for them, God was not interested in the exterior, vanity of the city walls, but the interior state of the hearts of his sovereign people. God was interested in the poor and humble, the disadvantaged and dispossessed; in those who loved him with a true heart rather than by fickle outward pride and prejudice and outward show.

It doesn't get more humble for a king than riding on a beast of burden; humility and the love of God was all that Jesus needed to show, to give the clue about true freedom and liberation. Those who know the real power of the love of God to deliver a soul from death to new life will get it.