

A Missed Opportunity
Matthew 21:1-20

March 24, 2013

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a. what two things did riding on a donkey convey?

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^A The outline of the first two sections has been taken from a message by Pastor Coy Wylie of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas.

^B Matthew 20:18-19, Acts 2:23

^C Zechariah 9:9, John 12:31, 16:11

^D Revelation 7:9

^E Psalm 118:25, John 6:15

^F John 1:46

^G John 2:13-16, Malachi 3:4

^H Isaiah 56:7

^I Luke 17:37-40

A. Introduction

1. Parades

- a. I've mentioned it before, but at the risk of boring you, I'll mention it once again – it is a fond memory of my childhood
- b. on Sundays, I used to walk about ½ a mile to Sunday School and church, which could take a lot of time for a young boy
- c. but once a month, there was a special service for veterans at the Presbyterian church near to us baptists, and after their service the vets would march back to the Legion Hall which was on my way home
- d. with the skirl of the bag-pipes and the beating of the drums, we boys were drawn to march with them along the sidewalk
- e. the sound of the music, the vets in their kilts, the people marching along with them was infectious
- f. they set a good pace, so on those days, I would always arrive back home on time for lunch – something otherwise rather rare for me
- g. that is why I can relate to the words of this old popular song—{2}.

I love a parade, the tramping of feet,
I love every beat I hear of a drum.
I love a parade, when I hear a band
I just want to stand and cheer as they come.
That rat-a tat-tat, the blare of a horn.
That rat-a tat-tat, a bright uniform;
The sight of a drill will give me a thrill,
I thrill at the skill of everything military.
I love a parade, a handful of vets,
A line of cadets or any brigade,
For I love a parade.

h. and I can relate to the people who joined the parade as Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday morning so many years ago – the infectious excitement as the crowd swelled with new participants along the way – many perhaps not even knowing what was happening

2. It Was Jesus the King

- a. each of the writers of the four gospels had a different emphasis in their accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth
- b. that of Matthew is that this Jesus was the promised Messiah, the One Anointed to be King
- c. this parade was a coronation parade of the King entering the royal city of Jerusalem – it was Jesus' triumphal entry
- d. but the people's idea of what Messiah King should be, and God's, were vastly different
- e. the Jews looked for salvation from Roman rule
- f. God's plan was that through Jesus' death there should be salvation from the rule of sin and Satan in the lives of men and women
- g. the Jews looked for a throne and a crown
- h. Jesus was looking forward to the cross
- i. because of this difference, many of the Jews missed an opportunity

B. The Presentation of Messiah ^{–{3}}. 21:1-11

1. The Preparation for the Triumphal Entry (vv 1-3)

- a. Jesus knew full well what He was doing – in Matthew 20:18-19 He says, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.'
- (A) so now as He approaches the city, He sends two of His disciples – it matters not which ones they were although Peter and John were sent on such tasks – with very clear instructions – go to such and such a place – get the donkey and its colt that are there – when you are asked why, give such and such and answer – then they will send the animals with you
- (B) in the other gospels, we see that this is exactly what took place

- (C) again, we do not know who owned these animals, but Jesus did
- b. thus, Jesus is prepared to enter the city of Jerusalem by the Eastern Gate, to carry out the final phase of God's plan for His Son during His ministry here on earth – God was in charge the whole while
- c. our title, 'A Missed Opportunity,' is not to suggest that the people of Jerusalem missed the chance of an earthly kingdom being set up then and there – that was never God's plan, for Peter speaking by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:23 says of Jesus Christ, 'this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.'
- d. the missed opportunity was that so many people came so close to recognizing who Jesus is on this day, but did not and so lost out

2. The Prophecy of the Triumphal Entry (vv 4-5)

- a. More than 500 years before, Zechariah had written these words: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' (Zechariah 9:9)
- b. Jesus knew that He alone was now fulfilling that prophecy
- c. the donkey was traditionally the beast that would carry a judge; Jesus was carrying out the judgement of God against sin and the Devil:
 - (A) Jesus told His disciples 'Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.' (John 12:31)
 - (B) and speaking of the Holy Spirit's coming that He '... will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment ... concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.' (John 16:11)
- d. but it was also the beast used to carry a king that was coming in peace – not one who was coming to lead armies and to conquer nations — that was what the Jews sought: deliverance from Rome
- e. Pastor Coy Wylie expresses it in these words: 'Jesus did not come as a mighty conqueror but a gentle Saviour; not a militant general but a sacrificial Lamb. He came in poverty, not wealth; meekness, not grandeur; not to destroy Israel's enemies but to save humanity. The coronation was a time of humiliation, not glorification.'^{4}.

3. The Process of the Triumphal Entry (vv 6-8)

- a. the disciples returned with the animals, and not having saddles, put clothes upon both of them – not knowing yet the intention of our Lord – and then He sat upon the colt, on which we learn elsewhere, no one had ever sat – a colt that did not miss the opportunity!
- b. and as He rode, people responded and crowded around
- c. laying their outer garments on the ground before them, a sign of submission as had been done centuries before when Jehu became king
- d. palm leaves – Jericho was called the city of palms in the OT – were cut from the trees as symbols of festivity and laid also along the way
- e. all this, of course, is a foretaste of a greater Triumphal Entry, of the Lamb once slain but now alive as John saw it in his vision on Patmos: *'After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands'* (Revelation 7:9)

4. The Praise of the Triumphal Entry (v 9)

- a. As the people went, they sang and shouted
 - (A) from the verses which we read earlier in the service – Psalm 118, a Psalm of the conquering Messiah – they shouted Hosanna
 - (B) Hosanna, which translated into English is, *'O please save us'*
 - (C) but what kind of salvation? their words give the clue
 - (D) they call Jesus, as did the blind men He healed in the preceding chapter, 'Son of David' – that is a Messianic title on account of the promise to David that God would raise up of His descendants One who would sit on David's throne forever (2 Samuel 7:11, 16)
 - (E) David, the king under whose leadership the land of Israel reached its greatest promised extent from the border of Egypt to the Tigris river, from the great sea to the borders of the eastern desert
- b. no, not as the salvation from sin, but from Rome
 - (A) the very verse they quoted shows the cast of their minds
 - (B) *'O Lord, do save, (Hoshi'a-na) we beseech Thee; O Lord, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity!'* (Psalm 118:25)

- (C) prosperity! that was their desire; once before Jesus had to escape the crowds when they would come by force to make him king (John 6:15), not for His teaching, but for His just feeding 5000 of them
- c. looking for the wrong kind of Messiah, they missed their opportunity to acclaim Him as God's Messiah of a greater salvation, that from sin

5. The Perplexity of the Triumphal Entry (vv 10-11)

- a. v. 10 tells us that all the city was in commotion
 - (A) about 35 years later, the emperor Nero had a census taken of Jerusalem at the Passover then taking place, and the number of people counted in the city was 2,700,000 ^{-{5}}.
 - (B) 2012: official population of the city was 801,000 (64% Jewish)
 - (C) either way, that is quite a crowd to be stirred up
- b. their question was simply this: 'Who is this man?'
 - (A) they had been praising Him in Messianic terms
 - (B) but now comes the answer
 - (C) the frenzy has died down
 - (D) Jesus is accorded a much lower title – He is the prophet
 - (E) for the Jews, the term prophet could encompass anyone from Moses down to a simple teacher
 - (F) was not used as an expression of admiration if found in their addition: '[This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee](#)'
 - (G) from Nazareth? from that place? as Nathaniel had said three years earlier, '[Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?](#)' (John 1:46)
 - (H) so they failed to examine His credentials
 - (I) they missed the opportunity to recognize him as the Christ indeed
- c. small wonder that a few days later many of these same people who had shouted Hosanna, were standing before Pilate's court, shouting Crucify Him! Crucify Him.

C. The Purifying of the Temple 21:12-16

1. Jesus Cleans the Temple (v 12)

- a. three years before, at the beginning of His ministry, John 2:13-16 relates how Jesus at that Passover had entered the temple and thrown out all those who were making His Father's house a market-place
- b. but the wickedness of men, coupled and fueled by their greed, is very great: and the animal-sellers and the money-changers had returned
- c. this was profitable business, especially at the festal seasons when the city was crowded with pilgrims wishing to make sacrifices
- d. but Jesus had come to earth to deal with sin, and the sin of false and insincere worship was turning the true worshippers away from God as had the sins of Eli's sons done a millennium before
- e. the sale of animals and changing of money into the form that the priests would accept was an extremely lucrative business, overseen by the chief priests themselves – Dr Edersheim says the price was often at 10 times that of the market, and exchange at a 25% premium
- f. confronted by the Lord coming 'suddenly into His temple,' so that 'Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.' (Malachi 3:4), these had the opportunity to repent; but they missed it, twice

2. Jesus Condemned the Hypocrites (v 13)

- a. this took place in the part of the temple known as the court of the Gentiles, which recalls the rest of the verse which Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56:7, '... For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.'
- b. but Jesus called them what they were: thieves and robbers
- c. they missed the opportunity to acknowledge the Truth who is Jesus

3. Jesus had Compassion on the Needy (v 14)

- a. not everyone on that day missed their opportunity
- b. there was Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, whom Jesus had healed back at Jericho; that we know his name shows he didn't miss it
- c. there were the blind and lame whom He healed even within the temple itself – for all to see as a witness – they didn't miss it

4. Jesus Confronted the Leaders (vv 15-16)

- a. yes, these leaders saw and beheld and admitted these miracles
- b. but they missed their opportunity
- c. their dignity and their position was far too important to them
- d. they would not jeopardise it for this rabble-rouser from Galilee
- e. but they held their hand for a while, fearing the multitude whom they disdained as 'knowing not the law' who had acclaimed Jesus
- f. the children shrieking in the temple courts, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' as only their shrill voices could do, was an offense to them – it robbed their Judaistic religion of its sacramental reverence
- g. these children didn't miss their opportunity – what they cried came from their hearts and was praise and worship acceptable to God
- h. and, as we read from Luke 17:37-40, earlier in the service, if they were to have kept silent, then the very stones would have cried out
- i. but the leaders missed their opportunity – confronted with the truth of Scripture and with the Truth in person in Christ – they chose rather to seek to secure their place as religious rulers by plotting against him

D. Conclusion – The Warning of the Fig Tree 21:17-20

1. Leaves Without Figs (vv 17-19a)

- a. here there was one fig tree, by itself, on the common thoroughfare, and thus open for anyone who passed by to eat of its fruit
- b. the cause of the cursing of the fig tree is made very clear
- c. it made a show of leaves at a time when the earliest fig trees might indeed have borne fruit, but there was no fruit to be found
- d. this was not a petulant reaction by Jesus because he was hungry
- e. it was given as a warning illustrating the events of the day before – an enacted parable
- f. a great opportunity had been given to the thousands upon thousands who had flocked to Jerusalem to participate in worship at Passover
 - (A) many professed in their cries of Hosanna that they believed in this Jesus as the Messiah, the bearer

- of salvation – but within a few days, they would cry out that He be crucified
- (B) others professed to lead the people in a form of religion that made a mockery of what God had designed – and they rejected the opportunity to know the true worship and plotted His death
 - (C) all these made a great show of leaves, but bore no fruity figs

2. A Withered Wonder (vv 19b-20)

- a. Matthew telescopes these events, but the other gospels clarify that the 'immediately' or 'at once' means that it happened in the course of the very same day, before nightfall
- b. the curse given in the morning; the result seen as evening came
- c. some would apply this to the nation of Israel, but that goes against both the picture and reality – Israel was not to be denied forever knowing the truth; but rather those who made a show of faith
- d. there is a warning here for today as well:
 - (A) men and women have got excited; caught up by the crowd, joined the parade as it were, to follow Jesus
 - (B) perhaps when faced with a special need or crisis in their life
 - (C) or under the influence of a charismatic evangelist
 - (D) but yet they miss the opportunity
 - (E) for it is all on the surface; a quick prayer of 'I believe'
 - (F) but failing to turn with a whole heart to God that they might walk in fellowship with Him and His indwelling Spirit all the days of their lives
- e. do not this day miss the opportunity to follow this Jesus Christ as Lord

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| AV | Authorized (King James) Version of 1769 |
| NAS | New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition) |
| NIV | New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society |
| NKJV | New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers |

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

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| BM | - | Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870 |
| EBC | - | The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan |
| EGT | - | The Expositor’s Greek Testament |
| Kerux | - | The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com . |

2. *'I Love a Parade'* – Music by Harold Arlen, Lyrics by Ted Koehler, 1931
3. I am indebted for this outline to the message *'Signs of Rejection,'* by Rev. Coy Wylie, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas – Kerux sermons #10682
4. From the message by Coy Wylie noted above.
5. The Cambridge Bible, *in loc.*, but also see *'The Temple, its Ministry and Services,'* by Dr Alfred Edersheim, pages 183-4