

Part 69: The Triumphal Disappointment

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During my undergrad my reporting professors would always warn us, "Don't bury the lede."

In journalism, the lede is the main point—the piece of information everyone is waiting for. So when you have the lead, you lead with the lede. Don't backload it.

Burying the lede can often create unintentional humor. For instance, in the T.V. show "The Office" one character gives the update on the health of a co-worker this way: "Meredith was hit by a car. I took her to the hospital. The doctors tried to save her life. They did the best they could. And she's going to be ok."

In this instance, the burying of the lede is funny because the build-up sounds bad, but the lede itself is good news.

But sometimes the burying of the lede is less humorous, it can cause confusion and disorientation. Take for example a company-wide email which announces exciting new changes for the business—a fresh start and new ideas that will carry it into a new era—only to hear the key piece of information: most of you are going to be laid off.

For the last 10 chapters the whole narrative of Luke has been working towards Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. It was the headline story. The one who claimed to be the Jewish messiah was heading into the town of religious and political significance. Even as readers of Luke's gospel we too can feel the excitement of the crowds in our text today which is often called "The Triumphal Entry."

But if we zoom out from the narrow lens on the text this triumphal entry was a triumphal disappointment. Jesus seemed to have buried the lede. The newspapers were all ready to insert their own lede, thinking they knew what Jesus came to do. But at the end, it seems the main point of Jesus and his ministry is still misunderstood.

They thought the lede would be: Kingdom restored—The King is crowned. But instead Jesus laments the Holy City and rebuked the temple saying in essence the king you hoped to accept is actually the king you reject. But behind the veil of disappointment and confusion, Jesus is revealing to us the good news—the better news that actually being accomplished in Jerusalem. He's not burying the lede, in fact he's showing us the lede that we would have otherwise missed.

I'm sure all of us have at times hurried to write the story of Jesus based off our own expectations and hopes. We type the headline we think we need, and demand Jesus to meet it—but when it seems he fails to we find ourselves confused and frustrated. But today Jesus writes the story we need to hear—today Jesus shows us how we can find peace even when things seem dark.

We will only find peace, and only understand the story of our own lives when we understand the story with Jesus at the center. This is our main point today as we see that **Jesus is the man of God executing the plan of God so that people can be saved by the hand of God.**

Way back in Luke 9:53, Luke told us that Jesus' face "was set on Jerusalem." So as Jesus is nearing this long anticipated target, we would assume the pace of the story to pick up. Maybe like in an action movie where music is blaring and there's a bunch of cut scenes of the heroes preparing for battle.

But Luke actually slows down the pace and slow walks us into Jerusalem. In fact you'll notice that three times in this text Luke tells us of Jesus, drawing near, nearing, and being near, but it's not until we see Jesus in the temple that we are finally in Jerusalem.

Luke tells us that Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem from the east, and right before they went over a pass that would bring them down the Mount of Olives he tells his disciples to take run ahead of him into a small town saying: **(Luke 19:30-31)** "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"

I'm the kind of guy who feels awkward asking for more sauce at a restaurant, but here Jesus asks these two disciples to commandeer someone's donkey! But just as Jesus always does with us as his disciples—he prepares them for what to do and in verses 32-34 they do what he said, and it happens like he said it would, and they do what he said they should do, and they find their way back to Jesus with the colt.

So what is going on here? Luke uses the following narrative to help us understand the significance of these events: **(Luke 19:35-40)** "And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on it, 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, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"

Luke is using the positive response of the crowds and the negative response of the Pharisees to show us our first point today: **Jesus is the man of God.**

Jesus is heralded as the "King who comes in the name of the Lord." In other word's he's God's guy.

Luke's audience was primarily Greek, so he leaves out some direct prophecy that Matthew includes to his primarily Jewish audience: **(Matthew 21:4-5)** "This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

This prophecy from Zechariah 9 call for great rejoicing and loud shouts of praise because the king is finally coming. It's almost as if the crowds are reading a good novel and they just finally picked up on the main twist.

The proclamation they sing is taken from Psalm 118, but there it simply says, "Blessed is *he* who comes in the name of the Lord." So Luke appears to be affirming that the crowds have figured it out: if he's coming to Jerusalem, if he's on a colt, if he claims to be the messiah, if he's done mighty works...it's got to be the king!" That's why they not only marvel at the mighty works he had done, but they anticipate more that this coming king will do.

Here's a great hope for all of us—the more we begin to understand Jesus as the Bible presents Jesus—the more praise will naturally flow from our hearts. Many of these people still failed to fully understand the significance of what was being said, but Jesus affirms their praise.

We know he affirms it and accepts it because he's told by the Pharisees to silence it but Jesus said to them "If these were silent the very stones would cry out." Jesus in all his glory is so worthy of worship that when our eyes are opened to see him, he draws out praise from us like a moth to a light. Even when the world tries to silence you, Jesus your king commends you.

The Pharisees found it unfit for the crowds to act this way for two reasons. The first reason is that they didn't believe he was the king and therefore the worship of the people was seen as foolish. They could not believe that God would send his messiah in such a way. Their idea of peace and glory with God didn't look like Jesus.

My daughter is in third grade and she already feels the weight of this. She told me how many of her classmates say, "Oh my God" all the time. She confessed to me one night saying, "I really want to say it because I don't want to feel different—but I know I shouldn't talk about God that way."

What a beautiful burden! When we see the beauty of Jesus, we don't talk about him even in casual, ordinary ways. People will find it odd, but Jesus finds it beautiful. There's a blessed burden when our worship of Jesus sets us in tension with the worship of the world.

But secondly the Pharisees wanted the crowds to be silent because they feared the consequence of Jesus' kingship.

You see, if Jesus wasn't God's king, if he wasn't the one to bring salvation and peace—then he's a danger to what currently kept the peace. As Jesus is descending the Mount of Olives the huge procession, and most likely their cries of kingship would have been seen and heard by the Roman officials sitting in Jerusalem.

If Rome heard that a "King of the Jews" was coming to rival Caesar as king—then the peace they currently had would be threatened. If Jesus is the king, then he immediately is at odds with rival rulers. The same is true in our own hearts. So do not make the same mistake as the Pharisees. They rejected the worship of Jesus because they trusted in the peace of Rome more than they trusted in the one who promised peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

They didn't want to upset the applecart because they weren't certain that Jesus could provide a better peace than the people who oppressed them. How often do we bemoan our slavery to sin—while at the same time finding an odd sort of comfort in sin's security? We trust our sin more than we trust the King.

If Jesus isn't bigger than our sins—then we are in trouble. But if Jesus is the King who comes in the name of the Lord—then we of all people have hope.

Here's our second point today: **the plan of God.**

If Jesus is God's king, then what is he going to do? Well, in the Old Testament the plight of Israel was often seen in connection to two centers: Jerusalem and the temple. In the prophets and the histories we see that at some level people are trying to rebuild Jerusalem so that God can rule over his people in

safety, or people are trying to recapture the arc or rebuild the temple so that God's presence would dwell with them.

The Jewish idea of the messiah would be that like Nehemiah, Jesus would come and rebuild the security of the city. He would come like a sunbeam in a Disney movie and dead flowers would come to life, dirty buildings would shimmer and the bad men cast out. Or like Ezekiel's vision, the royal presence of God would finally enter the temple and the river of life would flow out of it.

So you can imagine the screeching sounds, the record scratches, and the furrowed brows which met Luke's words. When Jesus catches his first look of Jerusalem he doesn't rejoice—he weeps. He weeps not because Rome is there, but because a spirit of rejection is. Look at **Luke 19:41-44**, "And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.'"

But it gets worse. Jesus then enters the temple, the sacred place of the Jews, and he rebukes those who were in it because they were not worshipping God, but making a profit for themselves. **Verse 45-46** tells us, "And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers.'"

The pride of Israel was Jerusalem, and the hope of Israel was the temple. But as the King who comes in the name of the Lord came, when he saw Jerusalem he wept. When he entered the temple he swept. The city of kings was declared to be destroyed and the place of God's presence was declared depraved.

I'm sure that at different points we too have experienced something like this. We run to Jesus because we think we know what he needs to do, and yet he never seems to do it. Maybe you ask in your own heart, "Is this the plan of God?"

So what went wrong? Was Jesus really the messiah?

C.S. Lewis once famously said that God finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. Often times we are frustrated that Jesus doesn't rid us of the problems we have identified as the greatest—but that's because we don't understand the weight of our greatest problem. Often times we are disappointed at the power of Jesus because we think too small. The problem for the Jews was bigger than foreign governments and tourist temples. Our problems are bigger than our politics and our relationships.

Jesus was able to predict the destruction of the Jerusalem because there was a kingdom coming bigger than Jerusalem. The plan of God suffered no lack when the walls of Jerusalem came down, because the kingdom Jesus was going to establish has no walls. "The earth is the Lord's and fullness thereof." While the author of Hebrews reminds us that there awaits for us a heavenly Jerusalem yet to come, God's kingdom under God's king will no longer be tied to one geographic city—but it will go forth to the ends of the earth. A longing for physical Jerusalem, was too small.

Jesus is able to declare the temple empty, because there was a greater presence of God—Immanuel who is God with us. When this king establishes his people we no longer need to go to a place to

experience God's presence, because wherever Christ is confessed, there the Holy Spirit himself indwells the believer. The temple was too small a vessel for God's presence.

The plan of God is better than we could ever hope because it's not confined to a place, it's confined to a person: Jesus Christ. He is the King.

But look at how this Jesus is treated in Jerusalem: **Luke 19:47-48** "And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words."

Here, the king that they expected was the king they rejected. Instead of enthroning him, they sought to kill him. Why?

Because of what Jesus came to do. When he got to Jerusalem, he didn't ride into Herod's palace and kick out the puppet king. He didn't march into the Roman barracks and draw a sword. He didn't even enter the temple and start amassing soldiers. Instead he went to the very things these men looked to for hope, and he criticized them.

He showed them that their greatest problem was not Rome, but their own rejection of him. Their lack of faith was the enemy which held them captive. This is what Jesus came to free us from. This is where the lede of our life gets corrected by the true reality of our king. Jesus came to bring us back to God not by kicking out Rome, but by kicking out unbelief.

This is our last point this morning, Jesus is **The Hand of God** to save sinners.

There's still a problem here isn't there? Even if you're on team Jesus you'll notice that by the end of this passage it is sinful men who are seemingly taking the narrative over. They sought to destroy Jesus. And Jesus' only hope at this moment was the mere mass of people who hung on his words. We too might have all of our theology right and find life still hard and the path still opposed.

But notice what else it said: "But these men did not find anything they could do."

We may try to wrestle against Jesus as king, but in the end we will find there is nothing we can do.

The reality of who Jesus was and what he came to do brought a deep lack of peace to these men and despite their best attempts, they could do nothing on their own to bring peace between them and Jesus. But that's why Jesus came. He came to bring peace to those who are not at peace. He came to save those who would otherwise be destroyed. In other words, for the self-righteous rulers there was nothing they could do. But for Jesus, the true king of God, there's never nothing he can do.

In fact that's the beauty of this whole passage. Why did Jesus go into such intricate detail about the colt, where he was tied, what kind of colt, and what to say when people asked? Because what was about to happen in Jerusalem was not driven by the hand of men, but by the hand of God.

Everything was going according to plan. Even the rejection of Israel was because the terms of peace were "hidden from their eyes" (vs. 42). How was it hidden? It was hidden because they could only think of Jesus in terms of waging war against the sinners. But if sinners are to have any hope, they need to see the king who came to declare peace first.

If we only view Jesus, and only ask of Jesus, to wage war against that which is out of place—then we will never see that we are the ones out of place. Jesus will come to wage war—but he has first come to offer peace.

This is the significance of the donkey. One commentator says, "Despite its widespread use by all, the donkey and the mule were also evidently a staple of ancient near eastern royal ceremonies." He goes on to show their use in kingly ceremonies in both the Bible and other literature of the day.

Why is a donkey so symbolic of kingship and celebrations? Because when a king got on a horse, it communicated the need for war. But when a king got on a colt, it communicate the security of peace.

Jesus didn't march in to wage war on Rome, he came to offer peace to sinners.

This was in fact the very context of Zechariah 9. Right after we are introduced to the king on a donkey we read (**Zechariah 9:10**) "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."

Jesus came to bring peace. But sinners didn't want it. Here's what Jesus' prophecies remind us of. He will not always be on a colt. One day, the king will return on a horse. In Jesus the offer of peace is made to those who refuse to accept the king and his terms.

Take note of this text. The history of Jerusalem and the beauty of the temple meant nothing in regards to Jesus. Your family's history of worship, your seeming cleaned up life are no warrant for God's favor. There is no peace on our terms. There is only peace on his terms.

What were those terms of peace? Didn't you notice the unique way Luke presented Jesus' momentary salvation here? The influential people wanted to kill him, but they couldn't find a way. Why? Because the people were hanging on his words.

That Greek word "hanging" is unique—it literally means to be suspend or hung from. This is the only time this word is used in scripture and I think Luke means it to be a subtle head nod to what was about to come.

For the moment, there was temporary peace because the crowds hung on Jesus' words. But in a few days there would be the offer of eternal peace because Jesus would be hung for the sins of his people.

You see Jesus rode a donkey because he came with the offer of peace for us, because he came to declare war on our real problem on the cross. It was sin, not Caesar that Jesus came to fight.

Peace came on the cross, and that peace can be here for you too.

Jesus here again reveals what was hidden. Sin blinded the eyes of the Pharisees. You might do well to fear that same blindness, but take heart the cross reveals what sin conceals.

Here is the sovereign hand of God, here is the offer of peace to those who were far off. Here is the triumphal entrance that brings not an end to Rome, but an end to death itself.

So how do we apply this today? I can think of two primary ways.

First, notice the evangelistic emotions of Jesus. Here he gazes at the city which will unlawfully and arrogantly put him to death—and his response in sinless perfection and divine affection is to weep for the lost. God's wrath is real, but it is never separated from his attributes of love and compassion. For all who remain in sin, judgement comes—but now—if that's you—notice how your savior weeps for you. The puritan Stephen Charnock says it this way, "God never uses his justice to crush men till he had used his kindness to allure them."

To those who are believers, how does Jesus allure men to himself? Paul's helps us in **2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2**, "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

This week would you pray that God would give you the same eyes and same emotions for the lost that Jesus had? Evangelism is faithful even when done out of obligation—but it is all the more beautiful when pursued out of deep affection.

Second, let us worship Jesus louder than the rocks.

We live in Missoula—the beauty of God's creation is noticeable. People pay to see it, clamor to post about it and make sacrifices to experience it. Why? Because as Psalm 19 puts it, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaim his handiwork." Brothers and sisters we of all people know that creation is not silent.

But if the sky merely proclaim the handiwork of God—then how much more ought the church which is the handiwork of God rise to the challenge. Creation is the canvas of God's redemption but the church is the center of his affection. This King didn't come so that creation might sing—it already does. This King has come so that sinners can sing, that's the plan of God. Consider this even as we take the Lord's Supper and close in worship today—let the stones be silent and the saints be resounding.

Resounding with the old hymn that goes:

*"Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
O Christ, your triumphs now begin.
O'er captive death and conquered sin.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die,
Bow your meek head to mortal pain
Then take, O Christ, your pow'r and reign."*