



Mark 11:1-11
Palm Sunday
“Backwards”

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This morning and next week we are taking a break from our series in the gospel of John, as we turn to passages about Palm Sunday and the Resurrection from other gospel writers. John covers these events, but we’ll get to them later in our series as we continue our journey through his account of the life of Jesus.

The sign out in front of a restaurant in Texas recently read, **“My day starts backwards...I wake up tired and I go to bed wide awake.”** Jesus is kind of like that. His approach to life and faith are backwards from conventional wisdom. “The first shall be last and the last shall be first;” Normally we presume that the first will finish first and be lifted up as great, and so forth. But Jesus teaches the opposite. Or how about his statement later in the gospel of John: “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father except through me;” In a world where it’s common to believe “good people go to heaven and spend eternity with God” even if we can’t very well define what “good” is...but Jesus puts the requirement not on being good, but on knowing him. Or how about his refusal to get defensive or go on the offensive when he was on trial. I could never have responded the way he did.

And in today’s passage we see yet another instance where Jesus does the unexpected. It’s backwards of what we expect, in fact. But in this, he models some things for us that are so important in following Him. **Let’s read Mark 1:1-11.**

Normally, when a king was being welcomed into a city, the customary animal to ride was a horse. Perhaps they might ride in some kind of chariot or cart or something like that...but it would have been pulled by a horse. No one rode a donkey or a colt or a foal or anything like that. So why does Jesus do this?

There are a couple things going on here. First, there was an Old Testament prophesy that spoke of a king who would come to his people “righteous and

victorious” and not riding on a horse. Here’s what the Old Testament prophet Zechariah says,

**“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9)**

So, this is an unusual prophetic word. For one, it’s a prophecy that is predicting a positive future event. Generally, the role and intent of a prophet was to warn people about the direction their life was heading, in order to get them back in relationship with God. So, this prophecy is kind of backwards in that regard. But it’s also unusual because of the prophecy that this king would come to his people “on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” That just isn’t how kings rolled; it’s backwards. That’s like the queen of England riding in a Yugo instead of a Bentley. And yet, that’s the prophetic word: that this king, though victorious, will come in lowly and riding on donkey colt. So, the prophecy is rather backwards.

The other thing going on here that seems odd is this: **How did Jesus know about the colt?** Jesus being who he is, it’s certainly possible that he knew where every animal in the region was. He once met a woman at a well and he told her everything about herself – that’s what she herself said to her friends – even though they had never met before. He once saw a woman put a couple of coins into the offering at the temple, and Jesus proclaimed that she had just put in everything she had. So sometimes Jesus just knows stuff because of his nature. And that may be what happened here.

But we should also keep in mind that Jesus had been in this region before, and spent a lot of time there. For instance, Luke 22:39 says, “Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives...” This was a usual and common place for him to be. The base of the Mount of Olives was a short distance from the Jerusalem Temple. And essentially on the hill sat Bethpage, one of the towns mentioned in the text this morning, and on the other side of it was Bethany, the other town mentioned, about two miles from Jerusalem. This was the

town where Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus lived, and several events in the life of Jesus occurred in Bethany.¹

So, this is familiar territory for him. He's spent a lot of time wandering around these villages ministering to people, teaching them, and more. And so, if Jesus just knowing where all the animals are doesn't seem feasible to you, then I will suggest to you it's highly likely that Jesus had seen this animal before, and interacted with the family that owned it. Perhaps he asked them in an earlier visit if he might be able to borrow it some time, "just in case" he ever needed it. In fact, that explains why, when the disciples were asked why they're taking the animal, and they say, "The Lord needs it" the people there willingly let it go. Either way, it was brought for Jesus to ride on.

Now the first thing I really want us to consider how it applies to our life is this: **Even though there is a prophetic word, about what Jesus will ride into town on, Jesus doesn't leave things to chance.** I mean, normally, we kind of think, "Well, if there's a prophecy about the future...if it's God's will that something will happen...then God will make sure it happens. I don't need to do anything." But Jesus shows us just the opposite here.

He lays things out for his disciples and tells them exactly what to do, so he comes into Jerusalem as prophesied. No miscues. He walks them through each detail. "Go to the next village...just as you enter there's a colt that no one's ever ridden on...grab it and bring it to me...if anyone asks, tell them I need to borrow it." He is very strategic about this.

And so, one thing we learn from him here that is so applicable to those of us who are Jesus followers is to: **Plan and prepare for what God will call us to do.** If God wants to work through you to reach people for Christ who play basketball, for example, then it probably would help if you know how to play. God could supernaturally give you the talent in the moment, but more likely, you're going to need to practice out on the court. Or if God wants you to be generous in some way, then that might mean being strategic about how you spend and invest your money, so that you could give generously; it might mean planning the way your house looks so you can host ministry events; it

might mean using your time wisely so that you are free and available to serve your neighborhood as a missionary right where you live. This takes intentionality and even strategy. There's nothing wrong with that. Jesus teaches in Matthew 10:16 that we are to be as shrewd as a snake, and as innocent as a dove. Christians love the last half of what Jesus says, but oftentimes forget the first part of that teaching. But Jesus totally lives it out here.

This doesn't mean we leave the Spirit out of our lives, as though we plan and schedule everything and there's no room for God to intervene and move us in new directions. In fact, it's quite the opposite. We want to intentionally be open to the Spirit's leading and be intentionally open to the people around us and be intentionally ready to minister to people when God puts us in a place where we have that opportunity to use the gifts he's given us. We want to plan for those things and be ready for them.

And those opportunities come all the time. Sometimes, it's in the middle of a parade or some other party-like setting, such as we see here. Just recently I've had opportunities to share with people about my faith, and answer their questions about matters of faith and related significant topics. There have been five of them in the last month or so, with five different people. Three of those came at events that were wrapped around kids' sports – two state tournaments and an end of the year team party – and the last two were while on vacation this past week.

One of them, I found myself riding up a chairlift with a guy who organized a conference in a hotel where we stayed one night. We'd seen all the people with their conference tags hanging around their necks, but didn't know what it was about, so I asked him. Turns out it was a conference on nuclear power, and this guy sitting on the chairlift was in charge of the whole event. After answering several of my questions, he asked what I do. I said, "Well, I deal in power as well. I help people connect with the power of God, that put everything we see in place. I'm the head pastor of a church." He said, "that's cool" and then didn't ask a lot of follow up questions, to be honest. But I was prepared, and even adjusted my answer based on his own line of work. Maybe that was smart, maybe it wasn't. I don't know. All I *do* know is that I

didn't know that these conversations were going to happen, but I was ready for them.

So, we can't plan when the Spirit is going to give us opportunities to talk about matters of faith, but we *can* intentionally be prepared for them, and intentionally put ourselves in places where we might have those opportunities. Jesus shows us that here; he's very intentional; he's shrewd, even, as he lays everything out that he needs the disciples to do so he can fulfill this backwards prophetic word. By the way, this is exactly why you should grab a few of these postcards, and take them everywhere you go this week – to school, to work, grocery shopping, to the coffee shop, and so forth. That's being shrewd, being intentionally being prepared for the opportunities the Holy Spirit gives you to invite someone to church for Easter.

We also see here that Jesus works in ways contrary to what we might normally presume. He should be riding a horse, not a donkey. He teaches things that are backwards from conventional thinking. This is at the heart of who Jesus is. At the start of the message, one of the “backwards” things I mentioned that Jesus teaches about himself is that we know God and enter his Kingdom when we know Jesus. Want to know God? Then know Jesus; he is the way to an eternity with our creator. And that pushes the buttons of our world, where people want to try and know God apart from Jesus. I met someone this last week who told me that she's “spiritual” but isn't really a part of any religion or faith community. A lot of people like to make spirituality kind of fuzzy like that, and probably mostly focused on just being a “good person.” But Jesus is pretty clear that the only spirituality that matters is rooted in him. **So, if we know Jesus...if we know the son of God, then we know God.** If we know the Son, we know the Father.

About 10 days ago I got to experience an incredible example of this. On April Fools' day, the father of one of my best friends died after a brief illness. His name was Tex. Tex loved Jesus and was loved by a lot of people – he was always up for an adventure, loved to encourage and cheer people on, especially on the ski slopes or on the water ski course. He had incredible passion and energy for these kinds of things. But, he was a man with good character, worked hard, and loved Jesus. Well, when Tex died, his son Dusty

sent out a text message to a few of us to let us know. One of the people in the group had not actually met Tex before, but had heard about him from his son and the rest of us in the group over the previous couple of weeks during his illness. After Dusty texted us that his dad had died, here's what this one guy texted back: "I did not know Tex. But, I do know he was a good man because I know his son and I see how much his son and son's friends love and respect Tex. I wish I would have known him...at least to do some powder turns with him!! Dusty: I pray for peace and comfort for you and your family. Long live the memories of Tex!!"

You see: **Based on his knowledge of Dusty, he knows that Tex was the kind of guy he would have liked to be with. It's the same with Jesus: When we see him, we see who God is like.** Jesus is the picture of God. It's focused in on him, which is so contrary to how most people approach God. It's backwards from how the world thinks.

Do you want to know God? Then know Jesus. **Jesus himself says in John 14:9, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."** So, Jesus himself affirms this. If you want to know your creator, your heavenly father, the God of the universe, and be a part of his eternal kingdom: then get to know Jesus. True spirituality may be focused in tightly on him – which is kind of backwards from what people want to believe – but anyone and everyone is invited to do so. The invitation is not to a select few; it's broadcast far and wide, and each person on the face of the earth is invited to follow him.

So, if you want to know God, then follow Jesus. Live for him. Be his disciple. Put your trust in Him. Emulate him. Live like him. It sounds backwards, like waking up tired and going to bed wide awake. It's backwards – like a king, or the savior of the world, riding into town on a donkey colt in a one-person parade in his honor. But, as backwards as it might seem, following this savior king leads to right spirituality in this life and the life to come. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ For instance, see: John 11:1-4 Mark 11:11; Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:12-14; Matthew 26:6-13.