



Luke 19:28-40
Fact or Fiction
“Silent Jesus”

Rev. Brian North
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Palm Sunday

Today is the 6th and final message in a series where we have been fact-checking some ideas about Jesus that might be in our heads, with what Jesus himself says and does. We want to make sure that we have a clear and accurate picture of who Jesus is so we’re following the real Jesus, based on facts, and not some misguided version of him based on fiction.

Next week, on Resurrection Day, we will begin a new 5-week series that will help us find spiritual encouragement in unlikely places. **(New Sermon Series Graphic)** Each sermon will focus on a Bible passage as always, but then connect that to a song from popular music of the last several decades that have messages aligning with Scripture. We will kick things off next Sunday with one the most beloved songs from the Seattle rock band, Pearl Jam. It’s a song with a lot of connections – probably not intentionally so – but a lot of connections with the message of the Resurrection of Jesus, his love, and as well as his crucifixion and having faith in him. Besides discipling people who are already believers, this is a series designed to connect with non-believers as well. So, just as I did each of the last couple days: invite your friends or neighbors who don’t know Jesus, or aren’t connected to a church, to join you.

(Fact/Fiction Sermon Graphic) Today, as we finish up the Fact or Fiction series, we’re looking at the question of, “Is Jesus silent?” A lot of people, including Christians, might say “I never hear from God. He doesn’t respond. Jesus is silent.” Speaking of Pearl Jam, there’s a line in one of their songs, and it’s not the song we’ll look at next week, that addresses this topic:

“Whatever the notions we laced in our prayers
The man upstairs is used to all of this noise
I’m through with screaming
And echoes nobody hears, it goes, it goes, it goes
Like echoes nobody hears, it goes, it goes, it goes”

So, there’s some belief expressed that there really is “a man upstairs”...that God exists...but there’s also this expression of frustration about prayers that seem to be unheard. The reason for believing the prayers are not heard is that

there seems to be no response. For some reason, my wife says I'm the same way. She'll be like "You aren't listening to me, are you?" And I'm thinking, "That's a strange way to start a conversation."

Similarly, some people believe that Jesus is silent, because there's seemingly no response. So, is this fact or is it fiction? There are a number of passages we could turn to, to get an answer to this question, with many of them coming in the verses dealing with Jesus' last few days. Jesus is quite silent in his sham trial, for instance. He doesn't argue his case hardly at all. But today we'll be in **Luke 19:28-40**. This is God's word to you and me today...

Pray. So, let's answer this question right up front today, and take the mystery out of the car deal: **Other than his directives to two of his disciples to go get the colt and bring it to him, Jesus doesn't speak until he's spoken to by some Pharisees. He is silent.** The Scriptures don't record for us anything that he said.

So, this passage begins with Luke letting us know that Jesus is continuing his journey to Jerusalem. If you go all the way back to Luke 9:51, we read, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem" This is no casual journey he's on, like college kids on a shoe-string budget back packing trip wandering around Europe or Asia. He is resolutely journeying to Jerusalem. There's a sense of purpose. **He's on a mission, and it's a mission to the cross, via Jerusalem during the Passover.** Passover is the week-long holiday and festival to commemorate what God did for their ancestors so they could flee from their bondage and slavery in Egypt. And it's intentional that Jesus gets to Jerusalem for his date with the cross at this time: Jesus' death frees us from the chains of sin, just as Passover celebrates freedom from the chains of Egypt.

Then we get to this interesting directive, where Jesus sends a couple of his disciples ahead of him to untie a colt and bring it to him to ride on. **Two people from this multitude of people are sent ahead with instructions to untie a colt, and bring it to him.** Should anyone ask them why they are taking the colt, Jesus tells them to simply say, "The Lord needs it." And sure enough, as they're untying the colt, the owners show up and ask, "Hey! What

are you doing with our colt?” And the two disciples respond just as Jesus told them to: “The Lord needs it.” And, somewhat unbelievably, the owners let them walk off with the colt.

You gotta think that either Jesus arranged this in advance and this phrase “the Lord needs it” is like a pre-arranged password; Or it could be that these owners were followers of Jesus, or had at some time benefited from his ministry, and so they’re happy to let it go even though they weren’t planning on this, because Jesus is Lord. **Whether spur of the moment or pre-arranged, they freely and generously give to Jesus.**

So, after narrowly escaping charges of “colt stealing” the two disciples bring the animal to Jesus. By the way, Mark also says it was a colt; Matthew says a colt and a donkey...which is interesting to think of Jesus standing with one foot on each riding it like a pair of four-legged water skis...and John says “donkey.” Personally, I’m not hung up on those differences. Matthew quotes an O.T. verse that references both animals, so he points to Jesus fulfilling that verse, so that’s some of his motivation for that. John quotes the same O.T. verse but only mentions the donkey. It’s one of those times where different authors have slightly different information about details, or are trying to convey a particular theological or prophetic point. They all tell us that Jesus rode the last mile or so into Jerusalem with a crowd cheering him the whole way.

And this is when the crowd really starts to get into it. Jesus is being treated like royalty. **This is a joyous atmosphere, like a parade or a party. People are praising Jesus: singing and shouting.** They spread their cloaks on the ground before him – like rolling out the red carpet at the Oscars or the Grammys. Jesus is being welcomed like a king.

This is also where, if we were looking at the same event in Matthew, Mark, or John, we would see that the people cut off branches from the trees and laid them down along with their cloaks. In the book of John, he tells us specifically that they were palm branches. So that's why we call this Palm Sunday. Palm trees were a symbol of long life, prosperity, and blessing (See Psalm 92:12, for example), and so they used the palm branches to bless Jesus

as he rode this last bit into town. Little did they know, however, that this was the beginning of a difficult week that would end in his crucifixion.

So, Jesus is being welcomed like royalty. **And for the first time in a long time, Jesus' words or, even his actions, are not really the focus of the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus.** This is the longest stretch of Luke in the last 10 chapters without any words from Jesus. Yes, Jesus is riding on the colt, and the focus of the people there in that moment is *definitely* on Jesus. But for us, the reader, Luke draws our attention to the people and to their proclamations:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38).

Matthew gives us some other things they say:

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Matthew 21:9).

So, they're chanting this, singing it, calling out words of praise, and making a wall of sound as Jesus rides toward Jerusalem. But in verse 39 some Pharisees who were there get Jesus' attention and have a request. “Hey, rebuke your disciples!” It's a strong word used throughout the gospels. The Pharisees don't like that Jesus is being praised...worshipped. It's heretical to them because God alone is worthy of praise, but Jesus accepts it and encourages it. It's another example of the true nature of who Jesus is. So, Jesus says to them, “No way, Jose! Besides, you don't want them to stop, because if they do, then even the stones around us here will cry out.”

This Lent I've been doing the Lenten Scripture reading challenge as many of you have, reading through the four Gospels during Lent, 2-3 chapters per day. And 10 or 12 days ago we read Luke 3. And because I was reading it not long before Palm Sunday, I had an “a-ha” moment related to what Jesus says here about the rocks crying out.

In Luke 3, we see people flocking to John the Baptist and his message “to repent and be baptized.” But some are clinging to their ancestors for their

righteousness rather than repenting. In other words: their errant thinking is that just by being in the right family lineage, their relationship with God is good. And so, John says to them, **“Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that *out of these stones* God can raise up children for Abraham” (Luke 3:8, *emphasis added*).**

In other words, clinging to someone else’s faith as your own doesn’t count jack diddlyquat. (That’s a very technical theological term you learn in seminary...lol). Nothing. Zip, Zero, Zilch. God is *not* impressed. And when I read that line from John about the stones, I thought of Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in today’s passage. “If these people stop cheering, praising, worshipping, then even the very stones will cry out.” God is going to raise up worshippers of Jesus, one way or another, even if he has to work through the stones on the ground.

So, up until this comment, Jesus has not said much of anything. But what he says here to the Pharisees speaks volumes. All creation is in tune with Jesus here in this moment. All creation sings his praises. All creation is about Jesus. And Jesus receives it. He welcomes it. He’s not going to stop it. His disciples are praising him with voice, with the branches, with their coats, probably with their bodies in other ways like bowing down or raising their hands or clapping...and Jesus encourages his disciples to do this. It’s not an arrogant thing – he’s riding a colt for crying out loud. This is not a warrior king on a prancing horse...this is someone coming in peace, who comes humbly and with humility. But Jesus accepts their praise and adoration.

Where Jesus might seem to be silent, it leaves room for his disciples to speak up, to take action, to worship him and praise him. We see this in other parts of the gospels where Jesus sends disciples out to minister in his name, to pray for people, to share the good news of Jesus. It’s not always Jesus doing the speaking or the ministering: He equips and trains his disciples to do it, and he welcomes the praise that we offer him.

And when it comes to people in the world around us – in the pews next to us, in our places of work, in our classrooms, in our neighborhoods, and homes – when there are people who are like, “Well, Jesus is silent. God is silent. I

pray and I get no response"...And maybe sometimes that's you, wondering why God doesn't answer your prayers the way you want. He didn't respond to the Pharisees request very favorably, right? There was an answer...it just wasn't the one they wanted. Sometimes that's how God works.

And frequently when God seems to be silent, he leaves room for his followers to step in. We praise Jesus. We worship him. We minister in his name. We come alongside others in their time of need. And it's all in his name because He is Lord of lords and King of kings. And as we bow down before him, you and I can be the ones who point people to Jesus and help them see him, just as the Pharisees were drawn to Jesus to talk to him because of all the people praising Jesus.

So, Jesus' silence isn't because of a lack of care or concern. Rather, it creates the opportunity for his disciples to live by faith. To praise him. To point people to him. To minister in his name. To invite others – just as the Pharisees were there – to be with us in this journey of faith. To join with us in praise. **Jesus doesn't need to speak, because his followers are saying more than enough – with their speaking, their singing, their chanting, and with their physical demonstration of praise for him with the cloaks and the palm branches.**

As we move toward Resurrection Day this week, and on that day and every day after: let's praise the Lord. Let's minister in his name. Let's pray for people, bless them, encourage them, be the answer to their prayers...Let's praise so loudly – not only with words, but also with actions – that people take notice. Where Jesus seems silent, let's fill the space with praise...with lives leading people toward Jesus. As the Apostle Paul writes, **"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship"** (Romans 12:1). Worship is more than just words. Worship is living out our faith every day, wherever we are, and in whatever opportunities God gives us. It's not just an hour on Sundays. We offer our bodies – the head and the heart, the hands and the feet – every day. So, let's praise him, because Jesus is the only King worthy of our worship. Let's pray...Amen.