

Illustration:

It's said you can tell a lot about a person by how they travel. When I was in college, I drove a 1965 Ford Mustang. It was just what I wanted to be – cool, rugged, and a bit different. I could imagine driving nothing else. Now I drive a station wagon and a minivan with a car seat in the back, crayons on the floor, and VeggieTales in the stereo. Something has changed. You can tell a lot about a person by how they travel.

Jesus came not on a stallion but on a donkey. He came not to wage war but to establish peace. It defied the expectations but that's how He came. And they killed Him.

Application:

Listen. We ought to cry out “*Hosanna!*” But we ought to know something about the One we're crying out to. All through history, people have had their own take on who Jesus is and what He came to do. The philosophers said He brought wisdom. The monks said He brought holiness. The scholars said He brought morality. Activists said He brought social justice. And He did. All those expectations. But so much more.

Now you may be wondering, “*What's that got to do with me? What's the connection between all those expectations, then and now?*” Just this. He brought more than we think He did. He came to save us from more than just the stuff on the surface, the symptoms. He came to save us. Now that's worth remembering when we don't see Him “driving out the Romans,” when we don't see Him saving up to our expectations.

Look. I used to read these passages – the shift from “*Hosanna*” to “*Let Him be crucified*” – and look down my nose at these people. Now I look in the mirror. I'm no better than they were. And neither are you. Can I just put it this way? What do you do when His intentions collide with your expectations, when Jesus doesn't give you what you want? When you're insisting on more money, more possessions, a fulfilling career, a fulfilling marriage, ease and comfort and all He gives you is Himself? Will you still cry “*Hosanna*” or will you shout “*Let Him be crucified*”? It happens. With all of us.

Illustration:

I can remember a time years ago while serving in another church when life there became nearly too hard to go on. There were some days I just did not want to leave the house. God's people can do a lot of ungodly things in His name. And I was losing hope. I was losing the ability to even pray. Why? Because my expectations were colliding with Jesus' intentions. He wasn't giving me what I wanted – a fix, a resolution. But what He was giving me was more of Himself. Despite my expectations.

CONCLUSION:

Let me put it this way. Think of the crime dramas on TV or a movie portraying a hostage situation. The thug has the gun. He's holding it on a helpless victim. He and the hero are staring one another down, each assessing the situation. The thug yells in desperation, “*Give me what I want and nobody gets hurt!*” The hero calmly replies, “*Put the gun down and I'll do what I can for you.*” That's what we see here. We're the thug demanding that God give us what we want. He is the hero – here to rescue everyone in the room (including us) but insisting that we've got to drop our demands, let go our expectations. And, in fact, He lays down not only His gun but His very life for us.

Is that not reason all the more for us to cry out “*Hosanna*”? “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*” For despite our demands, despite our flawed expectations, He comes riding in triumph to a cross – for us.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the focus of Christ's intentions for us,
(magnet) we must be wary of our own flawed expectations.

insurrection started in the city and for murder.” However these descriptions are blended together, this is not a model citizen. And yet, when given a choice between which prisoner should be released, the crowds choose Barabbas. The condemned is pardoned. He is set free, granted full amnesty. And that’s the last we hear of him.

2. Kill Jesus

But not Jesus (**READ Matthew 27:24-26**). How can I possibly portray for you the injustice of what takes place here, the madness? What words can be used? His compassion, selflessness, wisdom, patience. His healings of the blind, the deaf, the mute, the lame, the possessed, the dead. He is the Shepherd, the Servant, the Suffering Servant. As surely as mere words cannot capture the glory of Jesus’ person and work, so surely they cannot capture the horror of what then unfolded. Many died before they even reached the cross. The scourging ripped open the skin, chewed into the flesh with whips of bone, metal, and glass. But Jesus survived that. And the beatings that came with it. But only to be crucified. Only to be subjected to the most shameful and painful death imaginable at the time. Only to have His limbs stretched out, spikes driven into His hands and feet, the weight of His body upon them as He hung, left to die of hunger, exhaustion, or asphyxiation – whichever came first. This is what the crowds demanded.

B) *Why It Was Said*

Now why? What happened between Sunday and Friday to bring about such a shift in sentiment? Why did the people’s cry of “*Hosanna!*” so radically change before week’s end to cries of “*Let Him be crucified!*”? Things started so well. Why the change?

1. Because of what they wanted

Why? Because they didn’t get what they wanted. Let me take you back from Friday to Sunday and the shouts of “*Hosanna!*” It’s one thing to understand what words mean. It’s another to understand what people mean when they use them. The salvation they were shouting of was not the salvation He was bringing. Let me put it this way. The people saw their problem as a political problem, as a military problem. They saw themselves as a people suffering the effects of an occupying army – the Romans. That was the extent to which they saw their need. Get rid of the Romans and you’ve gotten rid of the need. They had a superficial problem. And so they were looking for a superficial savior. They were expecting Jesus to drive the Romans out and establish His kingdom right then.

Now, in fairness, we have to say that there was some justification for such expectations. The prophets had spoken of One who would come to deliver, protect, and establish His people. A conquest was going to take place. But of another kind than they were expecting. The armies of Rome were not their greatest problem. That was but a symptom of a far greater problem – the brokenness of creation, of our hearts, an estrangement from our Creator, and a rebellion against Him lodged deep within us all.

2. Because of what they got

The problem was much deeper than they realized. And so they needed a Savior much greater than the one they were looking for. But they were expecting Him to rule the Romans, not their hearts. They were expecting Him to destroy their enemies, not their pride. They were expecting a show of force, not an act of compassion. It was a collision of their expectations and His intentions. And something had to give.

But Jesus was up front about this from the beginning. Notice He came riding not on a mighty war horse but on a meek and lowly donkey. No one rides into battle on a donkey! It’s as though He’s saying, “*I am your King. But my Kingdom is one of peace.*”

I. A TRIUMPHANT CRY – “HOSANNA!”

Look with me at this storm and its fronts. The crowds shout “Hosanna!” Why?

A) *What Was Said*

What did it mean? It comes from Psalm 118 – the last of the Hallel Psalms (READ Psalm 118:25-26). This and other passages were chanted at the great festivals of Israel, these verses forming the crescendo. And as such, in the midst of the Passover celebration, it would have been fresh on their minds and come naturally upon their lips.

1. Original meaning

In its original context in Psalm 118, “Hosanna” meant something along the lines of “*O, save!*” It was an expression of longing, a hope for deliverance from the LORD.

2. Intended meaning

But by this point in Israel’s history, it meant a bit more – especially in the context of the festivals. It meant not so much “*O, save!*” but “*Ah, salvation has come!*” Not so much a longing but an expectancy. And this was seen in the palm branches waved by the people. They were a nationalistic, patriotic symbol. It would have been much like a ticker-tape parade today – people lining the streets, all waving tiny American flags.

B) *Why It Was Said*

So great hope is being expressed here, relief that “the Son of David,” the Messiah, has come. “*Hosanna*” was the perfect thing for them to cry out as Jesus rode in.

1. Because the prophecy was fulfilled

Because, as Matthew makes clear, Zechariah’s prophecy from centuries before is being fulfilled. (READ Matthew 21:4-5) The King was coming, riding on a donkey, a foal. Zechariah’s words are coming true in all their details. There’s real specificity here.

2. To declare His arrival

And intentionality as well. (READ Matthew 21:2-3) Jesus’ act of acquiring this donkey is that of a royal figure impressing another’s property into His service. His riding it into Jerusalem was a parable acted out, laying His cards on the table. “I am your King.” Clearly intentional. It’s the only recorded instance of Jesus riding and not walking. His disciples recognized the significance (at least to some degree). And so too did the people of Jerusalem – they are, as Matthew says, “stirred up.” And Jesus accepts the praise of the crowds. Much to the consternation of the religious leaders of the day, He accepts it.

Application:

And we should join in the chorus. For it’s true. He is the King. The Son of David has come. He has come to save us from our guilt, our fear, and that nagging hopelessness within. We should cry out in desperation, “*O, save!*” because we need such deliverance. And we should cry out with joyful expectation as well, “*Ah, salvation has come!*” For it has. For He has. And so we should join in with the crowds, lifting up our voices, lifting the affections of our hearts off our idols and onto Him.

II. A TRAGIC CRY – “LET HIM BE CRUCIFIED!”

Which brings us to the second point. For before the week was over, the cry of “Hosanna!” had shifted to something else entirely (READ Matthew 27:15-23).

A) *What Was Said*

Now we need to think about what is being said here.

1. Spare Barabbas

Barabbas is described as being “*a notorious prisoner.*” John notes that he was “*a robber.*” Mark and Luke state he was “*a man who had been thrown into prison for an*

March 20, 2005

“Great Expectations” Matthew 21:1-11

FCF: Misplaced expectations as to what Christ will do

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the focus of Christ’s intentions for us,
(magnet) we must be wary of our own flawed expectations.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I understand that today is the first day of spring. This being middle Tennessee, however, that’s no guarantee of warm sunshine and flowers. We might just as likely have blustery drafts and showers. Case in point – my son’s soccer team (of which I am the coach). Knowing how to dress for practices in the late afternoon can be a bit hard. It’s warm as the kids leave their homes to head for the field and so they dress one way. But by the time practice is halfway finished, the sun is going down and it’s quite a bit cooler. You expect one thing (and dress a certain way) and then get something else.

Expectations can be tricky things – especially when they’re flawed. What we think is going to happen we often insist must happen. And when it doesn’t, we’re left with a mess. There’s a lot of mess here this morning. Let’s look to God and His Word.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 21:1-11](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Let me come back to this idea of expectations. They can ruin your day. Some of you know I take Mondays as my day off. I have to for my sanity’s sake and so Sarah and the kids don’t forget what I look like. But the expectations that can build up for that day! Projects that have been put off, piles of stuff threatening to collapse, games to be played, stories to be read, one-on-one time with one another – and everyone with their own timetable. With all these weather fronts swirling, it can create the perfect storm. And, at times, it does. Especially when you throw my selfishness into the mix. Without a doubt, Sarah and I have found that the best Mondays are the ones where our expectations are lined up and we’re on the same page. Things then have a much better chance of running smoothly. And I have a feeling there are no few of you here who can relate to something like that. It doesn’t have to be a day off. It could be a vacation and how it will be spent. It can be time around the holidays and the buildup surrounding it. Expectations. They can ruin your day. And I think we see something of that here in our text.

Let me set the scene for you. Matthew is recording for us one of the few events in the ministry of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels – what’s called “The Triumphal Entry.” Such processions make for a familiar image both to the Bible and the culture of the Ancient Near East. Some had a spiritual connotation such as the processions that took place as part of the formal worship services at the Temple in Jerusalem. Others took place in a more political and military context such as the processions of a king returning in victory, possibly even leading captives in his train. Now what transpired that Sunday of what we now call “Holy Week” fused both of these elements – the spiritual and the political, the eternal and the temporal. The anticipation for the reader of Matthew’s account has been building for several chapters and now the story has reached its climax as Jesus reaches Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel and the home of the Jewish Temple.

But here too there are the makings of the perfect storm – not of weather fronts but of flawed expectations and the clear intentions of the King in His arrival. These are about to collide. And clearly the lesson for us centers on Christ’s own intentions for us and the fact we must be wary of our own expectations. For they too may be flawed.