

The King and the Donkey

Introduction:

To understand the lesson of the donkey – we need a history lesson. – It is Ok – it is not going to be boring. Kid's – look at this as preparation for school starting in a few weeks!

There are two names you should know - Mattathias of Hashmon and his son Judas Maccabeus. Mattathias lived about 200 years before Jesus was born when Israel was in captivity. They had been in captivity for not one hundred years, not two hundred years, not three hundred years, but four hundred and 22 years. Ever since Nebuchadnezzar captured Judah so long ago.

For most of the time, Israel behaved themselves well as a captured nation. W. Davis in his *Cambridge History of Judaism* states that during most of this time of captivity the: “nation never rebelled” and they were generally loyal to their pagan masters... There is no indication of any serious uprising by the Jews against the empires that ruled them.” Why? Scholar say they realized they were being punished and were content to wait for the Messiah to come to rescue them, as the Old Testament prophesied.

Now, when Mattathias was living they really needed a Messiah really bad. An evil man called Antiochus Epiphenes was in power and he was determined to wipe out Judiasm and replace it with the Greek culture. Do you know what he did? He took God's temple and dedicated it to the false God Zeus. The forced the Jews to eat pig meat and to attend pagan celebrations which were full of sin – And if you did not agree or do these things – They would kill you!

The people no longer wanted to wait patiently for God to save them. They needed action now! Remember Mattathias? One day an officer of the King was forcing him to make a sacrifice to a false God. He took out his sword and killed him. Israel was at war again. Mattathias was killed in the early fighting but his son Judas Maccabeus got on his war horse and undertook a three year guerilla-type

warfare, with about 3,000 soldiers. Remember last week we looked at the horse as being used for war? Many paintings of Judas Maccabeus show him on a horse – a He was a Messiah – which means a savior – A fighting Messiah! And you know what? In 165 B.C. he won! The people were FREE again! And so they were able to restore the temple. This, of course, is the celebration, today, of Hannukah. Can you imagine how the people greeted the warriors when they returned victorious? When they rode into Jerusalem – probably on their horses? Well, we know – 1 Maccabees 13:51 says, “with praise and palm branches and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and song, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.”

But...the peace was short lived only about 100 years, and Israel was captured again by a foreign power - Rome, just 63 years before Jesus was born. What went wrong? Over time the Maccabees became corrupt. They began to compromise and embrace the very things they had originally fought against. And also the people were not quite satisfied because they were not from the house of Judah, the line of David – they were Levites. Mattathias may have been a Messiah, but not THE Messiah. The Scripture was clear – THE Messiah had to come from the house of Judah – the line of David.

If you follow the Dallas Cowboys, you know they won 3 super bowls in the 1990's – The taste of past victory sets high expectations for the team to win again. That is the way it was when Jesus was born. The people were looking for a new Messiah – this time with moral character, this time from the tribe of Judah, the line of David – this time, the Messiah would fight and win and establish David's throne forever! The people were looking for a Messiah on a horse – a messiah with a sword – but they found... another barnyard animal didn't they? They ultimately found the donkey and they didn't know what to do with it.

This morning we are continuing our sermon series looking at key Bible animals, and what they teach us about God and ourselves. I hope you have enjoyed this series as much as I have. The donkey is our last animal.

I. Donkeys in the Bible.

Before we go to our primary text, which is Jesus entering Jerusalem not on a horse – but on a donkey - it will help us to have a little bit of cultural background on the donkey.

Now in our day, when people think of donkey's they think of one word – “stubborn.” Or, maybe foolish. In our culture the donkey is the Rodney Dangerfield of Bible animals – it doesn't get any respect. We are prejudiced against it. This is not surprising - I mean, what role models do we have of donkeys anyway? We have Eeyore - not the smartest of Christopher Robin's friends – and very pessimistic, slow. And then we have Pinocchio and the donkey – the donkey there was a symbol misbehaving, foolishness.

But while the donkey does not get much respect in our day – but it was just the opposite in Bible times. Donald Ray Schwartz said: “The donkey has been a long-time friend companion, hard worker and passenger conveyer to humanity. Perhaps it is time to recognize it as also a noble creature – unlike their sometimes negative reputations, donkeys are friendly, loyal, eager to please and affectionate.” *Noah's Ark*, p.90. The donkey held an important place in the Bible for two primary reasons. Let's briefly look at those two reasons.

A) The donkey was a hard worker, Pinney says, “Donkeys were employed to carry the household goods...also carried a heavy work load by drawing plows, raising water from wells and turning millstones to grind the grain. [Is. 30:24](#) Also the oxen and the donkeys which work the ground will eat salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. [Genesis 42:26](#) “So they loaded their donkeys with their grain.” The donkey was an extremely hard working animal – what a tremendous example for you and I.

B) Second, The donkey was the main mode of transportation. Really, the “The Donkey was the “car” of the Bible”. Some will tell you the donkey was only for the poor but that is not true. The poor rode on donkeys *and* the rich rode on donkeys –The rich just had the better quality donkeys – white donkeys – they were the Mercedes Benz of Donkeys in the ancient world. You might remember

some of the famous donkey-as-transportation stories: Mary and Joseph rode on the donkey – to Bethlehem Balaam rode a donkey – and so many others. Now, let's make this point clear - People in Bible times did not ride on horses for transportation. As we saw last week, horses were only used for what? For war. Donkeys were the main mode of transportation.

So the picture of the donkey in the Bible is clear – it was a hard working animals and a mode of transportation. The donkey is mentioned 150 times in Scripture – and the great majority of those references can be placed into those two categories.

II. Triumphal Entry

And with the background of the donkey, and the background of Judas Maccabeus, we now turn to the most important donkey story in the Bible – the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Please turn with me to John chapter 12:12-16

John 12:12 On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

John 12:13 took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”

John 12:14 And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written,

John 12:15 “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

John 12:16 These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

This is a familiar story to us. We think of what? Easter. But do you know what the people back then probably thought of? Judas Maccabeus, and how the people welcomed those victorious warriors into Jerusalem. Now here was Jesus – a new King – a new Messiah. The people shouted:

- John 12:13 – Hosanna! (Save Us!)
- John 12:13 – The King of Israel
- Mark 11:10 – Coming Kingdom of David
- Luke 19:38 – “Blessed is the King”

That the Jesus rode on a donkey did not bother the people – that is OK – they were not at war, at that moment. Tomorrow we trade in the donkey for the horse. Then the King would bring peace to the land. Then the Messiah would overthrow the Romans. They missed it – didn't they?

III. What the People Missed – Zech 9:9

What did they miss? They missed the true message of the donkey. They missed that Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah 9:9. Our text in John said this is what the disciples and we also take – that the crowd did not understand – this is the prophecy that Jesus was fulfilling when he chose the donkey, instead of a horse. Turn to Zechariah 9:9

*Zech. 9:9 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.*

YES - Jerusalem was to rejoice – because the King is coming – yes. Yes – the king would be just – not corrupt. Making things right. YES – Jesus would save - He is endowed with salvation – But the question is saved from what? The people wanted to be saved from the Romans – but Jesus knew they needed to be saved from a much more fierce enemy – from sin. And so would Jesus come to fight Rome – No – Jesus would not fight Rome. Jesus came humble, peaceful king. The Hebrew word is *Ani* – afflicted, poor, humble, gentle – not a fighting King. A king on a donkey.

A King who is not going to exchange the donkey for a horse – but a king who is going to exchange the donkey for a cross. Jesus came as a humble a peaceful king – and the people did not know what to do with that.

IV. Application: Humble King asks for Humble subjects.

The people didn't know what to do with a humble king – and we are not sure what to do with that either – We want a fighting king – not a peaceful king. We want a proud king – not a humble King. We want a king who will take out the sword and make our lives more comfortable. Take out the sword and kill sickness for us – vanquish financial trouble. Kill our giants, win our political battles. We want a king who makes our life more comfortable. Who will make us happy – change our external circumstance. A King who will take care of business and let us come along for the ride.

We don't want a humble king – or a peaceful king! We don't want a king who suffers. We don't want a king who says – suffer now – be exalted later. That is not the American way! American theology says – Jesus was humble so you don't have to be. Jesus suffered so you don't have to suffer, Jesus was poor so you don't have to be poor – Jesus was the humble King – so you can be have the world on a string.

But that is not what Scripture says. The Bible says the Jesus the *humble king, expects to have humble subjects* in his Kingdom. Turn to our last verse 1 Peter 5:5-6. Here I would like us to find our application:

Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. 1Pet. 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, - 1 Pet 5:5b-6

This is the lesson of the Donkey – Jesus came in humility, dependent on God – and then later, after his death. God exalted him to the highest place. Humility before exaltation.

And so we are called to follow Christ and to likewise be humble. No seeking to exalt ourselves – but entrusting ourselves to God. That is the path of the donkey – the model of Christ. “**He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name. Philippians 2:8-9.** Humility before exaltation.

We love that idea don't we? The story of Cinderella – the humble, oppressed, hard working Cinderella who is exalted to riches and glory – and the proud stepsisters are brought down – what poetic justice. We love a humble person who is exalted in a story – but what about in real life? In real life we don't want to be Cinderella – we want to be in control, we want to have power, we want to be self-sufficient.

This is what we need to apply this week – Here is our application. When you wake up tomorrow morning I want you to imagine you have two barn animals in your bedroom – can you see them there? You have a horse – a war horse – decked out for battle. And you have a donkey – a trustworthy, reliable, sure-footed, humble donkey. As you get out of bed – you have a choice – do I get on the horse? Or do I get on the donkey?

What does that choice mean for you? Kids – What would it mean for you to be humble this week? To ride a donkey instead of a horse? What would that mean when you are in an argument with other kids – and the argument keeps getting worse and worse? What will you do? Fight? Or work to bring peace? Kids – what does it mean to be humble when you are falsely accused of something you did not do? Maybe you even get in trouble for it? What do you do? Do you fight – get angry? Kids – what do you do if a friend loses something important to you? If your sister or brother breaks something that belongs to you? Will you get on the donkey – and be humble – seek peace? Or will you get on your horse and fight, fight, fight? I want you to think about that this week.

Adults – what does it mean for you to get on your donkey, instead of your horse? What does that mean at work? When you are treated unfairly? What does that mean in your marriage. So often the picture of marriage is the husband and wife both on their warhorses – jousting each other – rather than both on their donkeys traveling together, humbly. What does this mean for you with your sickness? You can get on your donkey, or you can get on your horse – I'd like for you to think about this, this week.

I'm not saying it is never Ok to fight – certainly Christ gives us a good example of someone who challenged and spoke his mind in a godly way – but even so, he was always humble – always entrusting himself to the Father.

Conclusion: We must follow our king - Jesus, who rode on the donkey – but who will know will one day come back on a powerful horse. . [Rev. 19:11](#) *And I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and true and in righteousness He judges and wages war.”* *Then* sin will be done away with. *Then* sickness will be vanquished. *Then* the enemies of God will be defeated – and all the tears will be wiped away. *THEN* you will be comfortable – for all eternity. But it is not yet – not yet.

We end this series with the donkey, not the horse – the donkey is the model for this life – may we live that out this week...even as we pray – Come quickly Lord Jesus, Come!