

Walking with Jesus in Triumph and Obedience

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Duncan. I'd like to take you back to that time, that reading.

! You believe he must be the one God promised long ago who would save his people. You're excited as you walk together to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with the Messiah. What will happen when you reach Jerusalem? Perhaps you talk about what you think may happen in Jerusalem and try to work out what Jesus was trying to teach you when he stopped to tell the story of the master who left on business and gave his servants money for them to use wisely until he returned.

Two servants did just that, earning more to offer back to the master. But a third servant hid what he had been given. Perhaps we need to take risks with what the master has given us to yield more for him and not hide his gift away.

You are deep in conversation. Then Jesus stops and turns to you and your friend and says, Go into the village there ahead of you.

[1 : 41] You will see a colt, tied up, never been ridden, untie it and bring it to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, just say, The master needs it.

Perhaps this is the first time Jesus has looked you in the eye and given you a task to do. You may have heard about Jesus through one of the disciples who was sent out to spread the news about Jesus and you decided to find out more by following in his footsteps.

You've heard his stories and realized that he's calling you to live a different way of life, putting God first in everything. You want to keep within sight of Jesus, to learn more and feel his presence and keep feeling safe and secure.

So when you are given a task to do, what would you think? Would you ask why do you need a donkey? Are you tired of walking? Do we need to rest?

Well, it's only another two miles to Jerusalem. What if the owner refuses to let us take the colt and ask, who is this master you are talking about?

[2 : 57] Do we try and take it anyway? We may be assaulted. Well, probably not. As many people normally hire out a donkey or if the traveler is rich, a horse for a price or at times an animal is borrowed.

You're not sure about this at all. But you know Jesus, you have followed him on his journey to Jerusalem, listened to his words of wisdom and feel the difference he's making in your own life. Is this the risk the servants took looking after their master's money? But can you do what he asks you to do?

The Bible tells us the two unnamed followers just did what Jesus asked them to do. They just trusted him. They trusted him so much that they were happy to do what he said.

They didn't understand the strange request, but they did not object, just obeyed his instructions. I wonder what they said to each other as they walked towards the village.

[4 : 10] Why ask us? We were quite happy just following with the others, not standing out or putting ourselves forward. It's a lot to ask us to do.

Will we find the colt? What if the owner does not allow us to take it? It's natural to have doubts and wonder if we're up to the task.

But they still obeyed and how much their trust must have grown when everything happened just as Jesus had said. They had been told what to say when challenged, and through their obedience, everything went exactly as Jesus promised.

They must have had a spring in their step as they headed back with the colt to find Jesus waiting. I wonder if they chatted about the experience, how they had overcome their doubts and fears, relying on the word of Jesus.

Perhaps they recalled their scriptures and quoted the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem.

[5 : 19] Look, your king is coming to you. He comes triumphant and victorious on a colt, the fall of a donkey. It was all very fitting.

A donkey was written by a man of peace, a merchant or priest. A king was more likely to appear on a mighty war horse. But Zechariah had said, your king is coming on a colt.

I would think they had big grins on their faces as they approached the other followers with the colt. I'm sure Jesus would have had a big smile on his face too, knowing what the two disciples had gone through for him.

You can imagine the joy as they threw their cloaks over the back of the colt and helped Jesus get on. What about us today?

Do we still have the feeling of joy as we obey the Lord's commands? It's all about trust, isn't it? The more we learn about Jesus by reading our Bibles, the more our trust grows.

[6 : 28] Enough for action? Prompted by his Holy Spirit, we can live our lives showing God's love through the way we act out our daily walk with Jesus.

We must follow his example and obey the most important commandment Jesus told us. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

I know it's not always easy. That is when we're talking to Jesus in prayer, helps guide us. Does it sound scary? What if I'm asked to serve in some way?

I have been told that we will never be asked to do anything beyond our God-given abilities. And I can testify that that is true.

But the challenge can sometimes feel overbearing. In 1990, friends knocked at our front door to tell me that my name had been given to them in prayer to apply for a vacancy at the Church of Scotland head office.

[7 : 39] My reaction? I laughed. But as they handed me an application form, I said, okay, if it's God's plan, I'll apply.

I was interviewed by a panel of 10 people asking about the Church of Scotland's structure and its national mission. I can remember saying more than once, I don't know.

But I got the job. And all of the skills I had learned through my previous career in the civil service were put to good use in my service with the Church.

I just prayed every day that God would see me do a good job to his praise. It was an experience I thanked God he gave me. Most of the things Jesus asked us to do will not be big things, but small acts which make small but real differences in other people's lives and bring them closer to Jesus. A listening ear, a warm smile, and praying for God's guidance in everything you do. As we grow in trust and practice obedience, we will see our faith grow and our relationship with God deepen.

[9 : 01] If we keep within sight of Jesus, we will feel his presence. Let us pray. Lord, help us to be obedient to your word by loving you with all our hearts, souls, and minds.

Deepen our trust so we may serve you in all we do, think and say. Amen. Morning.

Morning. The crowds. We've all been in crowds before. Maybe we've been Christmas shopping. Maybe we've been on the beach.

Waiting for your plane. Crowds. One word. What's a crowd like? Busy.

Chaotic. Noisy. Scary. Scary. Smelly. Smelly. They can be all these things.

[10 : 14] They can also be really exciting and exhilarating. Perhaps you're in a crowd of people for a special occasion, a special event. You're all waiting for something amazing to happen.

Is it going to happen? Yes, it does. And the excitement of that crowd. Or maybe you're there to see in a crowd for, look, to see somebody who you really admire and they are really important to you.

In which case, you're a Swifty. And this is Taylor Swift, if you don't know, at Murrayfield. And apparently, when they started to dance one particular song, it registered on the Richter scale.

So, a really, really excited crowd for Taylor Swift. Or maybe it's a sporting occasion, a sporting team. I went with Murrayfield because I don't want to show any kind of biases or prejudices or anything like that, cause any kind of problems.

But they are to support a team. And these kinds of crowds are there for particular reasons. If we take our football, our team metaphor, or your Swifties, as they're known, you know, singing star people, you get your season ticket holders.

[11 : 33] You get the people who are all in. They go to every game. They follow their team all over. Thousands of miles. Spend, I don't know how much money, on their team.

They know everything about their team. They know all the stats. If you're a Swifty, I did a talk once, at an issue camp, where I talked about Taylor Swift. And I mean, these guys, they know every word of her lyric.

They meet together to talk about the lyrics. Every tweet and social media that she posts, they pour over it. And, you know, what does this mean? What does this mean?

I mean, these people are 100% all in for their team or their celebrity, whoever it is that they admire. Or maybe they're the people who just come for the home game. Or they watch them on TV.

Yes, I support this team. Yes, I like this singer. But you're not there all the time. It's not a big part of your life for these people in these crowds.

[12 : 30] Or maybe you just came because your friend invited you. Yes, you've heard about this person. Don't really know much about it. But yeah, I'll come along. See what's happening.

Might be good. Jesus was used to crowds. Right from the beginning of the story, from Luke, we had crowds.

Jesus had to go out onto the boats because the crowd at the beach was so big. He had the women in the crowd who touched his cloak. The feeding of the 5,000.

Crowds gathering to hear him preach. Jesus had to keep escaping from the crowds to get some time alone. He was used to crowds. The crowds are a huge part of the four Gospels. As he started his journey from Capernaum away at the top there, the crowds followed him everywhere he went. And as he got further and closer to Jerusalem, we hear the stories. We've got blind Bartimaeus outside Jericho shouting, shouting above the crowds.

[13 : 38] Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. We've got the story from last week. We've got Zacchaeus up a tree because the crowd was so huge that he couldn't see Jesus. And in any hope of seeing him, he had to climb up a tree.

And as we get, oh, there he is. As we get even closer in to Jerusalem, and he gets to Bethany. Just as Norma said, two miles or there or thereabouts outside of Jerusalem, the crowd is still there.

And of course, when he gets to Bethany, his friend Lazarus has passed away four days ago. But Jesus, of course, raises Lazarus from the dead.

And the crowds are there to witness Lazarus being raised from the dead. News gets back to Jerusalem. Only two miles away. And people travel out from Jerusalem to Bethany to see Jesus and to see Lazarus to hear about this amazing thing that's happened just outside of Jerusalem. And in the meantime, Jerusalem itself is filling up with pilgrims coming for the Passover. And these people have heard about Jesus. The news gets back to Jerusalem. Do you know what Jesus did?

[14 : 50] He was in Bethany. He raised Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for four days. And Jesus raised him from the dead. And they're going rushing out to Bethany to see it.

The news is going all the way around Jerusalem. And the speculation is rife. John, it says, they're saying, what do you think? He won't come, will he?

So this is all around Jerusalem. Is Jesus coming? He's just like Jerusalem. Is he coming? Will he come? I don't know. What do you think? If he does come, where's he coming from? What's going to happen?

So the speculation, the hype, is right up here. Jesus walks up to the Mount of Olives to Bethpage where he gets onto the donkey which Norma talked about.

And the crowd know this is something special. Jesus has got onto the donkey. They know this is different. He's doing it. He's going to Jerusalem.

[15 : 47] He's going to do it. It's going to happen. The crowd starts to cheer. They break off the palm branches. It's only a mile from Jerusalem. This is like from here to Megatland.

They hear it in Jerusalem. They can hear the crowd. What's the noise? What's going on? The crowd comes rushing out of Jerusalem, breaking off palm branches as they go. It's happening. Jesus is coming. He's coming to Jerusalem. He's on the donkey. Isn't this amazing? This is fantastic. And they're shouting and they're cheering. Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And you've got your crowd.

In this crowd, we've got your season ticket holders. You've got your Swifties. You've got the people who follow Jesus all the way from Capernaum.

They were with him the whole time because they wanted to be with Jesus. They wanted to hear everything that Jesus said. They wanted to know everything that Jesus could teach them.

[16:46] They were all in. They had made the sacrifices to follow Jesus all the way. These are your season ticket holders. Then you've got the people who knew about Jesus.

Maybe they'd seen him once or twice. They'd heard about him. And they were coming along to join in with this celebration. And then you also have got the people who were invited by a friend.

Let's see what the noise is about. Let's go and see what's happening. These are the people who were in that crowd that day. They were all welcome. Nobody turned around and said, you weren't here from the start.

What are you doing here? You can't be in this crowd. This is for us. This is for the people who are here all the time. Nobody said that. Everybody was welcome in the crowd. Everybody was welcome to come and see Jesus coming into Jerusalem.

And we've got a crowd here in front of us. A crowd here who've come to see what Jesus has got to offer. And we have that same groups of people. We've got people that I know who are all in.

[17:50] This is what my life is about. I'm a seasoned ticket holder. I want to know everything that there is to know about Jesus. I want to meet up with people who worship this same Jesus that I worship.

I want to look at everything that he can teach me. And we've got people who come for the home game. who, yes, yes, I support this team.

But actually, it doesn't have a lot of difference to my life. And then we've got the people who, what's the noise all about? I've been invited by a friend. What is this all about?

I'm curious to know more. And by the same token that all the people in the crowd are welcome, everybody is welcome here. Nobody says you haven't been before. Nobody says you don't know enough.

Nobody says what are you doing here? Everybody is welcome here. But we also know that God's greatest wish is that we're all the season ticket holders. That we're all all in for Jesus.

[18:56] I want to know everything that God can teach me. I want to absorb and know as much as I can. I want to look at what does this mean? Meet up with other people who have the same passion for what I believe in like your Swifties and like your football fanatics.

And so this is our prayer that we would all become all in for Jesus. We are now going to sing. You may remember at the time of the late Queen's death one of her protection officers shared a story about a time when he was walking with her with the Queen in and around Balmoral and they met two young American tourists and stopped to chat.

These two young men said they were hoping to catch a glimpse of the Queen while they were in the area but so far hadn't managed to see her. Now they asked the Queen if she had ever met the Queen and she said no but pointed to the protection officer and said yeah but he has.

And they were very excited about that and asked him what's she like? Now knowing the Queen well as he did he said well she's quite cantankerous but she's got a good sense of humour.

Then the two tourists handed their camera to the Queen and asked her to take a picture of them with the protection officer because he was someone who'd met the Queen. And then as an afterthought they said well we'll get a picture with this lady as well and she said later to the protection officer that she would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when they got those pictures developed and someone said you did meet the Queen.

[20:50] And you can imagine that around the time of the Queen's funeral both of these men would share that story over and over again how they met the Queen but they didn't recognise her despite her probably being the most recognisable person in the world at that time and maybe even still.

So far this morning we've walked with the disciples and with the crowd and so now we turn to the third group of people in the Palm Sunday story and that's the Pharisees and just like the two American tourists they didn't recognise a royal person but in the case of the Pharisees they are deliberately refusing to recognise in Jesus the King and the Messiah and this is despite being familiar with the scriptures that told of his coming and the evidence before their eyes that Jesus had fulfilled them they didn't recognise Jesus but they failed to recognise something else they called on Jesus to stop people shouting and singing and praising God and recognising Jesus as the King prophesied in Zechariah in verse 9 but some of the Pharisees among the crowd said teacher rebuke your followers for saying things like that he replied if they kept quiet the stones along the

road would burst into cheers the stones on the road would burst into cheers what you might call a rock concert come on that was worth something

I've used that one before the last time all I got was groan so that was an improvement but Jesus was saying something much more important than a crowd of people singing than a crowd of people singing was going on the Messiah the word became flesh had set his face and was coming to Jerusalem to give his life for the sake of all humanity no most significant thing had ever happened in the world because Jesus death and resurrection was going to change everything and even if these blind guides as Jesus called them failed to see it creation itself was ready to respond and did and yet there was always a way back for these blind guides in Mark 12 Jesus was asked a question by another group of religious leaders they put their heads together and come up with a way they thought was finally going to trip Jesus up it was a question to do with marriage and remarriage in heaven and they thought they were being clever but of course

Jesus answered them by saying they didn't know the scriptures or the power of God and after that no one dared ask him any questions but listening to this discussion was a Pharisee and he said that what Jesus had said would have been true and in agreement with the scriptures and said to Jesus that he answered well and Jesus saw in this Pharisee an openness to learning and responding when he heard that something seemed true to him and Jesus said to that Pharisee you are not far away from the kingdom of God there was a way back from the Pharisee and this particular man had started to walk down that path we could also talk about another Pharisee called Nicodemus he came to Jesus at night as we read in John chapter 3 with all his questions and Jesus gave him time and explained that the scriptures all pointed to himself all this is to say that the invitation

Jesus gave to those two people is an invitation that he offers to all of us as well Easter of course is an important time in the life of the church we rightly celebrate and remember all Jesus did in that last week of his life on earth but if all we do is celebrate and remember then we're like the crowd filled with excitement but who for many just moved on to the next thing that caught their attention as we've already heard this morning the stones were ready to burst into cheers a lot more was going on here than just a parade and a lot more is still going on because the power of the Easter story hasn't changed or diminished in all the years since it happened and it's still a story that demands a response the Pharisee made a mistake they failed to see who Jesus was but we don't need to follow them in that mistake Jesus the king rode into Jerusalem on a donkey according to prophecy went willingly to the cross so that we could have peace with

[25 : 32] God and rose again on that glorious resurrection morning and holds out his hand in welcome for all of us and invites all of us to follow him it's an invitation to know him to learn to grow to allow him into your life not only as a friend though he certainly is that also as king it's an invitation to move from admiration to commitment Jesus was a good guy of course he was but he was so much more than that and following him means following his way of love and sacrifice but also to know a life richer than any that could be lived without him this is who you were made to be a person who knows God and his love and who responds to that love in Jesus let's pray together Lord we thank you that we can celebrate this wonderful day when you rode into Jerusalem at the start of that world changing week help us to respond not as a crowd and not as a Pharisees but as people who know you and who want to know you more all these things we ask in

Jesus name Amen who have