

THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM

Eighth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Lessons for Life* from Luke 19:28-46
“*And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it.*” Luke 19:41

Coming back on the plane from Korea on Friday they showed one of those hidden camera features on the video screen. A man playing a cop was writing parking tickets for obscure offences when the owners of the various cars returned. While the cop provoked the owner, a jolly, overweight woman wearing a blue-flowered house dress, supposedly happened by, saw what was going on, and with a big smile decided to help the owner. She sneaked up behind the cop, fumbled in her purse, came out with a taser, pressed it against the neck of the cop, and pulled the trigger. The cop collapsed on the sidewalk, and the women, with a big grin and expansive gestures, urged the car owner to hurry and drive away. Of course, the joke was on the car owners, and the camera recorded the mix of horror, confusion, temptation, and indecision on each one's face. Then the cop stood up, the woman returned, and the joke was revealed. Beware of jolly women with tasers!

Turn with me to Luke 19:28-46. The story of Christ's triumphal entry on Palm Sunday gives us an occasion to learn the eighth *Lesson for Life* from the teaching and example of Jesus. Today's lesson is: *Things aren't always what they seem.* We'll proceed in three parts. **1. Jesus planned his triumphal entry, 2. Jesus' followers proclaimed him king, and 3. Jesus' enemies prompted their own destruction.**

1. Jesus planned his triumphal entry. Verse 28 tells us that Jesus was ascending to Jerusalem. He had gone from Galilee to Jericho, along the path that many pilgrims took to get to the holy city. Jericho lay below sea level, and Jesus wound up the road, emerging below the southern summit at the villages of Bethany and Bethpage. This was the week leading up to the Passover, and the roads were crowded. Passover was the national celebration of God's salvation of Israel at the Exodus. God had commanded the nation to come together for the feast and the offering of the Passover lambs that symbolized the ultimate sacrifice of the Savior to provide eternal life for all who believe. Jesus had come with his family to Jerusalem each year at Passover time, like thousands and thousands of other families. There's an application here about how important it is for families and the parents to include their children in observing the great events of our Christian faith—in the current case, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and of course, Easter. Worship at this time of year is how you lay out for your children a rhythm of faith and provide a foundation for life that they can pass to their children.

In verse 30 Luke tells us that Jesus sent a couple of his disciples to bring back a colt he had waiting for them to pick up. Apparently Jesus had made secret arrangements with the owner, and the code phrase, or the *parole*, as spy novel terminology puts it—was, “*the Lord has need of it.*” (v 31) The disciples did as they had been told, said the appropriate phrase, and brought the colt back to Jesus in the village. In verse 35, the disciples placed their garments on the colt and “*put Jesus on it.*” Once again, this was all part of Jesus' plan. His followers gathered around and laid their clothes on the roadway for Jesus to ride upon. The other accounts of this parade inform us that people climbed the palm trees and broke off fronds which they waved as Jesus passed by.

The fact that Jesus clearly planned to hold this procession teaches us that God has a plan he is working out that affects our lives, the church, and indeed, the whole world. You and I are not always aware of what he is doing or why he is doing what he does. In one part of Uganda that Christians have surveyed, there are something like 1200 Muslim and occult centers for worship. In that same region there are only 18 churches. So the Christians have made plans to

plant 1200 churches over the next few years. They want to outnumber the false religions. But they have neither the resources nor the numbers to accomplish the task. Why hasn't God given his people what they need to plant successfully the churches? Well, he has, just in the last few days. One part of this area of Uganda is dominated by witch doctors. They are very powerful in their influence and they oppress the people in the villages. The Christians in those villages have confronted the witch doctors with amazing results. A Muslim woman, who is a member of the national assembly, has noticed what is happening and she's been impressed by the power of the gospel. She owns a radio station, but has run out of money to keep it on the air. So she's decided to give the church her station—lock, stock, and barrel, totally free of charge. Now the believers have the means to plant their churches. What plan does God have for you, or for our church? We don't always understand what he is doing until we are able to look back and see with hindsight. But God doesn't fail to work out his plan.

2. Jesus' followers proclaimed him king. Jesus began to ride toward the brow of the hill. Verse 37 says, "*As he was now approaching near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen.*" The other accounts of Palm Sunday inform us that there were actually two groups that merged as Jesus began his descent into the city. The first group were pilgrims who had come from Galilee who were staying with family and friends or camping out south of the city near Bethany. The second group were pilgrims who were staying inside the city. Hearing the noise of the first crowd, the second crowd came out of the city, merging to form one giant, festive group—tens of thousands of people--swirling around Jesus. Obviously, Jesus could make only slow progress through this massive throng. Verse 37 says they were shouting *with a loud voice.*" In other words, picture Williams-Brice Stadium during a football game. You can hear the cheering a long ways away. If you hear a huge rolling burst of happy voices, you conclude that the Gamecocks have scored a touchdown. So it was at Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But instead of wildly cheering a touchdown, the mass of people chanted—probably sang--Psalm 118 which is a Messianic psalm. We have part of it quoted in verse 38. "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.*"

In other words, the people that day were proclaiming Jesus king. They believed he was God's long-promised Messiah. Their understanding of what that actually meant was limited. Probably most of them thought he would be an earthly king like David, and that he would overthrow the Roman occupation and establish an independent Jewish state. This was why Jesus, until now, had largely discouraged speculation that the Messiah. He did not want the people to force him into a position he did not desire to be in. Remember what we said about God's plan, that we do not always fully understand? He had come to do something more important before he would become an earthly ruler. He had to die to pay for sin. But on this Palm Sunday, it was important for the people to hail him as the Messiah, even though they didn't grasp just what that really meant. It was enough that they wanted to see God's rule over the church and the world. Notice however, that this proclamation of Christ as king did not happen without opposition. The Pharisees, the church leaders, did not want him to be king, and they told him in verse 39 to silence his followers. But notice that Jesus endorsed the demonstration. In verse 40 he said, "*I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out.*"

We must realize that Jesus Christ is indeed king over all the earth. People may not fully understand, but truth is truth, and it must be proclaimed. The first missionaries came to Korea only 120 years ago. A Presbyterian missionary doctor made contact with the Korean Royal family. At that moment the family was facing desperate physical illness, and the doctor was able to heal them. As a result, the emperor endorsed the doctor with the result that the country opened to the gospel. Today twenty percent of Koreans are Christians, and forty percent of Christians are

Presbyterians. Last Sunday I preached at the Disciples Church in downtown Seoul. They have 6000 members and are adding a thousand new members each year. I preached at the fourth of their five worship services, to a congregation of young adults, about 1200 of them, packed into the church's sanctuary. Later in the week I spoke briefly to the seminary students at Chongshin University. Nearly two thousand future ministers gathered for the chapel service. I introduced by country the members of the Board of Directors of World Reformed Fellowship—men from Mexico and Puerto Rico, Hong Kong and Indonesia, Australia, South Africa and Uganda, France, England, Scotland and the United States. The room rocked with applause. Not for us, nor for our countries, but for Jesus Christ who is Lord over all the earth. His church exists in every country on the planet. We should join the praise and the cheering, and help others to share with us in proclaiming Jesus as king!

3. Jesus' enemies prompted their own destruction. Jesus had planned this demonstration. The people had proclaimed him king. It would seem like this would be a happy day of triumph. But things are not always as they seem. Probably every child who has attended Sunday School or Vacation Bible School and has been asked to say a memory verse, has thought he was being extremely clever and funny when he quoted the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35, "*Jesus wept.*" Verse 41 is another verse that tells us about Jesus shedding tears. "*And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it.*" We would think Jesus would be smiling. We would think he would be thrilled by this display of support. But he was not. He caught sight of the city below him and he began to cry.

Abraham Lincoln made his way from Illinois to Washington, DC in March 1861, to be inaugurated as President. Everywhere he traveled he was cheered by enthusiastic crowds. Like every other President-elect, this was his moment of triumph. But he was not glad. Lincoln was traveling by rail, but they kept altering his itinerary by ever-changing routes and whisking him out of towns in the dead of night. His schedule was always secret, for Lincoln knew that war was already starting. South Carolina had already seceded. Other southern states were following her lead. Before it was over, 535,000 men would lie dead. The North shouldn't have been celebrating. The Confederacy shouldn't have been celebrating. There was no glory in the Civil War. Too much blood would flow. Our national sin of slavery had brought upon our nation the judgment of God. This was a time for tears, and the tears would continue for many years.

In verses 42-44 Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. The Roman army would march down from the north, grinding up and spitting out one town and stronghold after another. They would encircle Jerusalem. They would breach the walls, and the blood would flow ankle deep through the city streets. The Romans would tear down the city stone by stone and they would fire everything that remained. Jesus loved Jerusalem. He had been coming there since he was a small boy. He cherished the heritage of David and Solomon. He embraced with his heart the holy temple. But all of this would be lost, all of it destroyed. And he wept at the thought. But there was more than destroyed buildings that broke his heart. Verse 44 says Jesus told them all of this was coming because, "*you did not recognize the time of your visitation.*" In other words, God sent his savior, but they did not receive him. In fact, they would send him to die on the cross.

There is something interesting to observe here. The destruction by the Romans would not occur for forty years. Why was there a delay? Why not an immediate destruction? Do you remember that as he was being nailed to the cross Jesus prayed, "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.*" And Jesus was right. There were many among them who did not know who he really was. Some did, but not all by far. So the Father answered the prayer of the Son and he held off his judgment. And he gave the children of that unbelieving generation a

chance to know who Jesus was. In the days to follow there would be Christ's resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit would fall on Pentecost. The apostles would take to the streets to proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord and to offer the proof of his resurrection, which no one in the city denied. There would be miracles. Word of them would spread through the city. By 70 AD it could not be said, that people didn't know. But they still rejected him, and the destruction they had prompted fell upon them. Jesus looked into the future and began to cry. It looked like a celebration. It looked like Jerusalem was receiving him. It looked like a national revival was breaking out. But it wasn't. Underneath there was something else. Under the surface was the coming judgment.

Often things are not as they seem. A week ago yesterday Barb and I toured the DMZ—the Demilitarized Zone along the 38th Parallel—that divides South Korea from North Korea. It was here that the Korean War ended and will start again if it ever does. We could stare across the two mile-wide barrier to the border and see Propaganda Village that the North Koreans have built to present to the South the face of prosperity and pleasant living. Loudspeakers blare out a steady stream of statements about how wonderful it is to live in North Korea. Of course, that's not the way things are. North Korea is a brutal Communist dictatorship, one of the poorest countries on earth, a place where people starve to death. Propaganda Village, if you could get close enough to see clearly, is only a false façade. The village is empty. No one lives there. And the windows on the buildings are merely painted on the surface of the walls.

A lot of life is like that. Take sin, for example. Sin always presents itself in an attractive fashion. It always promises to give us our heart's desire. But sin inevitably turns ugly. Behind the façade is destruction, judgment, and tears. Selfish choices injure others and ultimately make us suffer. Sin brings regret, ruin, and remorse. Prosperity is another example of something that is not always what it seems to be. Having money and a satisfying career attracts us as a worthy goal. And in truth, there is little wrong with that as an objective. But prosperity can fly away and a career can be stolen from us by illness or changing circumstances. Then, if all you've based your life on is material things you hope to attain, you are left empty and disappointed. Spirituality is a third example. You can imitate being spiritual so that other members of the church think you are on God's good side. But God knows who and what we really are, and neglected faith ultimately reveals itself in doubts and fears whenever a crisis strips away our spiritual cover. The point is, we must commit ourselves to what is true and real and good. Make your priorities in life the things that really last—a true love for God, a sacrificial commitment to family and marriage, servant-based dedication to the kingdom of Christ.

On the other hand, things may appear to be bleak and discouraging. But that may not be the case at all. Winter does give way to Spring with its glorious blossoms and the singing of the birds. While we were in Korea I chatted with a professor at Chongshin University Seminary. There are about two million Christians living in North Korea. They face daily persecution. If their Christian faith is revealed they may be imprisoned, even lose their lives. This professor has an evangelistic ministry to the North. Several times a year he travels to Northeast China, and from there he enters North Korea to preach and train Christians in evangelism. He told me that if he or those who travel with him are discovered to be Christians, their lives hang in the balance. And yet they go. People hope reunification will come soon, and with it freedom to preach the gospel. But no one knows when reunification may take place. And in the mean time North Korean souls pass into eternity without hope of eternal life. So it may be for you. Life may be hard. You may face circumstances that bring despair. But things may not be as they seem, for at any moment God may answer prayer. He may change the situation you face. The power of God's spirit may already be eating away the walls that hold you in prison.

You and I need to pray for the ability to discern the truth, to see what God is really doing. We need to bring Christ to the city and into our homes, and bid him take residence in our hearts. Then what is truly taking place will become evident. Like Jesus, weep for the brokenness and the sorrows you and others face. But also, listen to the cheering that is rising from the crowd. Jesus is coming our way!

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