SLIDE #1

This is a familiar story about Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem that we read every year. Matthew, Mark, and John tell this story in their Gospels. Each of the Gospels spend a large portion of their writing telling the story of Jesus’ path to Jerusalem. The day has finally come for Jesus to enter Jerusalem and face His fate.

Jesus makes a grand entrance into town. He is one of the 2 processions that day. Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey while His followers laid their coats and palm branches on the road before Him shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest Heaven!” Hosanna can be translated save us now or please save. The crowd was shouting for Jesus to save them. His parade was for the peasants. He and His followers were peasants. He had said throughout His ministry that He had come to proclaim good news to the poor. The poor are the ones who welcome Him into Jerusalem and ask for salvation.

The message of Jesus’ entrance riding on a donkey is clear to His Jewish followers gathered to welcome Him to Jerusalem. Matthew 21: 4 - 5 tells us Jesus riding a donkey is to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 which is quoted. The prophecy says,

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The 9th chapter of Zechariah begins with a judgment against Israel’s enemies then announces that a new king of Israel is coming. Zechariah says that the coming king will take away the chariots, war horses, and bows from the enemy and his reign will extend to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:10).

Jesus coming into the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey conjures up the Jewish imagination of a savior to challenge the imperial oppressor. The Kingdom of God was an alternate vision of a kingdom for the Jewish people and a direct threat to the Roman empire. There was a stark contrast between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Ceasar.

This was one of 2 processions that day. There is a second procession coming in from the west. Pontius Pilate who is the Roman governor leads the way of the imperial calvary and soldiers on the other side of town.

You have imagined the scene of Jesus’ entrance. Now, let’s imagine standing on the other side of town watching the other parade. Soldiers on horses and foot soldiers enter wearing leather, armor and helmets, carrying weapons. Banners fly high overhead with golden eagles mounted atop. You hear the sounds of marching feet, the cracking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums.

It was common practice for the Roman army to come to Jerusalem for Jewish festivals and holidays. There were always guards in the city, especially at the Temple. However, for a holiday like Passover, the guards would have been reinforced with additional troops and the presence of the governor to quell any possible uprisings.

These two parades are at odds embodying 2 very different messages of power. The parade of the imperial guard represents the power of the Roman empire. The parade of Jesus represents the power of the Kingdom of God. The 2 parades will eventually lead to the city center where the conflict will come to a head.

Jesus’ parade is a sign of resistance against the imperial power of Rome and the Temple priests, scribes, and elders who perpetuated the oppression of the Jewish people by Rome. The Roman presence, not only represented the empire’s power and Pax Romana, they represented Roman theology. In Roman mythology, the emperor was believed to be the son of god. The Jewish people were allowed to worship the God we know as the One True Living God only as a means to appease the people and so long as they paid homage to the emperor who was the son of god. Jesus’ parade was a “planned political demonstration”[[1]](#footnote-1) showing His rival social order and rival theology.

For thousands of years before Christ and thousands of years after Christ, nations have been governed by monarchies who claimed to have been chosen by whatever god they worship to rule their nation. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book “The Last Week” described the historical governing rule as “the political economic domination of the many by a few and the use of religious claim to justify it.”[[2]](#footnote-2) We could easily say that the government still is a few rich people governing the many who claim to be convicted by their religious beliefs and elected by God.

It is hard not to be political preaching this text when this very scene is one of political protest. The issue this Scripture raises is whether or not our government lives up to the ideals of the Kingdom of God. I would say it does not. But, our downfall is that we are willing to celebrate all that is great in America then blame the other side for any of our failings. Part of being a good citizen is recognizing both our successes and our shortfalls and pressing officials to correct our wrongs.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: “would we be at the east gate welcoming Jesus or would we be on the west side paying homage to the imperial government?”[[3]](#footnote-3) Today, ignoring our social ills is the equivalent of standing on the west side of Jerusalem hailing Caesar. Today, welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem is welcoming the people He came to save and caring for the poor, widows and orphans.

Let me share some images with you to help you answer that question: “would we be at the east gate welcoming Jesus or would we be on the west side paying homage to the imperial government?”[[4]](#footnote-4)

SLIDE #2

Here is what a modern-day military parade would look like that is meant to squelch any ideas of political uprising and promote the oppressive regime of a leader who requires god-like adoration.

It is hard to say that we wouldn’t be at that parade if we were North Korean citizens who are required to show honor to the supreme leader or lose our life. There would be no second parade that would even offer us the difficult choice of standing with the government or with our faith.

SLIDE #3

In America, however, we have choices. You can go to marches or protests and demonstrate against the ways the poor are exploited and the disadvantaged are ignored. I imagine that Jesus would be a part of these demonstrations because He came to stand with the oppressed, ignored and exploited. He came to serve the least, last and lost.

1. The Last Week, Marcus Borg and John D. Cross, Kindle page 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, pg. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid, pg. 556. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, pg. 556. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)