

The Triumphant Entry
Zechariah 9:9-13, Mark 11:1-11

Brothers and sisters, over the past ten years there has been a lot of changes in the auto industry – perhaps none more noticeable than the fact that most vehicles on the road these days are SUV’s and they tend to all look rather similar.

However, there are still a few unique looking vehicles out there and if there is any credibility to stereotypes you can tell a lot about a person who has one of these for their ride.

For example, what sort of person would you associate with the following vehicles...

A VW Minibus? Aging hippies, dropouts, hipsters...

A Nissan Altima? A young male who likes to drive recklessly...

A Fiat 300? Kind of a chick car...

A Prius? Probably converted to a taxi...

A Subaru Forester? A hiking, kayaking, camping enthusiast...

A Jeep? An off-roading enthusiast, or someone who wants you to think they’re into off-roading...

Remember the Buick Regal? Used to be the choice of Senior Citizens, now its young person who bought it off grandma...

Or an Audi / Mercedes / BMW / Porche Sedan? Probably a Corporate executive...

What about Teslas or some other EV? Probably someone who wants to “do the right thing” and can afford to do it.

Of course there’s lots of trucks out there too:

A Plain Truck? A regular working guy...

A Really Nice Truck? An Oil Company exec, often in the field...

A Monster Truck? A redneck...

The truth is certain kinds of rides give off impressions about who they belong to, about who is riding them.

So, what about a donkey???. What would that tell you about who’s riding it?

Well brothers and sisters, that’s what we’re going to look at this morning as we shift our focus to remember and celebrate

the culminating events of Jesus' earthly ministry.

We're starting with Palm Sunday today, next Sunday we'll focus on the Last Supper, followed by the crucifixion on Good Friday's and Easter Sunday's Resurrection and then concluding with Jesus' Ascension back into heaven.

So, we're beginning with Palm Sunday, and we've read about Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem – riding on a donkey! And given what you can learn about someone from their ride – I'm a bit surprised that this celebration ended up being called "Palm Sunday" instead of "donkey Sunday" – because as we will see Jesus' choice of ride was far more significant than the oak branches people were laying on the road or the palm-branches they were waving...

In fact, its only John's gospel that mentions the people brought palm branches with them to go cheer Jesus on, the other gospels have people cutting tree branches from the field and cloaks being laid on the road as Jesus' rides his donkey on the approach to Jerusalem. But more on that later...

We've just read about Jesus' triumphant entry from the gospel of Mark, where prior to His arrival, Jesus and His disciples have been travelling, making their way down to Jerusalem from the northern parts of Israel.

And as they get close to the city Jesus pauses and tells his disciples to go into the small village ahead of them and bring back a donkey colt for him to ride on.

And as we consider this we might be thinking "*sure ok why not?! Jesus might be tired from all that walking... have him ride into Jerusalem on a donkey!*" And because Jesus – being fully God, and full of the Holy Spirit, probably knows there's a kind and willing owner coming up in the next town with a donkey he can spare for Jesus.

But brothers and sisters, if you ever take the time to get to know what Jesus does in His ministry through studying the gospels – you will discover that Jesus never does anything "just because" - there's always a reason for his actions.

So that's why we are asking "What does Jesus' choice of ride into Jerusalem tell us about him?"

Well, just as we kind of "know" a few things about people based on what they drive, the people of Jerusalem also knew a few things about what it meant that Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey... namely that if someone like Jesus did this - it was a claim to be King!

Now pause for a moment to remember that in Jesus' day the kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist – it was now the backwater province of Judea in the Roman Empire.

The Promised Land had been conquered and subjugated, not just by Rome, but by all the major empires in the history books...Babylon, Assyria, Persia, and Greece.

Its people had been oppressed and persecuted for their faith, and the worship of the one true God - most severely by Alexander the Great's successor Antiochus Epiphanes IV who

desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig on the most holy altar.

Since then generations of Israelites had been waiting for their God to show up and deliver them just as He had done in the ages past and as God's prophets had promised that he would.

And we read one of those promises this morning spoken by the prophet Zechariah.

And it promises that the Chosen city of God, Jerusalem would be delivered from foreign oppression – symbolized by the reference to chariots and warhorses – become a great city once more... and defeat its enemies! And Greece – as a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificing a pig on the temple altar - is specifically foretold here.

So, the people had been waiting....

And up to this point, although Jesus has done lots of teaching, and miracles, and healings, and telling people their sins are

forgiven... He has not sent out any sort of press release stating that He is or isn't the promised Messiah - the savior and deliverer of Israel...until now.

But – choosing to ride into Jerusalem on a Donkey is Jesus' proclamation that He is the promised King who has come to deliver Jerusalem from foreign oppression.

No wonder the people ran out with palm branches to wave around and went to cut down oak branches, laying them on the road along with their cloaks and shouting "*Hosanna – God save us!*"

They knew what Jesus was saying with his choice of ride – that He is King.

But brothers and sisters, stereotypes have their limits don't they. The fellow who drives the monster truck may actually be quite cultured and educated... and may actually be a she!

The aging hippy who drives the VW minibus might own a very successful hemp clothing business... and the young man who owns the Nissan Altima might actually be a responsible driver!

And so while Jesus is most definitely a King, He might not be the kind of King which the Jewish people are familiar with.

You see brothers and sisters, Jesus' choice of ride has some nuances to it, there's more than one prophetic meaning.

A donkey is not a warhorse, a donkey is a working animal, a humble animal, an affordable animal – and so Jesus comes as a gentle, humble King who will work to serve all people.

He is going to deliver His people, but not through displays of power and might, but through giving His life in service.

And there's more...

You see God's chosen people were not really innocent victims of Roman Empirical conquest. Rather their defeat in being conquered and oppressed came about because they and their

ancestors had consistently been unfaithful in their covenant relationship with God.

Ever since God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and given them the Promised Land, He had warned them to beware of being led astray by the gods and worship practices of the nations around them. He warned them not to live as they did and not to worship their idols. They were to worship Him alone as part of their Covenant relationship.

Which meant that if they were loyal and worshiped God alone, He would be their God and protect them and guide them through His laws and He would bless them.

BUT - If you worship foreign gods, you will be conquered by foreign powers and be oppressed by them.... And to drive the point home, in Deut 28 God provides a description of the Covenant curses that come with being conquered and oppressed – and there's this interesting reference in vs. 31 that says *"Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned."*

So it's not only Jesus' choice of ride, but how He requisitioned it. As a King He has the right to requisition this donkey for His use – BUT Jesus tells his disciples to tell the owner that *"the Lord will send it back shortly."* (vs. 3)

So this not only proclaims that Jesus is a just and fair King, but more importantly He has come to undo the covenant curses found in Deuteronomy 28 for being an unfaithful in their covenant with God. Donkeys are taken, but are now returned.

Those whom Jesus will rule over as King will have a relationship with God which **blesses** them.

And brothers and sisters Jesus' choice of ride also explains **why** that is.

Now prior to setting out for Jerusalem, and also along the way to Jerusalem, Jesus tells his disciples he has to go to there to suffer and die, and completing this, God would raise him back to life, and his disciples were struggling to understand why Jesus had to do this if He was God's chosen One.

However, Jesus' choice of ride clarifies why He must suffer and die, but there's some background info we need to know...

To help God's people remember how He delivered them from slavery in Egypt, they not only celebrated the Passover – which we all know about – BUT they were required to give back to God the firstborn of all their livestock as contribution to the various sacrifices in their worship of God.

Ex 13:12 says *“you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord.”*

So, they gave to the Lord their firstborn sheep, oxen, cattle, and goats for sacrifices. But a donkey was not offered in any sacrifice to God – instead God had made provision for them to be able to keep their donkey's by redeeming them or “buying them back” by sacrificing a lamb in their place. Ex 13:13 says *“Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.”*

So, Jesus rides into Jerusalem five days before the Passover meal, the main way of observing God's deliverance from slavery for the Jews.

And five days prior was the day when each family selected the lamb, they would sacrifice for the Passover meal. You see brothers and sisters, with Jesus EVERYTHING has a purpose!

Just as you could “redeem” a donkey from its death by sacrificing a lamb in its place, Jesus intends to sacrifice his life, to be God's “lamb” in order to “redeem” God's people,

To free them from Sin which was the cause of their unfaithfulness to God and to undo the consequence of that unfaithfulness – separation from God which ultimately leads to death.

And just like the blood of the Passover lamb painted on the doorframes of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt caused the Angel of Death to “passover” that house and spare them from judgment

So Jesus blood - applied to our lives through our belief in him - causes God's judgment on our sin and rebellion to "passover" us and allows us to be forgiven of whatever we've done wrong and begin a new relationship with God that is free from offence – but we'll say more about that next Sunday.

This is why Jesus' rule as King gives us a relationship with God that blesses us – He offered his life to buy us back from death, and give us a life which can survive death! Hosanna – God saves us indeed!

Believe it brothers and sisters – it's the good news! For anyone and everyone...

And Jesus chose to let His people know about this good news publicly by choosing to ride into Jerusalem -on a donkey!

So, if we believe in who Jesus is as King, and the kind of King He is, and we have experienced that blessing from God of forgiveness, redemption, and a new kind of life...

Our gratitude will motivate us to want others to know about that good news as well – so... we need to choose "a ride" which communicates publically to people who Jesus really is.

A gentle, humble King who offers forgiveness, deliverance and a relationship with God which gives you life that can survive death.

We might not want to communicate it exactly like this... (show picture of the Jesus-mobile)

But, our "ride" is really how we live our lives in front of other people isn't it. It's how we roll. So, it's good to be intentional in every area of our lives so people can come to know about Jesus...maybe even through our cars.

Because that also says something about Jesus as King – that His Kingdom includes everything.... Work, school, business, science, sports, art, politics, all of it – even cars! All of our life.

So that means He's king over us when we shop for groceries on Monday, when we work on Tues, when we are in class on Weds, when we have family time on Thurs, when we go out to party on Fri, when we sleep in on Saturday morning...

And He's especially acknowledged as our King when we get up to praise him and worship him at Church and give Him the first... the first hours of the first day of the week on Sunday.

Brothers and sisters if Jesus is our King, then we need to make it clear to people that we do everything "in his name" because it shows we are loyal to Him.

When you help the poor, when you do a favor for a neighbor, when you give to a charity make sure people know that you do it because Jesus motivates you...

When people tell you that you're a kind, honest, loving person – thank them and let them know you live that way to honor Jesus as King.

When people cut loose and curse using Jesus' name, gently ask them not to do that – it offends you because Jesus is your Lord, Jesus is King – it may not stop that person... but the important thing is you've demonstrated your loyalty and Jesus sees that.

And since Jesus has won our loyalty through offering his life for us – showing us incredible grace and mercy in this, we are indebted to Him – and we recognize that by showing grace and mercy to others.

So, we avoid gossip and slander, we don't join into the "he said she said" conversations at work and school, and we stand up against bullying... not because it's a celebrity cause-de-jour with pink shirts – but because Jesus Christ is our merciful King.

And showing grace and mercy to others means that we want everyone know that Jesus is their King too – and that nobody is excluded from needing the forgiveness we received to start a new life with God, King Jesus gives it to all to will receive.

So, Brothers and sisters these are all the little ways that your day-to-day life becomes your “ride” which communicates to those around you that Jesus is King

So what does your “ride” say about who Jesus is to the people around you?

Brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit move in our hearts and minds this morning and empower us to take the ride of our life showing that Christ is King – because that’s how we Christians roll.

Amen?!