

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

Friends, if there is any credibility to stereotypes you can tell a lot about a person by their ride. For example what sort of person would you associate with the following vehicles...

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

Subaru WRX? A young male who likes to street race...

Toyota Celica? A chick sports car

Buick Regal? Definitely the choice of Senior Citizens

Audi / BMW Sedan? A Corporate executive

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

A Plain Truck? A regular working guy...

A Monster Truck? A redneck...

A Jeep? An outdoors enthusiast...

A Volvo? A civic minded safety conscious responsible citizen...

A Dodge Caravan? A Soccer / Hockey Mom...

An SUV – A soccer / hockey mom in denial that they are a soccer/ hockey mom...

Now what about a donkey???

Friends, this morning we celebrate Palm Sunday where Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey... So the question is “What does Jesus choice of ride into Jerusalem tell us about him?”

Now he and his disciples have traveled down to Jerusalem after spending time ministering in the northern parts of the land of Israel...

As they get closer to their destination Jesus pauses... and tells his disciples to go ahead into the small village of Bethphage – which is situated just outside of Jerusalem, like Airdrie is to Calgary - and bring back a donkey colt for him to ride on.

Now we might be thinking, ok why not, Jesus might be tired from all that walking... he’s going to hitch a ride on a donkey for the last part of the trip to Jerusalem...

But friends, the Jesus that Mark’s gospel introduces us to, never does anything just because...

So why did Jesus tell his disciples to go and fetch him the colt of a donkey, which doesn't belong to him... and why does he ride it into Jerusalem?

Well, just as we can assume a few things about the kinds of people who drive certain vehicles in our society, the residents of Jerusalem knew a few things about what it meant for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And they knew that for someone like Jesus to do this, 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 a couple of backwater provinces in the Roman Empire.

If fact in the time leading up to Jesus birth the Promised Land had been conquered and subjugated by all the major empires in the history books...Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Greece...

And the people of Israel had been oppressed and persecuted for their faith and worship of the one true God, most severely by Alexander the Great's successor Antiochus Epiphanies IV who desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig on the most holy altar.

So, you can understand that 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 the prophets promised He still would.

And we read in Zechariah this morning.

God's word to Zechariah promises that the Chosen city of God, Jerusalem would delivered from foreign oppression...

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem (vs. 10)

That it would become a great city once more – as its King *ruled from sea to sea...* (vs. 10) and Israel would defeat its enemies - specifically Greece... (vs. 13)

So the people of Israel had been waiting, for a long time.

And up to this point, although Jesus has done lots of miracles - healing 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.

Riding into Jerusalem on a Donkey is Jesus' public declaration that He is the promised King who has come to deliver Jerusalem from foreign oppression.

No wonder the people cut palm branches and laid them down on the road with their cloaks and shouted "Hosanna – God save us!"

They knew what Jesus' choice of ride was saying – that He is the King!

But, stereotypes have their limits don't they.

While we can, and do, assume a lot of things about people based on their ride, it's not always the whole story is it?

The fellow who drives the monster truck may actually be quite cultured and educated... he could have a PhD!

And that aging hippy who drives the VW minibuss might not buy into corporate Calgary but still owns a very successful hemp clothing business...

And Jesus' ride definitely proclaims He is the King, but he might not be the kind of King the people are most familiar with.

You see friends Jesus's statement in his choice of ride has some layers to it.

A donkey is not a warhorse; a donkey is a working animal, a humble animal, an affordable animal. So Jesus riding on a donkey is a proclamation that He comes as a gentle, humble King who will work to serve the all the people.

He is going to deliver the people through his service, not through confrontations of power and might.

But as significant as that is friends, it's only just the first layer – we can go deeper still...

You see when it came to their political oppression; God's chosen people were not really innocent victims of the Roman Empire.

They had been defeated, conquered and were oppressed 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 about the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness.

Basically the deal went like this - If you stay loyal and worship me alone, I will be your God and protect you and guide you through my laws and I will bless you.... (Deut 28:1-14)

If you worship foreign gods, you will be conquered by foreign powers and be oppressed by them and they will do horrible and terrible things to you. (Deut 28:15-68)

For example, God says; *"Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned."* (Deut 28:31)

But... Jesus tells his disciples to say to the owner of the donkey that *"He will send it back shortly."* (Mark 11:3)

So not only is Jesus is a King who is not oppressive to His people, but the action of returning the donkey indicates that His Kingship who will undo the consequences of being an unfaithful covenant partner with God.

And that fits with what we know about the calling of the King of Israel – His task was to lead the people to be faithful covenant partners with God.

So people who recognize Jesus as King will have someone to lead them in a relationship with God which **blesse**s them!

And friends Jesus' choice of ride also explains **why** this is.

Now, on their way down to Jerusalem Jesus had to tell his disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die... and that God would raise him back to life.

But the disciples were having a hard time understanding why Jesus would have to do this if He was God's chosen One.

And Jesus' choice of riding a donkey explains why He needed to suffer and die – but, there's some background info we need to know to understand how.

If we go back to Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and God giving them the Law as a means to instruct them on how they can show their gratitude and live as a holy nation of priests...

We will find that they were required to offer the firstborn of their livestock back to God, as a reminder of the cost by which

God had freed them from slavery when He struck down the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt.

So they would offer their firstborn sheep, oxen, cattle, and goats... but not the firstborn of their donkeys. Instead they could redeem or "buy back" their donkeys by sacrificing a lamb in its place. (Ex 13:13)

So, keep that in mind friends...

Now when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey – He arrives five days before the Passover meal (another celebration which helped God's people remember their deliverance from slavery in Egypt) which was when each family would select the lamb they would sacrifice for the Passover meal.

And as we've seen friends, nothing is coincidental with Jesus.... so when you put these two things together, what does it mean?

Well, just as a firstborn donkey could be redeemed from death by sacrificing a lamb in its place, Jesus intends to sacrifice his life, to be God's "lamb" in order to "buy back" God's people, and free them from their captivity.

And this reveals to us friends, that Israel's political captivity was only a symptom of their spiritual captivity to Sin.

Human sinfulness was the root cause of their covenant unfaithfulness and the subsequent consequences and judgment for that unfaithfulness.

Something needed to be done about Human sin or God would have to continue to judge Israel as unfaithful, and that would be bad news for everyone – since God's intentions were to bless all nations through Israel.

So Jesus' choice of ride and the timing of his arrival in Jerusalem proclaim His intention to shed His own blood as God's sacrificial Passover lamb.

Remember friends, the blood of the first Passover lamb painted on the door frames of the houses in Egypt caused the Angel of Death to "pass-over" those houses and spare them from judgment.

So Jesus blood - applied to our lives as the Holy Spirit enables us to believe and trust in Him - causes God's judgment on our sin and rebellion and covenant unfaithfulness to "pass-over" us.

Thus Israel can be forgiven of whatever they have done wrong and be led by Jesus a new relationship with God that is free from offence – and so can we.

They were bought back, redeemed by Jesus offering His life for them and friends, so are we!

The first issue our King must deal with in leading us to be faithful covenant partners with God, is to take care of our prior unfaithfulness, our sin... and Jesus does this by going to Jerusalem to shed his blood as the Lamb of God.

Believe it friends – this is the good news!

And Jesus proclaims this for everyone and anyone to know by riding into Jerusalem, five days before Passover, on a donkey.

And friends as we celebrate this proclamation five days before Good Friday this is an opportunity for us to respond in faith to who Jesus proclaims Himself to be with his choice of ride.

Will we shout “Lord save us!” this morning to?

Not just because that’s what you do on Palm Sunday but because you know you need to be saved from the Sin that consistently makes you unfaithful to God – in spite of your best efforts...

The hear the good news of Palm Sunday friends – the King has come, and in five days we will celebrate how He dealt with the first issue that needs dealing with if He will successfully lead us to become faithful covenant partners with God.

And to show our gratitude for this friends, to let others to know about this good news friends, means that from this point on we need to choose “a ride” which communicates publically to people who Jesus really is...

...A gentle, humble King who deals with your sin and gives you his own faithfulness in order that you can receive the blessings of a Covenant relationship with God.

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. And it’s good to be intentional in every area of our lives to let people know about Jesus...maybe even through our cars.

Because that in itself says something about Jesus as King – that His Kingdom includes everything....

Jesus is our King 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 especially when we get up to praise him and worship him
at Church on Sunday...

Friends if Jesus is our King, then we need to make it clear to
people that we do everything “in his name” because 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 your 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
– it may not stop that person... and that isn’t really the point,
the point is you’ve demonstrated your loyalty!

And friends since Jesus has secured our loyalty through
offering his life for us so – showing us incredible grace and
having mercy on us in this way, we are indebted to him to
show 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 the trendy social thing to do
– but because Jesus Christ is our merciful King.

And it’s great that we live in such a tolerant society where
everyone is so quick to say “live and let live” there’s many
benefits to that - but friends don’t confuse that with showing
grace and mercy...

In our context showing grace and mercy to others means that we let everyone know that Jesus proclaims He is their King to!

And that nobody needs to be excluded from having Jesus' blood cover their unfaithfulness so that God's judgment passes over them, and they can start a new covenant relationship with God instead.

So friends – if you take home one thing with you for the week that God wants you to consider, it is this...

What does your choice of “ride” say about who Jesus is to the people around you?

So friends, I encourage you to choose the “ride” of your life – literally... because that's how Christians roll.

Amen.