

THE POLITICS OF THE PASSION

This Lenten series will highlight the interaction of Jesus with political figures and institutions during that final, emotional week. Intriguing conversations occurred with the Pharisees, the chief priests, the traitor, the High Priest, Herod, Pilate, and the soldiers. All of these contacts were opportunities for Jesus to use or refuse political power and to explain his mission in political terms. We will see what he said and did and try to understand how we as his followers emulate him in our world today—with a view to being agents of reconciliation even if crucified ourselves.

February 26: **The Parade Without a Permit:** Luke 19:28-40 (Insert pic of Mount of Olives)

Intro: This is the last week in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is passion week, and he is going to suffer and die. His death and resurrection will be the culmination of his time upon this earth, of his ministry, his mission, and his message.

Everything this week will circulate around his true identity. Everyone will be trying to figure out who he really is. This is the issue at the Cleansing—who does he think he is? It is the issue of his debate with the religious authorities—who gave you this authority? It is the issue at his betrayal—they wanted Jesus the troublemaker. It is the issue at his trial—are you a king? It is the issue at the cross: This is Jesus the King of the Jews. And it is the issue at the empty tomb—who was this man and how is this tomb empty?

This day, in this parade, Jesus will make it clear to the people of Jerusalem and the religious authorities that he the Messiah sent from God as was promised long ago. This claim has tremendous political implications for the Jews and the Romans. It is dangerous and treasonous to claim to be the king, and the powers that ruled will be united against him.

I. MAKE A SCENE: Jesus initiates the Parade with clear intentions: *If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it' (v30)*

A. TITLE: He calls himself “Lord”: “the Lord needs it” (v31).

1. He does this repeatedly but usually in connection with his disciples. Here he is suggesting to someone living in Bethany or Bethphage that he is the Lord.

2. He is about to ride into Jerusalem as the Lord. This is the title he will wear on this day.

3. He knows that this title conflicts with Roman insistence that Caesar is Lord.

4. He demonstrates his lordship over all humans by influencing those unknown persons who own the colt to give him up without further explanation. His disciples also do his bidding without question or protest on this day. They have protested freely before and tried to change his mind. But not today. Today they do exactly as they are told.

B. TRANSPORTATION: He rides a donkey into Jerusalem. This is the only instance we have recorded in scripture of Jesus riding anything. And it is an indication of an exalted position. It is part of this drama, this flesh-and-blood parable enacted on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

This donkey has never been ridden. Jesus brings into submission this animal that has no idea what to do. Jesus says later that if the crowd kept silent, the rocks would cry out. All of creation is under his feet, and on this day he demonstrates it in multiple ways.

C. TIMING: He creates this parade during the Passover Celebration. This is the greatest feast on the Hebrew calendar. It draws pilgrims from all over the world every year. If they can make the journey, it is their obligation to come to Jerusalem.

D. TRIP: Jesus intends to ride down the slope of the Mount of Olives and into the Eastern Gate of the city. The prophets insisted that the Messiah would arrive through the eastern gate.

1. The Messiah is viewed in political terms by the Jews. They believe he will be the great deliverer of Jerusalem and of God's people. He is the Chosen One who will sit on the throne of Israel.

***Todd Beamer died September 11, 2001, in the terrorist attacks. His last words were heard and recorded over his cell phone. The occupants of Flight 93 had decided to attack the terrorists. When the moment came, Todd said, “Okay, Let's roll.” In effect, that is what Jesus is saying to his disciples as he gets on this donkey and rides into Jerusalem: “Let's roll. Let's put this parade in motion.”

II. CAUSE A STIR: Jesus is heralded as the King: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (v38).

A. “King” is a religious, Messianic term. They have been waiting for the king like David, the Son of David.

who would come to rule over them. When they say king, they are thinking back to the united kingdom, Israel's height of influence and power in the world. It was a time when Israel occupied its largest territory, extended its borders, and controlled trade back and forth between the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia.

B. King is also a political term. A king generally reigns over a geographical area.

1. The Jews already have a king. His name is Herod. He is the one who beheaded John the Baptist, and he is eager to see Jesus and find out who he really is.

2. They also have a Roman governor named Pilate. He is the real power in their country, though they resent it. He is the one who will have to be convinced that Jesus is a threat and a traitor to Rome. He alone can legally execute a criminal.

C. Jesus is now at the nerve center of the Jewish nation. He is also at the nerve center of many a political problem for the Romans. Some nations rolled over and played dead when the Roman legions came. Not Israel. Israel resented Roman rule, conspired against it, and longed for the return of their king.

D. Jesus is allowing conflict to develop in Jerusalem, the capital city, the center of power, politics and religion. He wants to make a stir today. His high profile entrance into Jerusalem will make his execution even bigger news with greater significance.

E. Jesus has turned his face toward Calvary where the Romans will execute him. Everything from here on out is about his death upon the tree. His hour has come—"when darkness reigns" (Lk. 22:53).

F. In some ways Jesus is picking a fight now, a fight that he has avoided throughout his ministry because his time had not yet come. But now the time has come, and he is ready to bring the fire down.

III. MAKE A POINT: *"If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out"* (v40).

A. Have you ever heard the stones? Geologists read so much in the stones. The rocks tell us matters of time and life, heat and compression. They entomb the remains of life forms, and present them to us as fossils. From Trilobites to Moon Rocks, the rocks speak. Precious stones also speak. Diamonds say, "I love you." The Grand Tetons are some of the most majestic mountains in the world. Their stone faces rise 13,000 feet above sea level, face east, and declare the majesty and splendor of God.

1. The stones know the truth of creation, that Jesus is king, and they will share it should the disciples fail.

2. I have heard these stones speak there on the Mount of Olives and in the Old City of Jerusalem. The stones were carved and fitted in the bed of the road and along the containing walls as they approached the city. These stones witnessed the passing of priests and prophets and kings. Warlords rode their horses here, and conquering armies pounded these stones. The truth is obvious, but the religious leaders refuse to see it. The stones know, though, and God has ordained that on this day Jesus will receive the recognition that is due him. If the disciples fail to give him glory, the stones will do so.

B. Do you give him glory? Ever since this day upon the Mount of Olives the role of the disciple of Jesus is to publicly declare his glory. He is king of kings and lord of lords, and everyone should know. When we make this confession we are in tune with the rocks, the animals, the angels, and all creation.

C. ***"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believed in his name"*** (John 1:10-12)

Conclusion: