

Luke 19:28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ”

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.

GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD’S

Dear Friends in Christ,

Pilgrim. What is a pilgrim? In our country, Pilgrims are people with funny-shaped hats, funny-shaped guns and shoes that buckle. Names associated with “Pilgrim” include William Bradford, Squanto, and a ship called the *Mayflower*. We acquire a heightened interest in Pilgrims every fourth Thursday of November—if that isn’t weird! Pilgrims.

As those so-called Pilgrims just off the *Mayflower* knew, they were not the first pilgrims. Pilgrims had been around for many thousands of years. Jesus was a pilgrim. Ditch the hat, the buckled shoes and all that, and at the beginning of today’s reading Jesus is a pilgrim. For thousands of years, the definition of a pilgrim has been “a person making a journey to sacred place for religious reasons.” In Luke 19 the sacred place is Jerusalem, and the religious reason is the Passover, and Jesus was the pilgrim.

During the Jewish Passover, Jerusalem was an amazing place. The city of Jerusalem covered one square mile normally having a population of about 40,000 people. Radcliff, Kentucky covers about 12 square miles and has half that many people. During the Passover pilgrimage, for about a week, Jerusalem swelled to a quarter million people. Of course they spilled over into the countryside, but it still would have been a quarter million people in an area less than Radcliff. Pilgrims everywhere!

As Jesus and his disciples and the pilgrim crowd approached Jerusalem, Jesus did something we have no record of him doing at any other time in his life. He decided he needed to ride a steed. Two miles or so outside Jerusalem, he sent his disciples into a village to get a donkey.

I. Giving to God What We Think Is Ours

Jesus here shows us what it means *To Give To God What Is God’s*.

Jesus does not ask for the donkey. He simply says, “*The Lord needs it.*” Whether this was pre-

arranged or not, we have no hint. And it doesn't really matter. Jesus acts the part of a king here. All that exists is his. He has the right to it at any time. How does that sit with you?

This nation is a democratic republic. One of the pillars of our society is private property. There is reason for that, and there are advantages to it for our society. So how would you feel about a king who has a right to whatever he wants of yours, whenever he wants? He can just come in and tell you, "The King needs it!" and that's the end of the matter. Hatred for that sort of thing is what gave birth to this nation. Do we not bristle when such claims are made, even by God himself!

And so it was that Jesus, the king, demanded this donkey from the owners. And so it is that Jesus likewise has the right to step into each of our lives and say, "***The Lord needs it.***" Maybe it is your money to support your church's work. Maybe it is an hour or two or three of your time. Maybe it is that you pass up a better job, or even lose your job for reasons connected to Giving to God What is God's. Maybe his claim on you is that you support a down-and-out person, or forgive from the heart by forgetting a past wrong, or using your abilities for a Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. Maybe God's kingly claim is on your time for family devotions when everyone in the house would rather be on their device or watching their favorite show. Jesus has that right to step into your life and make that demand of you because "*You are not your own. You were bought at a price.*" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Give to God what is God's of your material blessings, your talents, your time. He has that right to make those claims.

But here is the good part. We need not worry that what we give to our King will be a loss. Do not think of our God as the heartless king whose concern is only for himself, and who makes capricious demands based on his latest whim. He is the God who came down to earth to give up his life. He was honored sitting upon a donkey as an assurance that he is the good king, the concerned king, the self-sacrificing king. What we offer to him, will not be lost. Whatever he may demand of us, we trust our king and his demands.

II. Giving to God the Honor He Deserves

When the disciples brought the donkey to Jesus, they knew what to do. The owners of the donkey had Given to God What Is God's. Now it was the disciples' turn to Give to God. "***They brought [the colt] to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road***" (35-36). When Jesus' disciples saw Jesus and this young donkey, they knew exactly what to do: First they put their coats on the colt, then they seated Jesus on the donkey.

Much has been said over the years of Jesus riding a donkey. Donkeys may have strength, but they have little beauty, little speed, and their disposition leave something to be desired. Besides that, in the human ear, there is a huge difference between the neigh of a horse and the bray of a donkey. It is often said that Jesus riding a donkey, must be the sign of a very humble man. That is a classic misunderstanding of what this crowd of pilgrims saw when Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem.

A thousand years before Jesus, there was a king lying on his death bed. This king had two sons. The elder felt that he should be king even though his father had said that the younger should be king. So the elder brother formed a *coup*. Together with the highest ranking priest and the five star general of the army, he declared himself king. All the people went over to him. When the king on his death-bed heard of this, he, King David, told the palace guard to ride out his younger son on the royal donkey. And when the people saw the younger son, Solomon, riding that royal donkey, they all knew that the elder son was a sham, that they had been deceived. They then all flocked to Solomon on the donkey, and acknowledged him as the rightful king (1 Kings 1). To the Jew, the donkey meant something people in a horse state like Kentucky inherently do not see.

Jesus riding a donkey is a paradox. If anything is true of God's kingdom, it is that God's kingdom is a kingdom of paradoxes. Jesus, riding the donkey is a sign of both his kingship and his humility.

And so, when they disciples saw Jesus riding that donkey, they smiled in joy. Their teacher, the Son of God, was getting the recognition they knew he deserved. There could not have been better timing. On this week Jerusalem was full with Passover pilgrims. What a time for Jesus to be acknowledged as the Messiah!

Now pilgrims (not funny hats Pilgrims, but religious pilgrims) could enter Jerusalem from any side. If you came into Jerusalem from the north, south or west, Jerusalem beckoned in the distance. The city and its buildings first appeared a light smudge on the horizon. As you walked the miles, you would begin to make out the buildings. Your eyes always on the goal, Jerusalem would draw nearer as you walked your last day of pilgrimage.

The favorite pilgrim route, however, was from the east. From the east, which was the way that Jesus approached, Jerusalem was hidden by the hills. Not until you skirted the shoulder of the Mount of Olives would you even know there was a Jerusalem. Then suddenly, there it was, just a half mile away. It was like it a city in the air. From the Mount of Olives, the ravine of the Kidron Brook plunges a few hundred feet below your feet, and ¼ mile directly across the ravine, the vertical walls of Jerusalem rise above the steep walls of the Kidron Valley. Rising above those walls nearly 200 feet was the gleaming white marble temple. Boom! There it stands like a city in the air.

In this awesome setting, with the euphoria of a religious pilgrimage, in the midst of a crowd, we read, ***“When [Jesus] came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen. ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’”*** (37-38). More than they realized, they were Giving to God What Is God’s—the honor he deserves.

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” When Jesus came into this world, just seven miles from the Mount of Olives, do you remember the song that announced his arrival? *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom God’s favor rests”* (Luke 2:14). Thirty-three years later, this hymn was repeated, not by angels, but by the pilgrims, ***“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*** Yes, Jesus is worthy of glory in the highest. That is why you have come today. That is why we regularly come to God’s house. We give to God what is God’s – glory, honor, credit for being our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier. That is why we sing of “Peace in heaven,” because Jesus is the arbiter of peace. Praise him! Give to God what rightly belongs to God!

May he get the credit for making your life what it is. Let others know how and why you have a hope that goes beyond the grave – where the hope of others ends. Come regularly to worship your God, because this is a place where we give him the honor, praise and credit that is his!

III. Jesus’ Concern for Those Who Won’t Give to God What Is God’s

I wish we could leave things here, but this is not where Luke left us on Palm Sunday. In the midst of all the celebration and cheering and shouts and smiles, someone is crying. He is sobbing. It is Jesus. ***“Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes’”*** (39-42).

May no one misunderstand what I say as being anti-Semitic. Indeed, how can any Christian hold the Jewish people in low esteem. Our own New Testament says this: *“Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!”* (Romans 9:4-5). Even though salvation has been opened to all people in Jesus Christ, salvation’s source—the cool clear artesian spring water—flows from the Jewish nation.

There is a book, a book from the 1800's with sketches instead of pictures. In one real life sketch, some people are up against a wall. They are not leaning up against it to give the feet a rest. They are not just hanging out by the wall. They are all facing the wall. Some are leaning into the wall of immense stone blocks. Some have their ears to rock, as if listening to the stones speak. The wall is the center of their attention. This is the Western Wall. It is the only little bit of the ancient Jewish temple complex still standing. To the observant Jew, these rocks are the most holy place on earth where they are allowed to worship. These were foundation stones of the temple where festivals and sacrifices were offered to the God of Heaven and Earth, the Triune God. And yes, some Jewish pilgrims do still put their ears to those stones. There they kneel against the wall to listen to the stones.

A mile east of the Western Wall, nearly 2,000 years ago, the true God, in human form, was riding to Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd was singing and praising him. When some in the crowd demanded they stop, Jesus told them, ***"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."*** And soon after that he wept. He wept because of people who would not Give to God What Is God's, and he saw the judgment which will overtake all of them. And perhaps he even was looking ahead to the descendants of these Pharisees, who to this day, even listening to the stones, still do not recognize the day when the Messiah of Israel walked into his temple.

Oh, the danger of not Giving to God What Is God's. Jesus' tears tell us two things. First, his tears tell us that God's judgment upon those who refuse him must truly be terrible, if he, the Son of God would weep for them. Second, he is a concerned king. He loves all people. And deeply desires that all be saved.

Give to God What Is God's! God be praised that when you see Jesus, you can Give God What Is God and praise him, ***"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*** Amen.