

An Unexpected Way

Pretend for a moment that you are one of the priests in Jerusalem when Jesus came parading into town. This man whom you have heard so much about has finally made his way into the capitol, your town. You hope for an opportunity to meet with him to see if all the hype about Him is warranted or not. You've seen many others like Him before, making wild claims about who he is and what he can do. Part of your job is to keep the occupying Romans happy and assure them that these fringe preachers pose no real threat to their rule. Even though you and the other priests worked with the Romans to keep the peace and thus, the status quo, you secretly hoped that the Messiah would come soon to throw off these shackles of domination and re-establish the sovereignty of Israel. But until you knew for certain who the Messiah was and that the Romans would be defeated, you had to maintain the status quo. The only thing that a false Messiah could do is cause enough trouble to force the Romans to rule with tighter control. If that were the case, then you stood to lose your power. You had to know if He was the Messiah and if not, you had to silence Him permanently.

This is the scenario that the chief priests faced that day when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Before we judge the religious leaders too harshly for their actions, we must remember that they acted out of their experience of being dominated by others trying to preserve their way of life, an experience that few of us can really appreciate and understand.

Jesus comes into our lives and challenges the status quo. Whenever Jesus comes into our lives, He takes us on a path that leads to the cross. How we respond will depend on how we see Jesus. Will we be like the religious leaders thinking that God would not intrude into our world in unexpected ways, calling us to something

new? Or will we be like His followers or even the Roman sentry and declare the true identity of Jesus? Unlike those who witnessed the crucifixion, we know what is beyond the empty cross as well as beyond the empty grave. But when Jesus breaks into our lives on a personal level, we may lose sight of the empty grave and just see a cross. We may try hard to keep things the same, keep the status quo, keeping God in the box we built for Him, keeping our lives neat and orderly. Through Jesus, God breaks out of those boxes, creating new life in the process. A new life that has as its foundation a right relationship with God that is established by what Jesus did at Golgotha for us.

How is it that the religious leaders at that time could have missed those signs that others understood to show that Jesus is the Messiah? Or asked another way, why doesn't God come to us the way we anticipate, the way we want or expect Him to? This is for several reasons. Many times, people will say, "If I only had a sign to prove that God exists and Jesus is who He says He is, then I'll believe." God doesn't want us to know Him because of proof, but because of faith. For when we require physical proof, then our understanding of God will be limited to our physical concepts. But by taking that leap of faith, then all sorts of possibilities are opened up to us. We will be able to see and experience God in ways that are not limited by our understanding of this physical world. If God came as the chief priests and Pharisees envisioned, then what would happen when God accomplished what they wanted? Once the Romans were overthrown, what would happen next? Would the religious leaders acknowledge God's power and worship Him or would a new status quo be established with the result that the people would again turn their backs to God? The story of the Old Testament shows that this cycle of following God, falling away

from God, being oppressed, repentance and turning back to God, and restoration by God repeated many times.

That cycle had to be broken so God had to try something different, something that would make the people turn their hearts to God for good. That is why God comes in the unexpected ways. That is why God came as a carpenter's son, to build faith in people that is strong and lasts a lifetime. That is why Jesus wound up on a cross so that we might willingly turn to God and not feel that we are forced to do so. When God made His creation, after each day, He said, "It is good." Even though humanity had sinned and we continue to sin, we need to remember that we, as part of that creation, are still good. God loves us, that is why the Son of God came as a sacrifice for our sins so that we may believe and live in the Light of God's love eternally.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: https://youtu.be/_LB1M5sNuno

Service: https://youtu.be/KhMuuq_7PFU