

*Do I Have Your Attention?*

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*Proverbs 8:1-11; Colossians 1:3-14; Luke 19:28-48*

Our final Scripture reading comes from Luke 19:28-48. Listen now to God's holy, sacred, and perfect Word. "After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "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. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'" Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 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: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 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. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words."

What will get your attention? Advertisers and marketers would love to know. Advertising data has become huge business. Google makes 96% of their money off of ad sales because they have the data to know who will respond to what ads. Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon all make predictions about what shows will get your attention because those shows will keep you subscribing to their services and buying their products. With our phones buzzing every five minutes, children and family and work all needing our time, there's big money to be found in what will get your attention long enough to stop and consider spending your hard-earned money on something new.

There are plenty of ways to get your attention – shock you, make you laugh, make you nostalgic, play with your emotions. Making grandiose promises works sometimes – in our family, we still love the ads about the super-strong tape that you can use to keep a boat on the water when you've carved out the center of it. Have you seen that one? Growing up, I remember every toy commercial made their product look the best – like I'd finally be happy with that one toy. (We talked about happiness last week, and we saw how that turned out!)

Jesus didn't go in for that kind of attention. The last week of His earthly life was far from what we might expect. But after looking at it closely, we see why He did what He did and how all He did was to draw attention to God our Father and how He as our Savior could reconcile us to Him. Let's take a few moments this morning looking at how the last week of Jesus' life echoes everything that has come before and what it means for us.

Jesus wants our attention – let's be clear about that. But as the Passover week starts, Jesus is determined to be known not by people's expectations for Him but for who He really is and who He was sent to be. The incident with the donkey's colt is weird when you think about it. Here Jesus tells two of the disciples to find this young donkey tied up in the next village and to bring it to Him, and to tell anyone who asks about it, "The Lord needs it."

This is wild. Is Jesus asking the disciples to steal for Him? Absolutely not – Jesus would never break the commandment. Yet Jesus is not asking, He's telling. The disciples aren't tracking down the donkey's owners and asking permission. Jesus is already showing His supernatural power in knowing that there's going to be a colt tied up in the next village that He will use.

But He's also having the disciples declare the truth about Him to anyone in the village who will ask. "The Lord needs it." The Greek term for "lord," *kurios*, means "master" or "owner"; it can even be a very polite form of address, like a very formal "sir." But they are to use the term with the definite article, "the Lord." This is God the Son, the spiritual authority who has every right over the donkey – because He made not only the donkey but its owners!

For much of Jesus' ministry, He hid His title and authority as the Son of God. Over and over, He told those who were healed and who figured out His identity not to reveal it. Why not? Because He wanted people to see His miracles, to come and listen to His message, to witness Him for themselves and believe that He is the Christ, the promised Savior and Son of God.

Because it's one thing if I tell you I had a great dinner at a famous steakhouse; you might believe me, but you'll not experience it; you won't know it personally. But go and have a perfectly cooked filet and you're not likely to forget it. Jesus is not sizzle; He's all steak. He wanted people to come and hear, come and listen, to learn who He was for themselves. But now, as Jesus heads to His destiny, to the cross and to resurrection, it is time for Him to be known for who He really is.

So word is spreading – "the Lord" needs this donkey. What is next? Jesus enters Jerusalem to shouts of "blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." His disciples – not just the twelve, but all His followers, are quoting that from Psalm 118:26, and they're applying it to Jesus. It's no secret what they're doing, and the Pharisees aren't happy about it. Shut them down, they say. To the Pharisees, who've never been willing to accept that Jesus isn't on their side, what the disciples are saying is nothing short of blasphemy – they are equating Jesus with God Himself.

But Jesus tells the truth – “if they stop, the rocks will cry out.” All of creation has been looking forward to this moment, this point in history where the tyranny of sin is broken. Jesus has always been and forever will be Jerusalem’s rightful King. Say it or deny it, shout it from the mountain or keep it a secret, it will always be true. The rocks know the truth. Jesus is Lord and King, come to save us from our terrible bondage to our selfish will and destructive ways.

This is all unsurprising to us, maybe, that Jesus finally accepts the praise that He’s rightfully due. Yet He does this sitting on the back of a young donkey. Kings come on stallions, on the “best of breed,” the finest horses in their land. Kings come in dressed as conquering heroes. This King is different. Jesus does not ride on the back of a steed of royalty. He rides on the back of a simple colt.

Even now, coming into the holy city with the praises of its King, Jesus shows Himself to be a servant every step of the way. The donkey is a sign of peace, of gentleness. Our King, who forged the skies with His hands and the hundred billion planets with a thought, keeps giving Himself to us, for us. He has given, given, given throughout His ministry, healing the sick, comforting the sinner turning from his old ways, lifting up the burdened. And now, He will serve us through the greatest gift of all – the gift of His own life, the only sacrifice perfect and worthy enough to cover the immense sinfulness of humanity.

He wants our attention, but He wants it on His terms. He weeps over the city of Jerusalem, mourning that they have not understood this day and recognized their Savior when He came. Remember that in the time of the Passover, experts say Jerusalem likely surged to over a million people. Even if 10,000 people were rejoicing in the streets over Jesus, that would have been only 1% of the city’s population. They’ve missed His coming, and soon – in 70 AD, as a matter of fact – the city will be destroyed, its people slaughtered, and the temple of God ripped apart stone from stone. He grieves what is to come for His people whom He loves.

Now I’ll tell you something...this is not the way you win friends and influence people! What do your typical politicians and statesmen and influencers do? They tell people how great their city is, how wonderful. “I’m here campaigning in this fine city, the home of the perfect pizza and perfect hot dog.” (It’s the same line they use here that they use in Chicago and New York, but oh well!) Your favorite singer or band comes to town, what do they say? “We love you, Detroit! It’s great to be back!” Which really means, “It’s great that you’re paying us to be here tonight in Detroit!” But the average person tries to win influence with us by telling us how great we are. Even if we need to change, we’re great.

Jesus has no such illusions; He wants our attention, but He wants it for the right reasons. This world collapses without God. Every kingdom, every country, even the one chosen by God to be His own, will fall if it abandons Him. Jesus doesn’t care if the people sour on Him because He doesn’t fall into the popular trap of His day, the constant push to be free of Roman rule. He knows the truth: it doesn’t matter who rules you if you’re a slave to sin. You can live under the worst regime known to man and be free in your heart if you know the love of God and His forgiveness. But the best human country and best human government living without God is still a hell on earth. Jesus is trying to get our attention: not to seduce us with words about our greatness, but with tears to convince us of our need to turn to God *right now*.

He enters into the city, and one of the first things He does is to drive out the buyers and sellers who have set up shop in the temple. The one place, the only part of the temple where those from outside Israel could come and worship the one true God has been overrun with people trying to make a buck – selling animals for sacrifice, trading Roman money in exchange for coins that could be given at the temple. This place meant for meeting with God, for reflection and prayer, is now filled with bleating sheep and men yelling, “I can give you a better price over here!” And Jesus is done with it.

Attention-grabbing? Sure. Though it certainly draws what many people would consider the wrong kind of attention. Jesus is zealous for the glory of His Father. Yet He’s going up against one of the most insidious traps in the human world: the status quo. He’s not gathering an army to take on the Roman legions. No, He’s disturbing the peace in *our* sacred temple! Sure, it’s God’s temple, but it’s *our* place, surely God is more concerned with the pagans on our doorstep than *our* worship. But that’s not the case.

Jesus wants our attention focused on the holiness of God, the unquenchable fire that is His righteousness. God isn’t interested in the worship of people who have His name on their lips all the time but can’t even give foreigners their place in the temple to worship too, who devise ways to break the Sabbath while making others keep it, who steal and have some sort of excuse of how they didn’t technically break the law. Jesus clears the temple because all that is sacred is being profaned here, and it’s coming down soon. And with Jesus’ death and resurrection, soon the true worship space of God will be within us, as the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts.

Jesus wants us to be zealous for the holiness of God in our lives. Not to look at others and say, “Boy, she sure is a sinner!” But to look at ourselves and say, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.” To go into the world and show others grace like we’ve been shown grace by God. To love others as we’ve been loved by our Savior who did not consider His own life too much of a price to pay for us. Friends, Jesus wants our attention on the right things, the things that He points out to us this holy week.

The passage ends with a summary – Jesus is teaching every day in the temple. Now it’s pretty sad that everybody with any semblance of spiritual authority in Jerusalem is spitting fury at him. Luke can barely find the words to contain them all – “the chief priests,” “the rabbis,” “the leaders.” It sounds like the start of an ancient bad joke – a priest, a rabbi, and a politician walk into a bar, and they all want Jesus dead.

To make it even more clear, the priests and the rabbis and the leaders all came from very different political and spiritual viewpoints. A chunk didn’t believe in resurrection; another chunk did. One group only considered the first five books of what we call the Old Testament to be Scripture; another considered the whole thing sacred. One set were from the old-guard families; another was a bunch of young upstarts. They constantly bickered about all this stuff. That is, until Jesus. He made them unified. Imagine in our modern political state if someone could make every Republican and every Democrat in the whole Congress come together in unity against them. That’s how polarizing Jesus was. All of them knew He was a threat to their power and authority.

Yet they couldn't just kill him, not yet, because the people who got Jesus loved Jesus. They hung on His every word. Once He had their attention, He had it fully. They eagerly came to the temple every day to hear the next thing He had to teach. They couldn't get enough of Him. They knew, as Peter had said to Jesus perhaps a year before, "You have the words of eternal life." Those who stood opposed to Jesus had to come after Him in the middle of the night under false pretenses and false charges because as much as He angered them, none of them would come after Him in the light of day. Jesus had too many people's attention.

And that's ultimately where we leave things for us this Palm Sunday – does Jesus have your attention? It is not that Jesus is egotistical in any way; His life shows He constantly thought of others before Himself. He wants your attention because He is beauty and goodness and truth and love and righteousness. You can't have those things without Him; all of those traits in this world are just a dim reflection of his perfection.

Does Jesus have your attention? You will know if He does. You will want more of Him. Sunday mornings will not be enough. Your thoughts will begin to go to Him throughout the day. You will be more interested in prayer so you can talk to Him, more interested in Bible study so you can know Him and see what He and the Father and Spirit have done in history. You will start to recognize that the world's pleasures don't have that much to offer in comparison. You will yearn for closeness to Him when you are busy and find joy when you find Him near.

Jesus wants your attention not so you can know facts and details about Him but so you know Him in a real and personal way. The question of salvation is not, "Do you know Jesus," but "Does Jesus know you?" Scripture reminds us consistently that believing in Jesus is not a mental accepting of facts but trusting Him and knowing Him enough to act in ways that please Him and display His ways.

It's kind of like this...when I was in high school and college, there were teachers and professors I liked, and some I didn't much care for. But then there were a couple that were passionate about their subject and made it come alive, who were dynamic and interesting enough that I became interested in them and not just the material they taught. They were teachers I would be honored to call friends.

Jesus is so far above them it isn't funny, but the same truth is in play. Jesus teaches us so much about God, is so in love with His Father, so loving and urgent and truthful and even harsh when He must be but so caring, that you cannot truly love His teaching without loving Him. You want a relationship with Him because He embodies all the things that you want to become. You want Him to know you because He is all goodness personified. Knowing about Him isn't good enough. He has your attention so thoroughly that you want a part of Him in your life every day.

The good news for us is this: He's still alive! Good Friday and the cross are still to come, but then Easter and the resurrection lie just ahead. May we all turn our attention to our living Savior, who loves us, who is in relationship with us. May we give our lives over to Him and enjoy His peace and presence both now and always.