

# Victory Parade - on a Donkey?

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Palm Sunday; Victory; An Enemy / John 12:12-19

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## Victory Parade

Perhaps you've seen the old movie clips about the welcome home those in the military received at the end of World War II or perhaps you saw it in person. You see people lining the route. Flags are all around. The guests of honor rode in the best cars in town. People came from all around. Applause and shouts of thanksgiving could be heard as the line of cars drove by. Paper and streamers swirled in the wind. You also see this type of setting when a sports team comes home from winning a championship. If you had no idea what was going on but saw this type of parade, you would immediately know that it was some sort of victory parade.

Things haven't changed much. Go back to biblical days. When a king conquered another nation or general captured a city, he returned to a celebration. Since paper wasn't available, many waved Palm Branches, a symbol of victory. People would come out of the city to welcome home the victors. Shouts and cheers would go up around the city. The king would rise triumphant on a mighty steed, a horse that stood tall and pranced around in pride. One look at this ancient celebration and you knew immediately that it was a victory parade.

## Jerusalem

Jesus rides into Jerusalem to begin the last week of His life. People are following Him into the city. Jerusalem is packed with people who have come to celebrate the religious festival called the Passover. Many of those in the city come out to join the crowds that are already showering Jesus with praise. Palm branches are being waved in victory. People are chanting "Hosanna." They are shouting out that Jesus is king of Israel. One look at this celebration and you know it's a victory parade.

## Donkey style

Except Jesus is on a donkey. He's not in a fancy chariot. He's not on a steed that stands tall and prances around in pride. He's on a little donkey. A donkey that is young and hasn't been ridden before. It's not been in a war. It's not impressive. It's a donkey. Perhaps this is the donkey's story...

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And yet, the donkey is the key to what Jesus' victory was all about. Verse 16 says the disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered. It seems the disciples weren't paying attention to the donkey during the victory parade. If they had, they might have understood just what kind of victory Jesus would bring. The same is true for us. We know about palms, the people shouting, but our eyes need to focus on the donkey. Because the donkey points out the enemies Jesus came to defeat.

## Enemies of Jesus

Who were the enemies of Jesus? Well, the people back then thought it was the Romans who had conquered Israel and had soldiers all over the place. They were hoping Jesus would bring Israel back its glory days of King David. They were hoping they would be free and secure, protected from anybody oppressing them again. And it was true that the Romans could be considered Jesus' enemy since they nailed him to the cross.

But the list of enemies only begins here with the Romans. A greater enemy is his own people, the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Chief Priests. Just a few days before this victory parade, Jesus did an incredible miracle. His friend Lazarus had died. He had been in the tomb four days. Jesus comes and with a simple command, "Lazarus, come out," Jesus brought his friend back to life. No wonder so many people were following Jesus into Jerusalem and coming out to meet him on the street.

But behind the scenes, the religious leaders were not happy. They gathered together in a council. The heart of the discussion was this: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." During the victory parade, they accused each other:

**English Standard Version Chapter 12**

"You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Wouldn't it be nice if the enemies of Jesus today, would still be saying, "The world has gone after him." Because the world certainly has not gone after him...they are running far from him.

They even planned to kill Lazarus. The next step by these enemies was to get Judas to betray Jesus. Then they would arrest him, falsely accuse him, and condemn him to death. They would get the crowds to yell, "Crucify him, crucify him," instead of "Hosanna!" They would get the Romans to execute him. Jesus' enemies are some of his own people.

But we still haven't gone far enough. Jesus' enemies aren't just his own people. An even greater enemy is driving the Pharisees and priests to do what they are doing.

- Jealousy - the people are following Jesus instead of them.

- Fear - they may lose their privileged position that gives them power.
- Hatred - Jesus is telling them they need to change their lives and follow him.
- Greed - Jesus attacks their money-making schemes in the temple.
- Anger - They are upset that Jesus is letting the people worship him instead of God alone.

Now that brings all this closer to home, doesn't it? Anger, greed, hatred, fear, jealousy come from deep within all us. We call it sin, and we know it is as the dark places in our hearts and minds. We see it in the world around us, and we can't stop from being infected ourselves. A whole demonic world, led by Satan, tempts everyone to give in to these ugly enemies of Jesus.

But we still haven't gone far enough. One more enemy to name. It's the last and greatest enemy. There was a cartoon in a newspaper years ago playing off of the GPS technology that was coming out. Back then it was the helpful device used when you were driving, now its on your smartphones and in your vehicles - that gives you directions to a location by telling you when to turn, using a map on a small screen. In the cartoon, a box reads, "The Inevitable Navigation System." The picture is of a cemetery, with a number of headstones and one grave, freshly dug. A car has driven into that open grave. The voice coming from the car is the GPS saying, "You have arrived at your destination." The comic strip uses humor to open our eyes to reality. The last great enemy we face is death itself, the punishment for jealousy, fear, hatred, greed, anger, and everything else that put Jesus on the donkey.

## Real Enemies

Do you see who the real enemies are? Not just some Roman thugs or a few religious elites back then. Jesus is going up against the very enemies that haunt us. He is going to battle against the dark places in our hearts and minds. He is taking on our worst enemies:

- Sin - the wickedness that infests this world that we live in.
- Satan - himself
- And against the greatest enemy - death and the grave.

And how does Jesus go into battle against these enemies? ON a donkey. Sounds strange, especially since the donkey was an animal of peace, not war. It was an animal that conveyed humility and gentleness, not violence and bloodshed.

But a war was going on, and Jesus would ride right into the wrost what his enemies, our enemies, would do to him. He would not resort to violence, but the Romans beat him up. He was manhandled and whipped to within an inch of his life. And blood was shed. Not the blood of the Roman thugs nor the of the Religious elitists, nor of those who cried "Crucify him, Crucify him.". IT was the blood of JESUS. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, humble and gentle,

seeking to bring peace. Indeed, he was the prince of peace. And his enemies, our enemies, attack him.

## Donkey Legend

Several years ago, I received a donkey ornament at Christmas time and there's a legend that goes along with it.

"Legend tells us that the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday followed him to Calvary. Appalled by the sight of Jesus on the cross, the donkey turned away but would not leave. It is said that the shadow of the cross fell upon the shoulders and back of the donkey. A cross marking found on many donkey's today remains a testimony of the love and devotion of a humble little donkey."

Actually, The cross marking on the donkey, I would say, reminds us of the love and devotion of Jesus. He rode into Jerusalem for one purpose, and that was to make the victory parade come true. He was riding into Jerusalem to become our Prince of Peace. He was riding on a donkey to show how He would defeat his enemies - our enemies.

## Victory

So how did Jesus gain victory? He let those enemies do their worst to him. He did not stop the violence done to him. He willingly went to the cross. All our jealousy, fear, hatred, anger, sin, evil, and death surrounded him. And when the darkness covered the earth, it looked like those enemies had won. It looked like Jesus had been defeated. He was beaten, bloodied, and buried. Satan and all the powers of evil had to be cheering. They thought they had won.

But we know better. We know what happened next. As Paul Harvey says, "we know the rest of the story." We know of a morning that shattered the darkest places of sin and evil. We know of a stone that was rolled away and all of the jealousy, fear, hatred, anger, and greed that had overcome by the Prince of Peace. We know of a Savior who rises from the dead to defeat death once and for all.

And then the disciples understood. Jesus' victory was bigger than pushing back a few soldiers or greedy, threatened religious elites. His victory was over everything sin and death could do to us. And it came by riding on a donkey. It came by way of a cross. It came because of his victorious resurrection from the dead.

## Victory Parade

And the victory parade has been going on ever since. Every hymn of praise we sing is added to the sounds of the parade. Every prayer we say raises the volume of the celebration. Every day we follow Jesus in faith and obedience, we're joining the crowds who followed Jesus that first

Palm Sunday. Every act of devotion and love for Jesus is like the palms being waved once again. Today, in this service, and everyday, in our lives of love and devotion, we join in a victory parade that takes us to an eternity with Jesus.

You see the cartoon was wrong, the inevitable navigation system will lead us to that enemy called death, but it is not our destination. The final destination is an eternal victory parade on this earth, celebrating with all the saints the victory that Jesus won for us when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, defeated the enemies by the cross, and the empty tomb days later. This victory parade is a victory of sin, death, and the devil. It's a victory parade celebrating the eternal victory won by Jesus!

In Jesus Name. Amen.