

**Messiah Stuff**  
**A Message for Palm Sunday**  
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**Introduction**

When I was young, we had some friends called the Wilsons. In many ways, a typical middle-class American family. The Wilsons' oldest son was named Bobby. Bobby was one of those young people who was expected to succeed at life. Bobby did very well academically, placing in the top 10 percent of his class. Mr. Wilson, Bobby's father had a good job, so they were able to send Bobby to a good college.

Then came the wait. You send your son off to a good school and you expect to hear good things, right? You expect to hear that maybe he's doing well in sports. Or he's made the honor roll or received some other kind of award.

Well, that wasn't what happened. One night, the Wilson's received a horrible shock. They got word that their son had a run-in with the law.

The run-in involved drugs. And Bobby was not just using drugs. He wasn't found with a small amount of drugs in his possession - He was accused of dealing drugs. Bobby, the boy that was sent off with high expectations, the boy that his family thought would make them proud, instead, made them ashamed. Instead of becoming a success, he had become a criminal.

Have you ever been disappointed by someone? Have you ever placed high hopes in someone, only to find out that you made a big mistake? Sadly, most people have been in that situation.

It may have involved someone they knew personally. It may have been a famous person who let a lot of people down.

Today, we're going to meet some people who were very disappointed. But, this story has a twist. This message is being given on Palm Sunday.



On this day we remember the day that Jesus Christ entered the city of Jerusalem - The capital city of ancient Israel. That event is sometimes called the "triumphal entry." On that day, Jesus became the featured member of a parade. He was heralded as a hero – a great savior. Then, a

few days later he was led off by the authorities and charged with crimes - Crimes so serious, he was sentenced to death. Only a few hours later, Jesus had been executed and buried.

As I said, this story has a twist. We all know the ending of the story. Jesus Christ rises from the dead. We celebrate that next week at Easter. But you know something? The people who were alive at the time didn't know the ending. Because of that, many of them were fantastically disappointed. Let's walk through the story with them and see if we can understand how they might have felt as they saw events in the life of Jesus unfold.

The story of Jesus takes place, as many of you know, during the time of the Roman empire. The Emperor at the time of Jesus' birth was Caesar Augustus. During those days, if you were a Roman citizen, life was good. You had beautiful buildings, the arts, literature, and wealth.

One problem: The Romans built their empire by invading and conquering surrounding nations. - Israel was one of those unfortunate places. If you were one of the vanquished nations, such as Israel, you saw another side of the Romans. The Romans were good at invading, breaking things, oppressing people, and taking money through heavy taxation.

But there was hope! The ancient Hebrew prophets said that one day, someone would come to save everyone. God was sending the promised Messiah. The Jewish people waited patiently for him. They waited for centuries - a long, long time. Along the way, there were lots of people who claimed to be the Messiah - But they all turned out to be phonies. They were disappointments. When would the real Messiah come?

Then, one day, we get the Christmas story. A young girl named Mary talks with an angel who tells her she's going to have a child while she's still a virgin. He is going to be the promised Messiah. To back up the story, her husband Joseph gets a visit from an angel, too. When the baby is born, there are more angels. And there are powerful foreign dignitaries, the "wise men", coming with expensive and rare gifts.

So, both of these people, Joseph and Mary, believe that their son, Jesus, is the Messiah. But before they know it, they have to flee to Egypt. They are warned that Herod the king is out to get them. They arrive safely in Egypt. But here's something important: All the other witnesses disappear. The angels leave and go back to heaven. The shepherds go back to their flocks. The wise men have to flee, too. They go in the opposite direction back to their home far away in the east. The only two people who are sure Jesus is the Messiah are his earthly parents, Joseph and Mary. They're living alone in exile in Egypt.

Eventually, Joseph and Mary find they can return to Israel. They head up to Nazareth in Galilee. Joseph sets up a carpenter shop and begins to train his son Jesus.

Years pass. The next time we hear about Jesus, he's 30 years old. Now, understand something: People who lived in the days of Jesus expected things from the Messiah. Let's call those things, "Messiah stuff." The Messiah was supposed to show the power of God. He was supposed to kick out all oppressors and invaders. He was going to make Israel into a glorious kingdom. However, up to this point, with Jesus, there was no "Messiah stuff."

Imagine some things. Imagine you're one of the shepherds who lived in the fields near the place Jesus was born. You saw angels telling you the Messiah came. You rejoiced. You went and saw a baby in a stable. You told everyone.

Then, you went home. And you waited. 30 Years have gone by. Nothing has happened. No "Messiah Stuff". Would it be tempting for those shepherds to be disappointed?

Imagine you're one of the wise men. You followed the star hundreds of miles across the desert. You found a baby in a stable. You bowed down and worshipped the baby. You left expensive gifts - Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. You almost created an international incident with the King of Israel along the way. You're warned in a dream that Herod is angry, so you run all the way back to your home in the east.

Then you wait. Thirty years have gone by. Nothing has happened. No "Messiah Stuff". Would it be tempting for the wise men to be disappointed?

Imagine you're Joseph and Mary. You spoke with the angel years back. You saw the shepherds and the angels and the wise men. Then, you had to uproot everything and flee to Egypt.

Eventually, you came home. Years have gone by. You've been shooing away people who drop hints that you weren't married when Jesus was conceived. Your son, Jesus, was a good kid. He didn't into any trouble. He grew into a respectable young man. On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be much unusual about him - No "Messiah Stuff." Lightning bolts don't shoot out of his head. Would it be tempting for even Joseph and Mary to be disappointed?

Things get worse. At some point, we stop hearing about Joseph. Most scholars believe he died somewhere along the way. Mary is all alone in her belief that her son was the Messiah. Previously, there were two people who witnessed everything about the birth of Jesus. Now, there's only one.

Mind you, Jesus is a faithful son. He takes over the family business and takes care of everyone. Again, though, at this point, there's nothing terribly unusual. No "Messiah Stuff." If you were Mary, would it be tempting to be disappointed?

Then, one day, it comes. Jesus turns 30. He announces that it's time for him to begin. He hands the business over to other family members. He makes sure his mother is taken care of.

What does he do? Does he do “Messiah stuff”? Does he call on angels to kick out the Romans? Does he call fire from the sky?

No. He disappears. He goes to hang around with his cousin John out in the wilderness by the Jordan river. Then he disappears again into the mountains near the dead sea. 40 days. It’s been a long time, and no “Messiah stuff.” Would it be tempting to be disappointed?

Then Jesus reappears. Does he have something to show for all this time? Has he been calling upon world leaders to tell them it’s time to get in line to follow him? No. Did he call the wise men back? No. He shows up with some fishermen from the sea of Galilee.

Here’s what he said to those fishermen.

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20)

A few minutes later, Jesus does the same with two other fishermen, James and John. These men leave everything they have to follow Jesus. Let’s listen in on a conversation that Jesus has with Peter that occurred later:

27 Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” 28 Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:27-29)

These men have left everything to follow Jesus. Because they did this, Jesus made some big, big promises to them. He said they would rule with him in his kingdom someday.

As it turns out, **these** men **do** get to see “Messiah Stuff.” First, they see Jesus act with great authority. At the end of the “Sermon on the Mount”, Mathew says this:

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28-29)

So, Jesus is teaching with authority. Authority - That's a good start. That's "Messiah Stuff."

It only took a few minutes for those who followed Jesus to see more.

1 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:1-3)

Wow! Jesus just finishes his sermon on the mount. He comes down the mountainside. And he's met by a man with leprosy - A dreaded disease. All Jesus has to do is say the word, and the man is healed. This is power. This is "Messiah Stuff." Jesus does this many times over - and, he does it in front of large crowds. If you follow Jesus around, this is common. That's more "Messiah Stuff."

It gets better. Jesus and his followers need to cross the sea of Galilee, so they get tickets for a boat ride.

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matthew 8:23-27)

"Amazed" is probably an understatement. The followers of Jesus have just seen an act of power rarely seen by humans. They ask, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" That's "Messiah Stuff."

The disciples are treated to almost daily shows of supernatural power from God. They get all the "Messiah Stuff" anyone could want. When the apostle John closed his book, the Gospel According to John, he wrote this about all the amazing things he saw: "If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (John 21:25)"

This is all great. But these men also get some warnings - Warnings that things would not go as everyone might expect.

John the Baptist got the first warning.

3 Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, 4 for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet. 6 On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much 7 that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10 and had John beheaded in the prison. (Matthew 14:3-9)

The story of John the Baptist is an important collection of events that parallel the life of Jesus. John was a great prophet. He performed the baptism of Jesus, where God the Father spoke, and the Holy Spirit came down as a dove. He was said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit of God before he was born. He led a life of complete obedience to God. That involved warning King Herod that he had done something unlawful in stealing the wife of his brother.

What was the result of all this? Prison and eventual execution. John lived his whole life in obedience to God and saw almost no "Messiah Stuff". Would it be tempting to be disappointed if you had lived your whole life in obedience to God and found yourself locked behind an iron door? Would it be tempting to be disappointed if you were one of John's followers and this is how your leader ended up?

Then comes the day for Jesus to enter Jerusalem. How does he do it? Does he come in like a Messiah, on a white horse? Or better yet, does he arrive riding a gleaming chariot? Is he surrounded by soldiers wearing armor and holding weapons? Better yet – is he surrounded by angels?

No. Jesus rides in on a donkey. Shouldn't the Messiah have a better ride than that? And forget the soldier, much less angels - He's surrounded by unarmed, common people. Isn't he supposed to lead an army?

But, that was OK with everyone. They still threw a parade for Jesus.

8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,  
"Hosanna to the Son of David!"  
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
"Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Matthew 21:8-9)

The word “Hosanna” means, “Save us! Please save us!” Those crowds put high hopes on Jesus. They thought he was going to save them from the Romans.

Over the next few days, Jesus acts like a Messiah should. He drives the money changers out of the temple. That’s Messiah stuff. He debates corrupt leaders and wins every single time. That’s Messiah stuff.

Again, though, you all know the story. As we said earlier, in a short time, Jesus is arrested. He is tried. He is convicted.

Jesus is taken before the political leaders. One of them is King Herod. Here’s how that goes:

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. (Luke 23:8-9)

Herod was ready to see Jesus. He waited for a long time. He’s looking for some party tricks. Maybe Jesus can turn some water into wine for Herod’s next party? He wants to see some “Messiah Stuff.” But no. Herod is not treated to any Messiah stuff.

Finally, Jesus is nailed to a cross. Even there, he’s expected to put on a show.

39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. (Matthew 27:39-42)

Everyone in the crowd, passers-by, political and religious leaders, even the criminals being executed all say the same thing: “Hey Jesus, where’s the ‘Messiah Stuff’?” But they see nothing. Nothing except the death of Jesus.

Then Jesus is taken away. The government is so afraid that something could go wrong that they seal the tomb and post guards. No one is getting in there. And certainly, no one is getting out - Or so everyone thinks.

On that day, there were lots of people who were very disappointed in Jesus. Some expressed that disappointment in anger - They stood at the foot of the cross, hurling insults. Some expressed that disappointment in tears. Some expressed it by going into hiding. But it seems, everyone was disappointed. If nothing else, the Messiah was supposed to win, not die.

Why were all those people disappointed? Here's why: They didn't understand what the Messiah was supposed to do. They failed to understand a very important principle:

***Only the Messiah decides what "Messiah Stuff" is.***

What was the Messiah supposed to do? Let's read what Isaiah said about the Messiah:

Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.  
3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.  
4 Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53:1-6)

The people of ancient Israel wanted a conqueror to kick out the Romans and lead them into a glorious life. But that's not what they needed. They needed a humble man ready to die for their sins. They needed a faithful man who was willing to do this even if no one understood. Fortunately for the world, when the Messiah came, the world got not what it wanted, but what it needed.

What does this mean for us today?



## Application

I've run into lots of people in my life who are disappointed with God. Some of them fall away from the faith. They become atheists. Or, they pick another religion like Buddhism or whatever. Others lead what writer Henry David Thoreau called, "Lives of quiet desperation". They come to church, but they're disappointed.

Many of them have disappointments that are very understandable. Maybe someone they cared about was taken from them? Maybe in a tragic accident or an untimely illness? Some, perhaps, wanted to be something in life, but they never made it. Some desperately want to be loved and appreciated by someone - And it never happened. All these people essentially say the same thing: "Where is the 'Messiah Stuff'? When does the Messiah come with power - Power to save me from all the pain of this world?"

Here is the reason Palm Sunday is such an important day. It's important because we know the ending. The Messiah did come. There were lots of people with legitimate concerns when Jesus lived. But, because he was God visiting the face of the earth, he knew that they needed something far more than anything they could imagine. They needed to be saved from their sins. From there, they needed to meet their God and begin on the wonderful plan that God had for them. The cross enabled people to be saved from their sins. The empty tomb enables people to begin the journey of restoration - The journey where we meet our God and follow him in the plan that he has for us.

It's the same today. Are you disappointed with God? Maybe you have a legitimate source for your disappointment. But let me encourage you to think about something - Maybe your disappointment could be addressed? For that to happen, you need to let God be God. You need to let the Messiah decide what "Messiah Stuff" is.

If you do that, I can't promise what will happen right away. You may be like the apostles. You might see "Messiah Stuff". You might see miracles and healings and power. Or, you might be like John the Baptist. You may be called upon to lead a life of faithfulness that isn't rewarded in this life. Either way, if you will let God be God, if you will let the Messiah decide what "Messiah Stuff" is, I can tell you this: You will enjoy the promise that Jesus made to his followers almost 2,000 years ago.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:27-29)

If you have never received Jesus as your Savior, contact us. Some links follow this article. We can tell you how you can set yourself on the road to eternal life. If you're disappointed and you want to learn more, again, contact us. We want you to experience the joy of the Resurrection. And whatever you do, come back next week when we celebrate the empty tomb. Come back when we celebrate victory over the grave. Come back and celebrate Easter with us.

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## Important Links

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Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ:

[TrinityTeaneck.org](http://TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil Brainerd's web site:

[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn about how to start a new life with Jesus, with Billy Graham's helpful site:

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)

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