

## Easter Shows Us That God Is In Control - Palm Sunday

By Phil Brainerd

### Introduction

Have you ever felt like the world is out of control? Lots of people go through periods where they feel that way. If your own experience wasn't enough, we had the last few years. There was the COVID pandemic of 2020, followed by the lockdowns of 2021. A few weeks ago, we celebrated the two-year anniversary of the fifteen-day lockdown. Here we are in 2022, and we have wars breaking out all over the world. We're hearing warnings that some of those wars could grow into World War III.



Yes, the world feels like it's out of control. But, you know what? God is in control. You know how I know that? There are lots of reason, but here's a big one: Easter! That's right – Easter is one of the reasons we know that God is in control. This is not to say that God approves of everything that is going on in the world. However, Easter shows us that in the end, God is victorious.

This is the first article of a three-part series: *Easter Shows Us That God is In Control*. In our first article, we're going to see how Palm Sunday fits into this.

Let's begin.

### The Story

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" 4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. (Mark 11:1-6)

## Bible Prophecy

What's happening here? Jesus is setting the stage for something very important: Bible prophecy. Our regular readers know how it works, but let's review for our newer people.

All through time, there have been people who have claimed to speak for God. Sometimes they're for real. Sometimes, they're fake. How can you know the difference? When Moses gave the law more than 3000 years ago, he told people how to know the difference.

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death." (Deuteronomy 18:20)

First off, if someone claims they represent God, and it turns out that they don't: Death penalty! In those days, being a false prophet was risky business. So, claiming to speak for God is serious.

With that in mind, how do we know whether a prophet speaks for God or not?

21 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" 22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously... (vs 21-22)

So, if someone speaks for God, God will give them the ability to predict what will happen in the future. If what they say comes true, then that is evidence that you're dealing with a real prophet. There are more requirements, but this is a start. However, the prophet must be 100 percent correct - No mistakes. If they say one thing that does not come true, they're not speaking for God. One mistake, as we said, equals a death penalty.

A great example of this was Moses himself. Moses went to the Pharaoh of Egypt and said, "Tomorrow, the Nile will turn into blood." The next day, the Nile did just that. Then, God allowed Moses to follow up with other predictions. There would be plagues: Hail and locusts destroying the crops. Darkness so thick you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Eventually, the firstborn of all Egypt died. Then, Pharaoh allowed the children of Israel to be free.

Why is this important? Because it shows us that God is in control. In order to predict something and have it come true 100 percent of the time, God must control all the events between the prediction and the actual events. God can do that because he is infinitely powerful and all-knowing. God controls whether a mighty river like the Nile brings health or stench. God controls whether the fields produce crops or insects and storms destroy the labor of the farmers. God controls whether the sun shines or not. God controls whether people live or die. And here's something important: ***He controls all these things on his schedule. And he can choose to share what he's about to do with anyone he pleases.***

So, a true prophet is someone who is in touch with God.

## **Near/Far**

Add to this the following important principle: A prophet who accurately shares what God is doing develops a kind of track record. When they accurately predict things that are soon to pass, God may use them to write things about the distant future. The further out a prediction is, the more it shows us how powerful God is - How much he is in control. It's one thing to make a prediction and have it come true sometime soon. It's another to make predictions and have them come true centuries later.

## **Messianic Prophecy**

That's what happened for a special kind of prophesy: Messianic prophecy. The Bible contains hundreds of times that ancient Hebrew prophets predicted a great King, called the Messiah. Those prophecies are all fulfilled in man named Jesus.

During this Easter season, we're going to talk about the prophecies that refer Jesus in his final days leading up to his crucifixion.

## **A Donkey(?)**

As we said, today we're looking at Palm Sunday. A moment ago, we read a story about a donkey. Let's see how a donkey fits into Bible prophecy.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. (Mark 11:1-2)

Jesus and his followers have been all over ancient Israel in the days leading up to this. Now, they're coming to Jerusalem. At different times, Jerusalem would be the site of big celebrations, just like any major city. At that time, people were preparing to celebrate Passover. This was a big event. There were going to be big crowds.

Jesus tells two of his disciples that they are to go into a village. There, they would find a colt. Now, all by itself, there is nothing unusual about this. Let's say I tell you, "Walk over to the park. There, you will see some trees." Well, trees are all over the place. No big deal. And in ancient Israel, there were animals of all kinds all over the place. So, finding a donkey was nothing special.

This animal though, was different - No one had ever ridden it before. That's unusual. That's special. That makes the animal valuable. Why? Because It's brand new. It's like walking into a car dealership and seeing a brand-new car that was never driven. Used cars are expensive, but brand-new cars more so. That's make it very odd for Jesus to tells the disciples, "When you see it, untie it and bring it here."

Give this a try: Go to a new car dealership. Walk up to a car, get in, start it up, and drive off. What's going to happen? Well, let's see what happened here. Jesus says to these men, "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" (Mark 11:3)

I think it would be understandable for the owners to ask what's going on. In fact, I think it would be understandable for the owners to be very upset. So, Jesus tells his followers how they will answer. Understand, he's not telling them to go and steal a donkey - He says, "Tell them the Lord needs it, and he'll make sure it comes back."

So, again, imagine you're on the dealership lot. You're in the car getting ready to drive away. The salespeople are understandably upset. They've got their phones in their hands and they're ready to call the police. So, you tell them, "You don't understand, See, Jesus needs this car. And he only needs it for a little while. We'll bring it right back, OK?"

On a normal day, is that going to work? Well, this was not a normal day. We see that the men did as they were told, and they found the donkey, just like Jesus said. What happened next?

As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. (Mark 11:4(b)-6)

Sometimes, when we read the Bible in public, we miss the drama of the stories we read. You might hear someone read this passage in a monotone. Again, these people may have been a little more emotional. I think you'd normally hear something like: "WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING...?"

So, the men tell the owners what Jesus said. Guess what? Everything's OK now. The owners answer, "Oh, Jesus wants it. Then go right ahead."

So, we don't just see a nice story here. We see an example of prophecy. Jesus made a prediction - A very unusual prediction. And it came true, just as he said. Remember the near/far principle. Jesus has just made a short term prediction that came true. This allows him to make predictions about the distant future.

## Who Jesus Is

We said a moment ago that a true prophet is in touch with God. God tells the prophet what he is going to do in the future. We believe something very special about Jesus: ***Jesus was God visiting the face of the earth.*** So, this was not the only time Jesus made a prediction and it came true. On any given day, his followers were treated to numerous miracles. A leper asks to be healed. Jesus does it. Right away. He doesn't say, "let me ask God." Jesus does it himself. A handicapped man wants to walk. Jesus heals him – right away. A blind man wants to see. Jesus does it. In fact, the donkey story, thought special, wasn't a big deal for Jesus. That's probably why his disciples had no trouble doing what Jesus told them.

## What the Donkey Means

Now, this is very nice, but why was Jesus asking for a donkey? He did this to set up a much larger prophecy. He was fulfilling a prediction made by the prophet Zechariah. Let's read it:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
(Zechariah 9:9)

The prophet Zechariah lived around 500 years before the time of Christ. He made a very interesting prediction about this individual called the Messiah. Most people would expect a king to have an expensive ride. In those days, that meant a beautiful chariot. Maybe with gold trimmings. And pulled by a beautiful purebred stallion. And a great king will be accompanied by armies - Soldiers in armor with weapons.

But according to Zechariah, this king was going to be different. He will be victorious, but it will not be because of armies. It will be because of righteousness. He will not come on a chariot pulled by a stallion. He will ride on a donkey, a "lowly" animal - A beast of burden. This king will be one of us. He will walk among the common people.

He is not surrounded by soldiers, but by normal people. He will rule, not by forcing everyone to their knees at the point of a spear, but with kindness. He comes, not to demand obedience, but to serve others.

## Character Matters With God

Why is this important? It's important because: God is in control. If God is in control, it matters what God is like. The character of God matters.

What if God is in control, but he's bad? What if he's mean? What if he's just some kind of thug that enjoys hurting people? What if he's uncaring? That would be scary! Being in control would mean that God could treat people in vicious and mean-spirited ways - And no one could do anything about it.

That's why God had to communicate to the whole world that he's not any of those things. He is kind. He is loving. He is humble, willing to ride on a donkey instead of a chariot. This is how Jesus entered Jerusalem during one of the busiest holidays of the year.

## The Triumphal Entry

Let's read more about the story.

7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.  
8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" 10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:7-10)

This is called the "Triumphal Entry" of Jesus. Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the Great King. And lots of people in Jerusalem knew it. How did they know? They recognized Jesus because they understood their history.

In America, when you send a child to school, hopefully they learn about American history. At least we hope – that's a message for another day. Children should learn about people like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. That's true for every country. And it was true for ancient Israel.

For example, the people in Israel in that day knew about an ancient king named Jehu. His story is found in the book of II Kings. We won't go there. For now, let me summarize: The land of Israel was ruled at the time by evil kings. One of the evil kings died from a wound in battle. The prophet Elisha knew that there was a man who was the legitimate heir to the throne: Jehu. Elisha knew that he would be a good king who could be trusted to wipe out the evil kings. So, he had Jehu appointed as King.

When the people found out that a good king was coming – A king who would bring righteousness, here's what they did:

13 They quickly took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps.  
Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!" (II Kings 9:13)

In those days, when a righteous king was coming, people would throw their cloaks on the way in front of him. That's why good people threw their cloaks on the way in front of Jesus. He was a good King who, they thought, would wipe out evil. Why did they waive palm branches? Waiving palm branches was thought to be a sign of victory. So, people believed Jesus was a victorious king.

And, it's nice when a king is victorious, but you want him include you in the victory, right? That's why people cried out, "Hosanna". That's a word that means, "Save us! Save us, now!"

After that, the people were calling out things they heard in the temple when they worshipped. When people worshipped, they sang songs that we find today in the book of Psalms. Here is one of the things that they sang:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
From the house of the Lord we bless you.  
(Psalm 118:26)

So, we can see how the people of Israel were drawing from their whole cultural experience to recognize Jesus as the great King.

OK. It's great to understand what was going on. However, we live on a broken world. We've said that God is in control, but why does it sometimes feel otherwise?

We're in Easter season. Today, we're looking at Palm Sunday, when we remember the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. If Jesus had become the king of Israel, we could easily stop here and say that God is in control. Jesus did things that had been predicted centuries before. Things that signaled that he was the great king. Things that signaled that he would be a good and righteous king - A king that loves and serves his people.

But that's not the end of the story. Most people know that there were other events.

### **A Change in the Plot**

In only a few days, Jesus was arrested. He was taken before the authorities and subjected to a sham trial. He was then executed with one of the most hideous forms of execution ever created by humankind: Crucifixion.

How could that happen? How could that happen if God is in control? At the time, it certainly didn't look that way.

But again, God is in control. Here's something we need to understand about God: He is way above us in every way - In knowledge, in intelligence, in wisdom. Here's something the prophet Isaiah said:

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the Lord.  
9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts."  
(Isaiah 55:8-9)

Yes, God is in control, but he doesn't always do things the way we would expect. The people of Israel wanted a conquering king. They wanted a king who would take away all injustice right away. But God knew that they needed something more.

### **A Problem**

We humans need to understand something. We need to understand why our world works the way it does. We need to understand why there is injustice and pain and oppression and sickness and death. **Those things are all here because of sin.** We live in a broken world. But the world did not break by itself. **We broke it.**

Here's one of the problems of sin: We're all guilty.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

So, before the world can be fixed, God needs to deal with sin. We don't need a conquering king to take away evil. The problem with that is, we're all guilty of sin. For God to take away all evil, he'd have to take away us!

So instead of sending a conquering king, God sent a suffering king - A servant king. A king who was willing to die on a cross to pay for the sins of the world.

24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray"... (1 Peter 2:24-25)

There were thousands of people in Jerusalem to view the triumphal entry. They must have been very disappointed to see Jesus arrested and executed. It must have felt like God was not

in control. But far from out of control, the cross shows us that God was perfectly in control. *The cross was the way that Jesus could pay for our sins.*

And you know what? That was predicted, too. On the Good Friday article, we'll talk about that. Watch for it!

And of course, if Jesus died and was left in the grave, that might show that God was not in control. But Jesus was not left in the grave. He rose again. He was victorious over death.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

So, God is in control, and he shows us that at Easter.

How should we respond? First, read rest of our series so you can learn more about God and how he shows us his power through the events of Easter. Read about Good Friday. And of course, read about Easter.

In the meantime, if this is the first time you've heard of all this, there's something you need to do - You need to make this real for yourself.

“Come now, let us settle the matter,”  
says the Lord.  
“Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool.  
(Isaiah 1:18)

Contact to us. There will be important information at the end of this article. Let us tell you how you can accept the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Let us tell you how you can know with full assurance that you will be victorious over death and the grave, just as Jesus was.

If you do that, you will join with all believers when there will be a new triumphal entry one day in the future. It's recorded in Revelation:

9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb.”  
(Revelation 7:9-10)

On that day, the whole world will see that God is very much in control - In control of the entire universe through all time.

No matter how bad things seem at the moment, God is in control. He has been in control in the past. He is in control right now. And he will always be in control, forever.

Praise be to our great God!

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Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:  
[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)