

# Tears On The Road To The Cross

## *The Meaning of the Cross*

Because the children are with us today, I want to tell a traditional story that I was told when I was a child. And I think people much older than me were told this story when they were children. Adults, although this is a children's story, it's for you too. Chicken Licken is walking through the forest one day, and as she was walking under a big oak tree, an acorn fell on her head. She thought that meant that the sky was falling, so she rushed off to tell the King. As she was going, she met Henny Penny. "Where are you going asked Henny Penny?" "The sky is falling said Chicken Licken. I'm off to tell the King" So Chicken Licken and Henny Penny ran off to tell the King that the sky was falling. On the way they met Cocky Lockey and Goosey Loosey. Chicken Licken convinced them that the sky was falling, and together they all hurried to tell the King. The last person they met was Foxy Loxy. When Foxy Loxy heard that the sky was falling, and that they were going to tell the King, he said "Come with me, and I'll show you the way to the King". They followed Foxy Loxy down into his fox hole, and none of them were ever seen again. Foxy Loxy had a very big dinner that night, and the King never got to hear that the sky was falling.

### **Wrong Interpretations – Fatal Consequences.**

A wrong interpretation of an event can lead to disaster, not only for us, but for those who believe the wrong interpretation. The invasion of Iraq was based on the understanding that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. A wrong interpretation that has had disastrous consequences.

Just before Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem 2000 years ago, something happened that was interpreted wrongly by most of those who were watching. That wrong interpretation had huge consequences for the people who were there at the time, and has consequences for us today. Here's what happened as Luke describes it in his Gospel. This is from Luke 19.

***"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." (Luke 19:28-40 NIV)***

### **What Jewish People Knew**

In the Jewish scriptures, the prophet Zechariah had spoken of a time when the Lord would become King over all the earth. He had spoken of how on that day, the King would stand on the Mount of Olives. Jewish people expected that Messiah would come riding down the mount of Olives on a donkey that had never been ridden. In Zechariah we read this: ***"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9 NIV).***

## **The Message Jesus Was Sending**

Like the crowds and the religious leaders, Jesus knew these scriptures well. He deliberately instructed his disciples to bring him a donkey that had never been ridden before. He allowed his disciples to throw their cloaks over this donkey, which is another thing that Kings did on occasions like this. Then he got on this donkey, and slowly rode down the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. Usually he walked everywhere. But not this time. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He was sending a message. He was doing exactly what the Jewish people expected the Messiah to do. He was making a very bold and dangerous statement that had huge consequences for him, for the disciples, for the religious leaders and for the hundreds and thousands of Jewish onlookers.

Jewish people had been waiting for this moment for more than 600 years. With the Romans occupying their nation, the hope for a political Messiah was building in intensity month by month. Word of Jesus healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, feeding the hungry and forgiving sins had spread everywhere. Very recently, not far from this spot, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, which convinced people he was Messiah. The whole city was buzzing with the fact that Jesus was coming. Jesus knew that for him to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey from the Mount of Olives was a very provocative act. He knew it would cause a reaction. And it did. The reactions were based on different ways people interpreted what was going on.

### **1. The Crowd.**

The people just went nuts. They stripped branches off the palm trees and laid them on the road. They took off their cloaks and laid them down in front of the donkey. This was giving Jesus the equivalent of the red carpet treatment. People began shouting Messianic shouts of "Hosanna!" and "Glory to God in the highest!" Ordinary Jewish people who had heard about what Jesus had said and done were so excited about what Jesus was doing, that they were over the moon. They had been waiting for more than 600 years for something like this, and as far as they were concerned, history was unfolding before their eyes. For them, this was huge. They really believed that Jesus could be the longed for Messiah. But their enthusiasm was based on a wrong interpretation of what was happening. They believed that Jesus would come and set up a political kingdom. They thought he would be a King who would kick out the occupying Roman army and establish a Jewish state. Their enthusiasm was genuine and their excitement was real. But it was based on a wrong premise. They saw Jesus as a conquering general who would lead the Jewish people in an uprising to establish a Jewish nation. It's interesting to note, that many of these same people who were so enthusiastically shouting for Jesus then, would be in another crowd a day or so later. They would be shouting. But it wouldn't be "Hosanna!" They would be shouting "Crucify Him!" In one sense their conclusion was right, that Jesus was Messiah, but their interpretation of the event was all wrong.

### **2. The Roman Authorities.**

We can be pretty sure the Roman authorities were watching this procession closely. Some years before Jesus a Jew named Theodus of Jordan had pulled the same stunt. Theodus had started a Jewish revolt against Roman authority. The Romans had cracked down hard on that uprising, and they sure didn't want it happening again. Theodus' revolt had been brutally put down, with 400 of Theodus' followers killed and the Theodus' head hung on the garrison wall. The Roman authorities interpreted this ride into Jerusalem as another potential challenge to Roman power.

### **3. The Jewish Leaders.**

The established power in Jewish religion were the Pharisees. They saw Jesus as a threat to the establishment. They had already been scheming for months to find ways to get rid of him. They saw this ride on a donkey as a challenge to their power too. For Jesus to send such a blatant signal that he was Messiah confirmed for them that he was dangerous, and they needed to get rid of him.

## Jesus In Tears

Now here's the surprising part of the story. The parade is making its way down the Mount of Olives before climbing up to the city of Jerusalem. The crowd is going nuts about the Messiah riding on a donkey. We would expect that this would be Jesus' finest hour. We would expect that Jesus would be smiling broadly, waving to the crowd, and punching the air with his fist. After all, at last they recognise him as Messiah.

But it's not like that. Jesus is weeping. He's sobbing. It's only the second time that the scriptures record Jesus in tears. Listen as I read it. ***"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." (Luke 19:41-44 NIV)***

## Why Did Jesus Weep?

Why was Jesus so upset? What was it that caused him to weep? It all came down to one thing. This was one of the most significant events in history, and they missed the point of it all. They were all interpreting it wrongly. They thought they understood what he was doing, but they missed it. They thought he was coming to set up a political kingdom. But for three years Jesus had been teaching them about a spiritual Kingdom, where God's rule would be established in the hearts of men and women. They wanted political deliverance from Rome. What he was offering was something far greater than that. He was offering them spiritual deliverance from sin. They wanted someone who would conquer Caesar. Jesus had come to conquer Satan. He had come to save these people from their sins and give them eternal peace with God. He was coming to deal with issues of guilt and forgiveness. But they weren't interested in issues like that. They just wanted someone who would deal with superficial things like putting food in their bellies, healing their bodies and kicking out the Romans. They were so focused on their magnificent city, with its beautiful temple. All they could see were the material things of this life. That's all they cared about. And Jesus wept, because he knew that this wrong interpretation of who he was, and wrong focus of their lives, would lead to their destruction.

What Jesus could see that they couldn't see, was that in AD70, the Roman Emperor Titus would surround Jerusalem, build siege towers up against its mighty walls, conquer it, and slaughter its inhabitants in their thousands. The historian Josephus tells us that blood flowed down from Jerusalem like rivers. The Romans flattened the city to such an extent that they boasted of pulling a plough behind an ox right through the middle of it.

## Will You Make Jesus Weep?

And Jesus wept. For in him was the opportunity for peace. And they missed it. They completely misinterpreted what he came to do, and they paid a terrible price. And so will we if we miss the significance of Jesus. If we get the coming of Jesus to us, and his death on the Cross for us – if we get that wrong – if we misinterpret that – the consequences for our lives, and the lives of our children for generations to come, will be tragic. Have you really understood who he is and what he came to do? If there is one person in all of history we can't afford to get wrong, it's Jesus. As Jesus looked out over that crowd, he wept. Is it conceivable he would look at you and say ***"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes"***. When Jesus looks at you, will he weep?

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