

Calling The Question

1. Warm-up question: On Sunday Jeff described a “Golden Girls” episode where President Bush Sr. stops by their house for a photo op. What’s something you’re enjoying watching on TV lately?
2. On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. When Jesus got on a donkey and rode into the city, he was deliberately enacting an Old Testament Messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you . . . humble and riding on a donkey. . . .” What happened as Jesus rode into Jerusalem is described in the Gospels. Read Luke 19:28-44 and Matthew 21:8, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. By the time we get to Luke 19, Jesus had been ministered among the people for three years, awakening hope, healing the sick, lifting up the brokenhearted, speaking of the Kingdom of God, and sharing his message. Now, he sensed it was time to call the question – to challenge people to decide whether they wanted to embrace his message and welcome him as their King. Suppose the majority of people had said yes to Jesus. Would Jesus have established the Kingdom of Heaven on earth then and there? Would that have forestalled or superseded the need for the cross and the resurrection? How would history have been different?
 - b. People’s reactions to Jesus on the first Palm Sunday can be divided into three categories that roughly track how people respond to Jesus today. The first category is **Religious Resisters**. Ironically, religious people were Jesus’ most vigorous opponents and the ones who ultimately framed him and delivered him into the hands of the Romans for execution. Does it surprise you the religious people led the opposition to Jesus? Why or why not? What is it about religious people – then and now – that makes it hard for them to embrace Jesus as he was?
 - c. Jeff said, “Jesus was spiritual, but not religious – and there’s a BIG difference. Spirituality is about becoming a beautiful spirit. Religion is about ritual observance and dogma.” What do you think Jeff meant? In your own words, how would you describe the difference between being spiritual versus religious?
 - d. Is there anything wrong with religious observance and dogma? Are these things helpful in building a beautiful spiritual life? Why or why not?
 - e. Jeff said, “It’s possible to be a very religiously observant person who embraces all kinds of religious doctrine, yet still have an ugly spirit.” He cited Vladimir Putin as a graphic example. Have you ever know someone who was deeply religious, yet had an ugly spirit? Tell us about them. What was the disconnect?
 - f. Was there ever a time in your life when religion got in the way of the growth and development of your spirit? Why? What happened?

- g. Jeff said, “Religious people are led by rules and human religious authority figures. Spiritual people are led by the Spirit of God within them. That’s why religious people find spiritual people threatening. Spiritual people can’t be controlled and often end up challenging religious norms. Jesus certainly did. Every time you turn around in the Gospels, you find Jesus challenging another religious norm and teaching his followers not to be afraid to do the same.” Examples of ways Jesus challenged religious norms include welcoming female disciples, honoring the Samaritans, criticizing aspects of the Mosaic Law, violating the rule about resting on the Sabbath, and violating the rule about shunning “sinners.” What are some ways spiritual people should be challenging religious norms in our culture today?
 - h. If Jesus were here today, do you think institutional Christianity would embrace or oppose him? Explain why.
3. The Religious Resisters of Jesus’ day were determined to kill him, but couldn’t do it alone. They needed the acquiescence of a second category of people who also appear in the Palm Sunday story, *i.e.*, the **Indifferent Masses**. The Gospels make clear that the number of people who actually welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday was probably less than 0.002% of the one million people estimated to be in Jerusalem at the time. That’s why Jesus wept at the end of the Palm Parade. Not enough people rallied to his side to launch the Kingdom of God then and there.
- a. Was there ever a time in your life when you were spiritually indifferent? If so, why? And what eventually awakened you from your indifference?
 - b. Even after our soul awakens, it’s still easy to get so caught up in all the distractions of life that we fail to focus on our spiritual life and the development of our spirit. What kinds of things are most apt to distract you from your spiritual life?
4. **Spiritually Aspirational People** are the third category we see in the Palm Sunday story. These are people who, at some point in life, say, “I’m not going to simply go along to get along. I’m going to be different. I’m going to separate myself from the masses. I feel my heart calling me to something better, something more beautiful than mere survival. I sense a dim echo in my soul that keeps saying, ‘Remember who you are and where you’re from.’ Your kingdom is not of this world. This world is not your ultimate home.” These are the kind of people who welcome Jesus as King. Their goal is not to be religious, but spiritual. Not to be robotic religious rule keepers, but to develop a beautiful spirit that is led by God’s Spirit. People who are determined to receive and share the love of God found in Christ Jesus.
- a. Suppose someone were to ask you, “Why is being a Category 3 person the best way to live?” Based on your own experience, what would you say?
 - b. None of us has yet arrived. We all still have growing edges. What feels like the next step for you in growing the beauty of your spirit?

Luke 19:28-44, selected verses, and Matthew 21:8

28 Jesus went ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a donkey colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here." 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road, 8 and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 37 And as he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop!" 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out!"

41 As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes . . . , 44 because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."