

The Rest of the Story

In your view, how reliable is the Bible? In other words, is everything in the Bible true or is it only true when it talks about spiritual things? These are pretty important questions because if the Bible contains errors, then how do you know what is true and what isn't?

Here at Valley, we affirm that it's all true. Our constitution states:

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error...

We don't believe this just because we want to, but because God says it. II Tim. 3:16:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...

What does this have to do with Palm Sunday? Well, all four gospel writers tell of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Sunday of the week before Passover. But only John tells of three groups of people who came looking for Jesus later that day. Each of these groups represented people with a different set of questions. I believe this is the 'Rest of the Story' of Palm Sunday and is part of the story that's especially relevant to peoples' questions today. The first group wanted to verify who Jesus was. They...

I. Had an Identity Question

Who were these people? Verse 20 says:

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. (John 12:20-21)

Philip is a Greek name and he might have spoken Greek. Maybe that's why these Greeks came to him. Whatever the reason, in verse 22 it says that Philip told Andrew and Andrew and Philip told Jesus. What's likely is that this took place in what is known as the Court of the Gentiles, which was an area surrounding the Temple proper. Gentiles couldn't go any farther in than that courtyard. It was in this area that Jesus often taught and it was here that He threw out the money-changers.

Jesus now gives an extended response as a crowd gathers around these Gentiles and Jesus. Think about this – the Jews had just been shouting, "*Blessed is the King of Israel*" and John then says:

Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." (John 12:14-15 quote of Zech. 9:9)

So, the King of Israel is giving a mini-sermon to Gentiles. John is the only one who records this encounter. Gentile rulers and soldiers will soon arrest Him, torture Him and put Him to death. But the King of Israel stops and reveals detailed truth about who He is and what is about to happen to Gentiles, with assorted Jews listening in. It would be like you coming in here to worship Jesus and out in the parking lot is a street preacher, but the street preacher is Jesus in disguise!

So, what does He say? Jesus shares a parable, a paradox and a promise. You know what parables and promises are but what's a paradox?

A paradox is a statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality is absolute truth.

So, let's examine them one by one. First, the parable. Jesus says:

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (John. 12:24)

What's His point? He's speaking of the spiritual impact of His death. He is the kernel of wheat. All those who believe in Him are the resulting seeds. Who is Jesus? He's the kernel of spiritual life that produces all other forms of human spiritual life.

Next, the paradox:

"The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12:25)

This seems absurd even, I think, to the disciples. But in reality, we know now that this is absolute truth. It describes perfectly what happens when anyone becomes a follower of Christ. We "lose" our life in this world's estimation but find it in eternity. Many people like Saint Francis of Assisi walked away from great wealth or, like Amy Carmichael, from a comfortable life to serve Jesus in a land of great discomfort, spending their lives building His kingdom rather than a kingdom of their own. People from their hometowns shook their heads and said, "They're throwing their lives away!" But Jesus says, "No. They threw away a disposable life to take hold of an eternal life." Who is Jesus? He's the only One who can give you eternal life.

Finally, Jesus speaks this promise:

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." (John 12:26)

Can you believe this promise? Anyone who puts Jesus' values, Jesus' agenda, Jesus' reputation above his or her own will be honored by the Creator of the Universe. He said this out in the parking lot of the Temple! The King said it to a group of foreigners and a few Jews who happened to be passing by. Then, He shows them His wounded but deeply focused heart. He says:

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"... (John 12:27-28)

Now remember, this is a couple of foreign tourists who sort of ask on a whim if they can see Jesus. It would be like us visiting Buckingham Palace on an official tour and, in the parking lot, the queen walks by and says, "Hey, do you have a minute?"

And Jesus bares His soul and ends up praying to the Father! Then to top it all off, the Father answers... audibly!!! Beginning at verse 28, John describes it for us:

...Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:28b-33)

The Gentile tourists asked a simple question, “Could we possibly see Jesus... for just a few seconds?” And what do they get? They get the inside scoop on who He is, why He came and, if you truly believe in Him with all your heart, what you will receive – eternal life with God and honor from the Creator. And to top it all off, they actually heard the voice of God! Incredible! And what could be more personal? It’s unbelievable! Now, why is this story here for us to read 2,000 years later?

Some skeptics will say that it’s just another piece of propaganda, a myth to try to reel you into this shady religious hoax. Okay, except for those people who were standing there, they heard the voice of God. You can say it was fake because you didn’t hear it, but they did! Has God ever showed Himself to you like that?

Some people say that the Bible is filled with errors that science through scientific investigation has proved to be false. However, today it’s scientific investigation that’s affirming the record of the Bible. For example, the *New York Times* ran a story a few years ago of an astounding archaeological find in the lowlands of Jordan. An international team of archaeologists found conclusive evidence that the nation of Edom existed as an advanced society by the 10th century B.C. And you say, “Well, whoopi-doo! What does that have to do with anything?”

Actually, a lot. Here’s why: for decades, archaeologists said that the Edomites did NOT exist as an advanced society which PROVED that the Bible was wrong, because the Bible says (II Sam. 8) that King David subdued the nation of Edom which would have been in the 10th century B.C. The co-leaders of this non-Christian archaeological team concluded:

“The biblical references to the Edomites, especially their conflicts with David and subsequent Judahite kings, garner a new plausibility.”¹

If you need more evidence like this, check out a new book by Josh McDowell, entitled *God Breathed*, which I’ve noted in the bulletin. There are dozens of examples of how God is revealing Himself to twentieth-century skeptics in as real a way as if He spoke with an audible voice from heaven. Which leads us to our next group of visitors to Jesus on this Palm Sunday weekend. This second group...

II. Had a Doctrinal Question

They said: (John 12:34)

...“We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

Some commentators take this group to be hardcore skeptics, asking trick questions to try to trip Jesus up. Maybe, but I think it could be something else. I think these could be honest Jews with honest questions. They know the prophecies of Scripture like [Is. 9:7](#) where God says of the Messiah:

He will reign on David’s throne... from that time on and forever.

They have an honest question about the Messiah. So, how does Jesus respond?

Let’s remember where we are. This is Sunday. In one week’s time, what will these people have seen? They will have seen the One who claimed to be the Messiah, ‘lifted up,’ (which they knew meant to be killed) and then, raised from the dead. They will have seen it! So, in that context, look what Jesus says to them:

... “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know

where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” ... (John 12:35-36a)

I think Jesus gave them these words before the crucifixion so that after the resurrection they would remember that He said, *“Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”* Do you see what Jesus is saying? He’s saying, “Knowing God is a commitment to a relationship, not a commitment to a doctrine. Commit to Me and you’ll know the love behind the Law.”

What’s the object of your commitment to God? Is it knowledge and rules, having the right answers and living by the numbers? Or is your commitment to the Person of Jesus Christ? You see, what did the apostle Paul mean when he wrote in Romans 7: **We know that the law is spiritual... (Rom. 7:14)?**

Then he also says:

...you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead... (Rom. 7:4)

He means that being a son or daughter of God is the primary commitment, rather than a commitment to rules and doctrine. So, it’s this way: Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was and He said there were two –

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.

Then, He made this conclusive statement:

“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:40)

C.S. Lewis said that when our commitment is first to a loving relationship, then obedience [becomes] ...more a dance than a drill.²

Are you dancing with Jesus or doing military ‘close-order drill’? *Put your trust in the light...so that you may become children of the light.”*

But there’s one more group that came to Jesus that day. They’re the ones...

III. Who Would Not Believe

Now, is it that they “would not” believe or that they “could not” believe? John quotes Isaiah who prophesied:

**He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts,
So they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts,
Nor turn – and I would heal them. (John 12:40)**

Throughout the Bible, we find this language of God “hardening” a person’s heart. It is said of Pharaoh, it is said of King Saul, it is said of the Israelites and it is said here of those who rejected Jesus. What does this mean? Are these people just pawns in God’s game? No, I don’t read it that way. We can understand what this means from what John shows us here in John 12. Verse 37 says:

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. (John 12:37)

“They still would not believe in him.” It was their choice.

But, in the Isaiah passage it says that God:

**...blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts...**

Isn’t that different? Isn’t that God making it impossible for them to believe?

Listen carefully. I believe this is referring to the fact that God made us in such a way that we are given time to make our choice, but that time of choosing doesn't last forever. The writer of Hebrews teaches this:

So, as the Holy Spirit says:

**"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the desert..."**

**But encourage one another daily... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's
deceitfulness." (Heb. 3:7-8, 13)**

So, here's what this means. God gives all people an equal opportunity to be saved. Somehow, sometime in their life, they will have that opportunity. This is why Romans 1:20 says, "...so that people are without excuse." But some people harden their own hearts by continually refusing to receive the grace and mercy of God. This is why Jesus is begging these people in John 12 with these words: (John 12:36, 35)

Put your trust in the light while you have it... before darkness overtakes you.

The apostle Paul writes this in II Corinthians: (II Cor. 6:1-2)

**As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (for no
purpose). For he says:**

**"In the time of my favor I heard you,
And in the day of salvation I helped you." (Is. 49:8)**

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Concrete is interesting stuff. When you mix it up, it's liquid and you can pour it and shape it and do all kinds of things with it, but once it hardens, it can't be unhardened. The Bible seems to be saying that every time you say, "No," to the salvation God offers you, your soul begins to harden just a tiny bit. How many no's does it take before it is completely hardened? I don't know. It doesn't say. But once your soul is hardened, there's no reversing it.

Have you received the grace God offers yet? Don't ignore it. Don't put it off. Listen to the apostle Paul, "*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" Don't let your heart be hardened by one more "no." Let's pray...

¹ John Noble Wilford, "In a Ruined Copper Works, Evidence that Bolsters a Doubtful Biblical Tale," *New York Times*, (06-13-06)

² C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946)