

JOHN 12:12-19

JESUS AND THE DONKEY

Jesus, found a young donkey and sat on it, and took it for a ride! If you found a bike just sitting around, would you just sit on it and take it for a ride? The Bible says that we are not to steal, and today we ponder if Jesus was stealing a donkey. John, the author of this Gospel passes over the details and goes onto the main event. Yet, for the sake of examining the commandment, “Thou shall not steal”, and for the children who might be wondering if Jesus stole the donkey, we’re going to look at the details, and end with the main event.

For the details we have to go the Gospel of Luke. There Jesus “sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as He rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road” (19:28-36).

So, firstly we can say that Jesus found the donkey by the efforts of others. The disciples found the donkey for Him. But why do the people let the disciples take the donkey? If two strangers walked up and started to take my car, I wouldn’t just let them take it.

It’s believed that Jesus either made previous arrangements with the owners to use the donkey when He needed it, or maybe the owners knew Jesus, or they just knew about Him. That might be like someone telling me they were a police officer and they needed to borrow my car, or maybe someone needed to borrow my car for a medical emergency.

Borrowing can be a bad thing or a good thing. The Bible sees it both ways. Psalm 37(:21) says that “the wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives.” So if you borrow something, like a donkey, or someone’s bike, you should give it back, and Jesus likely sent the donkey back after His Palm Sunday parade was over. Much earlier in Jesus’ ministry Jesus taught people to “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” (Matthew 5:42). So, even if Jesus hadn’t made any arrangements, and the owners of the donkey hadn’t known Him personally, if they had been listening to Jesus’ teachings, they might’ve been willing to lend their donkey, because they may have heard Jesus also say, “lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:34-35).

And so they lent their donkey, and Jesus borrowed their donkey, and nothing was stolen. When we look at any commandment there's the bad side which we tend to focus too much on, the do not do this side, do not steal, but there's also the good side, which we often forget about, the do this side, the lending, the helping of our neighbours and even strangers. As John the Gospel writer goes onto say, "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

So, Jesus needed a donkey, and people lent Him a donkey. Now for the main event. Why did Jesus need a donkey? Our Gospel goes onto say, "just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'" (v. 15). There was a prophecy that their king, their Messiah, their Christ, the one who was anointed to save them from their sins would come to them riding on a young donkey. And now Jesus was fulfilling that prophecy. Jesus said it would happen how the disciples found it, and it did happen.

However, finding donkeys and riding donkeys are simple prophecies and that may be why John skips over them, and he goes onto the angry Pharisees who are plotting to kill Jesus. Palm Sunday isn't all about happy parades. There's an angry mob off to the side, angry because it seems to them that the world has gone off to follow Jesus, and not them anymore.

Earlier Jesus said, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise" (Luke 18:31-33).

It doesn't get much clearer than that. This is the main event – the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This isn't about Jesus stealing the hearts of the people away from the Pharisees. This is about Jesus saving the hearts and souls of every person; it's about Jesus saving your heart and soul. Jesus made sure that every little thing written about Him right down to riding into Jerusalem on a donkey happened so that you can look at all those things written about the Christ and say, "Yes, Jesus is the Christ! Jesus is the Saviour of humankind! No one else did all those things that the Bible for thousands of years said would be done by the Saviour of the world. Only Jesus!"

What we hear about today is God's plan of salvation quickly moving towards its completion. Events happened exactly as Jesus had said they would from the donkey, to the mocking, to the crucifixion, to the resurrection. Our great hope is that Jesus also promised us a resurrection, for all who believe in Him as the Son of God. So, we thank God for Jesus, and donkeys. Amen.