

SMALL GROUPS

LIFE IS BETTER TOGETHER

Palm Sunday Part 2: “Not What You Expected”

ICEBREAKER |

What is one of your favorite surprises of all time?

INTRODUCTION |

Some surprises we like, others we don't. A surprise party on your birthday? Great! A surprise flat tire on the way to work when you're already late? Not so much. God can surprise us with something we didn't expect. It may be frustrating, but it's always for our best. Over two thousand years ago, Jesus rode into Jerusalem in a very unexpected way. But ultimately, it was for our good. We may want the easy route, the quick answer, but God always provides the way that makes us better. Are we willing to take the long way around?

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Last week we learned what Palm Sunday is all about. This week we zoomed in on one particular part of it. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He chose a specific way to do it. It may not sound too strange to us, but it was completely unexpected for those who saw it that day. Take a look at some of the details behind it.

Jesus sent two of His disciples on ahead. “Go into that village over there,” He told them. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.”

Mark 11:1-2 (NLT)

This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said, “Tell the people of Jerusalem, ‘Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt.’”

Matthew 21:4-5 (NLT)

This was all planned out hundreds of years in advance! But it was also completely unexpected for those watching that day. Why? Because a king would never enter the city this way. Instead of a donkey, He would be riding a horse. Instead of crowds of weary travelers He would be surrounded by soldiers. So, Jesus did the unexpected.

Have you ever expected God to do one thing but then He did another? At the time, maybe it felt like you weren't getting the answer you needed, but later you realized God had it all under control from the beginning.

Share with the group about a time when God gave you the unexpected and it ended up being a blessing. (Example, a job you thought you wanted but didn't get, going on a date with someone you didn't think you'd like)

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So, why did Jesus do this? Why did He do the unexpected and ride into town on a donkey instead of a mighty horse? There are several reasons, likely. One of those has to do with trust. Take a look at this verse:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 20:7 (ESV)

Horses were a sign of military might and human strength. When Jesus showed up on a donkey, though, He was showing us that we don't have to trust in ourselves or any other human. Instead, we can trust fully in Him!

Sometimes God will do the unexpected to get us to trust Him more. He answers our prayers in a way we didn't really anticipate, but are completely blown away by. And notice that we can trust in "*the name of the LORD our God.*" Someone's name represents every aspect of that person. So, we can trust that God is our Healer (*Jehovah Rapha*), that God is our Provider (*Jehovah Jireh*), or that He is always there (*Jehovah Shammah*).

What "name of the Lord" have you leaned on most this last year? What aspect of God do you need most in the coming weeks and months?

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Easter and Passover are deeply connected. It was the Passover that Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate. But what is Passover? It's a Jewish holiday. It's a time to remember how God led His children out of Egypt. It's a moment when their trust was built.

But it was also a time when they got something they didn't expect. How did they react? Read these two verses together:

When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."

Exodus 13:17 (NLT)

Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey.

Numbers 21:4 (NLT)

If Moses and the rest of the children of Israel had it their way, they would have taken the shortest route. But God knew they weren't ready for the battles that were ahead. So, He took them the long way around. Unfortunately, they were impatient with the long journey.

Have you ever gotten impatient with God because you didn't get what you expected? How can you work to be more patient while you wait for God's answers?

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We often want the quickest route to our promise. But God has the process in mind for us. We expect an easy answer to our problems. God wants to show us the purpose behind them.

We want the promise without the process.

The process is not always fun. It can take longer than we want. It can be tough and unenjoyable. It may not lead to what we think. But the promises of God aren't all about making us happy. Sure, He wants to bless us. But He is more concerned with our spiritual growth than our comfort.

When you are going through a process waiting on your promise, it's important to switch from "*Just get through this*" thinking to "*What am I learning from this?*" thinking. What are you learning through this process? How are you growing? What is changing about you? What bad habits are you shedding and good habits picking up? God's processes are always meant to help you be better.

Think of a time when the process to the promise made you better. How did you grow from waiting? What did you learn at the end of it?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Many times, God will show up in unexpected ways. But we can always expect that God has the best in mind for us. Patience in the process is difficult. But well worth it. How we respond can make a huge difference.

- Let's focus on trusting God above all else.
- Let's pray for His desires, not our own.
- Let's look for the slow and steady growth instead of the quick answer.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, You came at just the right time in just the perfect way, in humility and love. We know that's still true today, that You show up in ways when we least expect it and yet so timely and full of grace and compassion. Help us Lord, to trust You more, knowing that You are working all things for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your good and perfect will. When we start to become impatient in the waiting, would You kindly remind us that You keep your promises. Help us to not lose heart in the process as we wait for your promise to unfold. Build in us a stronger faith that will not waiver when it is tested. We are eternally grateful for You in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.*

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

Day 2: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "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 (NIV)

Day 3: *Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him, and He will help you.*

Psalms 37:3-7 (NLT)

Day 4: *Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.*

Galatians 6:9 (CSB)

Day 5: *But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31 (NLT)