

Perfect Timing!

Luke 19:28-40

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for January 14, 2024

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As we enter the final week of Jesus' life, Stephen Davey sets the foundation for this particular part of our study by laying out a timeline for the Passion Week that is sure to surprise and challenge you. We then focus in specifically on Palm Sunday, using three scenes that reveal the two different responses people had to Jesus during His earthly ministry. These are the same two responses people have today; make sure your response is one of acceptance and not refusal.

On May 6, 2023, Charles Phillip Arthur George was given his coronation ceremony. Millions of people watched it on television, making it the largest viewership of any program that entire year.

After his ceremony, he was driven away to a reception in a coach covered in gold leaf. It's the same horse-drawn coach that's been used by every monarch of Great Britain since 1762.

At his coronation, a symphony played 12 original pieces of music; choirs sang, dignitaries and guests eventually chanted in unison, "God save the King!"

Everything was carefully timed and organized.

Eventually that moment arrived in the coronation when King Charles was crowned. The crown was made of solid gold, adorned with 400 precious gems. The value of his crown is estimated today at \$57 million.

King Charles also was handed a scepter during the ceremony—it was covered with more than 300 diamonds, 31 rubies, 15 emeralds, sapphires and more. The crowning feature of his scepter is a diamond given as a gift from South Africa back in 1905. That diamond alone weighs 530 carats. It's about the same size as the engagement ring I gave Marsha—minus 530 carats.

The current value of King Charles scepter is \$400 million.

So, during that historic day, with all its pomp and circumstance, history, and tradition, nearly a billion dollars-worth of equipment and vestments and jewelry were on display.

That's the way you treat—that's the way you crown—a king.

Well, the sovereign King is about to arrive in Jerusalem. It won't be a billion-dollar display; there will be no crown of gold or a scepter this time, but even here you will discover that everything has been divinely orchestrated—all of it according to God's perfect timing.

Turn to Luke's Gospel account, again to chapter 19, where we have the beginning of what we call the Passion Week, the final week of the ministry of Christ—from His triumphal entry on Sunday to His resurrection the following Sunday.

This Sunday in view here was the tenth day of the month Nisan, which we call Palm Sunday.

Now Moses had instructed the nation Israel—all the way back in the Book of Exodus chapter 12—to select their lamb for the Passover sacrifice on the 10th day of this month. Over the centuries, everyone who could travel to Jerusalem for Passover did so for this signature event.

Now if you're older in the faith, you might know about the original Passover. The death angel was coming. Egypt had been warned as well as the nation Israel. The death angel would take the life of the firstborn in every family unless they selected a lamb, killed it and ate it for dinner, but first put some of its blood on the doorposts of their homes.

When the death angel arrived, he would see the blood and pass-over that home. Thus, the name Passover. That home was protected by the blood of the lamb.

Well to remember that deliverance for generations to come, God tells Moses to memorialize it annually.

So, Moses communicates to the nation here ***in Exodus chapter 12:***

"Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. ... Your lamb shall be without blemish ... and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight."

Exodus 12:3, 5-6

So, each household was to select their lamb on the 10th day, which this year of the passion week was on Sunday; then four days later, which this year would be on Thursday, the lambs were to be sacrificed.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote that a census was taken in Jerusalem around the time of the Lord's crucifixion, and he noted that 256,000 lambs had been brought into Jerusalem for the Passover sacrifice.

The population of Jerusalem would swell to some 2 million people during the Passover festival.

The Passover pointed to the final Lamb—the Lord Jesus—who now comes into Jerusalem with all the other sacrificial lambs on the 10th day; He's virtually surrounded by tens of thousands of sacrificial lambs. The final Sacrificial Lamb has arrived.

We cannot imagine the significance of this scene—the orchestration of these events—but let me tell you, this will all take place according to the perfect timing of God.

Which is why I believe that just as these Passover lambs will be killed on Thursday, so Jesus will be crucified four days after He arrives in Jerusalem: on Thursday.

At the same time when thousands of lambs are killed in a memorial of deliverance, the Lamb of God will be crucified for our final deliverance.

Now I'm not trying to be different, or dramatic here by telling you that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday. And I'm not suggesting we change the annual calendar, just as we continue to celebrate His birth on December 25.

Through the years, Bible scholars have given their timeline of these events during the passion week.

Some Bible scholars place the crucifixion on Wednesday, some on Thursday, and some on the traditional day of Friday; some have even moved the resurrection to late Sunday evening.

And the reason for all this discussion is the Lord's own prophecy of His coming death.

Here it is, in Matthew 12:40:

“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Matthew 12:40

Not only does Jesus verify the Old Testament literal account of the prophet Jonah being swallowed by a great fish, but Jesus also makes it synonymous with His own death and burial—three days and three nights.

The major problem with a Friday crucifixion is that it doesn't allow enough time to fulfill the Lord's prophecy.

Now I realize that the Jewish reckoning would claim that a portion of a day or a portion of a night would be considered an entire day or night, but with a Friday crucifixion, you would have a portion of three days in the tomb, but no matter how you slice it, there's not even a sliver of a third night.

If Jesus' prophecy is to be taken literally, how do we interpret this timeline?

I believe we're given some clues in the Gospel accounts that make this mystery something we can solve, and therefore take the Lord's prophecy of three days *and* three nights literally.

There are three key passages, and the first one is in **Mark 15**. And this is the primary passage used for the traditional view of the crucifixion taking place on Friday.

Here in Mark chapter 15, Jesus has already been declared dead by the Roman centurion; **Mark writes here in verse 42:**

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Mark 15:42-43

Now from that verse it seems clear here that Jesus is crucified on Friday, because Joseph asks for the Lord's body on **the day before the Sabbath**. And the day before the Sabbath would be Friday.

But here is a point that is often overlooked. During the Passover festival, there was an additional day set aside as a memorial rest-day—a day to be treated as a Sabbath day.

This special memorial day was called by the nation Israel a *High Sabbath*.

According to the instructions given in **Leviticus 23**, this High Sabbath was to be treated like any other normal Saturday Sabbath.

No work was to be done by the Jewish people; they were to spend that day in rest and worship as they spent time remembering their nation's deliverance from Egypt centuries earlier.

This was sort of like our Memorial Day or the celebration of our independence on the Fourth of July.

Now is it possible that this particular year, the High Sabbath landed on Friday, so that you effectively had two Sabbaths—two days of rest—in a row?

Well, we can thank the apostle John at this point, because he's the only gospel writer who fills in the blank for us with this rather amazing clue:

John chapter 19:

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.

John 19:30-31

Of course, Jesus was already pronounced dead.

Since the next day was a Sabbath, Jewish leader wanted these Jewish criminals buried and out of sight. This was ***the day of preparation***, a day to prepare for the Sabbath—a phrase normally associated with the normal Saturday Sabbath.

But John's Gospel informs us the next day was not a normal Saturday Sabbath, but a *High Sabbath*—that extra Passover Sabbath—and this year, these two Sabbath's were back-to-back, Friday and Saturday, where the nation was to rest and remember their deliverance.

In fact, over in the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 28, Matthew writes in verse 1:

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Matthew 28:1

The text goes on to tell us the Lord had risen.

In the Greek, that word "Sabbath" is plural. You could translate it: "Now after the Sabbaths" implying this reality: the memorial Sabbath and the Saturday Sabbath were Friday and Saturday of this year.

And here's where the symbolism and beauty of the perfect timing of all of this comes into play in the Gospel accounts.

On Sunday the 10th, all the Passover lambs are being brought into Jerusalem. Just as these lambs are arriving, destined to be sacrificed, Jesus arrives, destined to be sacrificed.

Then, on the fourteenth, four days later Thursday, the lambs are all killed and eaten as the nation celebrates their rescue by the blood of the Passover lamb. So also, Jesus dies on that day, His blood is shed, once and for all, to rescue everyone who trusts in Him alone.

Then on Friday, the High Sabbath, and Saturday, the normal Sabbath, the nation rests and remembers their salvation from the judgment of God. So also, Jesus lies in a tomb, the One who promised rest for all who were spiritually weary and heavy laden, all who would come to Him to be rescued from the judgment of God.

Here's something to keep in mind as well: we know from Matthew 26:5 that the High Priest and the Jewish leaders had decided to arrest Jesus *after* the Passover, *after* the crowd left Jerusalem, *after* the sacrifices are over, but that wasn't God's plan.

What's happening here, according to the perfect timing of God, Jesus is going to force their hand; He's going to back them in a corner and force them to arrest Him *before* the Passover sacrifices.

Because Jesus plans to die at the right moment, for the right reason, at the right place and at the perfect time.

He is the final Passover Lamb who came to take away the sin of the world (***John 1:29***).

This is all divinely orchestrated; this is God's perfect timing.

With that background, let's move through this event when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on Sunday.

I'll divide this into 3 scenes.

We'll call the first scene:

The Colt and its Creator

Verse 28:

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he 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."

Luke 19:28-30

The fact that this donkey's foal or colt is unbroken—that it has never been ridden—is significant in light of the Old Testament practice that only animals that had not been used for ordinary purposes were often used for sacred purposes.

Animals that had not yet worked were considered pure; in fact, only these animals would be used in the Old Testament to carry the ark of the covenant, the very presence of God.

Well, this colt is about to carry the very presence of God into Jerusalem: the Person of God the Son.

The obvious implication from the fact that this colt has never been ridden is that it has never been tamed.

If you want to ride an unbroken colt, they'll hire you at the rodeo. And if you can sit on that bucking bronco for just 8 seconds, you win!

Marsha and I can remember taking our twin boys to a rodeo when they were young, we wanted them to see what they were putting us through, what life had become for us!

Sitting on a bucking bronco for 8 seconds is a long time.

This is the Lord's mastery over His creation.

I got curious and I looked up the most successful bucking bronco rider ever. A man who is now a legend in that world made a career of it for 21 years. He won 51 times. Which means over the course of his career, he won 51 matches by riding a bucking bronco for a career total of 6 minutes and 8 seconds.

Now I'm not looking down on his career, I wouldn't have the courage to do what he did. In fact, the last time I rode a tame horse it threw me off. Well, I fell off—it sounds more heroic if it threw me off.

Truth is, the horse wanted to go one way and I wanted to go the other way, and the horse won.

Keep in mind that Jesus isn't just about to ride an unbroken colt, but a colt of a donkey, and you probably know how donkeys are so easy going and obedient.

No, get this scene: Jesus is going to ride that unbroken colt through a mob of people who are shouting, chanting, throwing their garments on the road in front of him, and waving palm branches in the air, according to John's Gospel.

This is the Creator, in this miraculous display of authority over His creation; He rules over all of creation.

But Jesus is also revealing His right to rule over the nation.

A donkey was regarded as a royal animal during the days of King David; it symbolized a peaceful and humble King at his coronation.

It's interesting that after David and Solomon, the Hebrew kings switched to horses, which symbolized pride and power. Jesus is identifying Himself as a peaceful and humble king in the line of David.

R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume Two* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 239

But even more significantly, five hundred years before this event here in Luke 19, the prophet Zechariah said this of the Messiah:

Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9

This is all orchestrated by our sovereign Lord; He's been planning this for centuries, in fact, before time began.

And now, on this Sunday, it's time! And the timing is perfect!

But there's still another wrinkle here in the plan: you don't just come into town and take somebody's donkey; they were costly, and only wealthier individuals would be able to use them as a means of transportation.

This would be like taking someone's car today.

Barton, p. 441

But notice what Jesus tells His disciples here in **verse 31**:

"If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"

Luke 19:31

Notice what Jesus calls Himself! False religions claim that Jesus never personally used the title "Lord" for Himself; other skeptics argue that the early church gave Jesus this title of deity later.

Well, this divine title comes from the mouth of Jesus Himself.

And evidently, this colt belonged to someone who acknowledged the Messianic claims of Christ, and they willingly offered it. By the way, **Mark's Gospel** tells us that the disciples promised to return the colt (Mark 11:3).

The Lord has need of it—the authority has required it—and that settled it! One author writes, this has the ring of a royal requisition.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 770

The King has asked for it and you don't turn down the King.

Many of you are aware that one of our large air-conditioning units that sits on the roof of our student center completely broke down a year ago.

The delivery chain has been terribly slow these past two years, the manufacturing delays also took nearly a year of waiting, but finally, we received news that our new 11-ton unit was to be delivered just a few weeks ago.

But then, the United States government, which has the right to requisition an air-conditioning unit it might need for some government building, decided they wanted ours. And we didn't get to vote. They simply requisitioned it—our country's leaders took our unit.

I've never been so proud to be an American ...

We're in for another hot spring and summer; that's okay, we've ordered another one and I think we'll make it!

Now verse 32:

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.

Luke 19:32-35

Matthew's Gospel indicates the colt and its mother were tied up and both were brought to Jesus.

We're not told, but the disciples more than likely used the mother donkey for their cloaks and belongings and the unbroken colt specifically for Jesus. Luke focuses only on the one Jesus rode.

Now the next scene takes place, we'll call this one:

The Crowd and their Chorus

Verse 36:

And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole

multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Luke 19:36-38

This multitude is spreading their cloaks on the road before Jesus. This was symbolic; the cloak represented their lives, the people spread their cloaks on the road to welcome King Jehu back in **2 Kings 9**.

This was a symbolic way of saying to the king, "I am laying my life down before you; you have the right to rule over my life." We might say it today, "You have the right to tread on my turf—my life is completely open to you!"

Notice what Luke writes here again in verse 38, the crowd is singing/chanting:

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Luke 19:38

This is from **Psalms 118**, a song that was sung during the Passover season.

Psalms 118 and verse 26 sings this line:

*"Blessed is **he** who comes in the name of the Lord."*

But you'll notice they've changed the lyrics as they sing this to Jesus:

*"Blessed is **the King** who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

Luke 19:38

All that simply means, "Here comes the King!"

Up until this time, Jesus had told people to keep quiet about His identity, reminding people that it wasn't time yet.

But now, this is the perfect time. Jesus is putting the Sanhedrin and the religious leaders in a virtual headlock.

He's forcing them to change their plans, He's not going to let them wait until after the Passover to arrest Him.

They are not operating on their timetable; they are operating on His. This is divinely orchestrated, and the death of Jesus will take place at the perfect time.

There is this rather feeble attempt to interrupt the celebration; we'll call this third scene:

The Cynics and their Complaint

Verse 39:

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."

Luke 19:39

Catch that insult here: the crowd is chanting He's the king and they call him a teacher. As if to say: "Get back in your place, get off that donkey; you're not a king—at best you're a teacher, now stop this!"

But Jesus responds here *in verse 40*:

He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

Luke 19:40

In other words, if people won't praise Me, the rest of My creation—even these rocks—will not be able to hold it in.

Now as I've surveyed this opening scene of the Passion week, two words keep coming to my mind: perfect timing.

This is the divine orchestration of events, the perfect timing of these events, and let me tell you, this scene should bring two results:

First, the perfect timing of these events should bring the unbeliever concern.

The fulfillment of prophecies hundreds of years old, the perfect analogies of the lamb and the Lord, the timing of Sunday and Thursday, the royal entrance of our humble Savior should be very concerning to anyone who rejects Jesus.

Don't land on the side of the religious leaders who missed it all. The perfect timing of these events should bring the unbeliever concern.

But secondly, the perfect timing of these events should bring the believer comfort.

Divinely orchestrated, miraculously managed, the Savior has arrived right on time to the very day, and He is on time in your life as well.

God always operates with perfect timing.

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