

LIFE IS FOUND ONLY IN JESUS, THE PRINCE OF PEACE

SERIES: HE IS ALIVE! AND HE IS STILL ALIVE!

By Ron Ritchie

There is a great hunger for peace in this world full of tension, strife, and wars. My attention was captured by two articles in local newspapers recently. After the massacre of Arab worshippers in Hebron last month, one headline read, "Israel OKs Peacekeepers in West Bank, Gaza Strip." An international security force of some two thousand men would be set up in the Arab territory with the hope of laying the groundwork for a similar force in Jerusalem. This is basically peace at the end of a gun. The other headline read, "Palo Alto has Worries about Troubled Youth." Rising violence by local gangs on school campuses has educators worried. The educators agree that lack of parental supervision, influence, and attention contributes to antisocial behavior in their children. They admit that neither parents nor schools can guide young people by themselves. In reality they don't know what to do next.

In neither article was the need for spiritual influence mentioned. Neither could really uncover the root cause of the violence. And neither understood that the only source of peace for the situation is Jesus, the Prince of Peace, whom Israel has rejected for the last two thousand years, and whom our school systems have now outlawed!

In the midst of this spiritual blindness, the word of God tells all of us that we first need to personally establish peace with God by placing our faith in his son Jesus, the Prince of Peace. The fruit of this spiritual relationship will be a new life---an eternal life filled with wholeness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This was what Jesus came to earth for the first time. And his life and message could not have been clearer on the first Palm Sunday when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey colt to proclaim that truth as the Prince of Peace.

Approaching Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples had come to Bethphage, the Mount of Olives, and Bethany, which was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, just two miles east of Jerusalem. It was now spring and the beginning of Passover. When we left Jesus last week in John 11, it was the winter before his last Passover. Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, had raised his beloved friend Lazarus from the dead. His Father was glorified, he was glorified, the disciples' faith in him as God's Messiah was increased, and many Jews came into the kingdom as a result of that miracle. But the Jews in Jerusalem were seeking to kill him, and Jesus, realizing his hour had not yet come, left town for several months and eventually arrived in Jericho some fifteen miles east of Jerusalem. In that city he healed two blind men and invited Zacchaeus into the kingdom. Then he and his disciples walked out to the Jericho Road and headed up to Bethany and Jerusalem for the last time.

As our story opens, Jesus has entered Bethany and enjoyed a Sabbath meal in the home of Simon the leper, where he met again with the risen Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. After supper Mary symbolically anointed his feet with some very expensive burial oil. At the same time many of his disciples from Galilee were arriving in Jerusalem a week before the Passover feast to prepare for it and to find an opportunity to visit the now famous Lazarus. It was that final Sunday that we now call Palm Sunday....

Jesus: the Prince of Peace

Matthew 21:1-7

And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me. And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,'"

and immediately he will send them." Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,

"Say to the daughter of Zion,
'Behold your King is coming to you,
Gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat.

Now, on several occasions during Jesus' ministry he had refused to allow his disciples or the people to proclaim him the Messiah or King because it was not the right time (see John 7:6). But now the day had come, and by the end of the day, the hour had come. So in concert with his Father and the prophets Daniel, Isaiah, and Zechariah, Jesus had begun planning to finally present himself officially to the nation of Israel as their long-awaited Messiah. The Lord God had spoken through his prophet Daniel (9:24-27) and told him that Jewish history would be given some 490 years or 70 weeks after the Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (445 BC). After 483 years, or 69 weeks, Messiah would be presented to his people (Palm Sunday) and then would be cut off, which completed the 69th week. This will be followed by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which we now know was accomplished by the Roman army under General Titus in 70 AD. We are now living between the 69th and 70th week for Israel; history will begin at the start of the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21) and end in seven years with Christ's second coming.

It is apparent that Jesus had made some previous arrangement to borrow the animals (see Mark 1:6). The donkey colt was an important symbol in our Lord's overall plan to officially present himself to the nation not only as Messiah, King, and Son of David, but also as we shall see, the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). He would be the one who would come to promote and establish the things that make for lasting peace---both reconciliation between God and man and reconciliation between men (see Luke 19:42).

At the end of the day while Jesus was in the temple area, he knew not only that the day had come but that now the hour had come to go to the cross for the sin of humanity. For the Greeks had come and told Philip, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." And Jesus knew it was time to die---for all the world, the Jews and Gentiles alike. (See John 12:20-25.)

"Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled..." (Matthew 21:4). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, there may have been as many as 2,700,000 Jews attending this Passover feast in Jerusalem. Many of the pilgrims were disciples of Jesus who had come down from Galilee. Once they settled in, they began to gather to go up the hill to the village of Bethany just two miles east of Jerusalem to see Jesus and the now renowned Lazarus. It was this crowd of believers that was available to follow Jesus as he rode on a donkey colt into Jerusalem. So once the donkey arrived, the disciples threw their garments on her back and then put Jesus on her. God's word through his prophets was now being accomplished by God himself in order to contrast the majesty and humility of the Savior. Isaiah had written (62:11) seven hundred years earlier,

"Say to the daughter of Zion,
"Lo, your salvation comes;
Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him."

And Zechariah had written (9:9) some five hundred years earlier,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The daughter of Zion was the faithful remnant who were truly looking for their Prince of Peace, men and women who understood the prophecies of Messiah's coming. And they understood that he would approach the gates of the city of Jerusalem as a humble Jewish King as symbolized by the donkey colt. He would not be a foreign king who would terrorize the people, but his heart would be set on serving his people and offering all of them the gift of salvation.

Within the mixed crowd of Jews from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem was also a mixed understanding of the character and ministry of the coming Messiah. One group of religious scholars thought that Messiah would come to Jerusalem riding on a great white horse with his powerful army behind him, in the strength of David as he had defeated the hated Philistine army a thousand years earlier. This Son of David would defeat the hated Roman Empire and its cruel army and establish his long-awaited kingdom on earth. But this Nazarene from Galilee coming into Jerusalem on a donkey colt offered no hope of victory to the zealots, regardless of the singing of "Save us now, save us now" from the crowds. Neither was he any threat to the Romans.

A second group was the faithful remnant, which was preparing for the King-Messiah to come and establish his kingdom in the hearts of men and women, a spiritual kingdom which in time would tear down strongholds in a fallen world ruled by Satan. When God painted the picture of his redemptive history, his canvas covered all of time up to that moment. He began in the Garden of Eden when he promised Eve that a Savior would come out of her womb and defeat Satan (see Genesis 3:15). The promise was confirmed when God told Abraham that out of his loins would come the Christ (see Galatians 3:8-16). Then David was told that after he died God would raise up his descendant, the Son of David who would establish his kingdom and his throne forever (see 2 Samuel 7:12-13).

And now on this wonderful day in the redemptive story, God was about to present his Son to the nation of Israel and the world using a symbol that no one could miss...a donkey colt. The donkey was seen as a lowly but noble beast of burden, and if a king wanted to approach a city in peace he would ride up to the gates on a young donkey instead of a great white war horse. At this time Jesus was preparing for the first time during his ministry to be declared the long-awaited King of Israel, Messiah, and Son of David. And he was going to enter Jerusalem, the City of Peace, not as a warrior-messiah who would physically conquer the Roman army, but as the prophetic Prince of Peace who would seek to conquer the spiritual hearts of his people and give them the gift of eternal life. But there was so much history, prophecy, and political tension coming together at this time that the disciples of Jesus could not read all that was going on. "At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him." (John 12:16.)

And while Jesus was preparing to present himself to the nation as the long-awaited King of Israel, Prince of Peace, and Savior of mankind, the chief priests were taking counsel to seize and kill him (see John 11:57), which then in turn would fulfill the prophecy of John the Baptist when he cried out upon seeing Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29.) Bishop Fulton J. Sheen in his classic *Life of Christ* wrote:

...His Hour had come. It was time now for Him to make the last public affirmation of His claims. He knew it would lead to Calvary and his Ascension and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. Once He acknowledged their praise, then there were only two courses open to the city: confess Him as did Peter, or else crucify. Either He was their king, or else they would have no king but Caesar.

Anne Marie and I have become friends with a delightful couple in our area. And over the last fifteen years or so we have gotten together on several occasions with them and their children. In all that time they have felt free to share some of their joys and a few of their sorrows and stresses. But in this last year they have had their back to the wall. The husband appears to have been falsely accused of breaking the law. The investigation is being strung out, and it has caused great emotional and mental stress for both of them. Knowing that neither of them had a personal relationship with the Lord, I asked them if I could pray for them, and they both agreed.

We hadn't heard from them for a few months. Then three weeks ago I received a phone call from the wife,

who was very nervous and scared. She told me that she was facing a serious cancer operation at the end of the week, and she asked if Anne Marie and I would pray for her. I prayed for her right then on the phone. The next day she phoned back and told me that the prayer had really helped, and that the night before she had had a dream in which Jesus appeared to her. She wanted to know if Anne Marie would visit her in the hospital. Two days later my wife was able to visit her, and all this woman wanted to talk about was Jesus. In time she told Anne Marie that she was ready to "make her peace with God," and she wanted to invite Jesus into her heart as her Lord and Savior. She was given the peace of God because it was the Prince of Peace who became her Savior. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, and Jesus is a spiritual King. And real peace must start within us, not in the circumstances around us.

Life is found only in a personal relationship with Jesus because...

Jesus is the only one who can save us

Matthew 21:8-9

And most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road. And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying,

"Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!"

As Jesus moved down the hill from Bethany toward Jerusalem, the crowds coming out of the city began to grow. The Jews of Bethany coming down the hill were merging with the Galilean believers who were coming out of the Holy City on their way to visit Jesus and Lazarus (see John 12:17-18). The latter crowd took the branches of the local palm trees and went out to meet him. These palm branches were a symbol of victory offered in a parade of triumph for a conquering general. In Jewish history nearly this same scene had occurred after Judas Maccabees defeated the hated Syrian king Antiochus in 175 BC, and then went into Jerusalem and cleansed the temple that the king had desecrated with a pig (2 Maccabees 10:7).

Coming down the road of Mount Olivet, Jesus could see the City of Peace before him and the Golden Gate through which he was going to ride into the courtyard of the temple. This triumphal entry would be followed by a cleansing of the merchants from the temple by the final Passover Lamb. In Revelation 7 also, John tells us that all the nations will gather "...before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (Revelation 7:9). (We missed the first victory parade, but we will all get to be in the second one!)

Now as though the crowds were being led by some invisible conductor, they were turned into a gigantic choir who were led to sing, out of the many messianic psalms selected for Passover, Psalm 118. They skipped over verses 22-25, which read,

"The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.
This is the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
O LORD, do save, we beseech Thee...."

But they quoted the praise and prayer of verse 26 as they sang:

"Hosanna [save now] to the Son of David [Messiah];

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord [adoration];
Hosanna in the highest [Messiah is a gift from God]!"

Clearly the crowds were proclaiming the hope of the restoration of the kingdom of David at this time, implying deliverance from the yoke of the Romans and the re-establishment of Israel as a great and independent nation. As the crowds saw it, God was at peace with the human race, particularly with Israel, and in turn they shouted with joy to God for his grace toward them.

Yet during all this religious activity and excitement, they were missing the whole point of our Lord's humble entrance into Jerusalem. He was coming to offer personal salvation, which in turn would indeed have brought blessings to Israel as a nation so that they would once again be a light of truth to the other nations of the world. Societies are changed when the hearts of the people are changed and filled with the righteousness of God through his Son Jesus Christ.

On a recent trip to Jerusalem in January, Anne Marie and I with four dear friends took a cab from our hotel to the east side of the old city. There we got out and walked up the side of Mount Olivet, past the Garden of Gethsemane, until we came to a small orchard of olive trees. We sat down in the shade, and as we looked up above us we could see the old city walls that had been rebuilt during the Ottoman rule (1517-1917). The Turks also rebuilt the Golden Gate on top of the original one through which Jesus, the Prince of Peace, had ridden on his donkey colt into the temple area to present himself to the nation as their long-awaited Messiah on that Palm Sunday some two thousand years ago. Jesus was rejected, crucified, and buried, but God then raised him from the dead; and he will one day return to this earth on Mount Olivet as King of kings (See Acts 1:11-12).

The Jews still expect Messiah in his first coming to open the Golden Gate, which has been closed since 1530, and set up his rule in the City of Peace. But meanwhile, because the Jews in fact rejected Jesus, their Messiah, King, and Prince of Peace, in his first coming; they have experienced nothing but unrest, wars, persecutions, and holocausts for the last two thousand years. And even at this moment in their own country they cannot seem to experience any peace settlement with the PLO. We know that according to Scripture they will never enjoy peace until they make peace with Jesus. And none of us as individuals will find peace within our hearts and souls until we make peace with him. "For He Himself is our peace...." (Ephesians 2:14).

Some who watched Jesus enter the city of Jerusalem accepted him as their spiritual King and received the gifts of eternal life and the peace of God. Others were willing to reject Jesus as their spiritual King, Messiah, and Savior; and they in turn lost the gift of eternal life.

Who is this Jesus really?

Matthew 21:10-17

And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den." And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant, and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself?'" And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.

Jesus' heart was broken because he saw the hearts of the majority of the people that he had come to love already rejecting him and all the blessings he was to bring. Luke tells us in 19:41-44, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what

would bring you peace---but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." We now know that all this occurred in 70 AD under the mighty hand of Rome. Jesus wept because he knew that their human hearts hungered to hear a word from God through his prophets, cried out for a king to lead them in righteousness, and sighed for a priest to stand before God on their behalf. And yet while most of the people at this moment sang out to him as Savior, their hearts were hardened to bowing to him as their King.

"And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." But he was not just another prophet, but the Prophet of God spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:15 who would reveal the will of God to mankind, even if the Pharisees would not believe it. In the immediate context Jesus was also the fulfillment of prophecy. Many other religions would like to keep him just one prophet among many, but he was so much more than that. This was the promised Author of life!

Upon arriving in the temple area (at this moment or perhaps the next morning), he "cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves." The temple was designed to be a place where God would dwell, where his own people and all others (see Mark 11:17) who sought to have a living relationship with him could come and worship him. But in time the high priests allowed merchants to set up shop selling lambs and turtledoves at inflated prices with a certain percent falling in their treasury box. They also made a profit from the pilgrims who needed to exchange their foreign money for temple money, at an again inflated exchange rate, in order to purchase animals for the Passover.

There is really nothing new under the sun, for as you visit the area around the Wailing Wall, in the side streets of the old city you can find stalls set up to sell you religious T-shirts, statues of Biblical characters, and holy water from the Jordan River. This scene is repeated over and over again around such religious shrines as Notre Dame and Lourdes in France and the larger cathedrals in other European countries, to mention but a few sad examples.

It was at this point that our great High Priest and Prince of Peace reminded all those who were willing to listen, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' [see Isaiah 56:7]; but you are making it a robbers' den." The temple was the heart of the spiritual life of Israel, the place where men and women came to speak to God. It was to be a place of confession, forgiveness, purity, and spiritual encouragement. And in the same way that our Lord cleansed the temple on Palm Sunday, so he wants to come into our lives and our hearts and cleanse them from our sin so that we can have fellowship with him.

"And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them," fulfilling his messianic calling of Isaiah 61:2 (see also Luke 4:18-19). This Jesus, their King of kings, was the only one powerful enough to deliver spiritually blind and crippled men and women out of the kingdom of darkness, to defeat the power of Satan and lead them into the kingdom of God.

The chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things Jesus was doing among the people and heard the children singing, "Hosanna to the Son of David [Messiah]." They became indignant, hard-hearted, bitter, jealous, and fearful; and they wanted it all to stop and go away. Many of the Pharisees, although not all, were blinded by a religious system that promoted power, fear, jealousy, and greed. It was these men who had said earlier after the raising of Lazarus from the dead that they needed to plan a way to kill him because "if we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48). And then they walked up to Jesus and said, "Do you hear what these children are saying---that you are the King, the Savior, the Messiah of God? This, sir, is blaspheming God!"

Jesus responded to these so-called spiritual leaders, "Don't you read your Bible? My forefather David wrote, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou has prepared praise for Thyself' [as translated in the Septuagint]. If you listen closely you can hear the truth about God the Father and the Son of David. I am the Savior of the world. This is the day of visitation, the day God the Father planned for the personal salvation and joy of his people Israel before the foundation of the world. And no one on the face of this earth, regardless of

their rank, position, power, or status, will be able to stop the joy of his heart and the heart of his Son Jesus. It is time for the disciples to sing, it is time for the stones to sing, it is time for the children to sing, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" For in him is eternal life, joy, and peace; and in no other name."

Who was this man who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey colt some two thousand years ago, when the crowds broke out into songs of praise and adoration? He was and still is Jesus: the Son of God, the Son of David, the Messiah of God, the King of kings, and the Prince of Peace. He is the only one who can save us from our sins and offer us eternal life and the peace of God, which every one of us deeply hungers for.

On the night before Jesus died for our sins on that Roman cross, he told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." (John 14:27.) This *shalom*, this peace, can be yours the moment you invite Jesus, the Son of the living God, the Prophet of God, the King of kings and the great High Priest into your heart as your personal Lord and Savior. How hungry are you for the peace of God? Don't put it off another moment! Invite Jesus to ride into your heart on the donkey colt of peace and become your Prince of Peace.

Catalog No. 4362
Matthew 21:1-17
Second Message
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March 27, 1994

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