

<b>Series:</b> Palm Sunday	<b>Reference:</b> Acts 17 & Luke 19	<b>Title:</b> Listen Up!	<b>Date:</b> 03.25.18
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Website Writeup:</b></p> <p>God's been revealing himself to all peoples throughout history. The stories are plentiful. But people don't always listen. Jesus was trying to tell them something on Palm Sunday as he rode into town on the back of a donkey. Some listened. Some didn't. Will we?</p>			

### Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

The beginning story is adapted from the first chapter of *Eternity in Their Hearts*, by Don Richardson.

The story I'm about to tell you is based on tradition recorded as history by Diogenes Laertius, a Greek author in a classical work called *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Vol 1, p.110). Plato in his writing, *Laws*, also writes of the main character of our story, corroborating some of its details. Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* (book 3, 17:10) also identifies some of the details. Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* (vol. 1, 1:4) and Philostratus in his *Apollonius of Tyana*, both refer to details of this story as well.

Sometime during the 6<sup>th</sup> century before Christ, in a council chamber on Mars Hill, Athens, council members conversed on the subject of a plague which had befallen their city. They'd sent council member Nicias to meet with the Pythian Oracle for answers. Athens was filled with statues of commemoration to hundreds of gods at the time. All of which they'd sacrificed to, in order to alleviate this plague, but to no avail.

Nicias relayed - the Oracle, a priestess, had said a certain god had placed a curse on them due to King Megacles' grievous sin of offering amnesty to a group of people, but then violating his promise by killing them. They'd made atonement to all known gods for this, but the Oracle claimed there was still one unknown god remaining.

Nicias continued, they must go to Knossos on the island of Crete & find a man named Epimenides, the only one able to help. They did. Upon arriving in Athens, known as the 'city of philosophers', Epimenides saw signs of the plague everywhere & noticed right away the many gods represented by statues adorning Mars Hill & lining the roads. He asked Nicias about it, who said they had hundreds, but apparently there was one more whom Epimenides must share with them. Nicias joked they'd already ransacked all the theologies of all peoples around them, how could there be one more god Athens didn't know about! Epimenides claimed, "Maybe that's your problem."

As Epimenides entered the councils presence, he wasted no time. "Tomorrow at sunrise bring a flock of black & white sheep & stonemasons to the grassy slope at the foot of Mars Hill. Healthy sheep, don't let them eat from now til then, they must be hungry."

The next morning they gathered. Epimenides began, "In futility you've sacrificed to all your gods. There's still one other. Although we don't know his name, he must be great enough & good enough to stop this plague & understand our ignorance of his presence - we will call upon him now."

He instructed them to release the sheep. Being their normal feeding time & their being ravenous, no doubt they'd eat. Yet he instructed them to watch for sheep which lay down & won't eat. He then prayed to this unknown god, asking him to choose among the sheep by causing those he wants as a sacrifice to lay down wherever they were. None believed any of the sheep wouldn't eat! But immediately a number of them lay down in the grass, not eating a blade. People were dumbfounded.

Epimenides instructed them to make an altar where each one lay, and since they didn't know the name of this unknown god, he instructed them to simply carve - Agnosto theo - to an unknown god - on each one. They then sacrificed each sheep on their respective altars. The change was swift & within a week all remnants of the plague were gone.

But with the passage of time, as with many great stories, this was forgotten. The altars lay in ruin, covered in weeds. Until one day, two older council members, who'd been there that day as young men, recalled the story. They decided, all the altars but one were beyond repair. They repaired it, and retold the story among the Council to keep it alive.

Fast forward. Easter's past. Jesus' been crucified, risen & ascended to heaven. The Apostle Paul's traveling in Athens. Luke records that story in chapter 17 of Acts where, like Epimenides, Paul (vv16-17) *"...was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there."*

He began with the Jews & God-fearing Greeks given they're most responsible for addressing rampant idolatry; they'd been entrusted with the Scriptures of the One true God. But maybe they, which happens so often, had grown too accustomed with the surrounding culture - and had ceased to share about the Hebrew God, so much so, they no longer knew how. But then...

*(vv18 & 19) A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him....and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus..." And...22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

Beginning with creation, Paul told the story up to, and including Jesus, his crucifixion & resurrection, using the Greek term THEOS as the personal name for God. Something they wouldn't have done. It's like naming your male child 'Man'. Theos, to them, was a general term for any god. But Paul was proclaiming him as the one true God, and all the others represented there to be false. The philosophers listening to him would've known that Xenophanes, Plato & Aristotle, the three great philosophers, all used THEOS as a personal name for the One True God in their writings. THEOS was the only term sufficiently unencumbered with cultural meaning which could communicate who God

really was - it's why Paul used it. And when he equated Jesus with THEOS & spoke of his resurrection, that's when they stumbled.

Paul had found something within their system which wasn't of their system - an unknown god. He argued this on the same Mars Hill where Epimenides ordered that altar to be made. THEOS had already begun to make himself known to the Athenians 6 centuries earlier. *And, as Paul says to them, (v28) As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'* He's quoting Epimenides, who was that poet! And in Titus chapter 1 Paul quotes Epimenides again, referring to him as a prophet - the same word he'd use for Old & New Testament Prophets which says, he believed the man to be bringing Truth to these people 600 years earlier! Truth they didn't fully 'get'.

Paul said to the Athenians, (vv26-27) *"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."*

A God who, although nameless to them for a time but never far away, was now being named as Jesus. The end result of his discourse is, some follow Christ, including Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, who tradition holds became the first bishop of Athens...but...why do I tell you all this?

*Well...God's been revealing himself throughout history, this is one story of many. Historically most haven't listened. His message centers on the sacrifice he makes for their willful sin & disobedience. Today's Palm Sunday, the day Jesus wept, since the people at the time didn't understand the reason of his coming - he was revealing himself again, but who'd listen? This is the day Jesus entered Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover which commemorates the time when God sent 10 plagues on Egypt in order to free the Israelites from slavery 1440 years earlier - another time God revealed himself both to Israel & to Egypt!*

The last plague is recorded in Exodus 12 where it says, <sup>12</sup> *"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. <sup>13</sup> The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

What's that blood refer to? Well, in preparation of this passover, four days before, every family in Israel was to set aside a perfect lamb, they were to slaughter it & then mark the lintels & doorposts of their homes with it's blood. Up until midnight of Passover, they were to consume the whole lamb, leaving nothing. Passover broke the resolve of Pharaoh; he let Israel go. They left Egypt in such haste there wasn't time to allow baked bread to rise; thus flat, unleavened bread (matzo), is a reminder of their rapid departure. *Exodus 12 even gives instructions on how to eat this Passover meal, <sup>11</sup> This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.*

Israel's captive. God's sent 9 plagues thus far. Pharaoh won't let them go. God sends the final plague killing all firstborn in Egypt. But the Israelites were to paint the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a perfect sacrificial lamb. As God passes over their homes, seeing the blood, he spares the firstborn of that household. Safe inside their homes the Israelites were to eat the whole sacrifice. They're to use unleavened bread since the Exodus will happen quickly - they've gotta be ready to leave, start a new journey, a new life - all this symbolizing the rebirth through the blood of the lamb. Just like in Athens, that this one true God brings healing through the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Jesus protects & satisfies the demand of death which is brought about by sin before a holy god.

Yearly they commemorated this in a weeklong celebration of Passover. It's this setting, which Jesus enters, and also this setting which foreshadows Him as the final perfect Passover Lamb in Luke 19.

Jesus' enters Jerusalem on the back of a donkey at the beginning of Passover. Whispers of him as the promised Messiah/Savior are rampant. People are thinking about the Exodus, when they were freed from Egypt. They're hoping this Messiah delivers them from Roman oppression just as God delivered them from Egypt. The imagery wouldn't go unnoticed, a conquering king would ride into a city on a donkey as a symbol of his coming in peace - but conquering nonetheless. People are shouting. Laying cloaks on the road before him, waving palm branches - all symbolic of welcoming their Messiah king. The hopes they expressed in Him were not at all vague as they shouted the words of Psalm 118, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" The Messiah had come to bring peace! To free them from Roman oppression. That's the expectation, but not his intention.

Jesus allowed this worship. It was prophecy fulfilled that he'd be presented as Israel's king, as expressed in Zech 9:9... *9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble & mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Timing's important. The religious leaders had planned to arrest & kill him *after* Passover, not *during*, in order to avoid a riot. But it seems only Jesus knew, even after all he'd said to his disciples, that he'd be slain as the Passover Lamb that year.

John the Baptist seemed to get it. Remember well before this, upon seeing Jesus, he said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" An unmistakable reference to the Passover Lamb. Every attempt to arrest Jesus before this had failed since his hour hadn't yet come. Now, he marches himself right into the hands of those who'd kill him, in perfect timing, accepting the worship as King while on the back of a donkey in a spontaneous coronation ceremony. Jesus was in control of the situation; leading the crowd in his own death procession in order for them to understand he was their Passover Lamb; their salvation. Slain in payment for their sin.

The hope of the celebration was peace, but there can't be peace until God reigns fully, and in that process there must first come division. *Jesus said to his disciples before Passover, <sup>49</sup> "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! <sup>51</sup> Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.*

The appeal of Christ wasn't that they'd find peace through the overthrow of Rome as expected. There'd be no *new exodus*. Rather if they'd listen to the background story, hear His words, read the signs, they'd find peace with God through his sacrifice as the Passover Lamb - the appeal is reconciliation between God & Man. In Egypt, God was judging the sin of the people. Yet, as the blood on the doorposts & lintels averted the Angel of Death in Egypt, the blood of Christ will cover the sins of the people & open up the door to total peace & reconciliation with God. God's judgment upon sin is death, but it would pass over them as they receive this final sacrifice of the Great Passover Lamb.

*As they rejoice in faulty notions of peace, we get a glimpse into Jesus' heart in Luke 19 after he's ridden in on the donkey. It says, <sup>41</sup> And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side <sup>44</sup> and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

He's referring to the future in a.d. 70, when Rome would kill 600,000 Jews, take thousands more captive, and destroy the temple & the city. All because the people wouldn't notice God had visited them on this day!

Death is looming for them, and for Him. He's distressed. He knows many of the same people shouting "Blessed is the King" today, will turn & shout "Crucify him!" tomorrow. The one true king bringing peace & reconciliation with God by covering their sin had ridden into the city on the back of a donkey. The great & last Passover Lamb had come who takes away the sin of the world. And when the Temple was destroyed, the whole sacrificial system went away, because there's no need for foreshadowing Christ, when the final Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. The deal was done for anyone who'd come under the covering of His blood allowing the judgment of God to pass over them.

Jesus weeps. He sees false expectations & knows they won't recognize this revelation. God had sent Jonah to Nineveh. Jonah had expected God to destroy it. God saved it. God entered Jerusalem on a donkey, they expected he would break the back of Roman oppression. God came to save it. Jesus weeps since Jerusalem destroys itself by not embracing the moment of His visitation. He wept because He extends the greatest of gifts, and so many will simply not pay attention.



John 1:11 says, *“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”* Then in Luke 19:14 Jesus predicts their betrayal in a parable about a leader who went away to be crowned king, leaving his people with a financial gift to steward while he was gone. As he was away the people sent a delegation to say, *“We will not have this man to reign over us!”* He was pronounced king nonetheless, but since some didn’t regard him as such, they did nothing with the gift he left. He told this parable just before his triumphal entry. Jesus would soon go away to his death, but return again crowned as king, will he find them to cherish & nurture the gift he’d left them, or to disregard it? Will the altar grow into disrepair on the side of the hill? Will we who shout “Blessed is the king,” turn & shout “Crucify Him”?

In the midst of all this self-centered celebration. Greed. Power-play. Disregard. And shallowness. Jesus weeps, knowing people don’t ‘get it’. Yet still, He’d face the cross, submitting to its pain for the sake of them. He knew their hearts. While everyone else celebrates, he weeps, longing for people to recognize this gift of God riding a donkey. He longed for them to stop looking down at their political situation & to look up to Him.

Will we stand ready, and take in the whole Lamb of God & all that he brings to & commands of us? We celebrate communion. A version of the passover meal. Celebrating His sacrifice as the Passover Lamb, by symbolically taking in the blood & flesh of Christ.

God’s been revealing himself all throughout history. He did to Athens, twice. Jesus did at Passover, some got it, some didn’t. He’s done so in many ways throughout history. *Maybe he’s revealing himself to you now!? Summoning you to recognize the gift of the Passover Lamb for the first time. You’ve never considered - everything in the story of God, leads here - to this table. To Passover. To Easter. You’ve never considered your own sin for which Jesus died. You’ve not considered your need of God until now. He’s been a vague god with no real name for you. But now he’s named himself in Jesus. It’s time. Take the step into relationship with Him now - all you have to do is ask, “Jesus, be Lord & Savior of my soul right now!” Then tell somebody this morning about that decision & come enjoy fellowship with us at His Table. If you want someone to pray that prayer with you, come up front.*

For others, your altar’s in disrepair. Weeds have grown up, the mortar is turning to dust. You know the old story, but you’ve forgotten to pay attention to it. Jesus calls you back. Back into vibrant life-giving relationship with him. Into an active & purposeful life of kingdom building alongside your spiritual father. If that’s you, grab someone, come up front, pray a prayer of rededication this morning. Don’t walk away without repairing the altar of Christ in your heart, don’t let one more weed grow up again.

As you think & pray on that, I want to bring up Kathleen, Elysia & Jen, three women who’ve made a decision to follow God into obedience. Like Paul to walk where Jesus leads them. And part of that journey will be in Lebanon this summer to do & teach prayer ministry over a group of our Middle Eastern sisters to further the ministry they are doing over Muslims, some of which are Syrian Refugees. We want to dedicate them to the Lord this morning, and commission them out on this trip. (Explain)