PLAIN TRUTH ®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION ®

Two Parades
By Greg Albrecht

Jesus arrived riding a donkey, but that humble act didn't fool his followers as they watched the parade coming into Jerusalem. Jesus' followers believed that Jerusalem was ripe for revolution, and they knew Jesus was riding a wave of public support. After all, Jesus had just resurrected Lazarus, and the news was spreading like wildfire. What kind of man was this who could order dead bodies back to life?

Everyone was hoping that something significant was about to happen—*Jesus' followers hoped* that Jesus would lay down the law and give the Romans an ultimatum to get out of town and take their miserable, two-timing Jewish turncoat collaborators with them.

Jesus' followers hoped that this was the beginning of a victory parade, and that things would really get better once Jesus took charge. And they were right—something monumentally historic and new was about to take place—but it wasn't what Jesus' followers expected or wanted.

The Triumphal Entry

Easter week in history begins with a triumphal parade, as Jesus enters Jerusalem from the east, from the little town of Bethany just over the Mount of Olives.

But while Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is the only parade the Bible records as happening on that day, **it was not the only parade in town**.

The great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

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 these things had been done to him. Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (John 12:12-19)

Every year in the spring, as Passover approached, the Jews remembered their freedom from Egypt, and their thirst for freedom was heightened by the memories of Moses and the children of Israel leaving the bondage of Egypt.

Passover was also a pilgrimage festival of the old covenant—a time when male heads of Jewish households from distant lands poured into Jerusalem. Their presence added to the potential volatility, as Jerusalem's population swelled beyond its normal numbers.

Another Parade

Because of the emphasis of freedom as a part of the celebration, and because of the large number of pilgrims in the city, Passover in Jerusalem was a time when riots against the Romans and their military occupation were common.

So every year Pilate, the Roman Governor, rode into Jerusalem in a show of force, reinforcing the Roman garrison and ensuring that any uprising would be quickly subdued and suppressed.

The idea, of course, was that the parade of military force would be enough to deter anyone from thinking about trying to overthrow the Roman military. At this time of the year Pilate usually entered Jerusalem from the west—while this year Jesus entered from the east.

Not only did the two parades come from two entirely different geographic directions, every dimension of meaning and symbolism of these two parades was as different as night and day.

- Pilate rode a war horse.
- Jesus rode a borrowed donkey.
- As Pilate rode a war horse in his parade he was surrounded by special, elite military forces armed to the teeth.
- As Jesus rode a donkey in his parade he was surrounded by women and children, by poor peasants and by the least, the lost and the last.
- Pilate rode into town to enforce the rule of law.
- Jesus rode into town as the personification of the kingdom of grace.
- Pilate represented a kingdom that ruled by the sword—by violence, intimidation and force.
- The kingdom of God

inaugurated by King Jesus was and is all about love and grace—about turning the other cheek.

What a contrast between these two parades—two parades that represented two diametrically opposite ways of life!

Palm Sunday is drama on a grand scale—cheering crowds, conspiring politicians, corrupt religious professionals, strong and powerful soldiers—and poor, frightened, normal, everyday oppressed and downtrodden people just trying to live another day.

There's the superhero on a warhorse, dressed in the finery of his military uniform. In the middle of it all is the lone figure of a man—humbly dressed, riding on a donkey—on the way to his death.

The way of Rome was about power and conquest—about domination and subjection of those over whom it ruled.

In the book of Revelation this ruthless system, which has characterized human history, is referred to by the term "Babylon." Babylon/Rome is a ruthless system that steamrolls over cries of the little children and the elderly.

The way of Babylon/Rome is about bondage, taxation and slavery.

The way of Babylon/Rome is of human institutions and organizations run by cold, merciless and unbending rules used to flatten and subjugate all who stand in its way.

Pilate's parade was a parade of power, wealth and oppression.

Pilate's parade glorified military might.

Pilate's parade impressed the masses with its mighty war

The hopes and dreams of those who followed Jesus were brutally tortured and crucified along with him. Which parade are we

machine—its technology—its powerful and strong soldiers.

Pilate's parade proclaimed "Might Makes Right!"

Jesus headed up the other parade, sitting on a donkey, rather than a war horse.

Jesus' parade underlined the way of serving rather than being served.

Jesus' parade was and is about ministering to those in need.

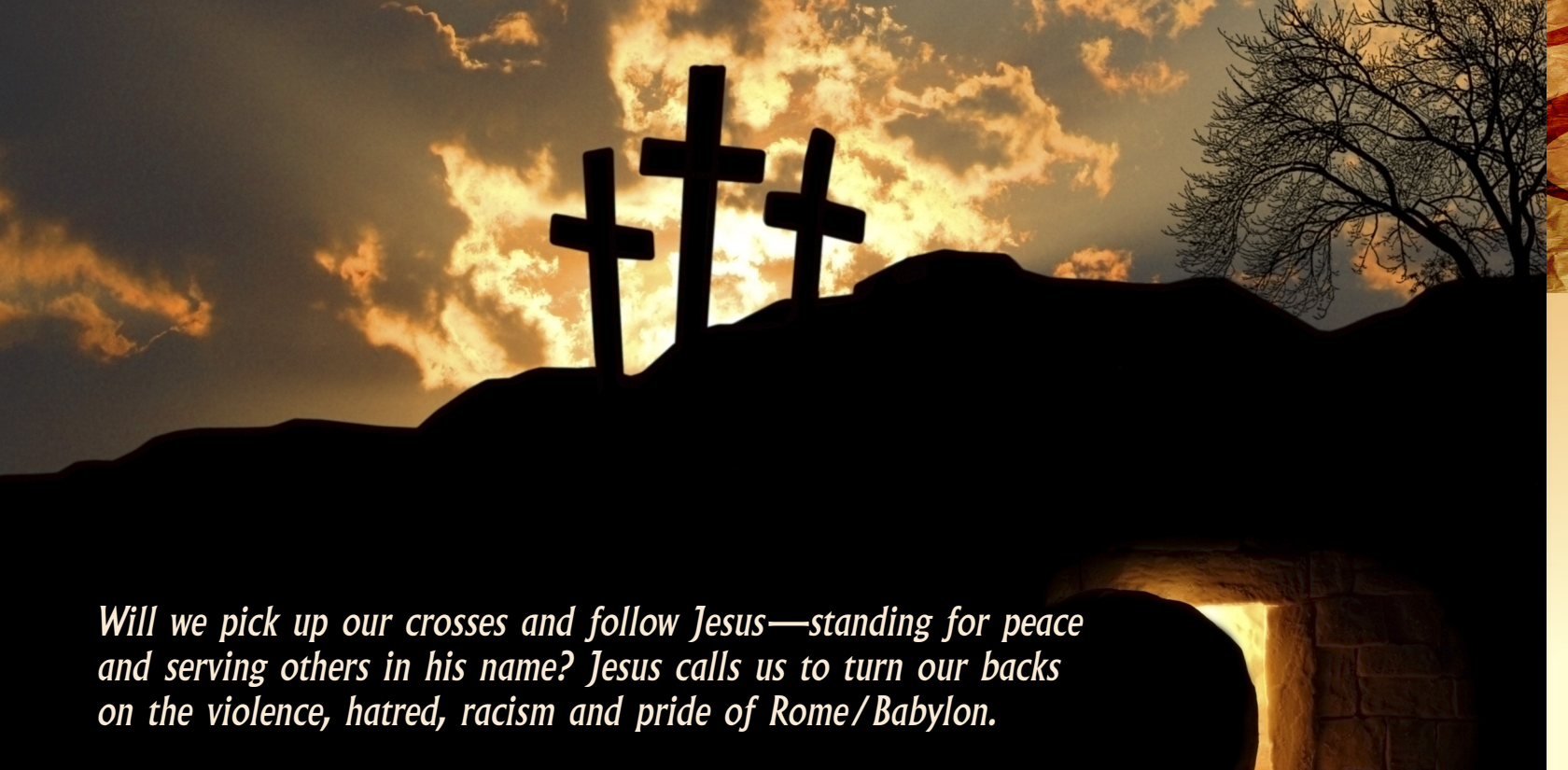**The way of Jesus** is about the reign of God, in the person of Jesus.

The kingdom of God is based on freedom from institutional oppression.

The kingdom of God is about spiritual and eternal freedom from all human oppression.

The Parade is Over…and Now…

You know, it's interesting to note the first stop that Jesus made in Jerusalem after the parade ended on Palm Sunday.

The first thing he did? Well, it wasn't to have a meal with his disciples. The first thing he did? It wasn't even to go to heal the sick.

Will we pick up our crosses and follow Jesus—standing for peace and serving others in his name? Jesus calls us to turn our backs on the violence, hatred, racism and pride of Rome/Babylon.

The first thing Jesus did was to visit the temple. The temple, with all its religious authorities and professionals, was the center of political intrigue, as the elite ruling class of the Jews collaborated with the Romans.

The temple was seen as the symbol of oppression and dominance—responsible for collecting Roman taxes and handing them over to Rome. The temple and its rules exploited the peasants for its own prosperity.

And Jesus cleansed the temple—he overthrew its tables—and he condemned the empty, corrupt religion behind it.

For those of us who have been held captive by the lies and deceptions of the kingdoms of this world—Jesus is a breath of fresh air. He is new wine—he is a new covenant. We read in Hebrews 10:20 that Jesus is a new and living way opened for us.

More than anything else, **the kingdom of God is Jesus**—not dogmas or doctrines, not priests, prescriptions and programs.

The kingdom of God is Jesus, who on Palm Sunday faced down the oppression of the kingdoms of this world, who marched into hell for a heavenly cause.

The kingdom of God is Jesus, who defied religious conventions and dogma, embracing and offering his love to those burdened by shame and guilt.

Just a few days after those two parades the two ways of life they represented collided head on. The collision was a titanic clash of two opposing ways of life, and no one who watched the events unfold would doubt that Jesus was clearly headed for his death.

When the crowds saw that Jesus was not going to give them the victory they wanted—when they realized Jesus would not conquer corruption and give them peace, the crowds changed their cries of support for Jesus to cries of support to release a well-known criminal named Barabbas instead of Jesus. The crowd, swayed by the military power of Rome and the oppressive powers of religion demanded that Pilate "crucify Jesus."

In a poem equally suited for celebration of Jesus' birth as well as his resurrection, a man named George McDonald once summed up the way Jesus completely failed to live up to the expectations of the masses—here's the last lines of his poem, in older English:

We were searching for a king to slay our foes and lift us high, Thou camest a little baby thing, to make a woman cry.

The hopes and dreams of those who followed Jesus were brutally tortured and crucified along with him. Which parade are we marching in and cheering on?

Listen to the voice of Jesus, who tells us in the book of Revelation to "Come out of her, my people."

Ask yourself if it is possible that you are so deeply deceived and enslaved by Babylon (and all of its corruption, oppression and domination) that you think you are following Jesus when you are actually cheering on the other parade?

Will we pick up our crosses and follow Jesus—standing for peace and serving others in his name?

Jesus calls us to turn our backs on the violence, hatred, racism and pride of Rome/Babylon.

Jesus calls us to walk away from the physical and spiritual cheap trinkets, toys and trivia the kingdoms of our world offers.

May we all turn to Jesus and embrace him—may we welcome and worship our Lord and Savior. May we receive and give thanks for his peace, his grace, his mercy and his love. ❑