

THE MAESTRO

Luke 19:28-40

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Contemporary worship Try out service

I want to share a story. Our church felt it was important to reach young people with the good news of Jesus Christ in a relevant way; to do this, we are in the process of introducing a third worship service in a contemporary worship style. We felt it was important to introduce this service to the congregation and we did a “try-out” service on Sunday, September 27, 2015.

At that time, we had a dry run rehearsal the day before. We spent much time to ensure we got the sound quality we wanted, but that wasn't easy; we couldn't seem to find the right balance in sound. In fact, we could not resolve this sound issue even on Sunday morning. We agreed to have only a sound check on Sunday morning (no actual music practice). We finally gave up and decided to go to the Upper Room for prayer. There were many people gathered in the room and we prayed together. I felt the strong presence of the Holy Spirit as people were lifting prayers together. When we finished the prayers, it was already time to begin our worship service. We went into the Sanctuary, knowing we did not resolve the sound issue, but at the same time somehow we were getting excited about what was to come.

When we went in and the music began, a magic happened. We did not know how and why, but somehow the sound we were hearing was exactly the way we wanted it. All the issues we were having, up until the last moment before the service, were suddenly not there. I was stunned by the quality of sound I was hearing. I came home that afternoon and shared this feeling with my wife, and she also said she was surprised by the sound quality in the service. Then, she said something profound. “God was really in charge.”

How I want vs. How God wants

What does it mean when we say God is in charge? I don't know about you, but I always dreamed of God's kingdom being realized here in this church and in the world. The seed that Jesus planted in my heart ever since he called me into the ministry of the Word and Sacraments has been longing to become something that reveals the glory and majesty of our God. I have become relentless in looking for new creative ways to realize this vision. “How can I bring more people to the cross of Christ? How can I help people give their lives for the noble causes found in the kingdom of God?”

Then, a series of events, including this experience at the contemporary worship “try-out” service, were like being hit on the back of my head with a bat. Here's what I have come to realize: God is interested in, not only the motive of action, but also the way it is being done. You see, I am

now fully convinced that God is asking, not only “why” questions, but also “how” questions. And at the core of the “how” question is this: is this how *I* want it or how **God** wants it?

How God wants in the Bible

I’m not arguing this based simply on my personal experience. I have very convincing proofs from the Bible that God is interested in “how” we achieve certain objectives. Throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament, God always gave the specific steps of how he was going to deliver his people from adversaries. Look at Noah’s story in Genesis, the story of Exodus, the story of many kings, who were always given specific instructions of how Israel should face battles through prophets. The strongest evidence for my argument is Jesus’ crucifixion. If God was not concerned about the “how” of salvation, why should the Messiah have to go through the pain and death on the cross? Why did Jesus reject the Devil’s offer in his temptation, when the Devil offered to give the world to him if he worshipped the Devil? God certainly looks at our hearts and examines our motives behind our actions. But, he is also interested in the way we achieve things.

Why and How

Why is God so concerned about “how” things are done? I believe there is a strong connection between the way we do things and why we do things. The way we do things often reveals why we do things. Allow me to give you an illustration. When I was a little, there was this video game my older brother and I loved playing. This little character is supposed to defeat enemies at each stage and the objective of the game is to clear all stages. I loved playing this video game and I tried so hard to clear all stages, but there was this one stage I just couldn’t do. So, I asked my brother to help clear that particular stage for me and he did. I was finally able to clear all stages, but when I did that, he said, “I helped you clear that stage. Without me, you wouldn’t be able to clear all stages. So, technically it proves I’m better than you and I could clear all stages.” I was upset! “Wait a second! I cleared 99 stages and just because you cleared one stage, the glory is yours?” He took the credit and glory that should be reserved for me. You don’t understand how much I regret letting him clear that stage for me. No matter how long it took, I should have done it myself. Then, no one could take the credit and glory that was supposed to be for me. I was determined to clear all stages in that game, so that I would be recognized for my gaming ability. But, when I let my brother clear that one stage, somehow this defeated my purpose of clearing all stages in the game.

All glory to Him

Much is the same for God’s work. For instance, the glory in God’s salvation should be solely due to him. There is no room for us to help complete Jesus’ salvific work on the cross, so that no one can come to heaven and say, “Look, I got here by my own effort!” (c.f. Ephesians 2:9). He carried the weight of the sin of the world all on his shoulders on the cross and faced and conquered the power of evil and death all by himself. Not one of us could have come to him and said, “Look, Jesus, that’s a ton of burdens on your shoulders. Let me carry my own burden and sin to help ease your work.” All we can do is to come to him, receive the gift of eternal life that he made available through his work

and just thank him for it. That's right! That's what he wants: being recognized and praised for what he has done for us.

Jesus the Maestro

In today's passage, you will notice that Jesus is taking a lead in the preparation of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In verses 30-31, Jesus orders his disciples, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" Now, let's just pause it here. What do you mean 'The Lord needs it'? That's it? Imagine if I ask one of you to go to one of the car dealerships and bring me one car and also give you the instruction, "if anyone asks you, 'Why are you taking that car?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" There is definite evidence here that there is a divine intervention in the process of events. In other words, God is interested in how this event of Jesus' triumphal entry is going to happen.

What's so important about this triumphal entry? I believe this goes back to the statement I made earlier: His interest in "how" this event happens has to do with "why" this event happens. He has a definite intention behind this event; otherwise, he would have not sent his two disciples ahead to prepare all these for him; otherwise, he would have not asked specifically for a colt that has never been ridden. Here he is making a statement and he is not shy about it. What statement is he making here?

Making Statement

I think the statement he is making (or the reason "why" he is doing all of this) is revealed through the combination of the message the crowd shouted out and the conversation Jesus had with some of the Pharisees. In verse 38, the crowd shouted out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" This story of Jesus' triumphal entry is recorded in all four gospels, but Luke's gospel has a few unique features that only appear in it. For instance, Mark and Matthew do not include the terms like "King" and "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven" Instead, for example Matthew writes, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Matthew 21:9) Notice the term "the one" is changed to "the king" in Luke's gospel, and Luke's gospel omits the term "hosanna." I believe this was so, because Matthew's first audience was different from Luke's first audience. Matthew was writing his gospel to the people who were familiar with the Old Testament, while Luke, I believe, was more concerned about those who were gentiles and not so literate in the Hebrew Bible and tradition. You see, for those who were familiar with the Old Testament, when they heard the words the crowd said, they immediately recognized that these were taken from the Old Testament writings regarding the coming Messiah. But, for the gentiles and those who were not familiar with the Old Testament, the words did not mean much. Luke thus omitted the term "hosanna" that was Old Testament lingo and added the term "king" which was a more meaningful term than the word "Messiah." The words "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven" were already familiar to them because they heard similar words from the story of Jesus' birth. Luke here was showing how the crowd rejoiced and praised as their awaited Messiah was coming into Jerusalem to be their king.

Of course, their understanding of kingdom and king was different from that of Jesus. Their expectation was that Jesus would use his divine power to judge and defeat the world, including the Roman Empire, and establish a new and eternal kingdom of Israel.

This is perhaps what made some Pharisees uncomfortable. Such an open proclamation that Jesus is the awaited King would make Roman authorities take notice and they were afraid of what the Romans might do to them. Or perhaps they weren't comfortable with the way this triumphal entry appeared. The crowd was probably experiencing the ecstasy of praise and worship, jumping, shouting, dancing, screaming, bowing down and laying their clothes and palm branches down. I mean, think about it; they were thinking their nation was going to be restored very soon, and they had seen all the deeds of power Jesus could perform (c.f. verse 37).

Some of the Pharisees finally said, "Enough of this. I have been patiently watching. I mean, I was really patient even when he was saying all the bad things about us. But, I can't stand this madness. I'm going to talk to him and make him stop this. Or else!" I believe this conversation some of the Pharisees had with Jesus was definitely a tipping point of what they would do with Jesus. I mean, it only took five days to turn this crowd's madness of worship into the madness of crying out to Pontius Pilate to crucify him. They said, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop" (verse 39).

Then, Jesus said something profound: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (verse 40). "I mean, Lord Jesus, you are not bothered by this madness? I thought you never wanted the crowd to follow you and praise you for the wrong reason (c.f. John 6:26). Why are you affirming their praise now?"

As I said, I believe Jesus is making a statement here. He takes initiative to organize and prepare this triumphal entry and welcomes and affirms the people's praise. He is making a statement: "I am in charge, and I'm in charge of this praise and worship because it's about me. Yes, people may have missed the mark here; yes, people may have praised me for the wrong reasons; people may have simply got carried away and joined this parade and praise (in other words, they just thought it was fun, not realizing the depth of its meaning)." Yes, all these things may have happened, but here, at the moment of his entry into Jerusalem, it was all about him; it was about him coming into Jerusalem to fulfill all the promises the Bible had mentioned about the awaited Messiah. It was about him, being determined to face the opposition and take up the cross for the sins of the world. It was about him, fighting against the enemy of evil and death. It was about him, who was worthy of all our praise and worship. It was about him, who was the king of the new kingdom he was about to establish through his death and resurrection. People of God, Jesus was making a statement to the people of Israel and gentiles at that time and to all the people whom he calls: "Watch carefully. This is the moment you all have been waiting for: the very visitation of God (c.f. verse 44), and it's all about me." It doesn't matter what background or circumstance you are coming from to be here. It doesn't even matter what you think of him at this point. It really doesn't matter, because when you and I are gathered here to worship, the Lord somehow intervenes, disrupts and takes control of worship and says, "It's all about Jesus and what he has done for you on the cross and through the cross."

The Maestro of our Worship

I'm sure even here this morning, we are gathered here for so many different reasons. Some of you may be here because you know exactly what Jesus has done and is doing for you. Some of you may have come here because you are searching for something more. Some may be here because someone invited you. Some may be here because this is something you do every Sunday morning and you are just going through the motions. Some may be here in faith or disbelief or doubt or suffering or sadness or hopelessness. People of God, all these don't matter, because ultimately here in this moment, it's about Him. Paul says, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). You may be a clay jar, or a fancy jar, or a stone jar, or a stainless steel jar. But, you know what? It doesn't matter, because what matters is not a jar, but what's in the jar, the treasure that God has given us, his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. He is the Maestro of our worship, and he is making a statement: "It's about me!" May all the glory and honour and praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.