

April 3rd 2011: The Day God Needed a Donkey: Luke 19:28-34

According to USA Today, on Wednesday, November 23, 1994, a couple named Sandy and Theresa boarded TWA flight 265 in New York to fly to Orlando and see Disney World. Theresa was almost seven months pregnant. Thirty minutes into the flight, Theresa doubled over in pain and began bleeding. Flight attendants announced that they needed a doctor, and a Long Island internist volunteered.

Theresa soon gave birth to a boy. But the baby was in trouble. The umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around his neck, and he wasn't breathing. His face was blue.

Two paramedics rushed forward to help, one of whom specialized in infant respiratory procedures. He asked if anyone had a straw, which he wanted to use to suction fluid from the baby's lungs. The plane did not stock straws, but a flight attendant remembered having a straw left over from a juice box she had brought on board the plane. The paramedic inserted the straw in the baby's lungs as the internist administered CPR. The internist asked for something he could use to tie off the umbilical cord. A passenger offered a shoelace.

Four minutes of terror passed. Then the little baby whimpered. Soon the crew was able to joyfully announce that it was a boy, and everyone on board cheered and clapped.

The parents gave the little boy the name Matthew. Matthew means "Godsent." The people on board the plane "were all godsendings," the father said.

What an incredible story! God had the right people in the right place when He needed them. And the right people had the 'something' that God needed, be it their skills, a straw, or a shoelace and they were so blessed through the giving of them. The last paragraph of that story says:-

Indeed, God had met the need through people who gave what they had and did what they could. God usually meets needs through people.

On that very 1st Palm Sunday, Jesus needed a donkey and that need was met through people. Can you imagine how that person, or that married couple, or that family felt afterwards. When the donkey was given they

would have had no idea how important it would become in the whole scheme of things. For them the loan would have been more than just a small gesture. H Walker Evans in his commentary on Mark states: "In those days borrowing someone's donkey was comparable to borrowing someone's car today. In that economy donkeys cost significant money for the middle-class person, and could be a vital part of how a person made a living."

Yet they lent it simply because Jesus needed it.

It was only some time after the event that they realized how critical their donkey was as far as Jesus was concerned. Matthew infers this when he writes about the time when the disciples collected the donkey and says in Mtt 21:4-5

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

***"Say to the Daughter of Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"***

For the 12 disciples and for the owners of the donkey full understanding came after they had remembered the prophecy found in the Old Testament book of Zechariah.

You see prophecy declared that the triumphant ride into Jerusalem had to be made on a donkey that had never been ridden or harnessed, making it suitable for such a sacred use—and this family had such an animal.

But the point is that they didn't know that when the request from Jesus came.

It makes one stop and think doesn't it! Does Jesus still work in the same way? Does He still at times ask His followers to provide something for Him—for His work, without specifying at the time how necessary their gift is? How gloriously it will be used? How much a small act will achieve in the eternal scheme of things? Of course He does!!

I always remember the story that a Christian Missionary nurse told about the time she was working in an isolated African community. A little baby girl was born but to survive the little mite needed a constant heat source on her body and the nurse had nothing she could use. She told the family that if she was back in her country she would have used a hot water bottle but there was

little hope of getting such an item quickly in that part of Africa. The little baby's brother, a child of about ten reminded the nurse that they simply had to pray for a hot water bottle and God would send one. So they prayed. Later that day an unexpected parcel arrived that had been posted from England many weeks beforehand, and in it someone had put a hot water bottle.

Now when God prompted that person to put a hot water bottle into a parcel they had little idea why it would be so important. They simply trusted His leading and obeyed.

It's that same trusting obedience that stands as one of the high lights of this story. Jesus had obviously made some secret arrangements beforehand with this family. He knew that the authorities were watching His every move and He had to be careful how He acted. Jesus recognized that the time of His death was close. In fact it was just a few days away, and he still had prophecies to fulfill. So He doesn't go to collect the donkey Himself but sends two of His disciples. He tells them where the mother donkey and the colt will be and that they are to simply untie them and bring them to Him.

At the same time He gives them a message for the owner which we find in Matt 21:3

If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

The tremendous confidence that Jesus has here in His followers. He knows that once the person realizes that it is Jesus who is making the request, He will send them right away. And Luke tells us that the disciples were asked what they were doing in untying the donkey. And they did reply "The Lord needs it." And immediately the owners sent them.

Note that the message was, "The Lord needs it". It wasn't "Jesus of Nazareth needs it". Or "Jesus the Teacher", or even Jesus the Lord. It was simply, The Lord, because for those followers that said it all. They had only one Lord and Master and that was Jesus, and for Him they were ready to give their donkey.

As Christians the very fact that the Lord has need of it, whatever that 'it' is, should be enough for us too. I was thinking as I wrote that this week, about one of our members who is preparing to go on Impact Africa with Challenge ministries in July this year and I know how nervous she is about that. But she knows that the Lord said to her, I need you to go, and that's enough.

I thought of another who braves the streets of Northbridge in the early hours of a Sunday morning once a month as a street chaplain, and I know that the only thing that gets her there is because the Lord has told her that He needs her.

But I guess the really exciting thing for me about this story is that the Lord needed a donkey. He couldn't use a stallion or a golden chariot. He wanted a humble and lowly donkey that had never been ridden on and was therefore considered inferior because it hadn't been trained. It wasn't sophisticated, famous, or highly sought after. It was a donkey!!!

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and said in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

There are many times when I feel very much a donkey compared to others with their great skills and wisdom, yet the Lord has chosen to use me. And perhaps you have felt the same too. Often people have told me that they feel the Lord is calling them to offer this or that possession to Him, yet it seems so small to them—so insignificant compared to what others can give..that they wondered if they should even give it. But I assure them that if the Lord needs it from them, then it's definitely not insignificant to Him.

And many times fellow Christians have shared with me a calling they sense from the Lord to be involved in this ministry or that and yet they confess to huge feelings of inadequacy. They look at the capabilities and experience of others and feel like untrained donkeys next to magnificent stallions. And I assure them that the Lord often calls the weak so that he can make them strong.

That to me is the hidden truth contained in the story, and it's made even more meaningful by the Greek phrase which is translated, "The Lord needs it".

In each account of this story where the disciples are to tell the owners that the Lord has need of it, the literal Greek phrase reads: The Lord of it need has, or, "The Lord of it, (the Lord of the donkey), needs it(needs His donkey).

Several times the same phrase is used but unfortunately it doesn't come out in our English translations. Jesus proclaims Himself as the Lord, and especially as the Lord or owner of the donkey. His followers may own it according to the human way of looking at things, but because those owners belong to Jesus, He holds the right of Lordship over them and all they have. Now He simply needs to use His donkey for His purposes.

In the same way if you have given your life to Jesus then He is Lord of you and all He has put into your care. The abilities and physical strength you have. The possessions and homes you have. Your state of health and your length of days. He is Lord of all, and this account is a reminder that when the Lord comes calling at your hearts door, then the blessings come when you are willing to say, here it is Lord. It is yours anyway. Now take and use it to your glory.