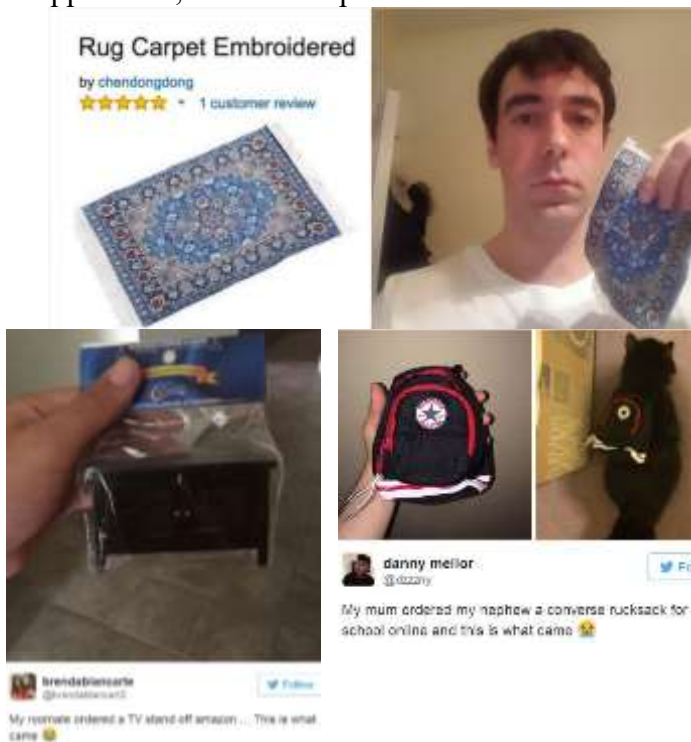


Truth In Advertising (Palm Sunday)

A Sermon by Rev. David Johnson

A while back I was bored, surfing from link to link online. After a while, I found myself on a site that showed some of the sad, often silly things people received after purchasing items online. It was sad to see how these people were taken, but I couldn't help but laugh when I saw some of the items that were sent to these well-meaning shoppers. Oh, how unscrupulous some charlatans can be.



It's true, no one likes being taken for a fool. And we are willing to go to any length to keep that from happening. This philosophy has even impacted our churches.

In recent weeks, since this whole coronavirus, stay-at-home, self-quarantine event has happened, I have been amazed at the response of churches of all kinds. In one week, every pastor – every worship leader – every ministry support business has promoted the need for expanded online outreach. Recorded messages, zoomed Bible Studies, Skype council meetings, and live-streaming church services have become the norm. As one Facebook meme promoted, “And just like that, we are all Televangelists.” Suddenly, everyone was sharing how they did it better, faster, or with higher picture quality. How did we ever get the gospel out without PowerPoint, 32 channel sound systems, projecting equipment, and professional video clips.

All of this forces one to sit back and question, Why? Are these things somehow going to make our worship experience more real or sincere? Will God be more willing to come and meet us if we use these things? Maybe God will appreciate all our effort, expenditure, and sacrifice and be more willing to return the blessing to us? What about a high profile pastor? Will sharing a Chuck Swindoll or Ravi Zacharias sermon on Facebook necessarily

get us any closer to God, or more “hits”? If these are our thoughts and intentions, we had better re-evaluate our hearts.

But if it's any consolation, we aren't the first ones in history to make this mistake. In fact, the story of Palm Sunday is quite poignant to our modern-day mindset, particularly because of this common feeling, “Nobody wants to be made the fool.”

But what if the opposite was happening. What if we were pursuing a piece of doll furniture, and got the real thing instead? What if we were expecting a loaf of bread, and were presented with the Bread of Life? Well, this is precisely what was happening as Jesus rode into Jerusalem all those years ago.

Luke 19:35 They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus {on it.} **36** As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. **37** As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, **38** shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" **39** Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." **40** But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" **41** When He approached {Jerusalem,} He saw the city and wept over it, **42** saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. **43** "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, **44** and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (or, "...did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.)

The people in Jesus day fell for a common deception. Even though the Scriptures consistently explain that the Messiah would be a man of simplicity, miraculous faith, and eternal authority; the Israelites had been convinced that he would be a man of great political power and prestige. He was to be a man like King David who would be a powerful earthly ruler, freeing God's people from Gentile political (*Roman, Greek, etc.*) tyranny.

Num 24:17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth...**19** "One from Jacob shall have dominion, And will destroy the remnant from the city."

Is 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. **7** There will be no end to the increase of {His} government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

So it's easy to understand how the Israelites got the idea this was going to be an earthly king and protector. On the surface, it would almost seem that God was some

sort of scam artist (like I mentioned before). Was Jesus just some kind of heavenly “bait and switch” swindle? Was God simply selling the concept of kingship and power, when He actually intended something completely different? Remember what Isaiah 55 tells us:

Is 55:9 "For {as} the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

The truth of the imagery of our passage from Luke 19 is that the people were honoring Jesus as an earthly king, because an earthly king is what they *wanted* to see. And Jesus realized this, especially in Luke 19:42 where he grieves, *"If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes."*

Sadly, the people only saw peace in terms of “lack of conflict.” Therefore, if there was to be peace, this Roman tyranny had to be stopped! If there was going to be any justice or righteousness, their own king must be on the throne. They weren’t looking at peace spiritually, in terms of inner rest or trust in God. It is very similar to how people saw life before Saul was crowned King.

1 Sam 8:19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

The people figured that with an earthly king on the throne, they would be like other nations, with an actual person to “go out before them and fight their battles.” This earthly king would be the panacea to all their problems. But God knew the real problem, and He shared it with Samuel earlier in 1 Samuel 8:

1 Sam 8:7b-8 The LORD said to Samuel, "...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. 8 "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day--in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods--so they are doing to you also.

Likewise, Jesus understood that this would happen just a few days later, and that realization broke His heart. Jesus’ pain wasn’t because of His own betrayal, but due to the people’s hardness, loss of vision, and eventual judgment. It says that He wept, not for Himself, but for the loss of the people of Israel.

Luke 19:41-42 When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.

Many of these same people who would soon shout “Hosanna’s,” were blinded - blinded to the reality of what God was trying to do. And it broke the Savior’s heart. They, like Elijah of old, had thought God would be in the Wind. But He wasn’t. Then an earthquake. But He wasn’t there either. Then a powerful fire arose. But God wasn’t in the fire either. No! God didn’t meet Elijah in any of those spectacular expressions. He came in the stillness of

a whisper; and many of these people who were welcoming Jesus would eventually transform into a raging mob, motivated by their disappointment and anger. They just couldn’t let go of their false expectations, their costume jewelry, even when offered diamonds.

The Treasure, By Alice Gray

The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening pearls in a pink foil box.

"Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please!" The price-tag read a dollar ninety-five. "Jenny's birthday is only a week away," her mother mused as she placed them in her basket.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere – Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. However, her mother said they couldn't get wet or they might turn her neck green.

Jenny had a very loving daddy who would come upstairs every night to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?"

"Oh, yes, Daddy. You know that I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess – the white horse from my collection. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite."

"That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?"

"Daddy, you know I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. You can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful.

"That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you." And he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed. As he came close, he noticed her chin trembling as one silent tear rolled down her cheek.

"What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?"

Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her hand up to her daddy. When she opened it, there was her pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you."

With tears in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her real treasure.

Many in Jesus’ day were expecting, and wanting the “dime-store stuff” of political power and authority. They thought that would lead to peace and satisfaction. But Jesus knew better and it broke His heart to see their distracted affections. Because if Jesus had been what the people expected, He would have failed.