

The closer we look at the world the more we realize just how crazy, just how “quirky,” of a place it really is. This is the premise of a new book entitled *Quirkology: How We Discover Big Truths in Small Things* by psychologist Richard Wiseman. For example, it’s a quirky truth that the single guy in a bar who uses a strange, even weird, pickup line, is more likely than not to get a phone number of the girl he’s chatting up. According to Wiseman’s research, he’s totally wasting his time by asking, “Come here often?” Instead he should open with something like, “If you were a pizza topping, what would you be?”

Quirkology is filled with all kinds of crazy insights. Here’s another: according to Wiseman, the best way to spot a liar is not with our eyes –as we’ve been taught –but with our ears. When someone is lying, they’ll give much less detail and almost never use the pronoun “I.” Wiseman is driven by the belief that in life there’s a reason for everything and a quirky cause behind every real world effect that we’re forced to live with. The more quirks we know, the better equipped we are to navigate life. Wiseman asserts.

One could argue that Palm Sunday marks the quirkiest moment in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. On this day we’re not celebrating one of his miracles, or retelling one of his teachings. No. We’re remembering the fact that Jesus once rode a “borrowed” donkey into Jerusalem, and that a crowd of bandwagon believers –many of whom would later mock him and shout insults at him all the way to the cross –waved palm branches at him. Quirky. And yet, in line with Wiseman’s thesis, there’s great meaning behind this great weirdness. There’s meaning that can prove enormously helpful as we continue our mission to navigate life as one of Jesus’ followers. To modern ears, the events that unfolded that day were just weird. But it was not weird in Jesus’ day to ride a donkey. In third world countries today, this is still a common sight. It was, however, a bit on the strange side for someone purporting to be a king to enter the capital

city on a donkey instead of a horse, as the provincial governor, Pilate, must have done about the same time.

If you were a first-century Jew, much of this would have made sense. God's people had been waiting for the Messiah. They'd been waiting for someone, sent from God, who would rule and change the world. In the Old Testament book of Zechariah, there's a prediction concerning the world's one true king and how he would make himself known. "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 and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Sound familiar?

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is his way of saying to those gathered that day, "Yep, I'm that guy!" And as the people responded with their coats on the ground, palm branches in the air, and praise on their lips, it was their way of saying, "We agree." And if you're a follower of Jesus, you would say, "I agree as well." "Jesus is that guy."

One of the more difficult aspects of Palm Sunday for us today is this whole idea of messiahship or kingship. We struggle to grasp the idea of living under the rule of a king. And being American –our national identity was forged by opposing a king –therefore it's practically in our DNA that life under an all-powerful ruler is not necessarily a good thing. But it's not like we are unfamiliar with the concept of a king –not with Queen Elizabeth sailing into her mid-nineties and Prince Charles lurking offstage, while –in the meantime – everyone is rooting for Prince William to be king, with Kate and their three little children George, Charlotte, and Louee cheering him on..

We know what a king is. We get that. The problem is that many Christians are a little uncomfortable using the word in a theological discussion. But this unease can be helpful. Palm

Sunday is a teaching moment to explain how God through Jesus desires to be the sovereign ruler of our lives. A big part of discipleship is learning how to submit our lives to the rule of Jesus, who offered himself as Judah's sovereign over 2,000 years ago. We know how that turned out, for we read the next part of the story in today's Gospel. Eventually the religious leaders and the people rebel against Jesus in a kind of mutiny, he is arrested, put on trial, and eventually he is crucified.

Today, however, let us try to focus on the idea that Jesus is offering to be our sovereign. So, what do we do? How are we to respond? Well, first we must learn to submit to his authority. Kings are sovereign, which means Jesus has absolute authority over absolutely everything. We observe hints of this in the quirky instructions Jesus gives to his disciples regarding the colt and donkey in today's Gospel processional. He sends two of his students off with rather detailed and specific orders, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, "The Lord needs them, and he will send them at once."

Jesus' taking of the animals, which belong –let's face it –to someone else, is an assertion of his kingly ownership. He even goes so far as to say, "If anyone has a problem with it, tell them the Lord wants it." In other words, he's not stealing because –Hey! He's the king, and as sovereign it's all his anyway.

Now there are two ways in which we submit to Jesus' authority. 1) As the church, by having faith in his Word which he's given as his standard over our lives. As a Christian there's no such thing as a private, personal life that's off limits to Jesus. He governs our bodies, our debit cards, our desires, what we look up on our phones, what we put in our fridges, and how we

work at the office. He is king and we look to him and say, “Lord, what is your will with this stuff you’ve entrusted me with?”

2. We submit to his authority by showing respect for the other authorities in this world that he’s put in place to lead us. If Jesus is King it means that anyone who has any kind of authority in this world only has it because Jesus the ultimate authority has delegated it to them. Here’s the deal: We honor Jesus when we are respectful, of others, as he himself was respectful even as he was resisting religious and political authority right up to his death. On the cross, as he was dying, he prays that his enemies will be forgiven for “they know not what they do.” In summary: When Jesus offers himself to us on this Palm Sunday as sovereign, we can respond, first, by submitting to his authority, having faith in his word, and being respectful of others whom he has placed in our lives.”

We can also accept Jesus as sovereign, not only by submitting to his authority, but by finding peace in his protection. In the ancient world, what often made you king and kept you as king was your army. The size of your army is what kept the enemy away and allowed your people to sleep peacefully. To believe that Jesus is king is to believe that he is unmatched in his ability to love us, protect us, and rescue us from all enemies. That’s why as Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted, “Hosaana” which means, “Lord, save us.” They did so, because they believed that his power could bring their lives the peace they so desperately needed.

Do you know why it is that Jesus rode a colt –a young donkey –into Jerusalem rather than a horse? A king only rode a horse in times of war, when he was a king in battle. A king would ride a donkey when it was a time of peace. Jesus rode the donkey to tell us that life under his rule will not be dominated by war and strife, but, for those who have faith in him, by a life dominated by peace! He will fight the most important battle –with evil and death-on the cross and defeat

them both in the resurrection, offering us a life in which the biggest threats are already conquered.

Third and finally, when you live under the rule of a king you know that you have to treat him differently than you would anyone else. This is why the people laid their coats on the ground when Jesus entered Jerusalem. If he really was the savior-king then they'd rather have him walk on their clothes than have his animal trudge through the dirt. Why do you think we sing songs in church? Why do you think we stand as we worship and bow our heads when we pray? Listen to what Jesus says, in Luke's gospel, when some wondered aloud why the crowds praised him. "I tell you, if these people were silent, the very stones would cry out. In other words, "If these people don't give praise recognizing their creator, then creation itself will scream it."

Part of our job, as people of the Sovereign, is to show the world who its sovereign leader really is by bowing at his feet and shouting our praise. Even though the rest of the world may mock us, we praise him. None of this comes easy to us. There's a learning curve to living under a ruler like Jesus. In fact, embedded in today's story is a picture of what the struggle is like. It's not found in the crowds who praise him, but in the donkey that carries him. The Scriptures tell us that it was a colt that had never been ridden. An unbroken animal is terrible to ride; it wants to reject the rider and be free. Yet, because of whom Jesus was, this immature and untamed animal submitted to him and exalted him for his journey.

That's us. We're untamed and immature and prone to reject all riders. Yet we have been chosen to submit ourselves to Jesus so that, through us, the people we are surrounded by; our friends, family, acquaintances, neighbors, co-workers, might see him for who he truly is. The bottom line is that on Palm Sunday Jesus comes to us as one who would be ourfill in the

blank. Are we ready to wave the palm branches, shout “Hosanna” and accept his leadership, mentorship, master-ship, lordship, sovereign-ship, CEO-ship?

Quirky. For sure. One could argue that Palm Sunday marks the quirkiest moment in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. In fact, this morning’s worship service is a bit quirky in that we begin by celebrating Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, only to hear later about his trial before Pilate and his crucifixion. We start the service with joy and merriment and leave it feeling very somber and serious. And yet, in line with Wiseman’s thesis, there’s great meaning behind this weirdness. Though the world might reject Jesus, when we do the unmistakable, quirky work of giving him praise, when we submit to his authority and allow him to publicly tame our unruly lives, the world will not be able to ignore him.