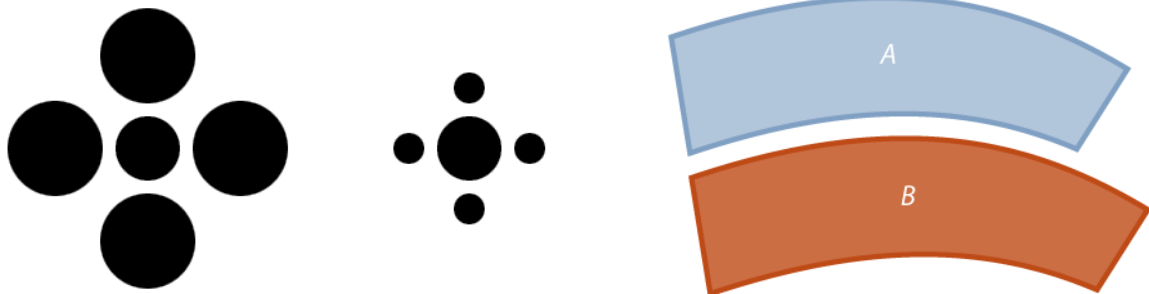




John 12:12-19

Comparisons can teach us a lot. For example, which is larger, the middle circle on the left or the middle circle on the right? The question is meant to lead you astray because they are actually the exact same size. Which of the colored arcs is larger? Again, they are the same size.



These are optical illusions of the same object but opposite comparisons can teach us a lot as well. For example, I could say that compared to Ryan and Ethan, I am an awesome basketball player. Do you think that is a true statement? I swear it is absolutely true—as long as I compare myself to the basketball skills when they were ten years old. I know they are snickering at me because now they could literally beat me with one hand tied behind their back.

Last Sunday we saw the stark comparison between Judas and Mary. Judas' greed is obvious to everyone but it becomes especially obvious when we compare it to Mary's gratitude. And we can likewise see Mary's gratitude when we lay it beside the greed of Judas. Colors, sizes and character are better seen when you have something with which to compare it.

In this next section of John, which is known as the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, we see another stark contrast and as we compare two groups of people, each of them come into better focus. The comparison I am referring to is the crowds of people in the city and the disciples. Make no mistake, the focus of the Triumphal Entry is on Jesus but we also want to see the various ways in which people respond to Jesus.

12 The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" 14 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. 17 The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. 18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Last week's story about Mary anointing Jesus is found in three of the gospels but the triumphal entry is in all four gospels. Of course the details that John gives are somewhat different than the other three gospels.

The first thing we learn is that it was a large crowd. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded details about the Passover crowd about thirty years after this particular Passover.

So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour till the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice, and many of us are twenty in a company, found the number of sacrifices was two hundred and fifty-six thousand five hundred; which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to two million seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons that were pure and holy;¹

Josephus tells us that there were approximately 2,700,000 people at the Passover feast. Many people think that this is an exaggeration but nevertheless, the crowds were enormous. At no other time of the year would there have been so many people in Jerusalem. If 3,000 Jews were saved at one time after Peter preached at the lesser feast of Pentecost, then clearly there could have been tens or even hundreds of thousands gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover.

Jesus did not necessarily want to be among these enormous crowds. After Lazarus' resurrection he attempted to stay away from the crowds. *Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.* (John 11:54) Jesus was not shy or afraid. He was just waiting until the right time to make his appearance.

And it was quite the entrance. The crowd heard that he was on his way to the feast so they rushed to give him a king's welcome. They laid palm branches on the road and the other gospels tell us some people laid their cloaks on the ground as well. It was the first century equivalent of rolling out the red carpet. There weren't 2.7 million people on the road. This was not the million-man march but there could have been tens of thousands of people. From great grandfathers down to

newborn babies, the crowds went out to see the man whom everyone was talking about. The crowds were abuzz with excitement and lots of questions.

“Who was he really? If the Sanhedrin wants to kill him, why did he put himself in danger by coming to Jerusalem? Has he really done all of the miracles they said he did? I heard he fed 4000 people with a plateful of food. I heard he fed 5000 people by miraculous powers. Well I heard he raised from the dead a man from Bethany who had been in the tomb for four days! Who is this man?”

Despite the fact that Jesus has mostly been doubted and scoffed at for the past three years, the crowds on that particular day did have a very specific idea about who Jesus was. *So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”*

Let’s break down their shouts of praise so we understand what they meant. The crowds were crying out from a verse in Psalm 118. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! By itself that was not a recognition that he was the Messiah. It was a generic blessing on anyone who came in God’s name. However, the crowds got very specific about what they meant when they added, “even the King of Israel.” That last phrase is not part of Psalm 118 and is a definitive title for the Messiah.

Now they did not see Jesus as Savior but they most definitely recognized him as the Messiah in an earthly kingly sense. They thought he was to be the one to finally deliver them from the oppression of the Romans. He was their long awaited king and the fact that that he arrived just before the Passover only served to heighten their expectations. So even though they did not have a full picture about Jesus, they were certainly incredibly excited and were ready to crown him as their Jewish king.

Now compare their reaction and level of understanding with that of the disciples. *His disciples did not understand these things at first.* John tells us that they did understand later—which makes sense that they would eventually understand. But it would appear that the disciples are not understanding the events of the triumphal entry but the massive crowds did understand. This is the main comparison that I wanted to show you. The enormous crowds of Jewish worshippers got it but the disciples did not.

I think you know that this is not the complete picture because we know that in less than a week they killed the One for whom they praised that day. But I want to show you why the handwriting of their rejection was written on the wall the day they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem.

Reason #1—Jesus knew their true hearts

The crowds were right to quote from Psalm 118 but the very next day, Jesus also quoted from it, just a few verses prior. He said this right after he told the parable of the wicked tenants, the one where they kill the owner’s son.

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:
“The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." (Matthew 21:42-44)

Remember, this was spoken the day after he cried out for him to be king. It was also after he cleansed the temple with his own handmade whip. He used Psalm 118 to chastise the same people who used Psalm 118 to announce his entry into Jerusalem. He knew their hearts and he was signaling to them that they would be rejected because they would first reject him.

Peter used the exact same verse when they were dragged before the Sanhedrin who condemned Jesus to death just a few months earlier.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:8-12)

Reason #2—Kings do not arrive on a donkey's colt

John reports that Jesus' riding the donkey's colt into the city was a fulfillment of Zechariah 9. Right in the middle of a chapter of judgment, the Lord spoke these words through the prophet Zechariah.

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.

John's quotation has most of the key elements from Zechariah.

14 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

*15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

But my point is that kings do not arrive on a donkey's colt. If you want to see how a king should into town, you need to need Solomon's entrance on his wedding day.

6 What is that coming up from the wilderness

like columns of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?
7 Behold, it is the carriage of Solomon!
Around it are sixty mighty men,
some of the mighty men of Israel,
8 all of them wearing swords
and expert in war,
each with his sword at his thigh,
against terror by night.
9 King Solomon made himself a carriage
from the wood of Lebanon.
10 He made its posts of silver,
its back of gold, its seat of purple;
its interior was inlaid with love
by the daughters of Jerusalem.
11 Go out, O daughters of Zion,
and look upon King Solomon,
with the crown with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
on the day of the gladness of his heart. (Song of Solomon 4)

That's how a king is supposed to ride into town! So why didn't Jesus enter the holy city in this way? The answer is found in the difference between John and Zechariah. Did you notice what John left out?

Zechariah 9:9

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.

John 12

And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as
it is written,
"Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

John left out the part about Jesus' salvation. I am not saying that John did not feel it wasn't important. By the time he wrote the gospel of John, Jesus has been in glory for almost sixty years. John knew full well the centrality of Jesus' salvation, but the crowds did not. They knew Jesus as Messiah but not as Savior. Jesus rode on a donkey's colt instead of a war horse to

demonstrate the ultimate humility of his work as Savior. God becoming man was humbling enough but God giving his life for his enemies was the ultimate act of humility. And the crowd completely missed this.

Reason #3—The crowd’s faith roots were shallow

The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. 18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

They knew about Lazarus but their faith was mostly in the sign itself and not in Jesus. Now remember that Jesus did the sign to bring about belief. But most did not truly believe in him. Signs and miracles by themselves are never enough.

Reason #4—The Pharisees were in panic mode

So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.

Do you think the Pharisees were exaggerating when they said, “the world has gone after him”? It seems to have been an exaggeration, but on the other hand, if there was a crowd of tens of thousands gathered around pronouncing him as their king, it certainly would have felt like the whole world to the Pharisees.

The panic of the Pharisees combined with the greed of Judas, led to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. The cries of the crowd put the final motivation into the resolve of the Pharisees. They concluded that Jesus must die and it must happen now.²

Reason #5—A snapshot of faith is not sufficient.

How was it that the disciples did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah yet the crowds shouted it as he entered Jerusalem? Surely, the fickle crowds were not further along in their understanding than the disciples.

The problem is that when John wrote, *His disciples did not understand these things at first*, we are only seeing a snapshot of their faith. We are seeing where they were right at that moment and on the surface it could appear that they had the same or even less understanding than the crowds. Remember that the disciples were experiencing all of these things before Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Their perspective was so much more limited than ours.

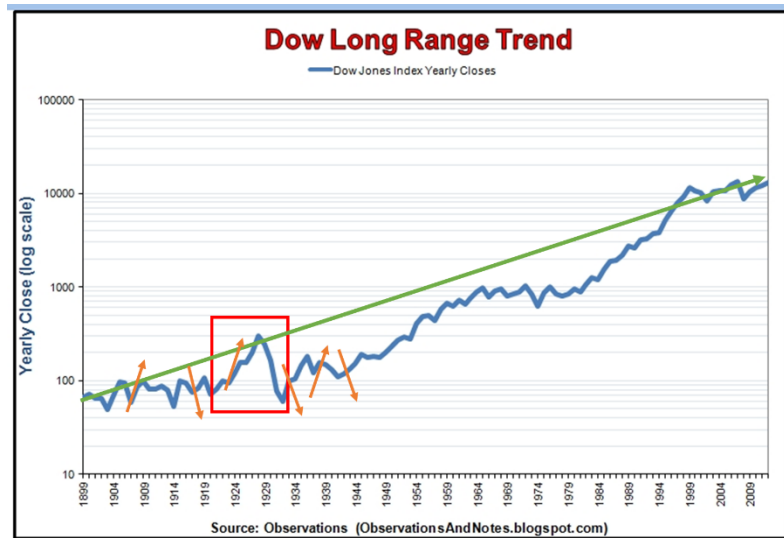


But more than that, remember that we are all in process in our understanding and obedience. Think about what you failed to understand a year ago or five years ago. How has your understanding and obedience grown over the past few years? Our faith journey is up and down at times. If this graph represented someone’s spiritual life, what might you conclude about the person? You would say, wow, that person is really growing spiritually! But the next frame of this graph looks like the one on the right side.



I pulled these sections of graphs from a 100-year history of the Dow Jones Stock Market indicator. The downside of the graph is from the stock market crash which brought about the

Great Depression. I am convinced that the Christian life is very much like this overall graph. If you only look at a quick snapshot it may not be a good indicator of your overall spiritual life. Because as believers, we tend to focus on the down times, right? It's much easier to wallow in spiritual defeat than it is to celebrate the Lord's victories in our life. So we look at all of the times the trend is downward. "Oh man, another failure. Another miserable day. And another and another." But what tend not to see are the upswings, all of the up arrows.



And most importantly, we want to see an uptrend over the long haul. If you only took snapshots of 100 years of the Dow Jones, you could be pretty depressed about it. But over time, the trend is clearly upward. This shows that the roots of your faith are going deeper over time.

Their slow and gradual understanding—even though Jesus rebuked them for it at times—serves to authenticate their personal journeys. Once again, skeptics and scoffers like to state that the Bible was written by a bunch of crazy zealots. But all of the disciples started as unconvinced learners. They weren't blind zealots following an egomaniac through the desert. They were not an elite army of professional religious men. They were just ordinary working men—fishermen, a Roman tax collector and other working class jobs. They were just ordinary men.

Acts 4:13 is such an awesome reminder of where they started. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

The faith roots of the disciples grew over time, not all at once. Be patient and allow God to do his work in your life.

Rich Maurer
October 16, 2016

¹ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

² (John 11) 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, 46 but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." 51 He did not say this of his own

accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.