

A WEEK OF WONDERS

GRAND ARRIVAL TO GETHSEMANE: MARK 11

A Canadian mother, Martina Phillips, has a wayward son. She hasn't seen her boy for four, long years.

Recently, she posted a dozen questions...

How does a parent deal with the rebellion of a child?

How does a parent keep from giving up hope?

How does a parent not envy other people's kids?

Why does free-will have to take us so far from God?

Why don't happy parents ask about unhappy ones?

Why do children see loving parents as their enemy?

Where is all this chaos going?

Where can a parent find comfort?

Where does a parent learn to understand their pain?

What does a parent do to dispel their fears?

What can I say?

What can I do?

Read Martina's questions, and it brings a tear to your eyes. She knows rejection of the deepest sort. Nothing is tougher to cope with than the rejection of a child.

A mom births her baby, and nurses him, and wipes his bottom, and diapers him, and does so endlessly, yet joyfully (*most of the time*). She falls in love with another human in a way she could've never fathomed.

She kisses his boo-boos, cooks a thousand meals, helps with his homework, carts him to soccer practice...

She buys him clothes, hems his pants, pays his car insurance, picks out a corsage for his prom date...

And none of this prepares her for the heart-rending moment when he rejects her overtures of love, and turns his back on their relationship. *A mom wonders what she did wrong... Why is she being rejected by her own flesh and blood, after all that she's done is love?*

A mother tries to make sense out of his senseless behavior. How can anyone reject pure, unselfish love?

Yet many children do, and it pains their parents.

The *worse pain* is always *your own pain*. And I'd never pretend to understand Martina's broken heart - [or yours for that matter](#) - but I know One who does.

Jesus has tasted this same sort of rejection.

When Jesus was born He was kissed by angels, and cradled by a mother. But when He died He was spit upon, and cursed, and physically abused. Oriental magi recognized His royalty, and bowed at His feet to worship - while the men who conspired to arrest Him and try Him, condemned Him as a common criminal.

And just as we do when it happens to us, we wonder why! It's easier when the rejection was caused by something I did or said. I can fix it. That's easier to deal with than the reality of not knowing, not understanding?

Certainly, after two Millenniums of reflection we see a little clearer the factors that led to Jesus' crucifixion. Politics and power played a role... But at the time, I'm sure His rejection seemed as senseless and hurtful, as the pain felt by the mother of a wayward son...

The Apostle John was there. His relationship with Jesus was especially close. John felt His friend's sting.

He saw how Jesus agonized over His rejection.

Later when John wrote of those amazing years, he characterized Jesus' life with these words, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." How's that for a hurtful, painful summation - *rejected by your own?*

In the month of March we're going to trace the steps of Jesus during the final stretch of His earthly ministry.

For centuries the Church has referred to the seven days from *Palm Sunday* to *Easter Sunday* as "*Passion Week.*" We think of the places and events of that week.

From His Grand Arrival in Jerusalem, before a crowd that paved the path with a tribute of palm branches...

To the drama played out in the Garden of Gethsemane - with Judas' kiss, and Peter's sword...

To the sham trials that occurred at Caiaphas' House, and later at Gabbatha (or *Pilate's Judgment Hall*)...

To Golgotha, or Skull Hill, where the beating and torture began by Pilate, culminated on the cross...

To the Garden Tomb, where the body of Jesus was buried and guarded, yet three days later rose in victory!

Even forty days later to His ascension into Glory...

It's a story of triumph, but it's also colored by deep and painful rejection. Far more important than the *places* and the *personalities* - this week was all about *passion... a week of wonders and a week of weeping*.

In sports we admire the player "who leaves it all on the field." An athlete may be limited *in talent* or *in size*, but he makes up for it *in heart*. He plays with passion.

And Jesus too lived His life with passion! We think of His back and the lashes. But think of His heart. It was torn and scourged long before whips struck His back.

The Prophet Isaiah peering 700 years down the halls of history was correct when He spoke of the coming Messiah, "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him..." Jesus understands rejection!

Our Lord is the beauty of holiness. The Hebrew Prophet, Haggai, called Him "the Desire of all nations."

Jesus is the King of kings who'll be adored and loved after this world vanishes and a new world comes...

Yet for a week He made Himself vulnerable to all the rejection that every human has ever tasted. He gulped down the pain you feel right now. Today, Jesus knows something about the hurt of a broken human heart...

And yet this final week of wonders didn't start out with rejection. In fact, by its beginning, you would've never dreamed that's how it would end. Jesus' week of weeping starts with a parade - an inaugural parade.

What occurred on the Sunday before the cross was the only public demonstration Jesus ever orchestrated.

He made an official entrance into God's holy city.

A few years ago I traveled to Germany to teach at the CCBC. On our way home, my son, Nick, and I, had a layover in London. We were there just one day - but we made the most of it... It was a memorable day.

It just so happened our one day in London coincided with an official visit from the President of South Korea.

And our timing was impeccable...

We were strolling along the mall, next to Buckingham Palace, when suddenly the place was swarming with swat team types - clearing the street... Then we saw red uniforms and bear-skinned hats in march formation... A band struck up some music... Nick and I looked up just in time to see the Queen Bee herself in a horse drawn carriage clip-clopping in front of us.

Her entourage traveled a mile from the palace to the Horse Guard Parade Grounds. A formal welcome was extended to the South Korean dignitaries. Then the delegation

climbed back into their Cinderella carriages and returned to Buckingham Palace with the Koreans.

And there on the street-corner - two dumbfounded Americans stood watching with dropped jaws - amazed that they had stumbled across a royal event.

I'm sure the Korean's official visit had been planned for months, if not years, but the Adams' boys were fortunate enough to be at the right place, at the right time. And I'm sure that's what happened to some of Jerusalem's visitors - in town for *Passover 32 AD...*

Normally the population of Jerusalem was 80,000, but during Passover, the city was swamped with pilgrims. The population swelled to 250,000 people.

And the visitors from the Galilee, and the Decapolis, and the Jordan Valley - had seen and heard of Jesus.

It was the perfect moment for Him to make a point.

This procession down the Mount of Olives had been planned 550 years in advance. Daniel 9 predicted that from the Persian king's decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem to the coming of Messiah there would be 483 years. A daring prophecy from the pen of Daniel.

King Artaxerxes' decree was issued on March 14, 445 BC. Count off 483 years, or 173,880 days, and it brings you to April 6, 32 AD... *this particular Sunday!*

The Passover pilgrims in Jerusalem that day may've been as naive about the timing of this event as the two dumb Americans were when *the Queen was seen*. But Jesus knew exactly what was happening and why...

Earlier that day Jesus had sent two disciples to a Jerusalem suburb to fetch Him suitable transportation.

In Mark 11:2-3, Jesus told them, “You will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?...”

And of course, somebody is going to ask...

This would be like me telling you to go up to the Red Lobster parking lot, and you’ll see a car with the keys in the ignition. Take the car and drive it back to me. *And if anyone says anything to you...* You bet they will! For one, Gwinnett cops will have something to say!

A couple of weeks ago, my wife met me at Red Lobster. She had our grandson, and I suppose Kathy was so preoccupied with *Colton*, that when she jumped out to unbuckle him, she forgot to shut off the car!

For over an hour the car stayed purring in the Red Lobster parking lot... *And yes, my wife is blonde...*

But what if Jesus told you... “Go to Red Lobster, and you’ll find a **Colt** - in a car that’s already running - “*And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this? Say, ‘The Lord has need of it...’”* “*Oh, okay! The Lord has need of my car... I’m cool!*” That would be a miracle!

One truth we learn from this *week of wonders* is that when God has a plan, He takes care of the details.

Actually, several miracles occurred that Sunday...

Jesus’ mode of transportation was predicted some 500 years previously, in Zechariah 9:9, “**Behold your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey.**”

As Jesus descended the slope of Olivet, even the cheers of the crowd were lifted from Scripture... Psalm 118, “Hosanna (or “save us” to) the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!...”

For three-and-a-half years Jesus had canvassed the countryside of Galilee... traveled the deserts and hills of Judea... taught in the porticos of the Temple...

He opened blind eyes, and made the deaf hear. He conjured wine at weddings, and feed 5000 with five loaves and two fish. He demonstrated His power over *nature*, and *demons*, and *sickness*, and even *death*.

He taught, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” And folks believed Him for He brought heaven to earth.

And now as Jesus rides His borrowed burro down the hill and through the gate, a huge roar goes up.

Thousands of visitors lay out palm fronds across the road, and pave it with the clothes off their back. It was the Jewish equivalent of rolling out the red carpet.

Even the tune the multitude sang was a Messianic psalm. It spoke of the King’s presentation to the nation.

It was Luke who dropped the first hint of rejection.

He writes in Luke 19:39, “Some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples.’” In the midst of the celebration, the doubters spoke up. They questioned the claim that Jesus was the Messiah, and expected Him to share their view...

You get the sense, Jesus anticipated their rejection.

He answered them boldly, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” *The Messiah is here, and if humanity doesn’t sing His praise - nature will.* I kind of wish the crowd had been silent. We would’ve heard some real *rock music*.

And recall what happened next... The Jesus the Jerusalem crowd identified as Messiah, *acts like one*.

Jesus enters the Temple - *His Temple - His Father’s house*. And we start to see further ripples of rejection...

After Jesus’ triumphant entrance the next few days will weed out the nation’s true intentions. It’s one thing for folks to identify, and greet, and praise a King - *but what’s their attitude when He starts to act like the role?*

Following His entry, Jesus preceded to the Temple. He walked in as if He owned the place - *for He did!*

He shouted, “Is it not written, **My house is a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves.**” His message was *shape up or ship out...*

Imagine, Jesus barging through the Temple doors to confront the crooked priests. They were exchanging coins at a mark-up so folks could tithe their preferred currency. They were selling rabbi-sanctioned sacrifices at exorbitant prices - **they were making a buck of God!**

Like Jack Bauer busting up a terrorist cell - or John Wayne in a shootout - Jesus took on the whole, corrupt Jewish establishment. He barreled through the Temple.

He turned over tables, and ran off moneychangers.

When I first came to Jesus it was like Palm Sunday.

Jesus road into my life to the cheers of my heart. It was a gentle, peaceful breakthrough. It was like *a house warming...* The Lord thawed out a frozen heart.

His love melted my hardness. I finally found rest.

But my life was dirty, and corrupt, and far from the kind of place Jesus would want to call home. So He took to cleaning house, and turning over a few tables in my life - *just like He did that day in the Temple...*

Mark 11:18 tells us after Jesus upset their apple cart, “*The scribes and chief priests... sought how they might destroy Him...*” He was now a threat to their authority.

And just as there were Temple stockholders who didn't like their business being threatened... There are people today who bristle up when Jesus acts like who we claim Him to be. We like Jesus as long as He stays within the narrow boundaries we establish for Him, and doesn't go places where we haven't invited Him.

But when He takes the initiative to overturn tables - that's another story. *We're like the Jews* - we'll adhere to His will, only as long as it harmonizes with our own.

It's one thing to praise Jesus on the Mount of Olives, *or even in church*, but it's quite another to give Him the run of your heart - and let Him transform your life.

As Jesus left Jerusalem that evening He saw a fig tree. He was hoping for fruit. But all it had was leaves.

The fig tree was fig-less... *go figure!* What a letdown. Jesus is hungry! He curses the tree with barrenness.

The next morning, on His return trip to Jerusalem He walks right passed the same fig tree. The tree had withered overnight. It was a miracle... *and a symbol...*

For in the same way, the future of the nation was about to experience an overnight change. The day before, crowds had embraced Jesus. They had hailed Him their Messiah. But on this day, seeds of rejection will be sown. A brewing bitterness will choke out faith.

It starts again in the Temple. It's Monday now. And Mondays are tough. It's been said, "**Mondays are when you think of the good ole days - Saturday and Sunday.**"

This Monday was the day Israeli officials inspected their flocks and chose a lamb to sacrifice for Passover.

On that same day, Jewish officials inspected Jesus.

Matthew 22 and Luke 20 recount the loaded questions the brightest minds in Judaism hurled at Jesus that day. He had to tiptoe around the land mines.

All their sly and tricky scenarios were designed to trap Jesus, so they could accuse Him of bigger crimes.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? A woman marries seven men who's wife will she be in the resurrection? Which of the 613 commandments is the greatest? If Messiah is David's Son, how can He also be His Lord?

Jesus gets four pitches, and knocks each one out of the park! At the end of the sparring match, I love what Matthew said, "**And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone question Him...**"

Arguing Scripture with its author is a futile task. The Jews matched *wits* with God and ended up the *dimwit*.

Sadly, by this point, the die has been cast. It's now obvious Israel's national leaders are looking for reasons to reject Jesus, rather than reasons to believe.

And there're a lot people today just like them...

Jesus is a threat to their lifestyle... His authority challenges their independence...

His righteousness exposes their corruption... His truth unnerves them...

And rather than open their lives to Him, they look to assert their own autonomy - do things their own way.

The Jews asked Jesus four questions, *but Jesus had just one for the Jews, "Why? Why resist my will, when all my intentions are good for you? Why the rejection?"*

Later that day, as Jesus left Jerusalem, He was overcome with emotion. As He climbed to the top of the Mount of Olives to the suburb where He was staying, He couldn't escape the view. It was spectacular. *It still is...*

It's the most stunning view in all of Israel. From the top of the Mount you get this panoramic picture of the city. Yet instead of the gold dome, Jesus would've seen the Temple - *a symbol of God's people* - His footstool...

And it was here that tears swelled up in Jesus' eyes.

The events of Monday proved that Israel's leaders had rejected Him. It was now a foregone conclusion.

And from the top of the Mount of Olives, Jesus utters one of the most heart-wrenching cries in all the Bible...

Matthew 23:37, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children**

together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Don't tell me Jesus doesn't know something about the anguish of a broken heart...

This past week I read a story I thought was amazing.

Twelve hours after baby Moses Goodrich entered the world, his 46 year-old mother, Susan, exited. The Michigan mom died of a rare amniotic fluid embolism.

Her widower, Robbie, was left with the task of caring for little Moses. And since it was Susan's desire to breast feed her baby, Robbie lacked what little Moses needed most... *milk!* There was no one to nurse.

That's when something wonderful happened. Young moms from Marquette - some who knew Susan - heard of the dilemma and volunteered to breast feed Moses.

For over a year, more than 20 mothers, agreed to an elaborate schedule to make sure that Moses was fed.

What a testimony to the power of maternal instinct to care for a baby even when it's not your own child.

And this is Jesus' passion for any wayward child. He longs for the lost ones... "O *Jerusalem, Jerusalem...*"

Over generations past, Jesus in His pre-incarnate state, kept leaning over heaven's rail, agonizing for His rebellious children, Israel, to turn to Him. Like a mother hen in the barnyard, scurrying about to protect her chicks, Jesus hoped to gather and provide for His kids.

Jesus has more maternal estrogen than twenty wet nurses. And all that stopped Him from gathering up Israel were four tragic words, "*you were not willing!*"

No other rationale is given... Sometimes rejection isn't as complicated as we think. Or else the perceived reasons don't really matter. They're all just excuses.

The pain could end if there was just a willingness.

From Sunday to Thursday, Jesus was reminded that not everyone on His bandwagon was part of the band. Not everyone who *joined in His praise*, was willing to *submit to His rule*. Not all His friends were truly friends.

Hal Niedzviecki learned this same lesson. When he opened his new Facebook account he was proud of the fact that he quickly accumulated over 700 friends.

But Hal was lonely, and he hoped to translate some of his virtual friends into actual, real-life buddies. So he decided to have a party for all his Facebook friends.

He sent out invitations for everyone to meet at a local pub. Of the 700... 15 said they'd definitely come... 60 said they might come... Hal was counting on 20...

Imagine his disappointment when only one person showed up - and she wasn't even his friend. She was a friend of a friend who heard about the get-together. She stay for a few minutes, then left. And there he was, Hal, *the man with 700 friends*, drinking all by himself.

Everybody likes a parade, a party, and as long as folks are part of the celebration they'll be friends with Jesus. But not everybody likes Jesus in their Temple - turning over tables - expecting life to be done His way.

Sadly, Jesus is still **“despised and rejected by men.”**

And you will be too if you choose to follow Jesus. Be His voice in this world, and folks will try to silence you.

We still live in the same place that rejected Jesus.

Recently, I was with a friend who admitted that he's weary of the stigma people attach to Christianity...

He told me, "The Bible teaches that God literally created the Earth in six days... that homosexuality is a sin... that miracles actually happen... and I believe it's all true. I'm just tired of being laughed at for my beliefs. People think I'm a buffoon for believing what I do."

Christianity is true, but it's seldom popular. Following Jesus will never be in vogue. Surrendering your life to the will of another is rarely seen as *the cool move*.

God's wisdom remains foolishness to sinful men.

We should wear this world's scorn as a badge of honor. In 1 Corinthians 4:10 Paul boasts, "we are fools for Christ's sake." He considered it a privilege to be so linked to Jesus that he was rejected for Jesus' sake.

Our Lord knows what it's like to be *mocked*, and *laughed at*, and *plotted against* behind closed doors.

After His showdowns in the Temple, Matthew 26:3-4 tell us that the chief priests, and scribes, and elders of the Jews assembled at the palace of the high priest, and "plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him."

Tragically, the leaders of the nation He'd come to save had rejected Him. *His crucifixion is imminent. His departure from this world is near. His time is at hand...*

So Jesus chooses to spend His final night with His closest friends. *And it was a night they'd never forget.*

In Matthew 26, Jesus prepares to eat the Passover.

And again He gives some cryptic instructions...

In Matthew 26:18 Jesus tells a couple of His disciples, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, ‘My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.’” It’s not like He’s giving Him a choice. *It’s the Teacher asking...*

Again, the city is packed. It’s a “no vacancy” week.

You make Passover preparations in advance, or you don’t make them at all. But Jesus has supernatural connections. There’s a banquet room awaiting Him...

Luke even adds a description... “a large, furnished upper room.” There the disciples prepped for the meal.

Luke 22:14 stresses it was Jesus’ “fervent desire” to celebrate this final Passover with His twelve disciples.

I think when the world rebuffs us it’s nice to recall who our friends are. In the midst of rejection we forget!

We get buried by the abandonment of one person, without taking comfort in the other friendships that still surround us. It was vital for Jesus to spend this time with His friends. He’ll convey some important truths.

People respond to rejection in different ways...

Some people give up and retreat into a cocoon of isolation so they'll never get hurt again... Other folks drown their feelings of rejection with drugs, or alcohol, or other destructive behaviors... Still other people get angry, and lash out at the source of their rejection...

Jesus does none of the above. Listen carefully to John 13:1, and try to identify His coping mechanism...

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”

There it is, the last six words in verse 1. Here's how Jesus overcame rejection - **“He loved them to the end.”**

Certainly, there is a healthy way to love, and a love that's self-destructive. But the answer to rejection is not *isolation*, or *self-medication*, or *anger*, or *resentment*...

Jesus kept on loving the folks who rejected Him.

Someone once told me, **“the only way to wipe out your enemies, is by turning them into friends.”**

And this is the Christian's response to rejection.

You can't make someone accept you, or respect you, or love you - but you can release that person to Jesus, and in your heart choose to love them with His love.

Here's why I call this last week, *a week of wonders*. It's not because it's chalked full of miracles. God does work miracles, but not where we would expect them...

Why doesn't the ground open and swallow the Jews who come to arrest Jesus? Where are the angels that are suppose to ride to the rescue and deliver Jesus from the scourging? Why don't the nails that are about to be driven into Jesus' hands and feet melt like wax?

Those are the wonders I would've included if I were writing the story... But here's the real miracle, **"He loved them to the end."** Even on the cross He cried, **"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."**

Maybe a friend wasn't there when you needed her... a child betrayed you... a parent neglected you... a spouse walked out... a co-worker let you down... have you stopped loving them, or will you be like Jesus?

When you harbor a grudge it'll eat at you. You're the one destroyed by your own bitterness. But when you choose God's love it *heals*, and *forgives*, and *unlocks*...

Whenever I feel hurt or rejection I force myself to remember that there is **no healing** in withdrawing, or drowning, or lashing out. **The healing is in the loving!**

This is what Jesus does in the loft that night. He loves the disciples who are about to abandon Him. By morning light, not only the crowds who met Him on the Mount of Olives, but His own disciples will reject Him.

He breaks bread, and says with such love, **"This is My body, given for you."** He sips the wine... **"This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."**

This is all a foreshadowing of the cross to come!

Jesus hurts. He's rejected. But to Jesus it's all about His love for them, not their lack of love for Him. His body will be broken - His blood will be spilt - for them.

And then Jesus dips a piece of bread in the sauce with Judas, and identifies His betrayer. *Yet Jesus even loves Judas.* He resists the urge to condemn the traitor, rather He sends him out to do his dastardly deed.

Imagine though, Jesus even loved Judas to the end.

That night Peter boasts, everyone might forsake Jesus, *but not me, not ever!* Yet Jesus tells Peter that Satan has asked for him, to sift him... Peter will deny His Lord three times, before the rooster crows twice...

Yet in Luke 22:32 Jesus extends hope to Peter. He promises His doomed disciple, **“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”** Even when a disciple acts cowardly, Jesus continues to love him!

Later that night, Jesus spoke about heaven. He was going to prepare a place for them... In His stead God would send another Helper of the very same sort as Jesus. The Spirit will pick up where Jesus leaves off...

Jesus knows dark hours are ahead for His disciples, so He assures them, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

In John 17, for a whole chapter, Jesus prays for an unbroken unity among all believers - *then and now.*

And as His disciples show their folly by arguing over who's the greatest, Jesus performs *the wonder of all wonders.* **With a bowl and towel He changes the world.**

Jesus takes on the task of the lowliest servant. He washes dirt off His disciples' feet. And proves over Peter's protest, that **“the greatest is the servant of all.”**

One man writes, "Until this moment the whole point of things was for someone to get on top, and once on top, to stay on top or else attempt to get farther up.

But this man already on top - rabbi, teacher, master, (God Himself) - got down on the bottom and began to wash the feet of His followers. In this one act Jesus symbolically overturned the whole social order."

You and I can't imagine the ramifications... *the hands that created the universe now with shriveled fingertips.*

That night, Jesus left His disciples with a new command, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

By this time it was getting late. Jesus and the twelve disciples opened the doors of the upper room, and walked out into the crisp, cool air of a Jerusalem night.

They strolled through empty streets - passed by the colossal Temple - then they crossed the Kidron Valley.

And there on the western slope of the Mount of Olives they entered a garden they'd visited before.

It was used to grow and crush olives. The locals called it "Gethsemane" or "the garden of the oil press."

The first leg of Jesus' amazing race is now over. The week of wonders has begun, but not as we might have thought... what starts with high hopes ends in rejection.

Jesus knows what it's like to be heartbroken!

Yet He continues to overturn tables... He knows His true friends... He loves people to the end, even those who reject Him... And He commands us to do likewise.

And if you know someone who's lost and needs to find refuge under the shelter of His wings... then pray for that person. For all the Lord is looking to see is *an inkling of willingness* - and He'll rush to their rescue!