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What Vehicle Does God Drive?

“In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus is God’s *vehicle* to deliver grace, love, forgiveness, and eternity.

Have you ever considered the vehicles *Jesus* used? For example, what occurred on Palm Sunday? Jesus entered Jerusalem. You know the story well, or do you? Jesus *rode* into Jerusalem. The people lined the streets. They honored Him with palm branches and laid their garments on the ground. What *vehicle* did He use?

If you said, “a donkey,” you are correct. Did you know that 500 years earlier, the prophet Zechariah predicted that event? In Zechariah 9:9, it says, “Your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle, and riding on a donkey.”

Did you know that every donkey, anywhere in the world, is born with a cross on its back? The long part of the cross runs along its spine, and the crossbar extends from one front shoulder to the other. How amazing! On Sunday, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a cross! The following Friday, He carries a cross out of Jerusalem!

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So, what was the vehicle Jesus used for Palm Sunday? If you said, “the donkey,” you are only half right. How did He get the donkey? He asked two of His disciples to go into Jerusalem and bring Him a donkey. The disciples were also a vehicle Jesus used. He is still using people today. You and I are vehicles for Jesus to reach the world.

God Uses Vehicles

In the Garden of Eden, the Creator used a fruit tree. It literally bore the difference between good and evil! During the Great Flood, God used an ark. Of course, to build the ark, God used Noah and his family. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God used the vehicle of blood on the doorposts. Then God used the vehicle of dry land in a sea that was separated. God used Moses, a vehicle of leadership. He used manna, a vehicle of survival.

Here is what you need to know about vehicles. They always send a message. They are containers. They represent the *medium*. The medium is not *the* message. It carries the message. However, the medium shapes the message. In Bethlehem, God sends a huge message: Jesus shows up in the flesh. Why would He use that vehicle? It is a vehicle that works. The mission of Jesus works best when the medium sends the right message.

Perhaps there is even another message about the medium of a donkey on that first Palm Sunday. If you are looking up the word “donkey” in the dictionary, it means “a domesticated ass; also slang, ‘referring to a person regarded as stupid, foolish, or obstinate.’” Perhaps the message is that Jesus can even use you and me! Anyone can be the vehicle of salvation. All we have to do is get out of God’s way.

Most Christians would never intentionally approach their faith life in a way that is “stupid, foolish, or obstinate.” After all, Jesus wants us to spread His love, forgiveness, new life, and His gift of eternal life. That is the mission of every Christian. That is what it means to be church. To effectively “do church,” you don’t have to be a genius, just willing—like the donkey.

Kingdom Vehicles Are Everywhere!

Beyond you and me, the Christian movement uses many vehicles. Jesus launched what we call “The Lord’s Supper.” John the Baptist launched baptism. As awful as it was, the cross became a symbol—a vehicle of victory. Why? (1) He paid it all for us, and (2) it’s empty—so is His tomb!

In the Middle Ages, Christianity spread throughout Europe. The believers were smart about using vehicles. Most people couldn’t read one of God’s greatest vehicles—the Bible. So, leaders told the story of salvation using stained glass.

In the early centuries, churches had no heat. People stood for worship. Eventually, someone invented benches. Later, they put backs on the benches—the invention of pews. People could focus longer on the message. (Then, someone padded the pews, not realizing, perhaps, the temptation to fall asleep!)

As Christianity flourished, villages became cities and humble churches became cathedrals. These magnificent facilities became the centerpieces of many metropolitan areas. Since few people had clocks, churches were built with bell towers to alert people and draw them to worship. Without modern media, news traveled by couriers. The church was the place to receive regional and national news. When the courier

arrived, the bells called the people to hear the news. Church was the place of worship *and* the centerpiece of regional information.

In that world, in which few were literate, those leading worship dressed in elaborate attire to reflect the symbolism of sin (black) and grace (white) along with colors that reflected the themes of the religious seasons. These were all vehicles that enhanced the communication in a world where most people could not read or write.

Today, many of those cathedrals are primarily tourist attractions. They are magnificent symbols—vehicles—of a time when the Christian faith flourished. I'm grateful for the privilege of traveling and the opportunity to visit the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (before the fire); the Cathedral at Cologne in Germany; the unusual cathedral in Barcelona, Spain; the Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral in London; St. Patrick's Cathedral in Ireland; the Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in St. Petersburg and Moscow in Russia; and one of the largest churches in the world—the Yoido Full Gospel Christian Church in Seoul, South Korea. Yet, all vehicles eventually become a distant shadow of contemporary, vibrant faith-life.

Vehicles Change

Winston Churchill once said, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." As buildings age, they send a different message. Many of the churches in the US were built as smaller versions of what early Americans from Europe called "church" in the countries of their origin. That was understandable in the first 100 years of North American Christianity. Now? Not so much! Today, those facility vehicles signal a message: "The church is old, out-of-date, irrelevant, and foreign." These vehicles have lost their significance for those who are unbelievers.

Many Christians have their "favorite Bible." However, language continues to change. With modern technology, language changes more rapidly. If you want to share the real message of the Bible with your children or among unbelievers, it may not be your "favorite" well-worn version of Scripture. If you want the *real* vehicle of the New Testament, you'd have to learn Greek. Yet, it wouldn't be the language they speak in Greece today. Modern Greeks would have a hard time reading the Greek of the New Testament. Why? Language continually changes. If someone were to ask you about your favorite version of the Bible (vehicle) today, your *best* answer might be "the next one," or perhaps, "three or four of the most recent versions."

Why do some churches still speak the Lord's Prayer and use the word "Thy"? Or read a version of the Bible that uses the word "Thou"? What if a young couple was lying in bed and the husband hugged his wife and said, "I love thee"? How would that work out for him?

In our book *Who Broke My Church?* we wrote, "In Kingdom culture, the medium is not the message. The message is the message, and you do not want the medium to get in the way. The mission of Jesus uses whatever medium works, and that medium changes with every audience, every time, and every place" (page 144).

Content and Vehicles

The content of Christian faith—the Scripture—should never be changed. The truth of

God's Word is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The vehicles that carry that eternal content must constantly change to fit the audience. As Nancy Pearcey once wrote, "Your church may be biblical in its *message* and yet fail to be biblical in its *methods*. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, said that the Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way, if it is to have the Lord's blessing. We must express the truth not only in *what* we preach, but also in *how* we preach it" (Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, page 361).

Jaroslav Pelikan was a theologian and professor at Yale University. He said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

When you think of Palm Sunday, remember this: It is so easy for Christians to slip into worshipping the donkey. In other words, the vehicle gets in the way of the Rider. Worn-out vehicles send a message Christians don't believe: "Jesus is old and out-of-date."

Jesus said, "No one pours new wine into an old wineskin. If you do, the skin bursts and the wine is spilled, and the wineskin is destroyed. New wine is put into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:17).

Jesus is the "new wine." Not just when He was on Earth, but always. The wineskin is the vehicle. It does NOT shape the wine. The new wine of Jesus always shapes the skin—the vehicle. On that first Palm Sunday, Jesus used two vehicles: (1) the disciples, to get the donkey, and (2) the donkey. Jesus wants to use you and me. He wants to use our churches, with *optimum* effectiveness. His mission did not end with the donkey or even the Resurrection.

Jesus says to every believer, every church, "Go, make disciples..." It is a miracle! Even if you are a dumb donkey, you, too, are imprinted by your faith. Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow me." You may be the only vehicle Jesus will use to reach some people before it's too late. Ask Jesus to ride your heart, your attitude, and your relationships. Ask Jesus to ride your church. It is His vehicle to reach the world. Never allow an old and out-of-date vehicle to send the wrong message about Jesus!

KEY RESOURCES

Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York, NY: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017.

Pearcey, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.