

Unexpected and Surprising

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Because to turn again to God in prayer you'll have noticed I hope on the bulletin sheet today this please be seated. I want us to return to Luke's Gospel chapter 19 and the second half of that chapter that we read together Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem. Now I wonder if you were asked to give a description of your relationship with Jesus Christ, how you would describe that.

Someone asked you about your relationship with Jesus Christ, how would you describe that? Would you describe it as stale or surprising or someone in between or would you be brutally honest with whoever asked the question and say I don't have a relationship with Jesus, I don't know him. Well I hope whatever your answer is that you'll be challenged by at least a question, how would you describe your relationship with Jesus. I think very often for us as believers it can be on the sliding scale towards staleness rather than on the sliding scale upwards towards exciting and surprising and ironically I think the more that we make Jesus in our own image the more that we stop letting Jesus be Jesus from how he describes himself and how he is in his person. Maybe you know we think if I just you know didn't make Jesus so demanding or if I didn't make him so like

God if he was a bit more like me and if he was a bit more acceptable to my friends then maybe that would be easy. If we do that the more we make Jesus in our own image the kind of Jesus maybe we think we would like then I think ironically paradoxically the dollar he becomes. The less we allow Jesus to be the Jesus that he reveals himself to be and the more we kind of mould him in our own image I think the dollar he becomes because he becomes less like God. He becomes less God. He becomes more manageable. He becomes more like a puppy that we take along in a lead and less like the God that he is. So I want to do today and I've been challenged by it in a very real way as I've looked at this passage to try desperately keen to try and let Jesus speak and reveal himself from this passage as to the kind of Christ he is because we find if we look at the scripture that Jesus is very often maybe not what we expect him to be and there's a couple of things here that I want to focus on. First of all the unexpected biography that Luke is writing here and then the surprising character of Jesus as it's revealed. Now you might think what in earth is he going to say about the unexpected biography how can that challenge us about our thinking of Jesus. Sometimes it's not that obvious. We come here to Luke's

Gospel and we come to verse 28 of chapter 19. Now there's nothing to indicate to us really that there's a break here but we know as we look at it and as we compare it with the other gospels that this is Luke bringing us to the last stage of Jesus life. It's the last stage of the Gospel of Luke and what we're doing is we're moving from his journey that we've looked at the last number of weeks up to Jerusalem to wars Jerusalem. Now he's entering into Jerusalem and it's the last stage of the biography and from verse 28 of chapter 19 right through to the end of chapter 25 to the end of the book is one week. It's just one week of Jesus life. So what we're reading today about his entry into Jerusalem is the Sunday before his resurrection. One week. So it's an unexpected biography because we have this massive amount of information about Jesus, five and a half chapters about Jesus being packed into this last week of his life. It's an unbalanced biography of Jesus isn't it? Now if we look at Jesus I think he's just a good example for us. We look at his life and we follow the kind of things he did and if God just wanted us to think of Jesus as someone that we can look to as a good example and why do we have this imbalance of his biography? Why wouldn't Jesus for the teenagers who are here, why wouldn't God have given us a detailed indication of the kind of teenage life that Jesus lived if he was only an example or the working people that are here, why wouldn't God give us a much more detailed indication of the ten working years between the ages of 20 and 30 that Jesus had so that we would know how to act as Christians in our workplaces following Jesus example. There's very little told about his childhood, about his teenage years, about his working life but nearly the whole gospel is about the three years of his public ministry and particularly this week of his passion. Luke wants us to know, God wants us to know that the week leading up to his death at the cross is absolutely central to who Jesus is and to why he has come. It's the next stage, it's the most important stage and not only does that come across from Luke's own imbalanced biography but it comes across from Jesus himself. In verse 28 of this section we're told that Jesus, after he'd been speaking to the disciples, he went on ahead going up to Jerusalem. It's a kind of throw away statement isn't it? We would just read that and think it's just the next stage of what's happening but it reminds us that when Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem he's actually going against everyone's advice. Everyone has been saying to him, especially his disciples, Luke, Jesus don't go up to

Jerusalem. There's guys there that want to take your life, there's people there that want to kill you. You know your life's been threatened, don't go near Jerusalem, go somewhere else, go somewhere quiet, go to a quiet house somewhere but please don't go to Jerusalem. Jesus was going directly into the eye of the storm, he was deliberately choosing to go to a place that was extremely dangerous for him. That is because he knew he had to go there because he had work to do. It is clear that Jesus had set his face to meet the most significant week in the history of this troubled universe. This week into which he was entering that he was facing by going to Jerusalem was something he couldn't flinch from, something he couldn't walk away from, something that has great significance not just to people then but to us today as we worship. Great significance as human beings and the unexpected biography reminds us and gently pushes us towards that fact.

[8 : 17] So we have this unexpected biography and Jesus and God, the Spirit is making clear that the cross is the center of Christ's life, not Christ's life. Now I'm going to say that a few times there, I'm going to say it later on as well, it might sound a little bit controversial. It's not the life of Jesus that is absolutely crucial or low obviously as great significance but the death of Jesus, he is more than just an example in other words of how to live a life because he has come with a specific redemptive purpose to die. Now if we minimise the crucifixion, if we minimise the cross and the need for the cross and the significance of the cross then we are kind of ignoring the elephant in the room. We're ignoring something that's absolutely central to the whole thrust of this biography, that it's pointing towards the fact that Jesus has come for a specific reason, his life is pointing towards his death. Jesus is reminding us that we need to square up to the reality of death and the reality of what it means spiritually.

Because this week was tremendously important for Jesus as he faced the cross. He knows and he's experienced and you experienced and I experienced a life that is enslaved by the power of death and by the reality of death and by the experience of death and the badness and the evil that kind of is a result of it or that comes from it. Jesus has come to redeem a world on its knees and individuals who spiritually are on our knees and so it ought to, as we think about this unexpected biography, we ought to be considering the whole implications of what Jesus is to say about our own mortality and our own death and what we think about death and how we consider our own death. Because Jesus says it has our spiritual genesis and is a spiritual separation from God and it leaves us in a place that leaves spiritually bereft and that we need this

Christ to come and deal with that for us. So there's a very important emphasis here, not only is he squaring up to a reality that we must face up to and we can bury our heads in the sand but we also see that he is driven by astonishing love. It's love that is driving him to this place that every ounce of his being must be wanting him to move away from. The author of life, the genesis of life, the giver of life, the breather of life, the one who is life is going towards death and he is doing so because of his great love for the people that he looks to save, people just like you and me. And it moves beyond platitudes I hope and beyond romance and beyond sentimentality when we think about the love of Christ and we see a love that is costly and sacrificial, all embracing, committed, undeserved as he faces the cross and as he moves towards Jerusalem to those who he knows will crucify him and yet in so doing he will fulfill God's purposes in redemption. So and he's dying on the cross not for himself but for us so it's a challenge to us today I think when we think about this unexpected biography and the balance of the book and the determination of Jesus to head towards

Jerusalem. But I think we also see and I hope you see in the passage that we've read his surprising character because there are aspects to his character that are revealed in this chapter as he relates and as he interacts with other people that must be relevant to us because you know the people he interacts with are only different from us by a couple of thousand years. You know people are the same all over the world wherever and his interaction with them will reflect his interaction with us and his relationship with us. What do we see? And we could really only skim the surface of this chapter in so doing. We can see he's comfortable with adulation. He's comfortable with worship Jesus. We have the triumphant entry as it's called into Jerusalem in verses 28 to 40 where Jesus in a most unexpected way enters into Jerusalem. It's the right time for him to do so and it is deliberately provocative. It's publicly provocative.

If you know that there are people out to take your life that have already kind of plotted and planned to kill you in many ways you wouldn't think of entering the city like this so that everyone knew that you were coming. Jesus does that in the most amazing way, most provocative way and in the most tempting way and indeed in a messianic way and he would have known that the religious leaders of his day would have been unhappy, tremendously unhappy with that as Old Testament texts were quoted to him blessed as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Here is, we've been looking the last few weeks at Jesus teaching on the kingdom. Well here is the coming of the King and he enters into Jerusalem in this amazing way. A great affront to the religious leaders. A slap in the face to them because they're privately plotting his death and here he's coming saying I am the Messiah. I am the Messiah of prophecy and the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope and the King and he is willing to accept the praise and the adoration and the worship of the people and he says with great significance when you know people are horrified by what he is saying and what he is doing you know and the religious leaders and others tell Jesus to stop his disciples praising in this way. Jesus says well even the stones will cry out, even the stones will cry out and he recognises that there's a universal significance in what he is doing. I tell you if they keep quiet the stones will cry out. There's a universal focus of worship on this

[15 : 42] Jesus on this week for this task that will change the whole face of the universe and he is comfortable at this point to be worshiped as God. You know it's interesting because at other places in the gospels he says don't worship me or don't tell anybody about me. He doesn't say don't worship me but he says don't make it public, don't make it known but now is the time. He wants everybody to know who he is. He is comfortable with adulation and with worship. That's Jesus. Are we comfortable as we worship Jesus? Are we comfortable giving him that worship and adoration? Are we embarrassed by that? Do we feel uncomfortable with it? When we worship him is it mere ritualism for us? Are we afraid of being spontaneous in our lives, in worship of Jesus Christ? Because he's revealing himself as one here who is worthy and who not only is worthy but who is looking for our worship. Are we comfortable with a God who looks for and who accepts worship? I hope so. He's no itinerant Middle East preacher from the past. He's the living God whom we worship today and I hope that you're comfortable to worship Jesus Christ because you've been made to worship him.

You've been made to adore him. You've been made to put him first in your life and Jesus just gives a hint of that willingness in this passage in this triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But we also see from him that he is one who has moved to tears. The surprising Jesus. He's shown himself to be God. He's worthy of being worshiped. He's the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy. He's coming to face his death. He knows he's opposed at every angle in Jerusalem and yet when he looks at the city from a height, from the Mount of Olives, he looks down and he weeps over it as he approached Jerusalem and saw the city. He wept over it. He weeps over the rejection. He weeps over the fact that they can't see that he's the one who's going to bring peace and more than that he weeps because he can see in his mind a terrible destruction on that city which came to pass in AD 70 with its sacking by the Roman authorities and powers.

Prophecy in these days in verse 43, these days will come when your enemies will build an embankment against you and circle you and hem you and on every side they will dash you to the ground and he weeps over that reality and here is God in the flesh facing death as a human and as a God on our behalf and he's not dispassionate from even those who reject him, not dispassionate. He is a God. In fact, Henry Chin, one of the commentators here in translating that verse where he cries actually says that he approached Jerusalem, he saw the city and he burst out crying over it. Burst out crying. It's a spontaneous emotional sense of sorrow for this people who are rejecting him. He's moved to tears. I wonder when we were last moved to tears over spiritual realities ourselves. I wonder where our own emotional energies lie. Do they lie in our spiritual life? Do they lie in our relationships with others who we know are not Christians and have a longing for them? I think we weep, don't we, when we care, generally speaking. We weep when we care, when we see the need of those around us, when we're moved, it's because we care. I think sometimes it's good for us to remember that and be surprised by that in Christ's Calvary and look for it not in a kind of affected way but looking for that same heart for people that Christ had, even those who rejected him.

We can't always live our lives as Christians in God's playground, this world, seeing it as God's playground, which it is in some ways, but it is also sometimes his battlefield and there are times when we need to move from that place of laughter and joy and pleasure just by the dint of reality to a place of tears where we see people's need and when we see spiritual realities in a way that maybe we haven't seen them before and when we see salvation and Christ and the importance of that, not just for ourselves but for others. He was comfortable with angulation, he was moved to tears, he is clearly also unsafe. Jesus is clearly unsafe because the next day, we're not told here in verse 45, just as he's then he entered the temple but from looking at the other accounts in the gospels we can we can make clear that it was the Monday morning, he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. It's written, he said to them, my house will be a house of prayer but you've made it a den of robbers. It's clearly unsafe. We were singing about Jerusalem and about the temple and about how it meant so much to these people as they looked into a place where God was in here. Jesus walks into the temple and the religious leaders have completely abused the whole sacrificial system, people sacrificing doves and goats and animals and they've just made it a big marketplace and they've made it a place of trading and commerce, nothing to do with worship. They would be skimming off amounts of money from the traders and they would have been putting it in their own pockets in the name of religion, in the name of prayer, in the name of godliness. They were just making a mockery of God and of the temple and of worship and of spirituality. They were abusing that for their own purposes because they were greedy and selfish and Jesus quotes from

Jeremiah chapter 7 and verse 11 where they were doing the same thing in Jeremiah's time where in the name of religion they were actually miserable godless selfish greedy people and they were the religious leaders. Jeremiah 7 verse 11 where he says, you know, will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to bail, follow other gods you've not known and then and come stand before me in my house which bears my name and say we're safe, safe to do all these detestable things. Has this house which bears my name become a den of robbers for you? I've been watching the clears the Lord and it's the same thing isn't it that he's coming up with here because these religious leaders think just because it's in the temple it's safe they can do anything they want. They're kind of God's people, God loves them and it doesn't matter how they live or how much money they skim from the poor into their pockets and Jesus is just raging with this. He's raging with the injustice of it.

[23 : 26] They thought it was safe to do anything they wanted and as I think I mentioned earlier things have changed now we don't come to church to meet with God in a way that we can't meet with them elsewhere you know it's not like this is God's house it's just another building but we know in the New Testament that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit. God lives in us through the personal spirit when we're believers when we trust that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit ourselves and sometimes we can take that truth of being saved and being redeemed and being forgiven because Jesus loves us and I can say well we're safe and it doesn't matter how I live, it doesn't matter what I think, it doesn't matter what I do it doesn't matter about God's ethical demands or His moral demands in my life because well what's it matter? He'll forgive me anyway. I'm safe. We want to take the gift of life but not the responsibility of being adopted into his family and bearing the Spirit's testimony by the way we live being transformed. Jesus no more than a spiritual comfort blanket for us. What about His holiness, His ethic and His purity? I was very struck this week in my own reading

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 7 where Jesus speaks about God speaks about Him as Father and how He disciplines those He loves. In your hardship He says as a discipline God is treating you as sons for what son is not disciplined by his father if you're not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline then you're an illegitimate children not true sons. Moreover we've all had human fathers discipline as we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live? Our father discipline us for a short time while he thought best. God disciplines us for our good that we may share in His holiness. So there's the sense in which we don't mock God and we don't treat Him as safe. Safe for us to do anything as Christians because well He's Jesus and He loves me and He forgives me anyway. He's clearly unsafe and you know it just takes and I've quoted this before often from here lying the witch in the wardrobes see a sluice great picture of that kind of Jesus where Lucy's asking Mr. Beaver about Aslan the King. Is he safe? Of course he isn't safe says Mr. Beaver but he's good. He's the King I tell you. I do think we need to recapture that a little bit in a relationship with Jesus's people. He's the King and He is good but He is certainly not safe. Not safe for us just to ignore and abandon and reject and disobey because He's the King and this passage reminds us of that aspect of

Him as we live. The one who loves us and the one who adopts us. And the last thing I want to say about the Jesus that's revealed to us here is that and this is maybe a bit more controversial. Is He charismatic? That's not controversial but what I'm going to say about it might be. In verse 40 the last verse of the chapter we're told you know the chief priests the teachers of the law the leaders among the people who were trying to kill Him couldn't do so. They could not find we're told anyway to do it because all the people hung in His words. Jesus was there and all the people really hung in His words. He had such a charismatic teachings ability and style. Everyone just loved what he had to say and they talked about his miracles and they were amazed at what he had done and they rejoily praised him in loud voices for all the miracles they'd seen verse 37 and he was totally charismatic people. Charismatic God and sometimes we think the same thing in the sense that we think if only Jesus was here if only I could hear His teaching if only I could see some of His miracles what a difference if

I could have touched Jesus and known the Son of God in my midst. I've got His debt rambling on every so and why would be great if we could see Jesus and if Jesus was here and Jesus walked among us then of course we would believe we would hang in we would hang in His every words as well we'd follow Him but can I remind you that these people who hung on Jesus words five days later were crying out crucify Him. Crucify Him the same crowds of people that were hanging on His words were five days later sending Him to the cross influenced by whatever was all happening around about them. Six weeks later that same crowd was listening to Peter preaching about having crucified the Son of God and they cried out for repentance and for salvation because they needed the Holy

Spirit to transform their lives and they needed to make that cry after Jesus had died and rose from the dead. So what I'm saying in the surprising nature of this is that the charismatic teaching of Jesus isn't enough to save you and isn't enough to save me. He needed to go through this week of darkness. He needed to go to Calvary Hill. He needed to have the nail pierced hand and feet. He needed to be forsaken by God. He needed to cry out my God my God. He needed to give up His spirit in death having been victorious over evil and the grave and he needed to rise again in order for us to come to Him by faith. See the crowd although they hung on His words were redeemed by Him. He needed to die in the cross. So the cost of our salvation you see it isn't just that Jesus came down and gave a series of lectures. The cost was that Jesus needed to come and have nail pierced hands and feet. That is the cost of our salvation. Can I say today in a provocative way, a living Savior isn't enough for you and for me. It's not enough that we have the Son of God who came and became flesh for us. That's not enough.

[30 : 13] However charismatic His teaching, however great His message, however many miracles He did, it's not enough for us because He could have gone straight home before going to Jerusalem. That was the case. We need a Savior who dies in our place, who's our substitute and who rises again over death to be victorious, not just as Savior but in our place. Now does that not say something about our need?

Does it not say something about the serious nymphs at our condition? I think today we spend a lot of time saying, yeah, Jesus is nice. You know, we don't really like talking about sin and how bad we are and how much we need Him. And yeah, I know then, you know, as we look at our own lives in comparison with other people, we might not be bad or anything. We might be good ultimately in nice ways. But spiritually, Jesus said He needed to go to the cross. What does that say? It says we really need that. He didn't do that as an added extra. He did it because that spoke to our need. He did it because each one of us will die and we have no power to raise ourselves from the dead. We have no power to make entry into heaven unless we come in the name of Jesus Christ trusting in His salvation.

And in so doing, then we share His charismat. We share His charismatic power. We share His life-giving blood. We share His spirit who will transform us from the inside out. We need that in our lives and it can be surprising sometimes to think about that. Not just a living Savior, not just a few nice messages from His Word and pithy statements and nice ethical codes. That's all part of it. But we need a Savior who goes to the cross. We need a Savior who makes this journey and for whom the Passion Week is central to His whole mission of coming to earth. So I guess the danger is for us sometimes to tame Jesus into someone we want to make Him. Someone that's you know calm and undemanding and easy and just tame.

And I think when we do so, we're engaging in idolatry. We've made a Jesus in our own image that we'd want to worship and in so doing we make Him stale and we make Him dull and maybe our Christianity becomes dull and stale as a result.

And so maybe there's a connection there. And I hope that we are excited by the Jesus who reveals Himself in Scripture and that there's a joy in discovering the Jesus, who's the real Jesus and who is a challenging Jesus and who's a surprising Jesus and an unexpected Jesus and who wants us as Christians to pursue a holiness that's in an exciting way and in a transforming way and in a charismatic way going to keep us from being stale. But enjoy a surprising and ongoing developing relationship with our great Redeemer. I hope that and I pray that is the case for myself and for each of us here.

[34 : 03] Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God we ask and pray that we would let the Spirit of God speak from His living Word from the Bible into our needs and into our lives and that we would be amazed by what we learn of Jesus when we think we maybe know lots about Jesus and lots about Him coming to Jerusalem and the death of His death on the cross and there's nothing more that we can know about it. In fact it can become dull for us. We pray that your Spirit would breathe life into it with a newness and with a new perspective as we seek to let you speak and seek to depend on your Spirit. That we would not be stale in our Christian lives and when we tame you to being someone that really has no place of Lordship, no place of adoration and worship, no supremacy, no primacy, no priority but who we can wheel out when we feel it's convenient for Him to be in our presence rather than us seeking an audience with the King. Lord help us then we pray to adore you, to worship you, to give you the preeminence and to seek the grace to live our lives, to love you and to love each other in the way that only you can help us to do as we deal with our sins and our deadness and allow the

Spirit of God to breathe life into us. We thank you for Jesus, thank you that over these next few Sunday mornings we'll be able to look at this amazing passion week. We pray that your Spirit would help us to look at it in a fresh way and in a dynamic way as we come up to Easter time and as we look at these chapters and verses together. Bless us then we ask and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.