

"Interview with a Stone"

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Scripture: Luke 19:29-44

Cast: Reporter holding a stone and speaking to it as one would to a hand puppet
Stone held by the reporter and voiced by an offstage person with microphone

REPORTER (to the audience): In Luke's account of Palm Sunday, the Pharisees tell Jesus to stop his followers from shouting for him. But Jesus says, "I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Which leads me to wonder: if those stones that had been lying on the road to Jerusalem for thousands of years had shouted out, what would they have said? Let's ask one of them.

(The REPORTER picks up a large STONE which can be held in one hand. The REPORTER holds the stone at eye level and points a microphone at it to answer questions. The STONE'S part is read by an unseen person through another microphone.)

REPORTER: Excuse me, but I have never interviewed a stone before. How should I address you?

STONE: Like you would a rock star.

REPORTER: Yes, of course. Well, how long have you been sitting on this road?

STONE: Longer than you can imagine. You human beings measure lives in decades; we measure ours in geological ages. To us something 6,000 years old is contemporary.

REPORTER: What have you seen in all that time?

STONE: I've seen the rise and fall of kings. I've heard the shouts and cheers of crowds. I've felt the hooves of horses, the tramp of armies, the wheels of chariots, the shuffle of pilgrims, and the tapping canes of blind beggars.

REPORTER: Who are some of the most interesting people you have met?

STONE: I go all the way back to Abraham. I was here when Melchizedek received a tenth of Abraham's possessions as an offering. I was here when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem and when Solomon brought the cedars of Lebanon for the temple. On my road came the Queen of Sheba and the armies of Assyria, and the siege works of Babylonians. By my road the people of Israel went into exile at the time of Jeremiah and came back at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

REPORTER: Wow, you have seen a lot of history.

STONE: I have seen pharaohs of Egypt, kings of Greece, emperors of Rome, Turkish sultans, medieval crusaders, British soldiers, and Israeli commandoes. Every kind of king and conqueror imaginable has traveled down my road, but none like the one I saw that Sunday afternoon before Passover.

REPORTER: Really. Tell us about him.

STONE: They said his name was Jesus. He was among a group of pilgrims coming from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover. I could tell they were Galileans by their accent. Normally, as people approach the temple they recite the words of Psalm 118: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Then they form a procession, sometimes waving tree branches, as they make their way up to the altar to offer a sacrifice.

REPORTER: What was different about this group?

STONE: The Galileans did something strange. They not only waved palm branches; they spread their coats on the road as if rolling out a carpet for a king. Personally, I have never understood why people had to cover up perfectly beautiful stones before a king could pass over them. I think we are quite attractive, don't you?

REPORTER: Well ... I guess.

STONE: And they cheered for him as if he were a king. It is traditional for people coming to Jerusalem to say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." But these people said, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" I have seen plenty of kings in my time, but never one like this.

REPORTER: So what exactly was different about him?

STONE: For one thing he was riding a donkey. Personally I hate donkeys, not just because of their sharp hooves but because of other things that donkeys do on roads.

REPORTER: I can imagine. But what is so unusual about a donkey in ancient Jerusalem?

STONE: Donkeys are pack animals. No king rides into a city on a donkey. I have seen Roman governors charge in on horses, and Egyptian commanders ride in on chariots; I have even seen King Herod brought in on a golden chair carried by his servants. But no great ruler ever comes into the city on a young donkey. The rider's feet were barely off the ground!

REPORTER: So what did the leaders think about this?

STONE: They were terrified, not of the guy on the donkey but of the Romans. They told Jesus to make his followers quit calling him a king.

REPORTER: Why?

STONE: The Romans don't take kindly to anyone claiming to be a king. And they tend to overreact. If some Jew claims to be a king, they arrest everyone remotely associated with him and put them on a cross. I've got blood stains from countless people that Pontius Pilate marched down my road to be crucified.

REPORTER: So your leaders were afraid that if Pilate heard the crowd calling Jesus a king, he might start arresting people and executing them.

STONE: Exactly. They were almost desperate to make Jesus quiet the crowd. But Jesus said, "If the crowd were silent, the stones would shout."

REPORTER: That must have made you feel good.

STONE: It did. We stones are not afraid of Roman governors.

REPORTER: But if he is really a king, why did he ride in on a donkey?

STONE: I could not understand that myself until I heard people discussing a verse from the prophet Zechariah. It said, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

REPORTER: So that explains the donkey.

STONE: There is more. It says, "He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations."

REPORTER: What does that mean?

STONE: Normally a king brings peace by amassing an army and wiping out his enemies with superior weapons. But this king will bring peace by getting rid of armies and weapons. Not that I object, you understand. A few less chariots would be good for us roads. Fewer potholes. And as for war horses, they have the same problem as donkeys.

REPORTER: I understand. But a king who brings peace without armies or weapons—can that work?

STONE: I don't know. But the alternative does not work either. I've seen almost every army in the Mediterranean come down this road: Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans. Since the time of David the walls of this city have been torn down four times. The temple has been destroyed three times. Twice the people have been forced out of their homes into exile by a foreign conqueror. There have been plenty of chariots and war horses on this road, but not much peace.

REPORTER: So what happened to the man on the donkey?

STONE: When he arrived in front of the temple, he slid off his donkey and began to weep. His tears were hot and salty. He said, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

REPORTER: It sounds like he did not expect to succeed.

STONE: It was worse than that. He said that enemies would overrun the city of Jerusalem. He said, "They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another." That's when it started to get personal.

REPORTER: I can imagine.

STONE: He said this would happen because the people of Jerusalem did not recognize the time of their visitation.

REPORTER: What did he mean by that?

STONE: I'm not really sure. Maybe he was saying they would have had a chance if they only believed in him.

REPORTER: But you said they called him a king.

STONE: Yes, but he wasn't the kind of king they were looking for. He never picked up a sword. He never organized an army. He never launched an assault against the Romans. That donkey was as close to a war horse as he ever got.

REPORTER: What happened to him?

STONE: He did not fair so well. Five days later there was another procession, this time coming out of the city. In the middle was Jesus. This time he was on foot, carrying a cross. The only crown he wore was a crown of thorns. The crowds weren't cheering him; they were jeering him. They said, "If you are a king, why don't you save yourself."

REPORTER: Didn't his followers try to protect him?

STONE: He told them not to. I heard that when he was arrested a couple of them pulled out swords, but he made them put them away.

REPORTER: You mean he intentionally let the soldiers take him?

STONE: That's how it appears. It was as if he expected it to be that way.

REPORTER: Why?

STONE: I think for him it was for him the way of peace.

REPORTER: The way of peace?

STONE: Yeah. I know it sounds strange. Most of the kings that passed down my road claimed to bring peace, but they tried to do it by creating a single world empire. *Pax Romana*--the Romans called it. But their unity was the unity of dictatorship, and their peace came with a sword. It never lasted very long. Eventually resentment, hatred, and desire for freedom tore those empires apart. (Pause) There has to be another way.

REPORTER: You think peace on earth can be brought by a king on a donkey who is executed on a cross?

STONE: If peace cannot be brought with a sword, perhaps it must be bought with a sacrifice.

REPORTER: But how can he be a king if he is rejected by his own people?

STONE: There is another verse in that psalm I told you about earlier: Psalm 118, verse 22. It is my favorite verse in the Bible.

REPORTER: Really. What does it say?

STONE: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." Isn't that a great verse?

REPORTER: I can see why you like it.

STONE: Sometimes the true value of a thing is not apparent at first glance. When the crowd led Jesus into the city, they shouted, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" Maybe they were right, but in a way they did not yet understand.

REPORTER: Do you understand it?

STONE: I don't know. But maybe his death is not the last word. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." If it can happen with rocks, maybe it can happen with people.

REPORTER: Do you have anything else to share?

STONE: Since I met him I have a new favorite song. Want to guess what it is?

REPORTER: "Rock of Ages"?

STONE: Nice try, but no. It's "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less."

REPORTER: Hmm. Why that song?

STONE: The chorus: "On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand."