

**“... Because I Said So”
Matthew 21:1-11**

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are available.)**

“...*because I said so.*” Those words rang through my ears as a child to signal that the discussion was over.

“...*because I said so*” was the equivalent of the final horn in the basketball game when no more shots could be taken.

They were the words of the teachers, “*Class, stop writing, and put your pencils down.*” They were the same as the ball dropping in Times Square to signal the end of a year.

When one of my parents said, “...*because I said so,*” it meant that whatever had been discussed was no longer up for discussion.

Usually, it meant that I had pushed the discussion one argument too far. Nevertheless, it was the signal that the person in charge had made the decision, and there was no turning back or changing it.

Of course, as a child who heard those words, and I imagine that I am not alone here, I was certain that I would never say those words.

Then, one day I hear those very words coming from my mouth, “...*because I said so.*” The phrase does not feel as harsh on this end of the words.

It means simply that I don’t think that you are going to understand clearly what I am saying; but this time, that is the decision, and it is the best decision for you.

Trust me.

One day, Jesus essentially said, “...*because I said so.*” It was not harsh. It was not short. It was definitive.

It happened on the Sunday of His final week. As Jesus was preparing for what would become known as His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He sent two of the disciples into the village to get the animal on which He would make this famous journey.

“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away” (Matthew 21:2-3).

In other words, “*If anyone gives you any static, tell them, ‘because I said so.’*”

This week is Holy Week. We will mark the week with many observances.

At 7:00 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday mornings, we will gather for breakfast, followed by a look at the crucifixion through the eyes of three people through whom Jesus performed miracles.

We will consider the meaning of the crucifixion through the eyes of the Samaritan woman at the well who was offered living water, the blind man who was given his sight, and Lazarus who was raised from the dead.

On Thursday evening, we will observe the Last Supper through the perspective of the twelve disciples.

As you surely know by now, we will experience the event in groups of twelve, every thirty minutes.

If you have not signed up for a time yet, please call the church office tomorrow to fill one of the remaining slots.

The evening will challenge us to rethink how the Passover became the Passing-Through, as Jesus confronted the angel of death.

On Friday, we will meet once more in our sanctuary to relive the seven last words of Christ.

This year, we will try to understand the event as we participate in the thoughts of those who cleaned up the Upper Room, the sight of the Last Supper of our living Lord.

Holy Week is an attempt to set apart the days for contemplation on the death of our Lord. This week contains the very essence of all that we believe.

As we prepare for the week, or as we prepare for any week for that matter, this exchange between Jesus and His disciples provides some lasting truth.

Usually, I focus on the triumphal entry itself on this Sunday. The confusing parade is always good fare for a sermon.

However, as I prepared this sermon, I could not get past the words of Christ to His disciples.

It reminded me of one of the great truths of Holy Week: nothing happened by accident.

We need reminding that God does not work by fate, or by karma, or by accident, or by numbers, or by order of the stars.

God is God, and God has a plan.

We can certainly mess up His plan by getting in the way, but God has a plan. Hear that truth again this morning, and find the assurance that it should bring.

Even during this ugly week, when it appears that hatred is victorious, God is God.

Relinquish the control.

Christ is in control.

The affirmation that Christ is in control is not something that rewrites faith for most of us.

We readily acknowledge Christ's power in the use of such words as Lord and Son of God.

But this morning, I am more interested in our living as though He is in control than I am about our making some kind of creedal statement.

This seemingly insignificant statement about an animal in a small village conveys so much.

Christ is in control. He has put in order even the arrangements for this parade, an event that most of the participants completely misunderstand.

In part, Christ makes this happen in order to fulfill Old Testament Scripture. He also causes this to occur to carry out preparations for His own final week.

What I need you to hear me say this morning is that Christ is still in control.

Of course, I can hear your question, because it is a question that surfaces every time the issue arises, "How much?"

"How much is Christ in control?" It was a question that we pondered at our last men's Bible study.

How much is Christ still controlling the events of life?

Does He have a parking space picked out for me at the mall, like he had a place where these animals were parked in the village?

If Christ is really in charge of everything, then why did someone else get my pew this morning?!!

Or on a much more serious note, why is life filled with so much pain and disappointment if Christ is in charge?

Those questions have roamed the religious landscape for centuries.

We could say that the debate started in the very beginning, when God commanded Adam and Eve to do one thing and they chose, out of their own free will, to do another.

Most of the early church fathers took a stab at trying to reconcile how the divine and human wills found peace.

Who makes the final decision on our actions: God or man?

Formally, we tend to think back to two men who battled this question in a more public setting, Augustine and Pelagius.

Augustine, the name with whom you are more familiar, developed a high-control view of God.

With his emphasis on original sin, Augustine developed a theology that understood God to foreordain even those who would go to heaven.

This strong idea of predestination placed God in a decisive position to control human life.

In response, Pelagius became concerned with moral failure in society and perceived that much of man's immorality was caused by an overemphasis on grace.

Pelagius believed that man's free will meant that we should take responsibility for our failures and that we were free to obey God or not.

Augustine and Pelagius presented their cases about 300 years after Christ's ministry.

At that early juncture in faith, Christians were debating how grace and free will made since of Christ's control in our lives.

More recently, about 400 years ago, John Calvin became the face most often associated with the predestination camp.

His concept of divine control in our lives placed God in a position of predetermining just about everything that happens in our lives.

His Reformed theology has taken shape in what many of us associate with Presbyterianism today.

On the other end of the spectrum (and there is always another end of the spectrum), Jacobus Arminius and his followers objected to such control because it seemed to ignore man's free will.

Many people associate Arminian theology with Wesley's Methodism.

We Baptists have historically been associated with both sides of the dilemma, depending on which Baptist pew one sits.

Let's return to the point of the text. Christ is in control.

Could it be that when we try to answer the question "*how much?*" that we are asking for an answer that we can never understand?

Perhaps, we should not ask "*How much?*" but rather declare, "*Yes, Lord.*"

The text gives us some insight at this very point.

The two disciples go straight into Bethphage and get the animals. The other Gospels inform us that they are questioned as Jesus warned, but that the townspeople consented immediately upon hearing that Christ said so.

How many of us in this room would have asked Jesus why He wanted the animals?

How many of us would have contested that given the growing animosity against Jesus, it would not be safe to steal someone's livestock?

How many of us would have suggested to Jesus that there were farms much closer where they could obtain the animals instead of right in the middle of town?

How many of us would have headed off to get the animals, no questions asked, no complaints muttered?

The difference is that the disciples had followed Christ for three years. They knew Him well enough to know that at this point, if something needed to happen, He would make sure that it happened.

They did not question, because they had learned to trust Him.

Christ is in control.

Christ is so much in control that He has given us a brain to use with which to make wise decisions.

Christ is so much in control that He has given you and me the ability to find open parking spaces.

Christ is so much in control that He has given us the free will to go get the animals instead of calling them to walk out to meet Him on the edge of town.

Christ is in control, but His control includes the freedom that He has allowed us to carry out His purposes.

Christ is in control of the areas of our lives in which we allow Him to be.

I wish that He insisted on having His way in everything, going against what I want because I don't know what is best for myself or my family.

Certainly, I would not argue the fact that there are times when Christ is going to accomplish what He wants in spite of who is in the way.

However, most of the time, He, for reasons beyond Me, has chosen to work within the freedom that I give Him in my life.

How much is He in control? I am afraid that is up to you.

Christ is in control.

Acknowledge the motivation.

Christ is guided by love.

But there is another truth that we cannot allow to slip by here. Christ is driven by love. Everything Christ does is guided by His love for us. I find that the most assuring truth of all.

Why should they go get the animals that He has pre-arranged?

Because He needs them to ride into Jerusalem. Why?

Because Jerusalem is where He is going to die on a cross. Why?

Because He is going to save the world for eternity from our sins. Why?

Because He loves us.

It always goes back to the truth that He loves us, always.

One of the first things that a student learns in the discipline of ethics is that all ethical decisions are guided by one's set of values.

We make decisions that are governed by our values. Those values can be very complicated, and sometimes, conflicting.

If your greatest value is money, then it will guide your decisions.

If it is family, that will guide your decisions.

If it is moving up the ladder, that will guide your decisions.

If it is self-recognition, that will guide your decisions.

Whatever you value will determine why you do what you do.

Christ is driven by love. We can be assured that every decision He made, and still makes, is out of love.

That is enough for me.

Christ is in control.
Christ is driven by love.
So what do we do?

Accept the responsibility.

Christ calls us to go and do.

As soon as Christ gives the instructions to find the animals, Matthew writes, *“The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed” (Matthew 21:6).*

As usual, another question comes to our minds: *“How do I know what Christ wants me to do?”*

The question brings us back to the text.

“How do I know what Christ wants me to do?”

First, I let Him have control. Every one of us knows the areas of our lives which we do not permit Him to control.

We don't like to hear about them, but we know which areas they are.

“How do I know what Christ wants me to do?”

Second, I love like He loves. If my decision does not exemplify the love of Christ, then I must re-examine my decision.

After the parade on Palm Sunday, the week got very ugly. We will re-think the ugliness during a variety of services this week.

But we must never forget that even at the ugliest moment, when Christ opened wide His arms from the cross, He did it out of love for you and me.

And never for a second believe that He was not in control of that moment on the cross.