



Celebrating Jesus' Entry

Kicking It Off: In baseball, a "curveball" is a pitch that is thrown with a spin, causing it to change direction and catch the batter off guard. What's the best piece of advice you've ever received for dealing with life's metaphorical curveballs?

Read:
Matthew 21:1-11

Summary

In this sermon, we explore the idea that God often defies our expectations and challenges our assumptions through the unexpected "curveballs" He throws our way in life. While these unexpected situations can be difficult and uncomfortable, they are ultimately opportunities for us to grow in our faith and trust in God.

We learn that God's ways frequently defy human logic and expectations. He delights in using the foolish, weak, and despised things of the world to accomplish His purposes, demonstrating His power and removing any grounds for human boasting. This challenges our natural tendency to rely on our own talents, resources, or connections to achieve our goals, inviting us instead to humbly depend on God.

We also see how easily our prayers can become self-centered wish lists, rather than truly seeking God's will. Even our deepest desires, though given by God, are tainted by our sinful nature and limited perspective. We need the Holy Spirit's help to pray according to

God's purposes, trusting that He can work all things together for our good and His glory. Ultimately, our own plans and solutions will always fall short; true fulfillment and purpose are found in aligning our lives with God's vision.

Trusting God in the unexpected often involves stepping out of our comfort zone. God invites us to lean into uncomfortable moments with faith, remembering that our job is simply to love others, not to have all the answers or execute a perfect plan. When we let go of our own understanding and rely on the Holy Spirit's leading, we open ourselves up to participating in God's miraculous work.

We are challenged to be more attentive to the people God brings across our path, seizing opportunities to extend love and share the hope of Christ. As we navigate life's twists and turns, we must learn to hold fast to God's promises, even when circumstances seem grim. Like those who celebrated Jesus' triumphal entry, we may not always understand God's plan in the moment. But as we choose to trust and worship Him in the waiting, we will experience the deeper joy of the resurrection life He has for us.

In the end, trusting God in the unexpected is an opportunity to know Him more intimately and celebrate His faithfulness in every season of life. As we surrender our need for control and embrace the unexpected, we discover a deeper peace and joy that comes from resting in God's perfect love and infinite wisdom. Life's curveballs may still catch us off guard at times, but we can face them with confidence, knowing that our loving Heavenly Father is shaping us into the people He created us to be.

Discussion Questions

1. God often uses unexpected situations and unlikely people to accomplish His purposes, challenging our assumptions and expectations. This serves to demonstrate His power and wisdom, while reminding us to rely on Him rather than our own abilities. **Can you share an example from your life or from Scripture where God used an unexpected person or situation to accomplish His will? What did this teach you about God's character and ways?**
2. Our prayers can easily become self-centered, focusing more on our own desires and plans than on seeking God's will. We need the Holy Spirit's help to align our prayers with God's purposes, trusting that He knows what is best for us and His kingdom. **How can we cultivate a posture of humility and submission in our prayer lives?**

What practical steps can we take to ensure our prayers are centered on God's will rather than our own?

3. Trusting God in the midst of life's "curveballs" often requires stepping out of our comfort zones. God invites us to lean into uncomfortable moments with faith, believing that He will guide and empower us as we seek to love and serve others. **Share about a time when God called you to step out of your comfort zone in faith. What challenges did you face, and how did you experience God's faithfulness in the process?**
4. As followers of Christ, we are called to be attentive to the people God brings across our path, viewing them through His eyes and seizing opportunities to extend love and share the gospel. This requires setting aside our own agendas and expectations, allowing God to work through us in the lives of others. **How can we cultivate a greater awareness of the divine appointments God places in our lives? What might it look like to approach each interaction with others as an opportunity to demonstrate Christ's love and compassion?**
5. Trusting God in the unexpected requires holding fast to His promises, even when our circumstances seem bleak or confusing. Like those who witnessed Jesus' triumphal entry and subsequent crucifixion, we may not always understand God's plan in the moment. However, as we choose to worship and trust Him in the waiting, we will experience the joy and victory of His resurrection power in our lives. **What specific promises from Scripture can we cling to when facing unexpected trials or challenges? How can we encourage and support one another in choosing to trust and worship God, even when His plan is unclear to us?**

Bible Passage

Matthew 21:1-11

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Outline

1. God Defies Our Expectations
 - God's ways often defy human logic and expectations
 - He delights in using the foolish, weak, and despised to accomplish His purposes
 - This demonstrates His power and removes grounds for human boasting
 - Challenges our tendency to rely on our own talents, resources, or connections

2. God's Plans Exceed Our Own

- Our prayers can easily become self-centered wish lists rather than seeking God's will
- Even our deepest desires are tainted by our sinful nature and limited perspective
- We need the Holy Spirit's help to pray according to God's purposes
- Ultimately, our own plans and solutions will always fall short
- True fulfillment and purpose are found in aligning our lives with God's vision

3. Trusting God in the Unexpected

- Trusting God often involves stepping out of our comfort zone
- God invites us to lean into uncomfortable moments with faith
- Our job is to love others, not to have all the answers or execute a perfect plan
- Letting go of our own understanding and relying on the Holy Spirit's leading opens us up to participating in God's miraculous work
- We should be attentive to the people God brings across our path, seizing opportunities to extend love and share the hope of Christ
- Holding fast to God's promises, even when circumstances seem grim
- Choosing to trust and worship God in the waiting leads to experiencing the deeper joy of the resurrection life He has for us

Notes

God throws us curveballs in life. It's not about Him trying to trick us or make us fail. Instead, these unexpected challenges are opportunities for us to grow in our faith and trust in Him. Just like a batter facing a skilled pitcher, we can't always predict what life will throw our way. But we can choose how we respond.

I've come to understand that my own desire for control and predictability can actually hinder my spiritual growth. When I insist on God only giving me "easy pitches" that fit neatly into my plans, I miss out on the chance to deepen my dependence on Him. The curveballs in life remind me that God's ways are higher than mine, and His thoughts are beyond my understanding.

It's not always comfortable when God defies my expectations or allows difficult circumstances in my life. But I'm learning to see these moments as invitations to rely on Him more fully. Like the disciples who struggled to accept Jesus' predictions of His death, I can resist the unexpected and cling to my own limited perspective. Or I can trust that God's plans are ultimately for my good and His glory, even when I can't see the full picture.

Spiritual maturity isn't about demanding a life free from curveballs, but learning to trust God's sovereignty in the midst of them. As I surrender my need for control and embrace the unexpected, I discover a deeper peace and joy that comes from resting in God's love and wisdom. Life's curveballs may still catch me off guard at times, but I can face them with confidence, knowing that my loving Heavenly Father is shaping me into the person He created me to be.

As I reflect on God's ways and plans, I'm struck by how often they defy human logic and expectations. We tend to assume that God will work through the wise, strong, and influential to accomplish His purposes. But Scripture repeatedly shows that God delights in using the foolish, weak, and despised things of the world to shame the wise and strong.

Why does God choose to work this way? I believe it's because He wants to demonstrate His power and remove any grounds for human boasting. When God works through unlikely vessels, it becomes clear that the outcome is due

to His strength, not human ability. This challenges my own tendency to rely on my talents, resources or connections to achieve my goals. God invites me to humbly depend on Him.

My prayers can easily become self-centered wish lists, rather than seeking God's will. Even my deepest desires, while given by God, are tainted by my sinful nature and limited perspective. I need the Holy Spirit's help to pray according to God's purposes, trusting that He can work all things together for my good and His glory.

Ultimately, my own plans and solutions will always fall short. Human progress and technology, while impressive, can never replace our need for God. Like the people who built the Tower of Babel, I'm prone to put my confidence in my own strength and wisdom. But God, in His grace, constantly reminds me that His ways are higher.

True fulfillment and purpose are found in aligning my life with God's vision - loving Him and others. As I surrender my agenda and learn to trust God's unexpected ways, I experience the joy of participating in His kingdom work. It's not about having all the answers, but resting in the One who holds all things together.

What does it mean to trust God in the unexpected? I realize that it often involves stepping out of my comfort zone. Just like a batter facing a curveball, I can easily feel unprepared or afraid when God brings people or situations into my life that I don't feel equipped to handle. My natural instinct is to shy away from the challenge, waiting for an easier pitch.

But God invites me to lean into those uncomfortable moments with faith. He reminds me that my job is simply to love others, not to have all the answers or execute a perfect game plan. When I let go of my own understanding and rely on the Holy Spirit's leading, I open myself up to participating in God's miraculous work.

This requires a posture of humility and prayer, acknowledging that God's ways are higher than mine. Like Joshua, I may not always understand God's battle strategies, but I can choose to be strong and courageous, knowing that He is with me. As I step up to the plate in obedience, trusting God to make my path straight, I experience the joy of being used by Him.

I'm challenged to be more attentive to the people God brings across my path, seizing the opportunities to extend love and share the hope of Christ. Even if someone seems "out in left field," I want to see them through God's eyes and engage with a listening ear. It's not about my ability to get a base hit, but about letting God work in and through me.

As I navigate the twists and turns of life, I'm learning to hold fast to God's promises, even when my circumstances seem grim. Like those who celebrated Jesus' triumphal entry, I can't always make sense of His plan in the moment. But as I choose to trust and worship Him in the waiting, I experience the deeper joy of the resurrection life He has for me. In the end, trusting God in the unexpected is an opportunity to know Him more and celebrate His faithfulness in every season.

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¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

God often defies our expectations and assumptions but, His plans are ultimately better than our own. This is the concept that I always come back to when I think about Palm Sunday and Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He didn't come as the people expected. Instead of riding a majestic warhorse, He chose a humble donkey. Rather than being praised by the religious elite, He was celebrated by the common people. He entered as a peaceful King, not a military conqueror. Jesus defied expectations as the Messiah. Many anticipated a political savior, but Jesus came to bring something far greater—spiritual salvation.

God's plans often exceed our own. The people in Jesus' time wanted a quick fix, a political savior to free them from Roman oppression. But Jesus came to offer eternal salvation, a long-term transformation that would change

lives forever. When Jesus doesn't meet our expectations, it's often because He has something greater in mind.

This reminds me of biblical stories like Joseph, who went from being a slave to a savior for his people. Or Ruth, who unexpectedly played a crucial role in God's redemptive plan. And David, who rose from a shepherd boy to a king. Their stories show that God's plans are superior to our limited vision.

Trusting God in the midst of unexpected turns can be challenging. I know I've struggled when life doesn't go as I planned. It's easy to question God's goodness and sovereignty when things feel out of control. But I'm learning to rely on His faithfulness, clinging to promises like Romans 8:28, which assures us that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

As I surrender my expectations to God, I'm discovering the benefits of trusting Him. Peace in the midst of uncertainty. Growth in my faith and character. A stronger relationship with my Heavenly Father. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it.

So, my challenge to you today is this: embrace God's unexpected ways. When life takes a detour, choose to trust His perfect plan. Release your grip on your own expectations and let God exceed them with His goodness. As we celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, may we also celebrate the joy of surrendering to His perfect purposes, even when they defy our expectations.

1. The Triumphal Entry story challenges our assumptions and expectations about how God works. It reveals that God's ways are often surprising and countercultural. **How have you experienced God working in your life in unexpected ways that challenged your assumptions or expectations?**
2. Trusting God when life doesn't go according to plan can be difficult. It requires faith to believe that God's purposes are ultimately good, even when we don't understand them. **What are some practical ways we can cultivate trust in God's sovereignty and goodness, even in the midst of unexpected or challenging circumstances?**