

Palm Sunday

The King has Come!

Have you ever found yourself in a circumstance where you desperately needed help? Things got out of hand; you were trapped and powerless to escape because it was too painful and challenging. You desperately required someone to intervene in your precarious situation and put things right. All through the Old Testament, that was frequently the case with Israel. They often found themselves in a position of oppression over which they had no control, whether they were in bondage to the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, or even their own corrupt officials. They frequently required a Deliverer.

God had previously guaranteed them a Deliverer, but it seemed as though He would never arrive. Numerous prophecies about a Messiah, a Saviour, the Promised One who would rescue the Jews are found in the Old Testament. The Jewish people carried these promises deep within their souls. The expectation of a Messiah sustained them through the ages in times of affliction, loss and exile.

The Roman Empire brutally ruled the people of God during the time of Jesus. This made them yearn even more for a King, a Messiah, a Deliverer. Throughout this time in history, various individuals would emerge and amass a following. People would start to believe that each of these individuals was the Promised One, but then they would die or lose their credibility, and the waiting would seem to go on forever. Life under the Romans was intolerable, but they had no other choice..

Jesus began His public mission at the age of thirty. His teaching authority and the performance of signs and miracles served as proof of His credentials and His mission. Lepers were cured; the lame walked; the deaf heard; the blind were given sight; the dead were raised and the gospel was proclaimed. All of this was done to set the stage for the events that would take place during the final week of Jesus' earthly pilgrimage, a week that receives special attention at this time each year.

In Luke 19:28-40 we read about a remarkable event. It was the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. This story is recorded in all four of the gospels. Up until this point, Jesus had been drawing back from public notice as much as possible. He did not seek large crowds, even though they at times sought Him. He did not aim to perform for public approval.

In fact, in Matthew 16 Jesus commanded His disciples that they should tell nobody that He was the Christ. In Mark 5, when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, Jesus warned them and said that no man should know of this. In John 6, after feeding the 5,000, John records that when Jesus perceived that the multitude would come and take Him by force, to make him a king, He departed again to the mountain alone. In Mark 9:9 we read that even while descending from the mount of transfiguration, Jesus ordered His disciples to tell nobody what things they had seen until the Son of man was risen from the dead.

Much of Jesus' ministry had been away from Jerusalem in the areas around the Sea of Galilee, but here, in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was finally making a very public proclamation. His time had now come and He very intentionally turned their attention towards Himself. The King has come!

This all unfolded at the time of year when the Jewish Passover was celebrated. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world had gathered in Jerusalem. From census information in Jerusalem at this time we know that over 250,000 lambs were slain each year at the Passover feast. The law regarding the Passover lamb stated that there had to be a minimum of ten people per lamb, which would bring the possible number of people in and around Jerusalem at Passover time to at least 2.5 million. In the midst of this great celebration, Jesus presented them with a picture, where His claims of being the Christ (Messiah), would be unmistakable. Here is the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

Luke 19:28-40 *"And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"*

So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road.

As he was drawing near - already on the way down the Mount of Olives - the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." Jesus answered, "I tell you .. if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

As we look back through this story we can notice many things. Leading up to this event, crowds of people had gathered around Jesus in the town of Bethany. They had recently witnessed or heard of the resurrection of Lazarus. So there was a crowd of people walking with Jesus towards Jerusalem. As this crowd descended into Jerusalem with Jesus another crowd was coming up out of the eastern gate.

John 12:12-13 *"The large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"*

When the crowd coming down into Jerusalem with Jesus combined with the crowd coming out of Jerusalem, the mass of people was so large and so loud in their praise of Jesus that the Pharisees who were watching said, *"Look how the whole world has gone after him!"* (John 12:19)

From our perspective, this seems to be a simple story of crowds of people cheering the arrival of Jesus. That is the basic truth of this narrative, but there is so much more happening here if you look closely. Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives to enter Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives was just east of the city of Jerusalem. It was a place with sacred importance.

In the book of Ezekiel God had given the prophet a vision of God and His glory leaving and one day returning to Jerusalem from the east. The crowds that day likely took note of the significance of the direction from which Jesus' triumphal entry was coming. We must also take note of the animal. An unused animal was often used for sacred purposes (Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3; 1 Samuel 6:7). The Passover Christ riding on an unused colt was another message to the people about the sacredness and importance of Christ.

A third detail to take note of was the type of animal on which Jesus was riding. A conquering king would enter a city riding a horse. A king coming in peace would ride a donkey (Matthew 21:2; 1 Kings 1:33-34). Jesus had not come to be an earthly, military king, who would free the Jews from Rome. He came as an eternal King Who would free His people from the condemnation and slavery of sin and reconcile us to God. He came as the true Passover Lamb who had come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy written 500 years before.

Zechariah 9:9 *“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Don't be mistaken here – don't think of Jesus as weak. In Revelation 19, we see that Jesus will one day return riding on a white horse as a conquering King of kings and Lord of lords. He will bring eternal and complete victory on that day. But on this day, He rode into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey. Jesus was coming to be King of the Jews. He was coming with righteousness and salvation. He came as the true Passover Lamb, gentle and riding on a donkey, but not in the way that most of them expected.

In John 12:13 this same story of Jesus Triumphant entry is told and it tells how the people waved palm branches. Palm branches were another way to prepare the way of a king. In ancient history, palm branches often symbolized goodness and victory. Some Jewish coins from the first century had palm leaf engravings with the accompanying inscription, *“the redemption of Zion.”* We also find Palm Branches as part of the worship that is described in Revelation.

Revelation 7:9-10 *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

The Sovereign God had brought all of these indicators together in one place, at one time, to declare Christ as Messiah and King. In response to all of these signs, the people began to praise Jesus, quoting from the Psalms regarding the coming Messiah that had been written centuries before.

Psalms 118:26 *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

The donkey, the location, the cloaks on the road, the palm branches, and the praises of the people all declared Jesus as the promised Messiah and king. It was a dangerous statement to be making at that time in history since the Romans were in power, but that is who Jesus was and why He had come.

In the midst of the cheers, there were Pharisees, some of the most religious Jews, who were watching the event take place. They rejected the claims of Christ's being the Messiah and called on Jesus to silence the crowds and their rowdy praise. They told Jesus to rebuke His disciples but He responded with these words, *“I tell you .. if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”*

Jesus was stating the truth that the praises of God in Jesus Christ cannot be silenced. Christ's followers were giving glory to Jesus because He was the Promised One from God, but the Pharisees refused to give Him glory or acknowledge Him as the long-awaited Messiah.

Our world is familiar with the concept of glory. We give glory and praise to athletes, actors, musicians, authors, scientists, political leaders and many others. Glory carries the idea of greatness and sadly we give glory to others much too easily these days. It is a distinction that one is better than the rest because of their ability, their achievements, or because of who they are.

But we must remember that even the greatest football players of the world were created by God. Musicians perform well but God created music itself. The politicians may lead nations, but in the end people from every nation, tribe, and tongue will bow to Jesus Christ. Even Scientists in their greatest discovery have only found what God had already put in place when the world began.

If we choose not to give the Lord glory, *“even the stones will cry out!”* He is of infinite worth. There is no other name that will ring throughout the halls of heaven for eternity except the name of Jesus Christ. The names that our world exalts will be forgotten and fade into the past but the name of Jesus will resound forever. The praise of God cannot be silenced and the Sovereignty of God will not be denied. If we do not give Him glory, nature itself will testify to His greatness.

Psalm 19:1-4 *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of this hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”*

The praises to God cannot be silenced by governments, by sword, by threats, or by fear. The people of God proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ will continue, unstoppable, until Christ returns - and that will only be the beginning. In heaven, all other glories will be silenced and Jesus Christ will be exalted. Persecution cannot silence it.

God’s Word proclaims and history confirms that the worship of God will continue forever. Even apathy will not stop the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of God. One can see this throughout Church history. When the people begin to drift away from God and His Word, God calls out to those who ‘have ears to hear’ and uses them to carry the name of Christ to its desired goal.

We see this in Martin Luther and the Reformation; German Pietism; the Moravians; the Mennonite brethren and the Methodists. Even the Baptists came about from a group of believers who clung to God’s Word when the Church-at-large had turned away from it. God will continue to raise up a people who will give Him praise above all others.

Psalm 115:3 *“Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.”*

Psalm 135:6 *“Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep.”*

Ephesians 1:11 *“God works all things after the counsel of His will.”*

Romans 11:36 *“From Him and through Him and to Him are all things.”*

1 Corinthians 8:6 *“For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”*

This sovereignty of God is also at work in every area of our lives. He ordered the details of Jesus' triumphal entry centuries before it even happened. He is moving our world towards its conclusion and Christ's return. Even in the midst of our struggles and failures, God has promised that those who have put their faith in Him, will be made like Christ (Romans 8:28). God will finish what He started.

As we think back through what we have discussed in these verses we see that Jesus rode this donkey into Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jewish people where they believe God Himself dwelt. This was the holiest of cities and He came as its King. This was the same Jerusalem where the leaders were already plotting to kill Him. It would have been easier to slip into Jerusalem unnoticed in the midst of the crowds, but Jesus chose otherwise. He was making one of His final claims to being the promised Messiah, King, and Saviour of Israel and the whole world.

Into that volatile political reality, Jesus made a blatant claim to His being the long-awaited Messiah. His intentions were not to come as a conquering king that would free the Jews from the Romans. He came for something greater. He came to free each man, woman, boy and girl from themselves, from the slavery of sin and an eternity separated from God. As the story continues Luke ends it with these words:

Luke 19:41-44 *"And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

From Scripture, we know that some were there to ridicule while others came to worship the promised Messiah. As we commemorate another Palm Sunday, the question begs: which are we?

The Jews of Jesus' day longed for freedom from the Romans. They believed that this would bring life as it was meant to be, but they were wrong. They desired too little. They were too easily satisfied. They wanted freedom in the present from sinful men when God wanted to give them freedom from themselves for eternity. They wanted to make a name for themselves when God wanted to give them His name. They wanted peace, the absence of conflict, but God wanted to give them a deep inner peace that remains no matter what conflict the world brings our way.

The Jews of Jesus' day missed the fact that a Messiah had come who would deliver them from what plagued them most. Jesus knew that the direction of person's life depends on the condition of the their heart. Jesus knew that we were condemned from birth because of our sin. Jesus knew that He came to seek and to save the lost. With this in mind, He would eventually go to the cross to set us free from the sin and rebellion that enslaves all of us. This was the Messiah He came to be.

In Hebrews 9:22 we are told that *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin."* Christ shed His blood so that we could be forgiven and gain eternal life. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were rituals that pointed to the true sacrifice that was still to come in Christ. They were temporary in effect and had to be repeated over and over again. Sin against an infinite and holy God demanded an infinite and holy sacrifice. When Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, died, the full wrath of God was satisfied.

Jesus Christ was truly the eternal *"Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world."* (John 1:29) Similar to the lamb's blood at Passover, it was the shed blood of Jesus Christ that covered the guilt of mankind and protects mankind from the judgment of God. No other sacrifice will ever be required.

The Palm Sunday story is legendary and millions of people are re-living that amazing story today. If we take the time to study this Palm Sunday narrative, God will teach us some very important lessons:

1. From the Pharisees in this story we see once again that it is possible to be religious without having a relationship with God.
2. From the crowd we see those who sang His praises but missed His salvation because they were seeking a Saviour who would help them fulfill their selfish desires.
3. From Jesus' words, we are reminded once again that there is nothing or no one that will ever silence the glory of Christ and the advancement of His Kingdom.
4. From the triumphal entry we see a King who welcomes all who will humble themselves under His lordship and trust in Him.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!