

Holy Week in Biblical Perspective
Palm Sunday – The Triumphal Entry
“The King and His Coming”
John 12:12–19
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April 2, 2023 • Sunday Morning Sermon

This is the Word of God. It’s eternal, infallible, inerrant and sufficient. John 12:9-24 says [9] *When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there (at Bethany in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus), they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. [10] So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, [11] because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

[12] The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. [13] 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!” [14] And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, [15] “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”

[16] His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him. [17] The crowd that had been with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. [18] The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. [19] So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him.”

[20] Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. [21] So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” [22] Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. [23] And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [24] Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We have arrived at Palm Sunday, and so I've picked from the Gospels this particular account of Palm Sunday to bring us to it. This is why. Whenever something is repeated in all four Gospels, it's obviously a message from the Holy Spirit that this is important. Palm Sunday or the triumphal entry is mentioned in all four of the Gospels. It's a little bit of a jagged edge for whenever you're looking for details and accuracy in the Scripture on the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, one almost immediately go to Matthew and Luke. Matthew is very much committed to giving some of the details and Luke, as a historian, is particularly oriented toward the chronology of things and having investigated and interviewed many people. So the Holy Spirit has laid that kind of accuracy and detail in Matthew and Luke and to some degree, Mark.

John is much more of a narrative. John spends almost a quarter of his book on the first week of Jesus’ public ministry, and then almost two thirds of the book is spent on the last week, the week of following the steps of Jesus, the passion week, this week of glory. So John is broad sweeping narrative normally, but not this chapter. In John 12 John gives us some details that the other writers don't. In fact, John kind of lays it out in an interesting way. His narrative form

is pretty clear, and he kind of lays it out in three scenes like a play. There is a scene on this Palm Sunday. There is a scene in Bethany. Then there is a scene that begins at the brow of the Mount of Olives and leads down into Jerusalem, the processional. Then there is another scene where Jesus walks into the temple.

As we work our way through these scenes, John is trying to communicate some things to us that are of significant proportions. What does John mean in John 12:12 as he starts out, 'the next day'? We're in a chronology of moments here that John's laying out for us. The previous day had been the Sabbath and Jesus had kept Sabbath at Bethany in Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home. There have been other things that are going on. There's another home that he'll be in, Simon the leper. His adopted home had become Capernaum, but His home away from home had been Bethany and He not only had Mary, Martha and Lazarus, but He had other people there that He had become friends with.

This day is going to be followed by another day and on this day, He's going to come back and stay the night after this day in Bethany and the next day He's going to come down which will be Monday. On Monday, He'll follow the same path back down the men of Mount of Olives, this time without the crowd, and this time He'll go into the temple that He had looked through on Palm Sunday. This time He'll cleanse the temple which will be the second time He has cleansed the temple. The first time He cleansed the temple was in the first Passover in the first year of His public ministry. Now, in the third year of His public ministry, He cleanses the temple again. On this day, when He had come in, it was crowded with the moneychangers. The very order of the temple was designed for reverence and worship. You were to come in to the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of Prayer to prepare yourself very much like we have a prelude and a time of prayer and confession to prepare for worship so that our joy is surrounded by reverence and our reverence is filled with joy.

But now the money changers had come, and the bargaining and negotiating is at work as in the marketplaces, but now in the temple. Instead of the time of preparation to walk in to worship, there's haggling. Then comes a priest ready to grab the sacrifice and as Jesus sees this, He cleanses it by sending them away and runs the money changers out. The question comes to Him again, that had come to Him the first time He did it which is 'By what authority do You do this?' He says, "This is My Father's house. It shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." In other words, He is saying "I own it. It's My Father's. That means it's mine and it's here to point to Me in the work I'm going to do to bring My people from every tribe and nation."

After the temple they go back to Bethany. On Tuesday, He comes again. He had cursed a fig tree on Monday. This time He explains why He cursed the fig tree on Tuesday. As He comes back down into the temple, He starts teaching all day with parables. The woes are pronounced upon the Pharisees and the hypocrites. In the midst of all of this, Judas Iscariot starts negotiating on this day. Then Jesus on that Tuesday before He goes back to Bethany, He'll stop at the Mount of Olives and He'll give the famous Olivet Discourse about the destruction of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the second coming of the Son of Man in glory. This is found in Matthew 24, and then He goes back to Bethany.

Wednesday is a day of silence, but it seems as if Wednesday is the day that Judas seals the deal of betrayal and then Thursday is momentous. He sends two disciples ahead to prepare for the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper. We call it Maundy Thursday. Why Maundy? It comes from a Latin word that we translate *mandate*, *command*, because in the giving of the Lord's Supper, Jesus says, "A new commandment I give you that you love one another." Now,

that's not new for that commandment has been there, but that you love one another as I have loved you. Maundy Thursday is where Communion reminds us of the love of God to save us and the love of one another as we are on mission for Christ together. Then He goes to prayer at Gethsemane and is betrayed.

The next day is Good Friday. It's called good because of the results of our redemption but what goes on that day is not good. On that day Jesus goes through His scourging. On that day He goes through six trials, three Gentile trials, three Jewish trials, the verdict for every one of them is ultimately innocent, but on that day, He goes to another trial, that Divine trial on the cross. When He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, the verdict from heaven was guilty as He takes the judgment for His people in His vicarious atoning death to redeem us as the wrath of God is satisfied against our sins against the Almighty by the Son of God Himself, who takes our place. He utters those seven glorious words from the cross which we follow on Good Friday. Then He's placed in the grave on that Good Friday, which is day one.

He rests on Saturday which is day two and He comes forth on the next day, which becomes the Lord's Day, the resurrection Sabbath. Now He comes forth in victory and sees the travail of His soul and is satisfied. It all starts on this day, Palm Sunday, and there's an inseparable link that we follow His steps as a people to learn from and there are things right here on this Palm Sunday that are extraordinary.

First of all, He appears in scene one in the Bethany. John tells us that this crowd was not a monolithic crowd. This crowd was actually a convergence of divergent crowds. There are the citizens of Bethany. They're the friends of Jesus, disciples of Jesus. There are His disciples. There is this gathering of disciples and the friends of Jesus who were there in Bethany, that we're used to seeing Him in His three years of public ministry. There is Mary, Martha and Lazarus, but there is another segment in the crowd and that's the curious. John spends a lot of time with this for in three different ways he refers to them.

There's this whole group of people that have come and are wanting to see Jesus because of the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb. By the way, while they're there, they want to see Lazarus. When they see Lazarus now they want to see the One who raised Lazarus. When that happens, they now want to see Jesus and some of them are converted. They begin to believe in Jesus because of the witness of Lazarus, who points to Jesus, who raised him from the dead. As that happens, there's a death warrant already out on Jesus but they can't enact it with all of the people making this celebration about Him. So now they're going to add to the death warrant Lazarus also.

There's so much here in this passage so I'll just pick out just a couple of strands for us. Aside from the groups I've just described who are in Bethany, there is also the Sanhedrin, the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the lawyers, who have put this death warrant on Him but can't get to Him. So now they begin to get a plot of how they can kill Him. They could kill Him by stoning like they will do to Stephen later, but they want Rome to participate in it, not even knowing that what they're doing by the plot is actually setting up the fulfillment of Scripture because Rome will make sure He dies on a tree – cursed is He who hangeth upon the tree (Galatians 3:13) as He bears our curses there in fulfillment of Scripture. They also want to get it at Lazarus at the same time.

There's a fourth group that's there, and that's the citizens of Jerusalem, and there's a fifth group that's there which are the pilgrims that have come from all over. How many were there in Bethany at this time? I do not know. Some extra Biblical historians have said there were around 200,000, some say 2.7 million and my guess would be somewhere between 500,000 to

one million. Josephus I think, has a habit of embellishing the statistics every once in a while, but it is a large crowd that's coming out to meet Him.

Before we shift to the second narrative, the second scene where the processional begins, which will go to the brow and the east side as we go into Jerusalem, there are some things here that I can't go past. There's this significant group of people who want to come and see Jesus because they had heard that Lazarus had been raised from the dead. So they went to see Lazarus. Guess what? He's risen from the dead. He's living so now they want to see Jesus. Do you realize that if you are a believer, a Christian today, you've been resurrected for you were dead in your sins and He caused you to be made alive in Christ Jesus. If you're a believer, you have been resurrected from a spiritual boneyard. You have been liberated from the penalty of sin, the shame of sin and you're right with God through the atoning death of Christ. You have been liberated from the dominion of sin. You've been born again and now you are liberated to follow Christ and you've got remaining sin but no longer does sin reign. You have the promise of perfection when you get to heaven and growth in grace on the way to heaven as you serve Christ.

When they heard Lazarus was raised from the dead physically, then they figured there would be some evidences. When they saw Lazarus moving around then they wanted to see Jesus. The same thing ought to be happening when we become saved for if we have been raised to life in Christ spiritually, there are evidences of a new heart, a new life, a new record, a new family, a new home and those evidences in our life ought to be sending people to Jesus. Who is curious about Jesus, having seen what He's done in us, to us and for us? Is it clear to this world with what we say and do? I once was blind, but now I see. I once was dead, but now I live and He did it. If our life in Christ becomes visual and verbal, some people are going to come to Christ.

Others are going to come after you, just like the Sadducees, Pharisees and Sanhedrin wanted to kill Jesus and after they wanted to kill Jesus they also wanted to go after Lazarus. That's why Jesus said all who live Godly for Me shall suffer persecution. Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that shall come upon you (I Peter 4:12). Their targeting of Jesus, if it doesn't change by repentance to come to Christ will become a targeting of you, His people and His church. That's why Jesus said, 'In Me, you have peace in the world, you will have tribulation, but take courage, I've overcome the world (John 16:33). It has been granted to you not only to believe in Me, but to suffer for My sake (Philippians 1:29). Blessed are you when men revile you, not if, but when men revile you, persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely on My account' (Matthew 5:11-13).

It's not accident that Lazarus gets included and if you serve Jesus, those who will not come to Christ will make you the target to get at Jesus. But you have a King, you have a refuge, you have the armor of Christ, the sword of the Spirit, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation and the shield of faith to distinguish, to extinguish the fiery darts.

One other little insight with Lazarus. They questioned what happened to him and he tells them and gives God all the credit. Our testimony is not the Gospel. It's the evidence of the Gospel whereby we get the chance to point people to Jesus and they start asking questions. As we have talked about evangelism this year, I have tried to continue to encourage you to make use of questions. Questions are very helpful for Jesus used questions and we can use questions. We ought to use questions for many reasons. But here's what seems to be in the Bible. If we are living for Christ with our life in our lips, and Christ is preeminent in all things and with you eat or drink or whatever you do, you do all to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31), you don't

have to ask questions. You start answering questions. They start asking you. Peter says in I Peter 3:15 that when they ask you, be ready to give an account of the hope that is within you.

Is the mark and ownership of Jesus such upon us in such a way that people want to know why asking things like – why do you do that? Why is the Lord's Day so important to you? Why are you reading God's Word? Why are you studying it? Why are you taking time to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Why are you doing all of those things? Then you say "I'll be glad to answer that" with gentleness and compassion, but with boldness. I want to give an account to those who ask me of the hope that is within me and this crowd is asking a lot of questions.

So now the scene shifts to the Mount of Olives, and three things become evident at the Mount of Olives. Number one, people are showing up with palm branches. That's not an insignificant thing they're trying to communicate to you. One of the great challenges in preaching isn't getting the first century Word to the 21st century, it is getting into 21st century people back to the first century. Those palm branches are significant for two reasons. Number one, palm branches showed up in certain occasions in the Old Testament when kings were being coronated. Who's coming in? King Jesus, but there's something even bigger. It's not in the Bible. It is in history between the Old Testament and New Testament, during that 400 years – not only did the Assyrians capture Israel, as did the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, and the Greeks, but there was also a period of time when a conglomeration of tribes had control of Jerusalem and a man named Antiochus Epiphanies were doing absolutely blasphemous things against Jerusalem and at the temple, even in the desecration of the temple which caused a revolt.

There was this group of people, this family called the Maccabees and the first one, his nickname was The Hammer. A revolt began and one brother led it and then another brother. Finally another brother led it and the Assyrians just got so tired of it that they said, 'okay, you can have your temple and you can have your worship.' Now, they didn't liberate all of Israel. They didn't liberate even all of Jerusalem but they did get the Temple Mount liberated and they did get what we call the freedom to freely practice their religion with worship on the Temple Mount. It became so glorious that they established a feast and it comes to this day known as a feast of lights, which called Hanukkah.

Hanukkah is not a Biblical feast, but it was a feast out of a moment of liberation and when they came to the temple, they came with the palms. Why? The palm was the sign of the nation. It was the flag of the nation. It was the Declaration of Freedom for the nation. It had been seen when they came into the land. It was dear to them. Here is an example one of our day could probably relate this to. Please read about the Declaration of Independence and the War of Independence. The flags of the colonies that became state, all had something called a Liberty tree or a liberty pole with a cap on it. The liberty pole was everything for that was the sign of independence, the sign of freedom. And then the flag that we now have took its place.

So what we have taking place here is a nationalistic movement of the palms. In fact, later they're going to have another revolution about 30 years from now. In Jerusalem, they're going to start making their own coinage and say 'no' to Caesar's coins as they start making their own coins. The coins made in Israel had imprinted on them, the palm tree. This was the liberty tree. This was the symbol of freedom. So they're coming out looking for the One who will deliver them from the Roman yoke of oppression, political tyranny and military domination. They are coming to this King, whom they have heard about, who has come with signs and

wonders and miracles. This will be the king who will set us free. This would be like our July the fourth parades with all the flags.

Secondly, they're singing the songs of freedom, the hallels. It starts in Psalm 113, and they're singing it – Hosanna! God save us now! The Liberator has come! When such a King comes in liberating power, He comes with either a chariot pulled by a team of trained horses, usually white, or He comes mounted on a white horse. When they get to the brow of the Mount of Olives, they meet this King, not on the War Stallion, but upon the foal of a donkey, a colt, the fulfillment of where we are in our series of Zechariah 9 – Behold, your king is coming on the foal of a donkey, even a colt bringing peace. He'll go to war on Friday. Today He is not coming to bring judgment for this King is coming to bear our judgment and set us free not from temporal powers, but from the eternal dominion of hell and sin. You hear the songs, you see the palms, and now you see the King. He makes His way down over the Kidron Brook that in a few days is going to run red with all of the deaths of the Passover lambs coming down out of the temple. He crosses over the Kidron Brook up to Temple Mount and He looks into the temple.

Now we're at our third scene. He sees the moneychangers. He makes His assessment. Tomorrow He'll deal with it but while He is there, Philip and Andrew come up and they say there are some Greeks who have requested to see Jesus. Unknown to you but reality is this; pulpit after pulpit of fateful churches have that statement on the pulpit right in the preacher's face when he opens the Scripture. They aren't there to see or hear the pastor. They are there through the preaching of the Word, to hear and see Jesus. We would see Jesus. Jesus then does something absolutely astonishing. There's a refrain in the Gospels, particularly in John, they're going to make Him King as they have come to do this and that and Jesus keeps saying His hour has not yet come but when He hears of the Greeks requests, the One who has come through the covenanted nation of Israel to reach all the nations of the Earth, then Jesus says, “My time has come. The hour has come. Father, now glorify Yourself in My death. For unless the grain dies and is put in the ground, there is no fruit. But if the grain dies, there is much fruit.” In His humiliation comes glorification as He saves His people from their sins. This is why He has come. The hour is now. (33:27)

The battle is to be engaged and Jesus says it's time to go. He knows the cost of it. It's such a cost that when He goes to the garden to pray, not only will sweat burst from Him in anticipation of that moment when He goes to the cross as all the sins of all of His people are laid upon Him with all of the unmixed, unadulterated wrath of God for all eternity that will also fall upon Him so that we might be saved by the grace of God from the wrath of God by God Himself, but He will sweat drops of blood as God saves us from Himself, by His grace, from His wrath as His Son takes His wrath, pays it to the end. It's finished in the ground and then He is risen. Jesus sees the travail of His soul and God is satisfied and we are redeemed. The time has come and He goes to it.

I'll just finish this way. I have had a lot of time to think about something these last couple of days and this last week I've been in contact, along with many of the folks in our church, with our dear sister Church in Covenant Presbyterian in Nashville and the Covenant School and all of the horrific stuff that took place. It's very dear to us because so many of our members who have been moved to Nashville have made that church their home and many members of that church have made this church their home. Our own founding pastor and his wonderful wife, Barbara, now with the Lord, their son in law, is there and I prayed for him early this morning as he leads God's people with Pastor Scruggs, who lost his daughter in this

horrific act of evil. I prayed 'O God, I don't know how You're going to do it, but that place I preached in it is beautiful. That place that is a sanctuary that has become a battlefield, make it a sanctuary today for Your people.'

I thought back to the battle moments. I thought of all of the training that must have been in place and when the code red went out, how the teachers fearlessly fulfilled their calling and took those children out, those evacuation routes and into woods, then out to a street, cars stopping as people were helping over to our Baptist brothers who opened up their place so that the family could come and get them. How did they have the time to do that? They had the time to do that because three of those people in positions right there – a teacher with her calling, the head of the maintenance with his calling and the head of the school, Dr. Koontz, with her calling. When the blast on the door blew it open their calling was to go and they went to the sound of the fire. Then as policeman made their way, exiting their cars, and the fire rained down from a second floor on them as it can be heard on the body cam, their words were, "Let's run, let's go" and so they went room to room. That was their calling. Let's go.

Jesus is in that temple. There's the crowd of the Jews. Here are the Greeks, the nations of the world who want to see Jesus. Jesus says, 'My hour has come. Let's go.' He would set His face to the cross to save us from our sins. It's just beyond my thoughts. O love of God, O love Divine, O love all other loves excelling. The One who didn't need me went to the cross to save me. The One who didn't need me wanted me and here I am, the one who needed Him and didn't want Him. But He went. The hour has come now, Father, be glorified.

I want to leave you with two things. I believe in many ways the hour is going to come for many of us to be faithful to Christ and I want you to take heart not by looking inside of you, but by looking to Jesus. You love Him in that day the way He loved you on this day. My hour has come, Jesus says. But I want you today to look to Jesus. I don't know who you are today, but I present to you Jesus. Power won't save you, positions won't save you, degrees won't save you, houses won't save you, experiences won't save you but Jesus will and your power can be right now – come to Him who at this moment went to the cross for you. Don't play games. Life's too short, eternities too long and hells too real. Come to Christ today. I plead with you. I beg you. Why would you die without Him? Come to Him who gives life and you who have come to Him our hour has come. This is the day He has given to us. Let's go for Him to the world. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer and let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. If you would like to pray with someone about a decision to follow Him or you just need prayer, please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and we'll pray with you. We would love to spend confidential, personal time with you committing your life to Christ or dealing with any issue in your life that you want to bring to Jesus. For the rest of us who know Him we have eternity because in the hour that came, Jesus went to the cross to save us. Now we have a life that's eternal. Love Him who loved you. If you love Him, follow Him. And if you love others, bring them to Him. But now see Jesus who loves you and who loosened you from your sins. Oh, Holy Spirit, please be with Your people today – You're sealing, sanctifying and sending grace, pour it out upon us. Let us have done with the lesser things. Our heart and soul we give to this King who came that we might have peace with God and sends us to proclaim the Gospel of peace, in Jesus' Name, Amen.