



Lesson 6: Palm Sunday

Lesson Introduction:

This Sunday we will remember Palm Sunday or what some call the “triumphal entry.” This marks the beginning of holy week, a series of important events described in scripture leading us to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Palm Sunday is the time we Jesus was both celebrated and misunderstood. Many celebrated Jesus coming into Jerusalem but did not really understand the purpose of his arrival. Therefore, let us examine this scene from the journey of Jesus to the cross so that we can better understand the purpose of his coming and then celebrate with greater understanding and appreciation.

Read the Text: Luke 19:28-44

Understanding the Text:

How Jesus Enters Jerusalem

The account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is one of the few stories covered in each of the four Gospels. We find it in Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-19. Obviously, it was an event that made an impression on the disciples accompanying Jesus. In fact, the gospels seem to be pushing us to get to this point. Mark especially writes with haste to get us to the final week of Jesus’ life on earth. The Gospels tell the story of Jesus on the move. Where he is going – Jerusalem. Finally, on Palm Sunday, Jesus enters the city where the Gospels writes have been trying to take us.

Jesus and his followers were not the only people traveling to Jerusalem at that time of the year. Many Jews were making their way to Jerusalem from all over the world to celebrate the Passover. Luke 2 tells us that Jews were present at Pentecost from 14 different nations. The same would have been true for Passover. It was an annual pilgrimage attracting many. As Passover neared, Jerusalem would swell with pilgrims. It was a tradition for pilgrims to walk into Jerusalem as a symbol of humility and respect. Even if someone traveled a great distance on an animal, the worshippers would customarily enter Jerusalem on foot. Jesus did the opposite. Mark 10 seems to indicate that Jesus had been traveling by foot but chose to finish the journey on a donkey. In fact, this is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus is described as riding on an animal.

Jesus of Nazareth had now become a notable person. He was certainly more popular in Galilee and Northern Israel but he was indeed known in Jerusalem as well. The news of his miracle and teaching has gone out. His disciples already understood and proclaimed that he was the Messiah and many others were hoping it was true. As Jesus entered the city, those who looked forward to his arrival met him with shouts of Hosanna (meaning “save us”). In a gesture of honor, they laid their garments along with palm leaves down on the road for his donkey to walk upon (rather than the dirty, dusty road). While riding a donkey over leaves and jackets may not seem that exciting or desirable to us, in the Jewish context this was the royal treatment. In Psalm 118:27 palm leaves are seen as being used in great processions, especially those connected to the coming of the Lord. King Solomon rode into his coronation ceremony in Jerusalem on a mule in 1 Kings 1:44. When Jehu was pronounced king in 2 Kings 9:13, the people offered their garments to cover the road where Jehu traveled. Indeed, some of those following Jesus would have preferred to see him ride into Jerusalem on a warhorse but they were glad to see him riding into Jerusalem in the style of great kings of the past.

. Why Jesus Enters Jerusalem

The gospel writers point out that this was a fulfillment of prophecy given in Zechariah 9:9. However, fulfilling prophecy was most likely of secondary concern. Prophecy is not a set of demands that must be fulfilled in the future. Prophecy is expressing the will and mind of God, whether present or future. This prophecy was not a mandate for Jesus. Jesus did not look back into the prophets to see what he must do. Rather, the prophets saw (by the grace of God) ahead those things that Jesus would do. The prophet Zechariah foresaw what Jesus himself would decide to do. Thus, riding the donkey into Jerusalem was not an obligation from the prophet, it was the determination of Jesus. Jesus determined to do this.

Why? Why would Jesus, who was the greatest example of humility, intentionally enter Jerusalem in this exalted way? We know it wasn't to boost his ego or flaunt his status. Jesus repeatedly told people to NOT disclose who he was. I think there were two primary reasons for Jesus to make this decision. First, it was to confirm to his followers and those residing in Jerusalem that he was the prophesied King and Messiah. His arrival into Jerusalem, especially this particular trip, was significant since his actions identified him as the Messiah and eternal king from the line of David.

Second, it was a foreshadowing of the glory that would be experienced on the other side of the week ahead. Jesus knew what he was going into. This was not just a Passover pilgrimage. This was a journey to the cross. Yet before all the suffering started, here was a moment of glory for Jesus and his followers to enjoy. They were excited. Mark tells us that Bartimaeus, who had been healed from blindness, was in the crowd. Most likely he was sharing his testimony. John tells us that those who saw Lazarus raised from death were in the crowd telling the story. Perhaps it was these men, with their savior riding triumphantly into Jerusalem for many to see, who led in the praise cheering "Hosanna!" It was a glorious moment and the perfect way to start a holy week. They were celebrating the coming of Jesus.

Later, however, in the midst of betrayal, trials, torture, and death the disciples and followers of Jesus may have been tempted to look at their situation and say, "this is not a holy week, and perhaps he is not the Messiah." Yet before they had the opportunity to doubt, God provided them with the opportunity to believe. The image of Jesus riding into Jerusalem with glory and praise while fulfilling scripture perhaps shored or strengthened the faith of those who watched. Unfortunately, in John 12:16, John recalled that the disciples really did not understand what Jesus was doing. It was only in hindsight that they were able to put everything together. However, they did not have to wait until the crisis was over on Easter Sunday to find reason to believe and trust God. There had already been given to them confirmation and reason to trust in Jesus on Palm Sunday.

What Happens to Jesus in Jerusalem

The glory and celebration of Palm Sunday did not endure. In fact, Jesus rides his donkey all the way to the Jerusalem temple where he begins to point out and drive out corruption from the temple courts. This further angered the religious leaders. They began to make their plans in the temple of God about how they might kill the son of God. They ultimately acted upon those plans by arresting Jesus on the Thursday after Palm Sunday.

From Palm Sunday to Resurrection morning, the Jesus and the disciples found themselves in both a holy week and a tumultuous crisis. Jesus took up the cross while the disciples scattered and despaired. While they gladly followed Jesus as he rode triumphant on a donkey, they failed to follow as he carried a cross. They were pleased to walk alongside him down avenues of palm leaves and soft garments yet were scarce by his side down the path of tears and blood. The disciples were happy to stand with Jesus when the crowds used their hands to applaud and worship Jesus. They fell away, however, those the mod's hands were used to beat and crucify Jesus.

Apply the Text:

As we see in Holy Week, walking with Jesus will include many days that resemble Palm Sunday but also many days that resemble Good Friday. The key here is not to squander the days of glory but use them to strengthen our faith for the days of hardship ahead. During the difficult days, fragile faith and weak trust

may not endure. Suffering may cause us to waver in our belief. Fear, doubt, and temptation may increase alongside troubles. Let us remember, God has given us reason to believe. Surely, we can recall even recent moments of glory where God was powerfully made known. Don't allow a recent glorious testimony to be diminished by this present crisis. We don't have to wait until the crisis is over to praise and trust God. We can do it even now based on what he has already accomplished and shown us.

As the disciples entered holy week, Jesus knew they would be tested along with him. Perhaps Palm Sunday was designed to be a lens through which the rest of the week should be viewed. As they saw Jesus struggling up the path to calvary with a cross on his back, they would have done well to remember his glorious entry and then view his present suffering through the lens of their prophesied king riding gloriously into Jerusalem for that very purpose. The journey to the cross was a necessary extension of the procession started on Palm Sunday, not a negation of it.

The lens of faith is the lens through which God intends for us to see the world. We do not look through rose-colored glasses. We do not deny the reality of the suffering. We put it into the proper perspective. Likewise, we should view any crisis through the lens of the victory that Jesus won this week against sin and death. The victory of Jesus gives us a confidence to trust in God in spite of what we see because victorious Jesus is still visible in the center of it all.

Conclusion:

As we end this lesson, let us turn our attention to Psalm 118. This Psalm is closely connected to Palm Sunday and the arrival of Jesus, Son of God and Messiah. As we read it, let us consider if we have the same excitement regarding our interactions with Jesus. Let us always be overwhelmed by even the thoughts of the goodness of God, especially when we consider his coming into our world and into our hearts

Psalm 118 (NIV):

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

his love endures forever.

2 Let Israel say:

“His love endures forever.”

3 Let the house of Aaron say:

“His love endures forever.”

4 Let those who fear the LORD say:

“His love endures forever.”

5 When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD;

he brought me into a spacious place.

6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.

What can mere mortals do to me?

7 The LORD is with me; he is my helper.

I look in triumph on my enemies.

8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in humans.

9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.

10 All the nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

11 They surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

12 They swarmed around me like bees,
but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

13 I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the LORD helped me.

14 The LORD is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.

15 Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!
16 The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”

17 I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

18 The LORD has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.

19 Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

20 This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

22 The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

23 the LORD has done this,

and it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 The LORD has done it this very day;

let us rejoice today and be glad.

25 LORD, save us!

LORD, grant us success!

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you. i

27 The LORD is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession

up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will praise you;

you are my God, and I will exalt you.

29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

his love endures forever.