

## ***THE PALM SUNDAY PRIMARIES,***

John 12:12-36

◆ If you want to imagine the feel of Palm Sunday, and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem all you need is to recall a few of our contemporary celebrity events. A few weeks ago the awarding of Oscars took place in Hollywood. You know the scene by now. The street is covered with red carpet for all the special people to walk on. It's a symbol of our admiration and honor of our heroes, similar to the palms, cloaks laid down for Jesus. Then the celebrity stands while people come to gawk, and take pictures and talk all about their clothes and reporters speak to the camera of all the glamour around them. Why are these people special? Did they, start a charity, enact great legislation? Did they save a life? No. They pretend to be someone else and act out stories. On the more negative side, often really horrible stories that reach into the gutters of human depravity and habit, elevating it for all. Something is wrong with this picture.

◆ Or think of Mardi Gras, the day of drunken festivities, and parades, the earning of bead-wear for a glimpse of female flesh -all held in preparation for the next day which begins the... the season of Lent, the holy days of denial and sober thought to prepare us for Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter celebrations! Strange that our preface to solemn, moral introspection should begin with its exact opposite, don't you think? Somethings wrong with this picture.

◆ These celebrative scenes are a study in some odd contradictions, as is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The Passover Feast, during which Jesus entered Jerusalem, was a bustle of activity. Josephus, the notable Jewish historian, estimated that over two million people were involved in the great Passover Feast. It is known that 256,500 lambs were

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slain at one Passover and that by Jewish law, each lamb represented at least ten worshippers. So the city was alive and the streets were mobbed. But ironically, no one seemed to get what Jesus was actually doing and showing on Palm Sunday. Just what was he teaching them?

◆1. **Escaping my depravity is more important for me than escaping my oppressors.** Palm Sunday, and the Triumphal Entry urge us to look for a deeper freedom. The zealot Jews wanted freedom from Roman oppression; but Jesus came riding in offering freedom from that which makes people oppressing.

◆A. The triumphal entry the Gospels record was not the first one to happen in Jerusalem and it wouldn't be the last. Between 63BC when Rome conquered Palestine, and 70AD when Rome finally destroyed Jerusalem, there were at least a dozen revolts in Jerusalem. In 164BC, when Israel was controlled by the Selucids (part of Alexander the Great's Greek empire) there was such a triumphal entry on Dec.25 when Judah Maccabee (the Hammer) led a revolt, entered Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna" and the waving of palms, and cleared the temple of the greek idols and gods, rededicating it to Yaweh. This is the event Hanukkah remembers. Twenty years later Judah's brother Simon, rode into Jerusalem amid waving palms and defeated the last bulwark of Syrian rulers winning complete Jewish independence for the first time in hundreds of years of servitude to the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks. It lasted only until the Romans. Once again, in 66 AD when the Jewish zealots revolted against Rome, palm branches were the symbol of defiance, even

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imprinted on the coins. So, you can see that everyone knew what palm branches meant: revolution! Throw off the oppressive government!

◆ The people even quote Ps118. This was a Psalm of the Messiah who would triumph over his enemies!

◆ *“O LORD, save us (hosanna); O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.” Psalms 118:25-27, NIV.*

◆ They were all hoping for freedom from their oppressors. And there is certainly nothing wrong with this. You and I have oppressors. You and I may very well be another’s oppressor! The co-worker who files her nails while you take the next task, and the next one, while she’s on her phone. The boss who treats you like a grade school kid instead of an adult. The CEO who piles things on you and then goes golfing. The gang of kids that leaves you out because you don’t agree with their supposed transgenderism, or because you do agree with the biblical view of what makes a marriage and a family. (By the way, have you noticed how desperate Hollywood is to redefine the modern family.) Yes, friends, we all experience oppressors of various kinds. And face them we must.

◆ B. But here’s the strange part. The mysterious part of Jesus. He didn’t wear a sword belt. He didn’t gather an army. He called himself the Son of Man (23) but spoke of dying like a seed. The fabled title “Son of Man” image comes from the Jewish book of Daniel. The Son of Man was to be like a general. Daniel predicted all the world powers that would dominate

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Israel in succession (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome) before it ever happened, but he also spoke of the Son of Man as the one who would tumble all these. The Son of Man was to be the equalizer! The hero.

◆ But Jesus didn't come like a general. He didn't ride a horse like a fighter, whereas a Roman general that killed 5000 or more men got a "Roman Triumph" when he returned. The general would ride into the city in a gold-covered chariot with white stallions pulling it, a symbol of a warrior. The general would display the trophies he had won. The enemy leaders he had captured would be paraded in chains down the street behind the general. The parade ended at the arena where some of the captives entertained the people by fighting wild beasts. Jesus was riding in on baby donkey with the reputation not of killing men, but of having raised a man from the dead (Lazarus, v17)

◆ C. What, my friends, is this antithesis of Palm Sunday telling us? What would God have us know? God is not unconcerned with the oppressions we all face. However he is very concerned with something more foundational. *Palm Sunday is our reminder that man's problem is deeper than our circumstances. Jesus came to solve the deeper problem of my sin and to give me freedom from it's domination.* Yes, you guessed it. The troubles in modern day Syria go down to the sin in the heart of mankind. It's not just a matter of this or that government. The genocide of Christians in the middle east begins in the hatred of the human heart. It's not just difference of religious preference. The redefinition of marriage by SCOTUS is a result of the fallen state of mankind's ability to make good moral judgement. It is not merely wave of evolving politics. What you and I need

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most this Palm Sunday, is not political balance in Jerusalem, but a correction of the sins that easily dominate our very own hearts. That state in which you and I actually agree with darkness and wrong. There's something deeper amiss, and it is the whole point of Holy Week, Good Friday, and Easter. Palm Sunday is our reminder to shout "Hosanna" which means literally "save us." Bow your heart today before the God of heaven and seek the deeper things. Ask him to save you from your wrong desires. Ask him to forgive you selfish actions. Where in your life do you experience troubles? Ask him to search you and show you what you should be asking him for! Jesus did not come for something as surface as everyone having affordable healthcare. He came to liberate the sinful heart so that it would *care* about the *genuine* health of other people.

**◆2. The pharisees (and even some disciples) wanted economic prosperity; but Jesus offered eternal and spiritual prosperity.**

◆You probably noticed at least another highly disjunctive element in John's record of Palm Sunday. Jesus comes as a teacher of the OT God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the leaders of Israel's religion were not happy about him. Lets go back a chapter.

◆"When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them

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what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”” John 11:43-48, NIV.

◆and just prior to our text:

◆*“Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.” John 12:9-11, NIV.*

◆Now that’s a little shocking wouldn’t you say? I mean, here you have a doctor so-to-speak who’s curing people and the church leaders are plotting to poison the cured people and the doctor!! And then in our passage for today:

◆“So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”” John 12:19, NIV.

◆So you can see what concerns them most. Jesus is disrupting their equilibrium! *Their* church services and classes aren’t as full. People aren’t coming to *them* for counseling as much. Giving will go down. How will they pay for the new website? We don’t see the religious leaders asking, “Is this of God?” or “Is Jesus fulfilling prophecy?” No, some of them (Sadducees and High Priests) have a deal going with Rome to keep their positions in

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the society. They want to cooperate with Rome and be as comfortable as possible during the Roman occupation. The Pharisees are more revolutionary in nature and Jesus is keeping them from amassing their forces. It's like the Democrats and Republicans agreeing to squeeze out an independent candidate.

- ◆ In an odd sort of way, even the disciples have misjudged the priorities. Parallel accounts of Palm Sunday tell us that just as Jesus prepares to ride a donkey into Jerusalem, the disciples were arguing about which of them were gonna be in high position in Jesus' cabinet.
- ◆ B. Jesus, on the other hand, is not promoting political position. He's not siding with Rome and telling the citizens to just "get along" with the high courts and law makers. Jesus did not come promising more jobs and lower interest rates. No, Jesus came preaching judgment on sin, satan, and evil. (v31),

- ◆ "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." John 12:31, NIV.

- ◆ and at the same time the promise of eternal life (v25)

- ◆ "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:25, NIV.

- ◆ C. I think we fall into similar traps even today. Our biggest concerns are growing our businesses until we are on top. Just listen to what our presidential candidates talk most about and stand for? From how most talk, it would seem the main thing we care about in America is our sacred economy! What will the leader do to get us more jobs. High pay. And lower interest. Are you for or against fracking and being able to compete

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with in the oil industry? What are we doing about the budget? Will the oval office have a good business man in it who can reign in spending? Not that these things are not of great concern. But they reveal our priorities as a people. When was the last time you heard a candidate speak about the necessity of having a high level of integrity? That hardly gets air-time. All the business sense in the world won't stop a greedy heart, or a leader who wants to make a name for himself by executive order, or veto of laws. I'm suggesting that Palm Sunday calls us to care about eternal things! What are you doing in your life to attend to spiritual things?

◆ On the presidential scale, to want a leader who tries to live a pure life, who disparages lying and deceit. How a leader views human life is perhaps more important than what our tax levels should be. Whether a leader supports or opposes natural marriage is far more telling about them than whether they can get trade deals lined up with other nations. Do you know where your candidate stands of eternal things?

◆ On our own personal level, what might Jesus offer to cleanse in your life? We have lots of wealth in our culture, but our marriages fall apart left and right. We drive constantly new, fancy SUV's but more students than ever are hooked on heroin. Even the poorer among us have cell phones, but not a dad that's around much. There's something wrong with this picture. If God stepped back and looked at you life, what would he be concerned about?

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◆ **Conclusion:** Another scene that may give you the feel of Palm Sunday is that of our recent presidential caucuses that have been taking place around the country. Candidates show up in a state of flash and fury. Crowds fill the streets convinced that their guy, or even gal, is the answer to all their dreams. But what are their dreams? If just this person can become president, we'll get free healthcare without having to work for it, or we'll get high paying jobs whether we deserve it or not. If just... Friends, our next president will not solve the troubles in our country.

◆ There's another glaring contradiction in the Palm Sunday narrative. The people are rallying and cheering, but the one they cheer is weeping over them.

◆ *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”” Luke 19:41-44, NIV.*

◆ Jesus has the answer to our life struggles, friends. Your sin need not run you or ruin you. But you cannot conquer it without him. Your life and my life need to follow Jesus' way. We need to repent of our sinfulness and instead of trying desperately to fit the messiah into a mold we want, to allow him to mold us into his. That's what it means to lose your life in this world, to keep it eternal places.