

Palm Sunday 2020

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, April 5, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. I praise God for the opportunity to connect DIGITALLY with you in such a time as this. I DO look forward to the time when we can all worship together again! Until that day, we will continue to meet using this medium. Please ENGAGE in this time of instruction...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

In recent days, it seems that the ONLY thing people can talk about is the Coronavirus. We have become ENGROSSED—and understandably so—with navigating this time of crisis and concerning ourselves with the impact that it is having/will have on our lives, our nation and our world. Allow me to ask the following:

Q. How much of your time and attention has been dedicated to this virus and its impact as of late?

Q. How much of your time and attention has been dedicated to the latest reports, projections, etc.?

Q. To what degree has the Coronavirus and ‘related topics’ dominated your thoughts/conversations?

FYI – I have the DESIRE to step back from addressing the condition of our times to focus on something truly TIMELESS. I have a LONGING to rise above our unique place in history to talk about something that TRANSCENDS history itself. Thankfully, HOLY WEEK provides for us the opportunity to fulfill these desires!

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

NOTE – This morning we enter into the most SACRED week in all of Christendom. Believers from all backgrounds and in all nations commemorate the significance of this week, for in it we pause to remember the final days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Holy Week—as we call it—provides for us the annual opportunity to reflect upon the FINAL happenings of Christ’s life and their import!

FYI – THREE major holidays (i.e., holy days) will take place this week...

1) Good Friday – If I were to ask you of the meaning and significance of Good Friday, a great many of you would rightly tell me that Good Friday commemorates the work of Christ on the Cross. i.e., on Good Friday we remember the CRUCIFIXION of our Lord and His sacrificial work.

2) Easter Sunday – If I were to ask you of the meaning and significance of Easter Sunday, a great many of you would rightly tell me that Easter Sunday celebrates the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ (i.e., signifying His victory over the powers of death, hell and the grave).

3) Palm Sunday – Today is Palm Sunday. If I were to ask you of its meaning and significance, what would YOU say? What happened on Palm Sunday nearly two-thousand-years ago? What is its meaning and how does it affect life and living in 2020, etc.?

Q. How might you respond?

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

FYI – In my years as a minister, I have found that many STRUGGLE to understand Palm Sunday in particular—perhaps because it requires insight into the history and culture of a society that we are so far REMOVED from. Either way, I make it my annual labor to RETELL the story of Palm Sunday, addressing its meaning for both time and eternity!

- If you are a VETERAN believer (fully versed on this topic)—lean in and listen!
- If you are a YOUNG believer (unable to A the Q's noted above)—lean in and listen!
- If you are NOT a believer and do not know what Palm Sunday is yet—lean in and listen!

TO THE WORD

FYI – All four Gospel writers (i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) detail the events that make up what we call Palm Sunday. When all four Gospel writers address the same event, it is safe to assume that it was SIGNIFICANT! I want to open primarily from the Gospel of Mark today (with an excerpt from the Book of Luke)...

Mark 11:1–10 (NIV)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10 “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Luke 19:39–40

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” 40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

NOTE – As we can see, this was clearly a MAJOR event in the life of Christ. Our holiday called “Palm Sunday” is connected to this arrival of Christ in Jerusalem (i.e., the Triumphal Entry). **Q.** But what does it all mean? Let’s be honest: as we read this a series of questions come to mind...

Q. Why did Jesus enter into Jerusalem in this fashion? On a colt?

Q. Why were the people so ecstatic (e.g., shouting, waving palms, etc.)?

Q. Why were the religious leaders so bothered (desiring to silence the people)?

Q. Why was this moment so sig. that Christ said it must be attested (i.e., rocks crying)?

KEY – The only way to answer such questions is to delve deeply into matters of history and culture. So...

LET’S DELVE IN...

A BRIEF HISTORY PT. 1

The Triumphal Entry took place in the First Century (A.D. 30) in the heart of the Jewish people’s ancient capital city of Jerusalem. This was a people and a nation rich in both history and culture. We must recognize that—thousands of years before the timing of this event and long before the Coming of Christ—God CHOSE the Jewish people to uniquely serve and represent Him before the nations. Their story permeates the OT.

KEY – For a short time, during the reigns of both King David and his son, Solomon, Israel had become a regional force (~1,000 B.C.). During this time, as they walked with and worshipped the Lord, they were blessed spiritually, economically and militarily—i.e., so much so, that Jews of every subsequent age deemed this to be their GOLDEN AGE (cf. 2 Samuel; 1 Kings).

A BRIEF HISTORY PT. 2

However, rebellion and a multitude of sin infected the Jewish nation, leading to a horrific cycle of JUDGMENT and national DECLINE (cf. 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles, the writings of the Major and Minor Prophets, etc.). Thus, around 900–800 B.C. this once mighty nation began to come apart at the seams. Sin (e.g., idolatry, sexual immorality, corruption, violence, etc.) cost them greatly and they lost their status as a regional power.

FYI – From this point onward, the Jewish people would be the WHIPPING post of every other major force...

For nearly 800-YEARS, other nations attacked them, harassed them, stole from them, occupied them, exiled them, etc. e.g., Nations like Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Assyria (722 B.C.), Babylon (586 B.C.), Persia, Greece, and beyond. Each took their turn in oppressing the people of God (to varying degrees).

KEY – By the time of Jesus’ Birth, ROME was the newest and most powerful of the empires to oppress Israel.

THE JEWS & ROME

We need to understand the RELATIONSHIP between Rome and the Jewish nation of Jesus' time...

FYI 1 – Israel was essentially a VASSAL state of the Roman Empire. Though they maintained a limited degree of self-governance, they lived under the boot of Rome. They were made to pay taxes to the Roman Empire and submit to Caesar. They were forced to live with Roman garrisons and soldiers in their country, etc.

Q. How would you feel if had to live under a foreign occupation?

Q. How would you feel if we were mandated to pay taxes to China?

Q. How would you feel if the Russian military “patrolled” our streets?

FYI 2 – The Jews HATED living under Roman authority. Being forced to submit to Rome was a HUMILIATION, particularly because at one point in time they were exalted among the nations. Moreover, Rome was fiercely PAGAN, which was an affront/offense to the strictly monotheistic Jews.

A NATIONAL LONGING

With such a brutal history—and in such an oppressive environment—it is NO surprise that Israel began to long for a day when God would intervene and save them from domination and servitude, once again making them the glory of the nations! This centuries-long hope for deliverance would soon become connected to the many prophetic writings that spoke to a coming Savior, Deliverer and King (i.e., Messiah/Christ).

KEY – i.e., One who would bring release to God's people!

For CENTURIES, the people had been waiting for that moment in history when God would send forth His anointed King to rescue them! By the time of Jesus' ministry, a messianic fervor had gripped the people of Israel. The coming of the Messiah/Christ was on the lips of Jews everywhere—i.e., a figure who would burst forth onto the scene at any moment.

ENTER JESUS

It was into this context that Christ was born, grew up and ministered. This was one of the reasons He was so incredibly POPULAR throughout His ministry (i.e., amassing crowds of thousands). Many had hoped—based on His teaching, miraculous works, etc.—that He was the long-awaited Messiah/Christ!

KEY – I do NOT think we can understand their desire to witness the arrival of the King (~cure for COVID-19)!

FYI – Of course, Jesus was the King they were waiting for. This reality is highlighted in the Gospel record:

1) People Rightly Declared Him to Be the Messiah/Christ (e.g., Peter cf. Matthew 16)

2) Demonic Forces—in Horror—Confessed Him to Be the Christ Who Had Come to Reign

3) Jesus Stated in Private Contexts that He was the Awaited Christ (cf. Matthew 16; John 4)

KEY – Yet here is the grand IRONY. Though He was the Christ He often DISTANCED Himself from that title. The Lord often told those who discerned/had discovered His true nature not to proclaim it amongst the crowds. Jesus refused to publicly declare this aspect of His coming for the bulk of His earthly ministry.

THE ACTIONS OF JESUS PT. 1

FYI – With all of this in mind, the Triumphal Entry and the events of Palm Sunday BEGIN to come into focus. All four Gospels state that, in preparation for His entry into Jerusalem, He had the disciples prepare a colt on which He would ride into Jerusalem?

Q. Why?

KEY – Remember that Christ was operating according to the CONTEXT of His day, in the midst of a people who were looking for the coming of their King, Messiah and Christ. They had studied the OT prophecies, including this prophecy from the Book of Zechariah (i.e., penned centuries prior to the events of Palm Sunday)...

Zechariah 9:9

9 Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
 Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
 See, your king comes to you,
 righteous and victorious,
 lowly and riding on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

KEY – In entering Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus was PURPOSEFULLY fulfilling prophecy. For the first time in His earthly ministry, He was PUBLICLY announcing to the nation that He was their long-awaited Savior (appointed and sent by God to rescue His people). Consider the following quotation from an insightful author...

QUOTE – “Up to this point, Jesus had not sought to openly be called the ‘Messiah.’ But now He allowed it, even encouraging it. Everything He was doing in this text was designed to call attention to the fact that He was the Messiah/Christ. This was the only time in His ministry that Jesus actually planned and promoted a public demonstration.”

Q. What is the meaning and importance of Palm Sunday?

A. It was that moment in history when Jesus presented Himself as the Christ.

THE ACTIONS OF JESUS PT. 2

As we delve deeper, we see not only the wisdom of Christ in choosing the MEANS of His entry (i.e., donkey)—we see His wisdom in selecting both the TIME and the PLACE for such a public demonstration. Take note the following...

FYI – Jesus came to Jerusalem (i.e., ancient capital of Israel) during the time of the Passover. This was a time when Jews from all over the world were expected to return to Jerusalem for this holy day. The streets of Jerusalem would have been PACKED with men, women and children (i.e., 2–3 million Jews would have been present)!

KEY – Jesus WANTED the most amount of people possible to witness His Triumphal Entry!

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE PT. 1

And the crowds RESPONDED passionately to His prophetically charged entry! Even if we fail to understand the import of Jesus' actions, they did NOT. Consider the response of the crowds who witnessed Jesus' entry into Jerusalem riding on a colt...

1) They Laid Out their Cloaks (Mark 11:8a)

2) They Waved Palm Branches (Mark 11:8b)

Q. What was the significance of these actions?

QUOTE – “The laying of garments on the animals and on the road—and the waving and spreading of branches—were all part of a traditional Jewish reception for royalty.”

Q. What else did the people do?

A. They cried out in the following way:

Mark 11:9–10

9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10 “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

QUOTE – The term Hosanna was “originally a prayer addressed to God, meaning ‘O save us now’ (cf. Ps. 118:25a). Later it came to be used as a shout of praise (like “Hallelujah”). Hosanna in the highest, in highest places means, “Save us, O God, who lives in heaven.” Its use here probably reflects a mixture of all of these elements due to the nature of the crowd.

KEY – This was the loftiest style in which He could be saluted as the promised Deliverer. Their centuries-long desire ERUPTED in the fervor of the moment, for the Chosen King had come to save His people. Once again, I do not think we can fully grasp the fervor of the crowd. i.e., This was the fulfillment of a hope that endured for CENTURIES!

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE PT. 2

NOTE – Of course, NOT all the people were excited about the actions and activities of Christ. The people who should have been the first to welcome Him (i.e., the religious leaders) challenged Jesus to SILENCE the impassioned crowd.

Luke 19:39

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

NOTE – To their dismay, they knew what He was declaring through His actions. They also knew that the people recognized His intent. Thus, as His enemies, they wanted to SHUT this spectacle down (believing the people to be blaspheming)! Yet Jesus said only the following:

Luke 19:40

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

QUOTE – “The Pharisees told Jesus to quiet the people down. This He would not do, for even if the people could be silenced, the very rocks would cry out! God’s eternal kingdom was being established and the long-awaited King of Kings had come. All of history pointed to this seminal moment wherein the Messiah publicly presented Himself to the nation. If the people remained silent, creation itself would testify to the wonder of this moment.”

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

With the excitement of the people in mind, etc., we may well wonder how the events of Palm Sunday could result in His CRUCIFIXION on Good Friday. It is logical to wonder how the same people who cried “Hosanna” exclaimed “Crucify Him” mere days later. **Q.** How could this be?

KEY – I believe the A centers upon a CONFLICT between the desires of the people v. the mission of Christ.

- The people wanted a Savior who would deliver them from Rome—that they might know earthly blessing.
- Christ sought to deliver His people from the power and consequence of sin—that they might have life et.

QUOTE – “The crowd correctly saw Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, but they did not see where Jesus’ kingship would lead them.”

NOTE – Ultimately, their MISCONCEPTION led to a colossal DISAPPOINTMENT. The Jews expected the Triumphal Entry of Jesus to be the beginning of His glorious reign—i.e., that moment He would unveil His glory, destroy Rome and elevate the nation.

Q. But what did Jesus actually do when He reached the city? HE WENT HOME...

Mark 11:11

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

KEY – When it became apparent that Jesus would NOT perform as they had hoped, they quickly turned...

A TRAGIC REALITY

NOTE – Interestingly, Christ knew that they people would ultimately REJECT Him (i.e., nationally).

Luke 19:41–44

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 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. 43 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. 44 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.”

NOTE 1 – Consider the DISPARITY between their response (jubilation) and His (sorrow).

NOTE 2 – Consider the PENALTY for their rejection—judgment and upheaval (vs. 42–44).

Their rejection of His Kingship was met with Roman Domination, Destruction and Diaspora (A.D. 70). TRAGIC! Frankly, to this day, His own people have not collectively realized the reality that their Savior/Messiah has come (i.e., nearly two-thousand-years later).

SUMMATIONS

AS WE MOVE TO A CLOSE, we do well to ASK...

Q. What is the meaning of Palm Sunday? Why was it significant?

A. It was the moment in history where Christ presented Himself as King!

APPLICATION PT. 1

Now you may be saying, “Good stuff Pastor—but what does PS have to do with ME?”

1) Palm Sunday Reminds Us of the NATURE of Christ

I get tired of hearing people say, “Jesus was a great teacher, philosopher, social activist, etc.” Was Jesus these things? I suppose! Yet this is NOT all He was. Through His Triumphal Entry, Jesus revealed Himself to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is true for all time—i.e., He is the same yesterday, today and FOREVER!

Q. Is this how you relate to Him?

Q. Have you submitted to His lordship?

KEY – You CANNOT have Him as SAVIOR until you recognize Him as LORD...

Romans 10:9

9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

APPLICATION PT. 2

2) Palm Sunday Reminds Us of the WORK of Christ

The people of Israel desired a Savior who would rescue from earthly oppression and opposition. But this type of deliverance was NOT Jesus' primary purpose! He sought to save humanity from something far deadlier than Rome (SIN) and to meet a far deeper need than earthly prosperity (ETERNAL LIFE).

KEY – He came to give His life that we might receive life!

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Q. To what degree have you (personally) received the benefits of His work?

Q. Have you placed your faith in Christ alone—that you might be granted life?

APPLICATION PT. 3

As we close, allow me to make a few CONNECTIONS between PS and the times in which we live...

NOTE – I Believe Jesus is Still Presenting Himself as the Savior We So Desperately Need

Nearly two-thousand-years ago Jesus presented Himself as the long-awaited King and Savior of the world. I believe He is STILL—continually and in the midst of this crisis—revealing Himself in the SAME manner. He is still calling the whole of humanity (i.e., individually and collectively) to receive Him as such!

THUS SAID...

Q. Will We Come to Recognize This Day of Visitation OR Will We Miss it?

Q. Will we be like the Jews of old, MISSING Him because WE determine our greatest need to be **a)** MEDICAL (i.e., what we need most right now is a scientist to find a cure); **b)** FINANCIAL (i.e., what we need most right now is an economist to fix the marketplace); or **c)** POLITICAL (i.e., what we need right now is the right political leader to show the way), etc.?

OR

Q. Will we have the wherewithal to recognize that our greatest need has always been for a SAVIOR?

QUOTE – “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior.”

KEY – Everything is being SHAKEN right now so that we might see the NEED for Him! WISE UP!

APPLICATION PT. 4

NOTE – What a TRAGEDY it would be for us to miss THIS “day of visitation”—i.e., to miss what God is doing in our midst because we lack the eyes to see or the ears to hear (spiritually-speaking). Hear me! I SHUDDER to think what will take place in this nation/world if we FAIL to take a knee at this time and REJECT His lordship!

cf. Rom. 11:22 – Behold/Consider the GOODNESS and the SEVERITY of God!

KEY – Now is the time for this WORLD to...

1) Recognize their Need for a Savior

2) Repent and Confess Christ as Lord

KEY – Now is the time for YOU to...

1) Recognize Your Need for a Savior

2) Repent and Confess Christ as Lord

Q. Will You? That is a decision that ONLY you can make!

CONCLUSIONS

As you can see, Palm Sunday commemorates an event that is both TIMELESS and TIMELY. It has meaning and import that stretches throughout time and space—even into the circumstances of 2020 and beyond. It is my prayer that you will recognize the significance of this day and allow it to CHANGE you accordingly!

-FINAL PRAYER

-ONLINE GIVING