

# Palm Sunday 2023

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, April 2, 2023

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## SETTING THE STAGE

Since the fall of man our race has been characterized by struggle. From the onset of the fall (cf. Gen. 3)...

- 1) Man has struggled in their relationship with God. Note that Adam and Eve hid from the Lord in the garden.
- 2) Man has struggled re: their sense of self. Adam and Eve used leaves to cover their nakedness and shame.
- 3) Man has struggled to find remedy for sin. Note that Adam and Eve covered themselves v. seeking God.
- 4) Man has struggled with accountability. Rather than confess their sin(s) they deflected responsibility.
- 5) Man has struggled maritally. The harmony they had known was now marred by an unholy rivalry.
- 6) Man has struggled concerning work and procreation. Both would now be connected with pain.
- 7) Man has struggled with matters of mortality. The race of Adam was now subject to death.

**Q. To what degree are such struggles ongoing in our world and generation?**

**NOTE 1** – The theme of struggle abounds OT writing(s) from numerous authors...

- 1) The psalmists (e.g., David) struggled amidst seasons of great adversity and opposition.
- 2) Figures like Asaph and Habakkuk struggled with the nature of God's justice in the world.
- 3) Job and friends, if they be so called, struggled with the issue of human pain and suffering.
- 4) The author of Ecclesiastes struggled with the purpose of life amidst both death and time.
- 5) Prophetic figures like Jeremiah struggled moral decline and genuinely difficult callings.

**Q. To what degree do these struggles persist in this day and age?**

**NOTE 2** – Commentators and apologists like J. I. Packer note that humanity—being deeply philosophical and introspective in nature—struggles with four overarching Q's (i.e., knowingly or unknowingly)—Q's pertaining to...

- 1) Origin – How did we get here?
- 2) Meaning – Why are we here?
- 3) Morality – Right v. Wrong?
- 4) Destiny – Life to come?

**Q1. Have you ever pondered such things?**

**Q2. Why am I touching upon this theme of struggle?**

**KEY** – Today we enter Holy Week, which serves to commemorate the final days of Jesus' life and ministry. Beginning with Palm Sunday and culminating with Easter, the Gospel accounts place tremendous emphasis upon this final seven-day span of the life of Christ. One thing I have noticed as of late is that the theme of struggle pervades every aspect of Holy Week. I would like to explore this premise, beginning with Easter and working in reverse to the events of Palm Sunday.

LET US DELVE IN...

## **EASTER SUNDAY**

**NOTE 1** – Easter celebrates the victory of Christ over death, hell and the grave via His bodily Resurrection. Easter serves to remind us that Christianity is ultimately founded upon a Risen (i.e., versus a dead) Savior. However, Easter is not without its sense of struggle. I will not linger long on Easter, but please note the following...

**NOTE 2** – Many in the biblical record struggled to believe in the Resurrection. Thomas certainly had his doubts. He said he would not believe apart from seeing and touching the wounds of Christ Jesus. What did Peter and John do upon hearing the reports of the empty tomb from their female companions? They ran to investigate the matter! And let us not forget that Paul had to contend with a church full of wayward Corinthians who struggled with this teaching, and Athenian philosophers who nearly laughed him out of town for the message of the Risen Savior!

**Q1. How many dismiss Christianity because they struggle with the idea of One who conquered the grave?**

**Q2. How many deem Jesus' Resurrection a "fairy-tale" and far too fantastical for modern man to believe?**

## **SATURDAY**

Working in reverse order, the biblical record is silent concerning the events of the Saturday of Holy Week. However, can we not reasonably infer the condition of the disciples while Christ was yet in the grave? Though Easter was on its way, that bright morning was preceded by the darkest of nights...

**Q1. Could they have struggled with sorrow? After all, had they not lost a close friend?**

**Q2. Could they have struggled with fear? If they killed the Shepherd, why not the sheep?**

**Q3. Could they have struggled with guilt? How many abandoned Jesus in His hour of need?**

**Q4. Could they have struggled with spiritual disillusionment? How could THE Christ be dead?**

**Q5. Could they have struggled with personal disillusionment? What is life now with Him dead?**

**Q6. Could they have turned bitter? Why did Jesus call me just to die and why did I ever say yes?**

**Q. Have you ever struggled with sorrow, fear, guilt, disillusionment and bitterness in life and living?**

## **GOOD FRIDAY**

Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Christ Jesus, wherein He functioned as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Though it was a day of awful struggle for the Son of God, humanity yet struggles with its ongoing message and meaning...

**NOTE 1** – Many cannot understand how Jesus could die for someone like them. How tragic that many resist coming to Christ because they feel unworthy of His love when that was precisely the point of the Crucifixion (i.e., the demonstration of love for the unworthy that brings them near).

**NOTE 2** – Many cannot understand why Jesus would have to die for someone like them. For those convinced of their own righteousness, needing a Savior is a rather preposterous proposition. "Why would God have to pay the price for my sin since I am a good person?" such might exclaim. Truly, hell is full of people who believe they deserve heaven while heaven is full of people who realize that their lives warrant hell.

**NOTE 3** – The three-fold denial of Simon Peter on the night of Jesus’ betrayal reveals our struggle to maintain allegiance to Christ amidst opposition and adversity. It was easy for Simon Peter to profess Christ in a room full of believers at the Last Supper or with fervent crowds of excited supporters, but his profession crumbled in a more hostile climate. How difficult it can be to claim Jesus when popular opinion turns against Him!

**NOTE 4** – Moreover, we struggle to overcome our natural limitations in our own “Garden of Gethsemane” moments. Whereas Jesus called His followers to watch and pray lest they fall to temptation in a moment of imminent and impending crisis, the urge to succumb to sleep proved too strong. Though the disciples were willing of heart, they all-too-easily yielded to the pull of their fleshly instincts.

**Q. Are these not ongoing realities in our era and age?**

## **MAUNDY (HOLY) THURSDAY**

Thursday was a critical day in the final week of Jesus’ life and ministry. Though that ancient Thursday was marked by the Last Supper and rich communion shared between Christ and His disciples, the theme of struggle is ever-present. Please consider the following...

**NOTE 1** – We witness the struggle of the apostles to understand the teaching of Christ. On multiple occasions throughout some of His most memorable statements, Scripture records questions and remarks put forth by His disciples—questions and remarks that reveal their spiritual confusion. For instance...

### **John 14:1–10a (NIV, Emphasis Mine)**

1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”

5 Thomas said to him, **“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”**

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said, **“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”**

9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?”

**Q. How many still struggle concerning the teaching of Christ and its application?**

**NOTE 2** – We witness the struggle of the disciples to understand Jesus’ call to sacrificial service. When Christ assumed the role of a servant and began to wash the feet of His own, Simon Peter insisted that such a task was beneath the dignity of One so great. Jesus noted that His actions were meant to provide an example, establishing the manner in which His followers are to live. The greatest of all shall serve! Yet...

**Q. How many yet struggle to live up to the example and expectation of Christ re: sacrifice and service?**

## SUPER TUESDAY

The Tuesday of Holy Week was packed with activity and contains some of Jesus' most memorable teachings and moments of ministry. However, once again, the presence of struggle abounds in texts related to that Tuesday of millennia-past...

**NOTE 1** – Christ spoke at length concerning the end of the age and the harbingers of His Coming. His words abound with calls for preparedness and being watchful of His Return, yet we struggle to remain readied or watchful. Sadly, many have come to dismiss the idea of His Appearing since it is a long-time in coming! Those who resist and reject His admonition do so at their own peril.

**NOTE 2** – We struggle to perceive what the Lord deems precious and invaluable. Should you or I have been present with Jesus at the Temple treasury, we would have lauded those who gave the largest of offerings! Christ, however, took the time to praise a poor widow who gave a mere pittance. Could it be that the Lord judges by a metric quite dissimilar from that of our own making? Also...

**NOTE 3** – We struggle to operate in the faith our Savior prescribes. Following the withering of the fig tree, Christ posited that faith functioning through the context of prayer has the power to move mountains! Christians are invited to abandon both fear and doubt that we might witness the wonders of the Lord in kind, yet we struggle to believe and all-too-often fail to take the Lord at His Word.

**NOTE 4** – Humanity struggles to maintain proper priority. The Law of Moses contained 613 commandments, causing generations of scholars to contend with which was the most important. The Jews of Jesus' day had lost their way, prioritizing relative minutia over weightier matters (i.e., failing to realize that those who loved God and others would fulfill the Law – the Greatest Commandment).

**Q. How often do we get lost in the minutia and the trivial, failing to embrace that which is truly important?**

## MONDAY

Monday was the day on which Jesus cleansed the Temple (i.e., for the second time in His earthly ministry). This alone indicates that we often struggle to learn the lessons Jesus tries to teach, reverting back to old ways, beliefs and behaviors all too quickly. Have you ever “regressed” in your walk?

**NOTE 1** – We struggle to maintain the priority of prayer. Those of Jesus' day and age certainly did! Consider that the Temple located in Jerusalem was established to be, per Jesus' words, a house of prayer, yet it was seemingly used for anything but! Rather, this sacred space was turned into a den of thieves! Sad.

**NOTE 2** – We struggle to honor God and love others, giving ourselves to greed and all manner of corruption. The Temple was a place for the people to offer biblically-sanctioned offerings (e.g., lambs, bulls, etc.). Therefore, it did make sense to have a market for such items versus bringing them with you from afar! However, those who ran such markets preyed upon faithful pilgrims by prohibitively-overcharging worshipers. Swindling God-seeking and God-honoring men and women for a quick buck turned the house of God into a den of thieves, and Jesus overturning tables and lashing them was an act of grace v. what they truly deserved! How often we love things and use people v. using things and loving people (i.e., regarding that which is sacred).

AND NOW WE COME TO PALM SUNDAY...

## PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday was the day on which Jesus publicly presented Himself as the long-awaited Messiah or Christ (i.e., the anointed King who would bring both salvation and peace). I do not think we comprehend the longing of ancient Israel for their Deliverer—a longing that manifested itself in the Triumphal Entry...

**Q. How did the people respond to the Triumphal Entry of Christ into the city?**

**Matthew 21:8–9**

8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

**KEY** – This is how you welcomed royalty in the ancient world!

**NOTE 1** – Of course, their joy dissipated when Jesus failed to operate as they expected. Christ did come to operate as King, but a very different type of King than they had anticipated or desired. Whereas they believed that Christ would enter Jerusalem to establish His government and dispel the wicked Romans, Scripture notes that He entered the city and its Temple, and then retired for the evening, doing NOTHING. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, and their dashed hopes led many to shout “Crucify Him” days later!

**Q1. To what degree do we understand the heart and mission of our Lord in our day and generation?**

**Q2. Do we yet struggle with Christ when He does not operate according to our desires and agendas?**

**NOTE 2** – Moreover, humanity struggles to properly recognize and respond to God-moments. While the crowds were shouting “hosanna” the Bible records that Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He knew that the city and its populace were about to miss their day of visitation, leading to needless and devastating national judgment!

**Q1. To what degree do we recognize and respond to our days of visitation?**

**Q2. To what degree do we miss the heart of Christ, rejoicing while He weeps?**

## APPLICATIONS

**NOTE 1** – This sermon is founded upon a simple yet profound premise. Humanity is characterized by struggle...

**NOTE 2** – This has been evidenced from the Genesis 3 account and latter OT passages, figures and moments. Moreover, I have identified a myriad of struggles evident within the Holy Week of the Gospel record—struggles that persist in this day and age (i.e., and likely in this very room). Who in the sound of my voice has contended with one or more of the struggles touched upon today (i.e., to any degree)?

THUS SAID...

**Q1. What are we to do with such struggles?**

**Q2. How do we handle this aspect of our condition?**

**A1.** Firstly, embrace the struggle in a God-ward direction. The Bible never condemns us for our struggles. Rather, it calls us to bring our questions, concerns and cares unto the Lord. Consider that the psalmists, prophets and apostles of Scripture all contended with deep and painful struggles, yet they did so before God in a posture of faith v. without Him from a condition of disbelief. Your struggle has the capacity to drive you toward or away from the Lord, so be wary concerning how you handle yourself in difficult moments and seasons.

**A2.** Moreover, please remember that the Lord still offers wisdom to those in need, guidance for the lost, perspective for the seeking and strength for the downtrodden, balm for the afflicted, comfort for the hurting, pardon for the sinful and an invitation to come home to the wayward. All that you need concerning your struggle is found in Him alone; and sometimes a little time with Him sets everything right.

**A3.** Recognize that your struggle, whatever it be, does not diminish biblical truth and your obligation to it...

**FYI** – We could spend a bit of time elaborating upon this point for each of the struggles noted this morning...

HOWEVER, I WILL ELABORATE ONLY WITH THE FOLLOWING (RE: HOLY WEEK)...

**KEY 1** – You may struggle with the message of Easter and of the Risen Christ, feeling it all a bit too fantastical. This, however, does not negate the truth that Jesus is very much alive, well and work in the earth, whether you rightly perceive it or not.

**KEY 2** – You may struggle with the message of Good Friday. Perhaps you deem yourself unworthy of His love or you see no need for it. This, however, does not diminish the truth that Christ gave Himself for you and you have need to trust in Him and Him alone.

**KEY 3** – You may struggle with the message of Palm Sunday, failing to understand the nature or application of Jesus' kingship in this world and in your life. Yet this does not diminish the reality that He is King, and He shall rule as He desires either with or without your consent.

**KEY 4** – This Palm Sunday, give yourself to the One who gave Himself for you; He Who reigns forever and ever!

## **CONCLUSION**

**NOTE 1** – Feel free to give either in person or online at [www.NewLifeBarre.org](http://www.NewLifeBarre.org).

**NOTE 2** – Feel free to participate in our “beyond-Sunday” ministries (MM, WM, Study).

### **1 Timothy 1:17**

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.