

Palm Sunday: The King Comes to You

April 10, 2022

John 12:12–19

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have three names this morning for you. Owen Young, James Byrnes, and Harlow Curtice. Have you heard of any of those three names before?

Those three have all been named “Man of the Year” by Times Magazine, meaning that nobody had a greater impact on the world than they did the year they won. Owen Young helped with the reconstruction of Europe after World War One, James Byrnes was Harry Truman’s Secretary of State early in the Cold War, and Harlow Curtice was the President of the first American corporation to earn over \$1 billion in a year: General Motors.

These three people were important people; they were celebrities when they won the award. Now most people don’t have any idea who they are. The same could be said for dozens of pop culture celebrities and sports celebrities. The celebrity of today is often forgotten tomorrow.

Celebrities can have a bizarre effect on us, can’t they? Our culture cares a lot about celebrities; what they say, where they go, what they endorse. Celebrities can be the most popular people in the country, but then very quickly fall back into anonymity.

Jesus, though, was not forgotten. He was a celebrity two thousand years ago and He still is today. Jesus is worth following.

He was one of the biggest celebrities of the day, and in our Palm Sunday text this morning He enters one of the biggest cities of the day. People expected him to do great things. He *did* do a great thing. But it wasn’t what most people expected.

Let’s pray as we begin this morning: God, thank you for your Word. Your Word is truth. Sanctify us in this truth this morning and grow our faith and our love for you. In your name we pray, amen.

The King Comes to You this Palm Sunday. First, we see that Jesus COMES PREPARED.

This Triumphal Entry took place during the Passover, an annual Jewish festival where everyone flocks to the temple in Jerusalem to remember God's past deliverance and look forward to His promise of future deliverance. The Jewish people had been looking for their promised savior for hundreds and hundreds of years, but Messianic excitement always ran high during this time of year. And now was exactly the time for Jesus to publicly declare that he was the King from the line of David that everyone had been hoping and waiting and praying for.

He chose the *date* (1), the *location* (2), and the *method* (3) of His arrival. Jesus had made all the arrangements, and was prepared to enter Jerusalem on this Palm Sunday even though He knew that this next week would be filled with pain and death.

Jesus very intentionally picked the perfect date. This first Palm Sunday fell on the 10th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan, four days before the Passover feast. Ok?

Now think about this: When God instituted the Passover for the Hebrew people back in Exodus 12, he told every family to take a lamb into their house to prepare to sacrifice it. The lamb would be in the house for four days, before it was sacrificed.

Four days before the Passover, the sacrificial lamb was chosen and began being prepared for its death. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Four days later, the sacrificial lamb of the world was in the midst of a brutal passion week, on His way to the cross to shed His blood to be a sacrifice for all.

God's timing is perfect, isn't it? Just as the blood of the sacrificial lamb saved the Israelites from the plagues of Egypt, so we are saved from the judgment of God by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

A better Lamb, offering a better sacrifice, to provide His people with perfect protection from the ultimate plague.

The **date** of Jesus' entry had rich, symbolic significance. Jesus also planned out the **location**

of His public arrival.

Five hundred years before this first Palm Sunday, the prophet Zechariah spoke of a liberator who would stand “with his feet on the Mount of Olives.” Jesus could have entered Jerusalem through any gate from any direction. But Jesus entered Jerusalem by way of Bethpage, a city sitting in the shadow of the Mount of Olives. Before Jesus liberated His people in Jerusalem, His feet were on the Mount of Olives... just as the prophet said.

So the **date** is significant, the **location** is significant, and the **method** of Jesus' Palm Sunday arrival in Jerusalem was also planned out and prepared for. Uber wasn't a thing yet, so Jesus arranged for a donkey and its colt to be used for transport into the city.

A donkey was used for menial tasks in peacetime; it wasn't an animal for a Conquering King to use! The people were expecting their king to enter riding a powerful horse who would free them from their oppression through strength and military conquest. But Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

The people of Israel were tired of being captives. They had been kicked around by different nations for centuries! They were subject to the Romans, they had been conquered by the Babylonians and Assyrians, they had been enslaved by the Egyptians. They were sick and tired of being a second-rate civilization. They longed to be *free*, and they knew their Promised Messiah *was going to come* and make them *free*.

Jesus *would* free His people from their oppression, but it wasn't freedom from political oppression and it wasn't freedom through a show of military dominance. Zechariah 9:9:

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, **your king is coming to you**; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

The **date**, **location**, and **method** of Jesus' arrival were all significant. Jesus knew that the week ahead would be agonizing and painful, but He still made arrangements to come and ensured everything was properly prepared for.

Jesus came to Jerusalem **prepared**, and He also came **triumphantly**.

This Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem is a triumphant one. A victorious entrance that proclaims that Jesus **is** who everyone has been waiting for, and that He's come to share His victory with everyone.

And the people were ready for this victory. They were ready for a king to ride into Jerusalem with a huge army behind him and conquer the Roman oppression and sit on an earthly throne forever.

Matthew says that the disciples took their coats and laid them on the donkey so Jesus would have a softer seat. They laid them on the road so that Jesus would have a smoother ride. They were willing to dirty their clothes out of submission and respect to their triumphant king.

They cut down palm branches and laid them on the road, too. Palm branches were used in those days as symbols of nationalism and victory. One hundred and sixty years before this, the Jews had revolted against the Romans and recaptured the temple and the city of Jerusalem. After the victory the Israelites celebrated by parading around with "green palm branches."

This same spirit of victory and patriotism was washing over the crowd this Palm Sunday. They shouted "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; even the King of Israel!" They believed that Jesus was their Triumphant King.

Jesus **was** the triumphant king they were hoping for, but we know that He accomplished His victory through **a single sacrifice**, not a mass slaughter. In order to accomplish His victory, Jesus hung on a cross and died. His humble life and death saved His people from the oppression of sin. To fulfill God's righteous, holy, perfect standard for sinners like us, Jesus took our place and died for us.

His sacrifice was the **greatest victory in the history of the world**, bigger than the most extensive military campaign the Israelites could ever wish for. Jesus was **triumphant** in His mission to liberate His people from bondage.

So when Jesus rode into Jerusalem that Palm Sunday so many years ago, He came **prepared** (1), He came **triumphant** (2), and lastly Jesus rode into Jerusalem **FOR YOU** (3).

The celebrity of today is often forgotten tomorrow. The crowd shouted praises to Jesus this Sunday, but they'd be singing a new tune by Thursday. **Jesus knew this, but He still came.**

When the people realized that Jesus wouldn't lead a government rebellion to rally behind, their cries of "Hosanna!" would change to "crucify Him!" **Jesus knew this, but He still came.** Jesus was pampered with respect and submission as He rode into the city gates, but as He came out of the city gates just a few days later He would be spit upon, mocked, and tortured as He carried His cross. **But still Jesus came.**

Jesus came because He wanted to. Jesus came because His Father had sent Him. Jesus came for you, because He loves you!

Jesus came for your benefit, Jesus came for your salvation. God loves you, God cherishes you, and God longs to be with you.

Martin Luther writes: "You don't seek [God], He seeks you. You don't find Him, He finds you. Your faith comes from Him, not from you. And everything faith works in you comes from Him, not from you."

Jesus came for those who knew Him, and Jesus came for those who didn't know who He was. Jesus came for the repentant, and He came for the proud. He came for me, and He came for you.

But why do we care about this? Why does it matter that Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? Can't we take care of ourselves and figure things out by ourselves?

We shake our heads 'no,' but isn't that exactly how we think? Isn't "trying to take care of ourselves" exactly what we do each and every day?

Skipping our daily Bible reading because it's just not important enough. Indulging in a secret sin because sin isn't that serious. Doing something good in order to help "balance the scales"

of good and bad things you've done in your life.

Many people think like that. Many of US think like that. And when we do... whether we intend to or not we are standing at the foot of the cross and spitting in Jesus' face. We tell him He's not needed. That's what we do when we think and act like we can take care of ourselves.

The Israelites couldn't do it by themselves, and we can't either. When we look to Scriptures we see an impossibly high guideline, a perfect standard.

And we know that when we look inside ourselves it's a different story, isn't it? We don't meet that perfect standard. When we try to earn our salvation or work our way out of our sin, we fail. Again, and again, we fail. We CAN'T "take care of ourselves."

The prophet Jeremiah says that the Word of God is like a hammer that shatters rock. If we try to build ourselves up and save ourselves from our sin, we will be struck down again and again.

Do you feel struck down this morning? Maybe you can resonate with the Psalmist when he writes, "Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life. I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes fail while I wait for my God."

It's easy to read about being a good parent. It's easy to read about keeping your thoughts and your actions pure and loving your neighbor as yourself. But it's another to actually do it. We struggle to actually DO these things that we know we should be doing.

Jesus knew this, but He still came for you. He knew you would struggle, he knew you would fail, but He still came for you.

Jesus came into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday prepared to deal with your sin. He was thinking about YOU and YOUR sin. He humbly declared Himself to be the sacrificial lamb who would take away the sins of the world. And that includes your sin, too!

Our God sacrificed His Son for you. Our God sacrificed His sinless Son for a world of people who fail over and over to obey Him; for a world of people who don't care; for a world of people

who reject Him; for a world of people who continue in their sin.

Other kings draw all they have from their people. Our King gives all He has to His people. And He came into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, for you.

Trust that Jesus did indeed take your place on the cross and win the right to forgive you all your sins and all your failing and all your falling short. If you receive your triumphant King with believing hearts, you can share in His triumphant victory. His sacrifice can be your gain. His death can be your life.

Your King comes to you today. How do you receive Him? With proud, arrogant, rejecting hearts? Or with gladness and thanksgiving and praise to the King who saved us?

Amen.