

I. Holy Week in Biblical Perspective
Palm Sunday
“All Hail, King Jesus!”
John 12:12–19
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
April 3, 2022 • Sunday Morning Sermon

I'm going to start this study by giving you context as we walk into the triumphal entry of Christ. This is God's Word for the people of God to the glory of God, by the grace of God in the hearing of the people of God. John 11:55-12:8 says *[55] Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. [56] They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That He will not come to the feast at all?" [57] Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest Him.*

[12:1] Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. [2] So they gave a dinner for Him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him at table. [3] Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. [4] But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, [5] "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" [6] He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. [7] Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. [8] For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me."
The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

By my count this is sermon number 23 meaning, I have had the extraordinary privilege of being the senior pastor Briarwood Presbyterian Church and this is the 23rd time I have given a sermon on Palm Sunday, on the triumphal entry. As I was thinking through this at first what crossed my mind is that I wished people would remember all my sermons but then again maybe if they don't remember all my sermons I can slip something in that I have said before and they won't realize it was said before. I have been thinking through this though on how in a fresh sense we might come to this. I thought we would back up because we are looking at a wonderful cluster of the trees of redemption that fill the forest of God's grace when we look at Holy Week as we follow the steps of Jesus.

What about the whole Bible? There are two things I want you to think about as we look at this passage. First of all, there are four grand themes in the Bible which are creation, the fall, redemption and consummation. The first three are actually an outline of the Bible. Creation is in Genesis 1 and 2. The fall into sin is Genesis 3. Redemption is Genesis 4 to Revelation 22, which is the unfolding of the covenant of grace. Revelation then initiates the consummation of eternity when we will be with Him forever and ever.

Secondly, in looking at the grand forest of God's grace, there are many, many events in the Bible where our Lord gives us insight into who He is, what He has done, what He has promised and the fulfillment of those promises in His Son Jesus. As we look at those, two weeks stand out in stark clarity in the Bible. One is the week of creation as it is unfolded step by step,

where there are three days of forming the heavens and the earth and three days of filling the heavens and the earth. Then we get to a second week which we call the Passion Week or Holy Week where the Gospels amazingly put together this glorious picture of what happened as the pinnacle moment of why Christ was born into this world. His 33 years and 3 years of public ministry are now coming to the point for which He came and that is to die for our sins, be raised on the third day, to the glory of the Father and by the grace of God to the salvation of His people. The Gospels outline this step by step.

This Holy Week is initiated on a Sabbath, then goes through a Sabbath until the first day of the week which becomes known as the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's resurrection Day whereby He rose from the dead victoriously and gloriously. These two things kind of pull together because Jesus is known as the Second Adam – the Son of God who became Man in order to take our place and our sins. Our sins came from the first Adam for we who are in Adam sinned and now we who are in Christ are redeemed from our sins. What was the first day for the first Adam's existence? His first day was a worship day for he was made on the sixth day and then came the Sabbath. The Second Adam does this work of redeeming us from our sins, as He rests in the grave on the last Sabbath of the Old Testament and comes forth on the first day of the week risen as our Savior and King which becomes known as the Lord's Day.

In this week we are about to take a look at, Jesus has made His way from the Galilee, making His way down from the Jordan, going through Jericho, and going up the hills as many of the pilgrims were doing as they were on their way for the Passover. The text said the Jews had come from the country side, why? In the Old Testament there was a king who brought reforms in order to heighten Biblical truth and his name was Josiah. King Josiah made a decree where people were not allowed to privatize the worship that had belonged in the gathering of the temple. People were to make their way to the temple where the holy of holies was found. We see in the Gospels that when Jesus was growing up, He and His family habitually came to Jerusalem for the great feasts and their observances. Jesus continued this in His three year public ministry and would bring the Disciples with Him for the great feasts, as He would make glorious and wonderful pronouncements at those feasts in terms of who He is and what He had done.

Now comes a feast but there is a question looming which is 'do you think Jesus will come?' All those gathered wanted to see Jesus. Why would they ask that question? They asked this question for two reasons. Number one was, there was an arrest warrant out for Him. At the previous time He was in Jerusalem they had tried to arrest Him but could not lay hands upon Him. The other reason is that there is a clandestine plot to kill Him. Now because of the resurrection of Lazarus, Lazarus had become an object of curiosity that was now leading more to believe in Jesus. The Sanhedrin and Pharisees now broaden the plot to kill Jesus by wanting to kill Lazarus too.

Jesus is at this point observing the Sabbath in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. This had not only become a place of respite but this entire week Jesus made Bethany His headquarters, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. When Jesus goes out to Jerusalem each day He returns back to their home most of the days until it nears the end of the week when He spends the night on the side of the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is anointed by Mary on the evening of the Sabbath, for His burial.

It's hard for us to grasp this for this perfume/oil that she broke open, poured upon His feet, then wiped clean with her hair, was equated to a year's salary for a middle class person at that time. After Judas makes his statement of saying she should have sold it for it to be given to the poor, Jesus makes two insights. One is He says 'you always have the poor with you, but you

don't always have Me.' Jesus is not diminishing our responsibilities of mercy ministries to the poor. Every time a political or religious figure offers you a promise of a utopia, it's not coming until Jesus returns. That doesn't mean we don't labor against the consequences of sin for we always labor against it with the power of the Gospel, but until Christ comes sin is still here and it will continually bring the consequences of sin. We bring the only answer to sin and it's not a military, political or economic utopia for it is the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves sinners no matter where they are and who they are if they will come to Him. The glorious utopian desire is fulfilled only in the coming of Christ.

In our text the Sabbath is coming to an end and the Bible then says 'a fragrant odor fills the house.' Wherever God's people dwell, out of their love for Christ, out of their devotion to Christ will arise the perfumed odor of sweetness and devotion. When Mary poured out the perfume, she had poured herself out and with that poured out adoration, acclamation and exaltation, arise the sweet odor of the permeating powerful love of Christ. Not to be provocative, as much as the sweetness of the odor where the Lord's people were in devotion to Christ, outside there was a stink and stench of hatred, duplicity and deceit for crowds were gathering. It's amazing how people can come together when they're not together but will be together out of their enmity against Christ. They were seeing people become believers and they couldn't stand it.

Who were these people? There were basically five factions. First of all, there were the disciples and those coming to faith – the 3, 12, 70 and others who were coming to Him and believing in Him. Secondly, there were the crowds at Bethany for Bethany was a place that Jesus was well known in and it had people who were well known like Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany was where Christ had raised Lazarus from the dead. Thirdly, there are the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees who have come out with the arrest warrant and plot to kill Jesus which now includes Lazarus. Fourthly, there are the curious crowd who want to touch Lazarus and the people who would come especially if it was set up as a tourist area for people to see the cave where Lazarus came forth from. Fifthly, were the pilgrims who had come from all over the world, obeying the edit of Josiah, to come to the temple for the observance of the Passover.

I don't know how many people were there but here is what I do know. Josephus three decades later will give an account of those who come for the Passover feast in Jerusalem and this account says 2.7 million came for this Passover. By the way, he is just counting the Jews that were there. My guess is it was a significant number of people who were there and those coming out of the city are asking the question 'will Jesus come in or do we need to go out to get Him?' The answer to their question had already been given by Jesus they just didn't know it, because the Gospels tell us when Jesus arrived in Bethany to observe that Sabbath Day, before He'd enter on the first day called Palm Sunday, He sent two disciples for His transportation in fulfillment of Zechariah 9 where they find a donkey and a colt and they tell them the Master has need of it. He has already made the arrangements for His entrance; He's coming into the city.

He is making a statement I want you to see. John 12:9-19 says [9] *When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of Him but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. [10] So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, [11] because on account of him many of the **Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*** (To believe in Jesus you have to go away from sin which is called repentance. This is the first day of the Holy Week.)

[12] *The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.* (The answer to the question of whether He was coming is answer here.) [13] *So*

they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" [14] And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, [15] "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

*[16] His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified (Ascension Sunday), then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him. [17] The crowd that had been with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. [18] The reason why the crowd went to meet Him was that they heard He had done this sign. [19] So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. **Look, the world has gone after Him.**"*

This crowd came out singing psalms and with palms. They were singing the Hallel which is Psalm 113 through Psalm 118. Psalm 118 is what is being quoted here in Luke 12:13. Why would they bring palms? If it was the feast of booths that would make sense because this feast used palms to build the booths. There were no shortages of palms there. Why are they waving the palms? One of the great challenges in the ministry of God's Word is it's not simply just getting to the truth of God's Word and how it applies to us in the 21st century but to properly understand God's Word is to get us back to the first century and here you actually need to go back a little further.

There is a period of silence we call the inter-testamental period between the books of Malachi and Matthew. There is 400 years of where God is silent and that's more than the existence of the United States, but God is working. In this time the Syrians had taken over and you can read about the ruler whose name is Antiochus Epiphanes. He captured Jerusalem and brought it under Syrian control. He began to do abominations in the temple. He brought destruction, corruption, immorality and the resurrection of child sacrifice into the temple. The Jewish people began to have revolts and one revolt was by a man named Judas Maccabees. He would set up the Maccabean rulers over Israel. He would be successful to drive the Syrians from the temple mount. When he did the people showed up with palms for their liberation has come. Then his brother liberated the entire city and his name was Simon Maccabees. Then they actually began to mint coins with palms on them.

Have you noticed on the flags of the colonies that became the original states and how many of them have something called a liberty tree on them? In the founding of this country there was this thing called the liberty tree which is where they gathered to declare the independence and fight for that independence. Liberty trees began to spring up all over the place and if you didn't have one, they would sometimes get a pole and put a hat on it as they raised the pole. For the Israelites in their time, the palms were their liberty trees. They had been liberated for the temple was no longer being desecrated. They now had not only religious freedom but freedom, freedom. It became a glorious time. So, from then on, every time Israel would get into celebration they would show up with palms. Palms was their declaration of freedom.

Here comes Jesus, the Messiah, our King, national Hero, Liberator who will drive out these dastardly Romans and their tyranny. When kings came to liberate with power, they would arrive on their war steed and when they met Jesus there was no war stallion but a donkey, a colt. Forget mule, for mules look like stallions compared to donkeys in Israel. They are hearty little beasts of burden, but they're small, insignificant and nothing challenging about them. Jesus is coming in on the colt that was prophesied, but He was giving them a message – I have come not as your national Hero to drive away the political oppressor, but I have come to bring you peace with God and to deliver you from your sins.

Let's look for a moment at the Zechariah 9 passage. Zechariah 9:9-13 says [9] *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. [10] I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. [11] As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. [12] Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. [13] For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.*

He is not one tribal god to deliver one nation, but He has come to bring His people savingly from the power and penalty of the Gospel from all the nations. His rule will not be simply in this promised land that's a down payment, but it shall be from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth. His very coming is giving them the message. He has come to set them free from sin's power, sin's guilt, sin's shame, sin's penalty for He is the Righteous One who takes our place at the cross. The next first day of the week, the Amen of God, He is risen takes place. He is gloriously risen.

I want to give you a couple of thoughts and then the takeaway for this study. Realize the Disciples didn't understand until after the ascension. Don't get down on the Disciples too quickly for there was a lot I didn't understand for 20 years. I could recite it but I still didn't understand it. When you get knowledge, you also need to understand it. So, they had the knowledge that Jesus had been teaching them but it took His resurrection and ascension to bring it into their hearts. My guess is that most reading this have heard that Jesus loves you. Most have probably heard John 3:16 which says [16] *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* Have you understood it?

I thank God so much that He broke through my knowledgeable acquiescence to it and gave me understanding and that the wisdom of salvation might be granted to me. I long for that for every single one of you. I don't want you to know just about Him and I certainly don't want you to be numbered with the antagonists that want to arrest Him and are upset because others are coming to Him and I certainly don't want you to be numbered with simply the curious, but I do want you to be numbered with those who were coming to believe, not because Lazarus has been raised but Jesus has been raised to save you from your sins. I want you to come to Him, put your trust in Him and you would leave where we were and believe in Him as your Lord and Savior.

I pray also that we might yet see the world coming to Him. First, have you come to Him? If you want to pray with someone about giving your heart and life to Christ, please call us here at Briarwood Presbyterian at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to pray with about this decision and help you get started in living your life for Him.

My second question is, will we bring Him to the world? Not bring the one that the world wants, but bring to them the One that they need – Christ – the One who humbled Himself to the point of death, the Righteous One, that they might have eternal life. The world can't come to Christ. It is amazing that the Pharisees were saying 'the whole world has gone after Him.' I understand they are frustrated when they say this but I just love that statement. I want others to say that again that the whole world has gone after Him. I remember the words of Benjamin Franklin after a meeting he had with George Whitfield when he said 'The whole world is going

to church.’ I want to see that again – one by one men and women coming to Christ and it’s a flood, but the world will not come to Him until we go to them.

The reason the world was coming to Him was because He came to them. If we are going to win this world, our nation to Christ and the Gospel to all the nations, it’s not if we hold it and built it, they will come, for they won’t come until we go to them, like Him, proclaiming His righteousness and humbling yet courageously calling them from death unto life. This is a glorious moment in Scripture but likely the backdrop is that many of these same ones will be yelling ‘crucify Him’ less than one week later. I pray that you have come to Him and I pray that together we will go to them. I pray that the sweetness of the fragrance of love to Christ will rise from us and invade the stench of sin in the world that men and women might flee to Christ, therefore the wrath to come, because He is coming again.

When He comes again it will be on the war stallion and He is coming in judgment, but today is the day of salvation. Take your Savior to the world, having come to Him from the world and embracing Him as Lord and Savior. Don’t simply pour out the perfume but let’s pour out ourselves. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Jesus for the sweetness of the truth of Your Word and thank You for the grace of salvation that You have so gloriously and wonderfully purchased for us. Father, even as Mary poured out that perfume upon Him, He was being anointed to pour Himself out for us. Now O God may we pour ourselves out for Him because He is our life and we want others to come to Him. O Lord our God may Your people rise up and as the world looks to the body of Christ may they see us coming courageously to face arrest warrants and plots as our Savior, yet with humility, love and grace as our Savior was that day mounted on the fowl of a colt to bring peace and deliverance from sin to all the nations. I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.