

## Preparing our Hearts for Worship

Jason Robeck

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Today begins the first day of Holy Week. Palm Sunday, or the Triumphal Entry. And as pastor Jerry preached last week, it's an important time to "Prepare" as we head towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

We often prepare for our holidays don't we? We prepare for birthdays, we prepare for Thanksgiving, we REALLY prepare for Christmas... how many still have some lights up?...

I think Easter week has varying preparations people make. For pastors it's a big day, it's like the Superbowl of church services. Maybe you do Easter baskets, egg hunts, or lay out the nice Easter clothes for church. Maybe you invite people over.

Whatever your Easter plans are, can I just encourage you this season to do some **Internal Preparation? Heart preparation this week.**

Pastor's message last week was titled "Preparing our Hearts for the Cross". I was asked to preach today on Worship in light of this Holy Week. So to keep with that theme the Title of today's message is "Preparing our Hearts for Worship".

So we are going to explore Matthew's account of Palm Sunday and then shift our thinking towards how we can prepare our hearts for worshipping this week.

Because this week is quite the mix of "worship emotions", can I say it that way? Mourning and solemnity on Good Friday, and joyous elation on Resurrection Sunday. And I want us to know and feel the full range of those Holy Affections this week. And that is going to take some Soul prep.

So before we jump back into scripture, would you PRAY with me?

(Prayer)

Lord as we, open your word today. Let it to the heart work that only it can do. Lord as we contemplate your suffering this week, the cross, the grave and the resurrection. Let it grow within us a greater love for You, and a

greater heart of worship. Holy Spirit speak to us today we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Let's read from Matthew's account again:

Matt 21:1-10 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, (2) saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. (3) If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." (4) This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, (5) "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" (6) The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. (7) They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. (8) Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. (9) And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (10) And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"

Let's do a quick exegesis of this passage. We're not going to go too much into the background of this passage since our topic today is how can we prepare our hearts for worship. But I do want to us to get a clear picture of what is happening here.

**All four** of the Gospels record this Triumphal Entry in some manner.

**All four** address the borrowed donkey.

**Three** gospels specifically tell of Jesus' command to go get the colt and say "The Lord needs it." (Only John doesn't record that conversation)

**Two** of the Gospels record that the triumphal entry was a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. (Matthew here is one of them)

Let's read that passage:

Zec 9:9 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.

Note that this is how Jesus decided to enter Jerusalem. It wasn't by accident, and it wasn't random. And the crowd knew what he was doing, and they responded directly to it. They knew Jesus was making a Messianic statement by riding in that way thus fulfilling Zechariah 9:9, because we see them shouting out, and quoting Psalm 118.

**All four Gospels** record the crowd quoting in some manner, Psalm 118:25-26. "Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Now that word Hosanna, means "save now" or "save, I beseech thee". So it's not just like saying "Hallalujah" because they are excited, they are calling him their king and messiah, and are asking him to save them, directly referencing that passage.

This is how that passage reads:

Psalm 118:25-26 Save us, (*Hosanna*) we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! (26) Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

Now I think it becomes very apparent that the crowd was not envisioning salvation from their SINS, they were saying "Save us from Rome!" They wanted to make him their earthly governmental king, and their political liberator! And before we get too hard on the crowd for thinking this, it actually IS what Zechariah 9 seems to be saying at first glance.

If we read the surrounding verses, tell me how you would interpret it?

Zec 9:9-13 ... 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. ... (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.

Wow! It sounds like an earthly king coming to save them from their oppressors to me. How about you? It even mentions Greece! So I don't totally blame them for misinterpreting that prophecy. AND, who wouldn't want to be free from the oppression of Rome?

But with most messianic prophecies there seems to be some hidden piece in them often. You may have noticed I skipped reading verse 11. Because verse 11, is what the crowds missed and didn't understand about who Jesus was and why He came. Look what it says.

“..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.”

We see the suffering of the passion of the Christ right there. The blood of the Lamb, slain for the sins of the world. The blood of a new covenant poured out for you. And the goal? Freedom from the pit.

In Psalm 40:2 David declares concerning his bondage to sin, “He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.”

... (v.3) “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord.”

That is what they were missing.

Jesus wasn't coming to defeat their temporal oppressor Rome, he was coming to deliver them from the enemy of their souls, and from the wages of their sins, which was eternal separation from Him.

And when they didn't get this earthly kingdom from Jesus... when they pushed him, and he didn't respond the way that they wanted... many in this very same crowd, turned on him later this week and cried out “Crucify Him”.

They didn't have eyes to see who Jesus really was.

I love the very last phrase in Matthew's telling of the triumphal entry. Verse 10. “And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “**Who is this?**””

“Who is this?”

I love David's response in the Psalm 40 passage; when David thinks about what God had done and **who He is**, his natural response in verse 3 was to worship Him.

I think we can learn something from this Psalm and many other similar verses. "When we begin to see Who Christ really is, we can't help but worship"

You see, I think there was quite the spectrum of opinions on who Jesus was in the crowd that day. They were asking the question. Who is he?

And so there was varying levels of worship.  
We see at least 4 groups of people that day.

First, working from the outside in: **We see "The City" in verse 10.**

They didn't know what was going on. "Who is this?" "What's happening here?" "I'm not awake enough for this noise! Where's my latte?" They heard a ruckus, they peaked out the window, they went back to their business. (I'm joking around of course)  
But they didn't have an idea of who Jesus was, and it didn't move them to respond in worship.

Second: I would guess that there were some passerby's in the crowd. Some people just joining in, shouting, whooping it up, getting caught up in the excitement. Maybe they started to get more interested, cut off some branches, yelled "Hosanna". But it was mostly because everybody else was doing it. Maybe there was a little glimpse of who Jesus was, maybe some hope that this could be "the guy". There might have been genuine interest and excitement, but their understanding... and their worship therefore was very limited.

Then we see another special group. A third group. The Gospel of John records this group very specifically. Matthew doesn't really mention them. A very special group of people.

John 12:17 (The triumphal entry account from v. 13-16)... 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.

So, we have a group of witnesses. New believers, bearing witness in the crowd that day. They were there when Lazarus was raised from the dead. They weren't just whoopin it up because they liked a good party and everyone else was doing it. They were the ones rejoicing! They saw Jesus' power first hand. They didn't know yet what it meant, what He was coming to do, or who He really was. They hadn't spent much time with him. But they were believers, and they weren't being quiet about it. And maybe some of them didn't continue in belief. But to the level that they got a glimpse of who Jesus was, they were worshipping.

And lastly we see the Apostles.

Peter being asked this exact question, "Who do you say I am." just a few chapters earlier in Chapter 16. And his response was with Truth, not with a question mark or a theory. "...You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matt 16:16)

Worship born out of truth.

And today I ask you. "Who do you say He is?" Because your answer is the preparation of your heart for worship this week.

Some people say our worship is a spiritual weapon. If our worship is a weapon (as they say), then the answers to that question "Who is he?", is the Ammunition.

What good is a weapon without ammunition? What good is worship, if we don't have reasons to worship. If we don't know WHY we are worshipping, because we don't know WHO we are worshipping, then our worship is empty, powerless, void. We might as well just be singing the ABC's. Because if we don't have the truth of who God IS in our Worship, then it is NOT true worship. Because listen to what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well.

John 4:23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

Our Theology is the Ammunition for our Doxology

Or to use a different analogy,

A true understanding of who Jesus is, is the fuel for the flame of Worship.

Listen to the words of pastor and theologian, A.W. Tozer in his book "The Knowledge of the Holy"

*"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*

*The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.*

*For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like."* –A.W.Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

So we come back around to the question the crowd was asking, "Who is He?"

The bigger the Answer, the deeper the Worship.

Low theology; Low Worship.

Rich theology; Deep, Rich, Meaningful Worship.

So how can we prepare our hearts for worship this Easter season? How can we use the question that was on the mind of Jerusalem that day, to deepen our worship experience this week?... and every week?

I just have 3 simple applications, there are many more. But I'm going to ask you to do Three things this week. It takes time to prepare for things, so I'm going to ask you to **spend some time** on these three things this week. So I want you to write them down.

### **1. Spend time Quieting your Heart before God**

Psa 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

There's just something powerful about zippin it! Be quiet! Quiet your mind, Quiet your heart. Don't bring your list of things. (You know your list) Quiet yourself before the Lord. "Be still and know that I am God".

I can give you one practical tip. And I would encourage you to do it more than just this week.

Anyone else ever feel rushed on a Sunday morning? A little stressed? Flying into church with your hair on fire? Not very prepared to sing praises unto the Lord. ☺ It takes you till the third song to even begin to start engaging in worship, before you are able to focus on God... there's no judgment. We've all been there. Life can be crazy sometimes.

But can I encourage you, here's one practical tip: **Come and sit quietly in the sanctuary 5-10 minutes before the service.** Find your seat, pull out your bible, quiet yourself, and pray. Prepare your heart for worship. Release your troubles and worries to the Lord, just let 'em go, so you can focus on Him. Ask Him to meet you in worship. It'll change things for you.

## **2. Spend time Meditating on what God has done and who He is.**

We want to be like the disciples in the crowd. When asked who He is, we give an abundance of truth. We are filled with the knowledge of Him, of His word. And we have been thinking and chewing on it in the deepest parts of our being.

Psalm 77:11-18 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. (12) I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. (13) Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?

You see I believe that Yahweh is a God WORTHY of worshipping. What I mean is, I don't think that a small, powerless, inactive, weak god; is much of an awe-inspiring being who is going to move my soul to worship him. It might be that the reason many people's worship life is suffering, is because the concept of who God is in their mind, is such a small pitiful creature that it doesn't stir any sense of awe and wonder, or inspire any real unction of



true worship within them. That their idea of God is so beneath the One True and Living God as to amount to laughing stock. Rightfully, with that idea of God, who would worship such a weak deity?

But our God is powerful!

But David goes on:

(14) You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. (15) You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. (16) When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. (17) The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. (18) The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook.

Now that is a God I can worship. A God worthy of honor, respect, love, devotion and all the praise.

My practical tip for this one. **Make a list** of the things you love about God this week. The things that make you go “Wow!”. His attributes, His character, what He has done and said. Make a list, write it down, and meditate on it. Maybe at bedtime prayers, as a family, go over your lists together, talking about the wonderful things God has done and what you love about Him.

Let me help you start your list off. I am in awe of the fact that Jesus loved me so much that died for me on the cross. That he suffered and bled and died, to cleanse me from my sins, and bring me back into relationship with Him. And, no one made Him do it. That’s what astonishes me. It was His own idea!

Wow. That is worth praising Him for. ... that one’s free. ☺

I have one other suggestion as well:

**Deepen your theology.** Get a good theology book. I recommend “The Knowledge of the Holy” by A.W.Tozer. It’s very approachable, and not too heady. But whatever you chose to do, deepen your wonder by meditating on who God really is. Let it confound you. Let Him overwhelm your mind with His wonder and greatness. Then you will have some ammo for your worship weapon and kindling for your worship flame.

And finally:

### **3. Spend time Seeking Him**

I think all three of these can kind of go hand in hand, and be done all at once. But I did want to specifically call it out. Quietness doesn't necessarily mean seeking God. So in your quietness and in your meditation, **seek Him**. Speak to Him. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you. This itself, is a form of worship. King David speaks of them all working hand-in-hand in Psalm 105.

Psalm 105:1-5 Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! (2) Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! (3) Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! (4) Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! (5) Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered.

So here is my practical tip for this one. And it comes from Jeremiah 29.

Jer 29:12-13 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. (13) You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

My tip is simple, but not easy. Make time to seek Him with **all** your heart this week. Not just a portion of it. I tend to give God my scraps. The scraps of my time, the scraps of my energy, the scraps of my heart. But that's not what God says here. He says, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with **ALL** your heart." Don't give God your scraps.

So again I encourage you to 1. Quiet your Heart Before the Lord, spend time meditating on who God is and what He has done, and Spend time seeking Him with your whole heart this Holy Week.

We want to be a church that is full of **DEEPLY DEVOTED** followers of Christ. That means, we are **ALL** in. With all of our hearts; seeking, meditating on, and worshipping our Lord with our whole being. Amen?

**...Would you pray with me?**

“Lord I pray that we would be like the Apostles and not like the city. Like the core and not like the crowd. That we would see you for who you truly are, and that your awe and wonder, your love and mercy, would move our hearts to bow in worship. Lord help us to prepare our hearts this week. Prepare our hearts for the bitterness of the cross. Help us to worship you in sobriety and solemnity on Good Friday. Let it impact us deeply.

And Lord, prepare our hearts for the joy and elation of the resurrection. Help us to worship in freedom, excitement and unrestrained praise on Resurrection Sunday! Lord teach us how to worship. That the meditations of our hearts would be worthy of who you are. The one true and living God, who came to earth to save us from our sins. In Jesus name. Amen.”

**Would you stand as we close in worship?**

**Benediction:**

Psalm 96:2-6. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

