

## Palm Sunday Parables

When our family lived in Bulgaria, our kids' passports needed to be renewed, so we made a trip to the capital city to go to the US Embassy. It was almost a 6 hour drive to Sofia and we didn't get to go very often so we decided to spend a couple of days while we were there resting and doing some fun stuff. One thing we did was go to the Museum of Illusions – it was just what it sounds like. **A museum full of optical and other illusions (pics as example)** Your mind sees things how they want your mind to see it not as it really is....This morning is Palm Sunday and we are going to look at the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. We will see that the people had in their mind how things would look...they looked at the world and events around them and interpreted it how they thought was correct. In reality, they were seeing things incorrectly, like what we saw of the museum, they couldn't see things correctly so they were looking for the wrong thing. So, Jesus used 3 parables to show them the true way – **Palm Sunday Parables**

**Context of the Parables** – Let's look at the context of Palm Sunday and the entry by Jesus into Jerusalem. The story is recorded for us in all four Gospels. About 1/3 of all gospel content takes place between Palm Sunday and Easter.

This morning, we will use the account in John as our primary passage and bring in some facts from the other accounts. I encourage you to take some time this week to read the Palm Sunday accounts and the other things that happened during passion week.

Let's read ***John 11:55 Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves.*** This gives us some extremely important information about the Passion week. It was almost Passover. Remember that Passover is a holiday that God commanded the Jewish people to celebrate every year. What were they celebrating? They were celebrating that God freed them from slavery in Egypt and led them to the promised land- Israel. In the book of John it is more than 1,000 years later. The people are in the land of Israel but again they are enslaved. This time it is by the Roman Empire. Remember that part of the celebration on the first Passover was killing a lamb and putting the blood on the doors. That saved Israel from the plague of death that God sent onto Egypt. Also, this was one of the holidays that all adult men were required to go to Jerusalem. The city was full of people. Based on sources like the historian Josephus from the time there were probably at least 2 million people in the city at that time. That is more than twice the population of the modern city of Jerusalem today.

Let's pick up our story. ***John 12:12–15 On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,<sup>13</sup> took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel."***

And just for some more info- the Matthew account

***Matthew 21:8–9***

***<sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> 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!"***

Let's look at what the crowd did and what they said – this will help us see exactly what they were expecting from Jesus that day.

Words – Hosanna - Hosanna is a Hebrew word that means "save us" or "save now!" Then they added some words from ***Psalms 118:25–26 <sup>25</sup> Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! <sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.***

They go as far as saying even the king of Israel. They call Jesus the Son of David – they knew the Old Testament prophecies that the house of David would rule forever. Then Hosana in the highest – or save us from heaven.

Actions -

1 – they spread their cloaks on the road – this was typical of a celebration of a king coming. We can see an Old Testament example **2 Kings 9:13 *Then they hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, "Jehu is king!"***

2 – they waved palm branches – we need to go to history to see the significance of this. During the time between the Old and New Testament Israel came under the control of the Greek Empires. Eventually, they revolted, rededicated the temple and won independence. This is called the Maccabean revolt – when they celebrated the temple rededication – the people waved palm branches as part of the celebration (Hannukah) also when they won full independence the celebration included palm branches. **In the two revolts that came after the time of Jesus they have found coin celebrating the revolt with palm branches on them.**

If we add all this up – the words and actions of the crowd - the people are asking for salvation, they are asking for a king – but what kind? They want salvation from Rome. They think the time has come for Jesus to overthrow Rome and set himself up as king. The timing of Passover, the historical symbolism of palm branches, the words they use – this all added up to the people wanting a military conqueror to give them physical salvation and freedom.

But, Jesus is there to offer people eternal salvation for their souls – the people want temporary salvation for their physical problems. We will look at more application later, but it is worth asking – how many times do we seek salvation from our physical problems while ignoring the spiritual work Jesus is doing in us.

### Parable One – The Donkey

**John 12:14–15 (ESV)**

**<sup>14</sup> And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, <sup>15</sup> "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"**

Back in John chapter 6, the people had tried to take Jesus and force him to become king. Jesus simply slipped away from them. But now, for the first time, Jesus allowed a public celebration of himself. His time is coming, the cross is looming near, and Jesus permits the celebration. But he doesn't let the crowd control the narrative – he has the disciples get a young donkey and he rides that into the city. Theologian **F.F. Bruce wrote this, "Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was an acted parable, designed to correct the misguided expectations of the pilgrim crowds and to show the city its true way of peace."** I love that term – acted parable. The crowds want an overthrow of Rome and a military conqueror – physical freedom and peace. Jesus is offering them a different path – to spiritual freedom and peace. So instead of correcting them with words, he corrects them with his actions.

The crowds in Jerusalem that day missed the thing that leads to true peace and freedom – the results were catastrophic. They were so convinced that Jesus would overthrow Rome, they missed the salvation he was offering. They rejected Jesus and within 40 years revolted against Rome resulting in the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Today, the results of rejecting Jesus are even more catastrophic...

The prophet Zechariah wrote about these events 500 years before they happened – he said a humble king that was righteous and having salvation would come. The crowds couldn't see it – they wanted a king on a war

horse. Everything that Jesus did was intentional – this is no different. He uses the donkey to teach them something, but he is also fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah

### **John 12:16 (ESV)**

**<sup>16</sup> His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.**

John admits that they didn't add all the pieces together until after the resurrection. We are kind of hard on the disciples but they weren't carrying around a Bible with them. They couldn't whip out their phone and ask Siri where that verse about a king on a donkey is found – more importantly they didn't all have the Holy Spirit like believers today.

Application – first, if you have never put your faith in Jesus, trusted him for salvation that is the most important decision you could ever make. It isn't about religion, it isn't about what we think thing makes God happy– It is Jesus the king who died in our place. We will talk about this more in a bit.

Believers – how many times do we forget to trust that Jesus has his own way of working. Maybe I am the only one – but how many times do we face a problem or a trial and we pray but we already have in our minds how we want things to look. We can be like that Palm Sunday crowd and have our own version of events worked out. We can be reminded today that we can trust king Jesus to work according to his plan and his will. We need to let God control the narrative.

There is one other quick application – Jesus is coming back one day. And it's going to look a bit different. He won't be riding a donkey next time. **Revelation 19:11–16 (ESV)**

**<sup>11</sup> Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.**

That is a vital detail of the Gospel – Jesus is returning as the conquering king to make all things new.

We are going to look at the next two parables – just one clarification. If we piece together a timeline based on all the Gospels, there is a good chance that the rest of John 12 didn't happen on the same day as the triumphal entry. But it is all connected in to these events.

### **Parable Two – The Seed**

#### **John 12:20–26 (ESV)**

**<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.**

This was Passover, one of the holidays all Jewish men were supposed to go up to Jerusalem. So there were Jews from all over that were there. It seems from the word use that these were Gentiles that feared God. They were very likely converts to Judaism. These men want to see Jesus – the verb in Greek implies they kept asking and asking. We don't know their motives. But we can surmise that they weren't expecting the answer Jesus gave.

Like so many other times, Jesus uses a simple farming parable. A seed has to die, be cut off from the plant, and buried for it to grow and bear more fruit. It is just left on the stalk, it will die, fall off and do nothing. Jesus is showing them that he had to die, be cut off, and buried. But just as a seed grows, he would rise again. He tells the people that his hour has come. How many times earlier does Jesus say his time hasn't come. It is time for the final Passover lamb to be killed – all those thousands of lambs are about to be killed in Jerusalem for the Passover – only one could give us salvation.

Jesus gives us the application for this parable. He uses this parable to outline the rest of history – he will die a substitutionary death for our sins. He expressed the principle that we must join Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection. That is why Paul wrote "I am crucified with Christ" We have to lose our life to Jesus. In our life we can only have victory through surrender, we have life through death, we have success through suffering. Jesus is calling us to choose fruitfulness over loneliness, eternal life over the temporary, dying to self over living selfishly, honor from God over honor from man.

### **Parable Three – Lifted Up**

#### ***John 12:31–34 (ESV)***

***<sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. <sup>33</sup> He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. <sup>34</sup> So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"***

The third parable speaks the most plainly – the cross is only a few days away, the sacrifice for the sin of humanity is only a few days away, the defeat of death, hell, and Satan are only a few days away. He tells the people how he will die – he has already given the parable of the seed to show his coming death, burial and resurrection. Now he is telling them how it will happen.

Again, the people thought they had everything figured out. They just knew that the Messiah would come and defeat Rome and liberate Israel. Then he would set up his kingdom forever. Have you ever thought about why Jesus ordered people not to say he was the Messiah? They completely misunderstood what the Messiah would be. They missed Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant, they missed Psalm 22 about the piercing of his hands and feet, they missed Zechariah 12 that they will look on the one that they pierced. Here tragically misunderstanding led to unbelief and rejection.

Like so many parables, there are layers of meaning – Jesus yes will be crucified, lifted up, the most gruesome and humiliating death of his day – but he would also be lifted out of the grave the third day, he would be lifted back to heaven and he would be glorified.

There is a story about a man who lived near a river. And there was a lot of rain and a flood started. The water got a little bit high around his house and a guy in a lifted 4 wheel drive came by and said "get in the water is rising." The man said "no thank you, God will save me." The water got even higher starting to get into the house and a guy in a jon boat came by and said "get in the water is rising." The man said "no God will save me." Then the water got so high the man climbed up on his roof. A helicopter came by and they called down

“get in the water is rising.” The man said “no God will save me.” The water got higher over the house and the man died. He went to heaven and asked God why didn’t you save me? God said, “I tried to - I sent a truck, a boat and a helicopter but you rejected all three!” That is a funny little story, but there is nothing funny about rejecting God’s salvation. But that is what the people did on Palm Sunday. Jesus gave them three parables – but they didn’t accept him for who he really was.

### **The Parables’ Call to Action**

One thing we learn from studying the Bible is that God does things differently.

Jesus is no different. The people had their thoughts about who Jesus should be and what the Messiah should look like. Jesus dying on a cross did not fit into these ideas. But that is what the Gospel does – it completely reorders everything. Religion says do, the Gospel says done, religion says work hard to get to God, the Gospel says God came to us. The world says promote yourself and the Gospel says follow Jesus’ example and humble yourself.

The people back on that fateful Palm Sunday simply couldn’t believe or understand that the creator of the universe, the king of glory, the Messiah would choose to die in our place. But that was the whole reason he came! **John 12:27 (ESV)**

***<sup>27</sup> “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.***

Jesus knew what was coming – the sadness, bearing the weight of all our sin, the pain, the separation from God, all the things he suffered on the cross. This is the beautiful thing about the Gospel – Jesus did not save himself. We can have salvation because Jesus did not save himself from dying for us. He literally died and went into the ground and came out again 3 days later. The only person that ever lived that didn’t need saving – died to save all of us that can’t save themselves.

Do you remember what the angel told Joseph about the name of Jesus? **Matthew 1:21 (ESV)**

***<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.***

In Hebrew Jesus’ name is Yeshua which means The lord is salvation. Let’s go back to the word hosana one more time. It means save us – Hosanna, Jesus, save are all the same root word in Hebrew.

The name of Jesus told the people why he was there. They cried out for salvation and salvation was right before their eyes. How did the people react?

Some outright rejected him – the Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus, they told Jesus to silence the people. We see in Matthew that they intensified their efforts to arrest and kill Jesus following all this.

We saw that many people misunderstood who Jesus was and they ultimately rejected him. **John 12:37 (ESV)**

***<sup>37</sup> Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,***

I hope no one here is rejecting Jesus outright – but maybe there is someone. If that is you, don’t be like the crowds – don’t reject eternal salvation. Talk to me, talk to pastor John...

Some believed but didn’t follow Jesus out of fear. **John 12:42–43 (ESV)**

***<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.***

I doubt there is anyone here that is afraid they will be kicked out of their synagogue for following Jesus. However, fear is still a major factor in our world – based on the numbers someone somewhere in the world will be killed today for following Jesus, others will be thrown in jail. Angela and I know people from our time overseas that lost jobs, got kicked out of apartments, or were disowned by their families. We were at a Bible

study last Wednesday with Afghan believers were sharing about relatives that had been killed. None of that may be facing any of us – though the family pressures could. But there is still plenty of things to fear about that can stop us from fully following Christ. Maybe you have accepted the Gospel but have never fully committed to a life of discipleship. It could be fear of losing control, fear of what other may think...maybe God is calling you to get involved in a ministry here in the church but you are afraid of failing. There are so many ways that fear can prevent us from fully following – confess that today. Maybe today you need to pray and tell God that you have been afraid but you are giving it to him. Maybe you are feeling guilty...that isn't from the Lord. Real quick – a good way to distinguish guilt from conviction. Ask – is what I am feeling drawing me to God or it is making me focus on myself? Guilt pushes us to look at ourselves, and feel bad about ourselves. Conviction points us back to God and we focus on him and who we are in him.

Many of you are following Jesus. You are serving him, making disciples, and growing and maturing in Christ. Let me encourage you this morning to keep fighting the good fight, keep persevering. We don't serve and obey to make us right with God. We serve and obey because he has made us right. We don't serve to earn his favor, we serve because we have his favor. The king has called us his child and his friend. Let's go back to a verse we read earlier

**John 12:26 (ESV)**

***<sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.***

We don't serve him just to be honored – if we serve Jesus God the Father will honor us. We have no merit in ourselves that is worth honoring, but the creator of the universe has promised to share his honor with us. It is too amazing to even understand.

Conclusion & Prayer