

A Right Response to Palm Sunday

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

All right, if you have your Bibles, I want to invite you to grab them. Luke chapter 19 is where we're going to be.

This is Passion Week, and I believe I encourage you to do this every year during Passion Week. I want to remind you, if you want something to be very meaningful to you in your devotional life this week, I would really encourage you to start today. We're going to start with the Sunday that Jesus rides into Jerusalem. That's Palm Sunday.

Every day this week, just follow the narrative accounts of Jesus' last week in the Gospels. Whatever he does on Monday, read that on Monday morning and just enter into the story with him. Then Tuesday, what did he do on Tuesday? Wednesday? Thursday?

You do this, I promise you, Friday will come, and it'll mean that much more to you to be at our Good Friday service as you're taking it in. There'll be Silent Saturday, and when you come on Resurrection Sunday, you're going to be ready to worship.

So I encourage you, read through this Passion Week in your time alone with the Lord. Go on a journey with Jesus, and Resurrection Sunday will be really, really special next week.

I'm calling the message today "A Right Response to Palm Sunday." I'm calling it this because, as we'll see in our passage in Luke chapter 19, there are some who do not respond in the right way to Jesus entering Jerusalem and the significance of that event.

I tell you, I have prayed this week in writing this sermon. I've preached Palm Sunday several times, of course, through the years from this passage. I just asked God to give me fresh eyes this week, to kind of take a step back and say, "Big picture, Lord, show me what you want me to communicate to your people this week."

I hope that by the time our allotted minutes are over here this morning, you have an appreciation, as I did this week in my study, for the fullness of what is taking place on Palm Sunday. I believe if we can grasp it to a degree - our finite minds can't grasp, of course, the reality of all that was going on in these moments. We'll have all of eternity to kind of peel back the layers and see everything that was going on. But if we can grasp just a little bit of it, it will inevitably lead to a right response. That's what we're shooting for today.

So let's get after it.

Jesus Goes Up to Jerusalem

Luke chapter 19, starting in verse 28:

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here."

If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you shall say this: "The Lord has need of it."

So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them.

And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

And they said, "The Lord has need of it."

And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road.

As he was drawing near - already on the way down the Mount of Olives - the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."

He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

— Luke 19:28-40

Luke 9 through 19 is a long discourse of what was happening as Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem. Most recently in his ministry, he has raised Lazarus from the dead. That, of course, has turned some heads. Word is definitely out on who Jesus is.

He is coming to Jerusalem from Jericho, where he has spent the day with Zacchaeus and changed his life. He healed blind Bartimaeus and changed his life. On no less than four occasions, he has told his disciples, "We're going to Jerusalem, and when we get there, I'm going to be betrayed. I'm going to be handed over. I'm going to be crucified, and I will rise again."

Four times he's told his disciples this. Now, they don't fully understand it, and we shouldn't expect them to. But I highlight this to emphasize that Jesus knew exactly what he was getting into when he went into Jerusalem, and he chose to go anyway.

That highlights the love of God for us. It's God's love on display. Knowing he would face the cross, shed his blood, and die on our behalf, he goes to Jerusalem anyway.

The Relational Presence of God

I have a number of books on my bedside that I just kind of work my way through, depending on what mood I'm

in as I'm going to bed at night. One of them is by a couple of my college professors, and it's a thick book. It's called *God's Relational Presence*.

In the opening pages of their book, they give their thesis, and I want to read it to you because it really is going to guide our time together in the text today. They say:

"Our basic thesis is that the triune God desires to have a personal, encountering relationship with his people and enters into his creation in order to facilitate that relationship. Thus, the Bible begins with God's presence relating to his people in a garden - that's Genesis - and ends with God's presence relating to his people in the garden - that's Revelation, paradise.

"This mega-theme, the presence of God being central to all biblical theology, drives the biblical story, uniting and providing interconnecting cohesion across the canon for all of the other major themes, such as covenant, kingdom, creation, holiness, redemption, law and grace, sin and forgiveness, life and death, worship, and obedient living."

It is the presence of God. It is the cohesive center of biblical theology.

Now, in college, I've got to tell you, I thought my professors were wrong a time or two, okay? Especially when it came to grading my papers. But on this, I think they hit the nail on the head.

The central theme of the Bible - the mega-theme, as they call it - is the relational presence of God. God desires from the very beginning to have a relationship with his people, for us to experience him. That's what we just lifted up in song:

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

— Psalm 34:8

It's for us to have a relationship and to live in his presence. It's the story from the very beginning. But so too is the story of man rejecting this gift of God's presence at every turn.

Let me give you some examples.

In Genesis, God creates man and woman, and he puts them in the garden. According to Scripture, he is walking with them and talking with them. We know the enemy comes in, deceives Adam and Eve, and they choose to take of the fruit there, the knowledge of good and evil. When they sin against God, it changes everything.

The Scripture says:

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

— Genesis 3:8

There it is. There was fellowship. There was relationship. They were experiencing the presence of God - God's ultimate aim and desire for them.

But because of sin, God shows up in the garden, and look at what man does:

And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

— Genesis 3:8

God wants to have a relationship. He wants us to be in his presence. Man hides from his presence. That's the essence of sin, and you can trace this pattern throughout all the pages of Scripture.

Think about the point of the tabernacle and the temple. When the people would wander in the wilderness, the tribes of Israel, when they would pitch their tents, would make sure that the door of their tent, whatever tribe they were, was facing the tabernacle that was in the middle.

What was in the middle of the tabernacle? It was the Holy of Holies. Inside the Holy of Holies was what we call the Ark of the Covenant. It was a box of acacia wood, and in it were the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod that budded, and a jar of manna. It was covered by the mercy seat.

Only the high priest could go into this Holy of Holies, and he could only go once a year to make atonement for the people. The Ark of the Covenant went wherever the people of Israel went because it represented the very presence of God. As long as Israel had the Ark, as long as they were facing the Ark, they could be reminded of the presence of God.

But again, what's the story of Israel? They're always rejecting the presence of God, treating the presence of God in a casual way, like it's not a big deal.

Let me give you an example of this. In 1 Samuel chapter 4, the Israelites are warring against their rivals, if you will, the Philistines, and the Israelites are losing. So they send word back to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield because, again, the Ark represented the presence of God. "If we've got the Ark, that means we'll have the victory." At least that's what they thought.

So they send word. If you remember, there's a priest by the name of Eli, and he had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were worthless. These two guys made a mockery of God. They didn't live holy lives. They didn't treat the presence of God in any way that they should.

They're the ones responsible for bringing the Ark to the battlefield. They bring the Ark, and when the Israelites see it, the Bible says they let out a shout that shakes the earth. The Philistines go, "What on earth is going on?"

The Israelites are fired up. "The Ark is here. God is here. This battle is ours."

They go into battle, and you know what happens? God teaches them a lesson: "You don't treat my presence in a casual way. You don't just get to deploy the presence of God for your advantage whenever you want to."

The Philistines route Israel. Thirty thousand soldiers die that day, and they capture the Ark of the Covenant. The Israelites can't believe it. Eli the priest dies that day. His two worthless sons die that day.

When Phinehas's wife, who just happens to go into labor, has this baby and gets the news, "Israel's been

defeated. The Ark has been captured. Your father-in-law is dead. Your husband is dead," do you know what she says? Do you know what she names the baby?

And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!"

— 1 Samuel 4:21

That's what Ichabod means: "The glory has departed." The presence is no longer here because the Ark had been captured.

God is teaching his people, "My presence in your life is a gift. It is to be esteemed. It is to be embraced. It is to be revered. It is to be honored. It is not to be treated casually or rejected."

Ezekiel the prophet has one of the most striking visions in all the Bible. What he sees is the glory of God departing the temple and ultimately leaving Jerusalem.

You read Ezekiel chapters 8 and 9. Ezekiel is shown a vision, and in this vision he sees that the temple has been desecrated. People are worshiping false idols. There's actually graffiti on the walls that is giving worship to false idols. He sees a vision of men who have turned their backs to the temple, representing that they've turned their backs on God.

Then you get to Ezekiel chapter 11, verse 23, and look at what the Bible says:

And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.

— Ezekiel 11:23

You just see the presence of God. It lifts up in this vision. It leaves the Holy of Holies. It then leaves the temple. It then leaves the city of Jerusalem, and it rests, the Bible says, on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.

Now, what mountain is on the east side of the city? It's the Mount of Olives.

Here is where this picture gets remarkable. I've never really even considered it until studying it this week. If we continue reading Ezekiel, he sees this vision of the presence of God leaving. But later in his book, Ezekiel chapter 43, he receives a vision of the presence of God returning to the city.

Listen to this vision:

Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east.

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory.

— Ezekiel 43:1-2

Look at where it's coming from: the east, the same place it departed.

Then in verse 4:

*As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east,
the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.*

— Ezekiel 43:4-5

Look at verse 7:

And he said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever."

— Ezekiel 43:7

The Presence of God Returns

I want you to think about what we just read and how it relates to what we're celebrating today, Palm Sunday. Talk about significant. Talk about meaningful.

Where does Jesus come from? We read it in Luke 19. When he's entering the city, he's descending from the Mount of Olives, from the east - the very mountain where the glory of God had departed in Ezekiel's earlier vision and where he promised it would return in his later vision.

You read the Palm Sunday account, and what are the people saying? "Hosanna! Son of David!" They believe he's the Messiah, and they're saying, "Save now!" That's what the word *hosanna* means: "Save us, please."

In their minds, the Messiah would be the one who, when he showed up, would usher their ultimate dream into reality - that they would one day live forever and ever in the city with God. He would dwell with them. They would be his people.

So you can see why on Sunday, when Jesus has done all of these mighty miracles that the Scripture prophesies the Messiah would do, and he rides into the city, there's great celebration. You can see why they run out to welcome him with praise. They thought the Messiah was going to usher in the presence of God coming back. They're ready for this promise that God had made to be fulfilled.

And get this: they were right, just not in the way that they expected. Their expectations were off.

We know what they wanted was a political savior. So when Jesus returns to the city and he doesn't overthrow Roman occupation, but instead chooses to lay down his life, what does the crowd do? They fall into the same trap they have fallen into throughout their history.

Do you know what they do? They reject the presence of God.

Only this time, it's not the presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant, in a box of acacia wood. No, they are rejecting the presence of God in flesh and blood. Those same people who were crying, "Save now!" reject the very presence of God and say, "Crucify!"

It's amazing. It's the exact opposite of a right response to what was taking place that day.

Do you remember those books growing up? They came out when I was probably in the fourth or fifth grade. I remember them because the Scholastic Fair always highlighted the new book that came out, and the book fair was just awesome. It was **Where's Waldo?**

Do you remember these books? There's Waldo, all right? You would have to find Waldo in a picture like this. You're looking everywhere for Waldo. "Where is that guy?"

You would search up and down for Waldo until you found him. Then, of course, you find him. There he is!

Here's the thing about these **Where's Waldo?** pictures: Once you see him in one picture, you can put that book down. You can put it on your shelf, and you can come back a year later. When you open up that book and turn to that picture, you'll know exactly where Waldo was. Do you know why? Because once you see him, you can't unsee him.

Now, we're talking about Palm Sunday right here. There's a lot going on in the text. But when you realize what is happening on Palm Sunday - that the presence of God that departed from the Mount of Olives in Ezekiel's vision is now back in Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives in the presence of Jesus - once you see it, you can't unsee it.

He is the presence of God riding into the city. And check this: He's doing for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Palm Sunday - why is this day a big deal? It's because it is exhibit A of God's relentless commitment to keep his promise: "I am going to be with them forever, even if it means going to a cross, shedding my blood, and dying for their sins."

It's a relentless commitment: "This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to be with them forever and ever."

Listen to me. You don't get Revelation 21:3 without Luke 19:28-40. Revelation 21:3 is the Garden of Eden restored. This is the new heavens and the new earth:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

— Revelation 21:3

Think about this. The Bible starts with a garden in Genesis - God walking with his people, experiencing the fullness of his presence. Man sins, and it's just page after page of God attempting to show us by his love and grace that he wants to be in a relationship with us, but we, because of our sin, reject his very presence.

It ends in a garden in Revelation 21, with us living in his presence forever and ever and ever.

The hinge point is Palm Sunday. Right between the two gardens is this Passion Week, where Jesus begins his descent - not just physically from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem, but he begins his descent to take on the very powers of hell to free us so that we could be saved and live with him forever.

Palm Sunday points to what's coming, and it only gets better.

Palm Sunday is like an appetizer. You go to a nice restaurant, and you look forward to that main course. It's going to be good. You know it's going to be good when you order an appetizer and it's really good. You're like, "This is it right here. Bring the main course. Bring it!" Why? Because the appetizer is so good.

Well, Palm Sunday is an appetizer to what's coming. Because when Jesus, at his first coming, rides in on a donkey, it's just a preview. It's an appetizer for the main event.

Revelation chapter 19, verses 11 through 16 - this is the day of the Lord, the second coming:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse!

— Revelation 19:11

It isn't a donkey anymore. It's a white horse, a warhorse.

The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

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.

— Revelation 19:11-12

Continue reading in verse 16:

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

— Revelation 19:16

That's his second return.

Now think about how beautiful this is. Zechariah the prophet, in Zechariah 9, said that God, the Messiah, would come riding in on a donkey 500 years before it ever took place. "This is how he's going to come."

But you keep reading Zechariah. In chapter 14, he prophesies that the Messiah is going to come again. Do you know what he says?

This is the mega-theme of Scripture: God desires to be with his people. God with man forever and ever. He will fulfill this prophecy. He will lay his life down in order to make living forever with him a reality.

When that reality takes place, Zechariah says, "On that day," at the second coming, look at where his feet are going to step on the ground:

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east.

— Zechariah 14:4

The same mountain that the presence and glory of God departed from in Ezekiel, the same mountain that King Jesus descended from to go into Jerusalem, is the same mountain that he promises to return to and ultimately seal the promise that we will live with him forever and ever and ever and ever.

Palm Sunday is just an appetizer of what is to come, and this is why we celebrate today.

Welcome Jesus

So what's the right response to Palm Sunday?

One, we're to welcome Jesus. It's what the crowd did that day. They didn't understand the fullness of what was taking place, but when they heard Jesus was coming, they moved.

Listen to John's account of Palm Sunday:

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

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!"

— John 12:12-13

He isn't even there yet. They went out to meet him.

Remember Adam and Eve in their sin? They hide from the presence of God. They go the opposite way. They run in the other direction. That's a natural instinct of sinful people. We don't want to be in the presence of God. Why? Because it shines God's holiness on our sin. Oftentimes, we will avoid the presence of God at any cost.

But what Palm Sunday teaches is how we should respond to Jesus, and that is that we run to him. We welcome him into our lives. He is the Savior of the world.

"Save now. Hosanna. Save us, please."

Welcoming Jesus into our lives - that's where it starts.

If you're here today and don't know Jesus in a personal way, your right response on this Palm Sunday is to say, "Welcome, Jesus, into my heart and life. Save me from my sin." Jesus will hear that prayer every single time.

But it's not just a one-time decision. He's Hosanna for every day.

You've got a marriage in trouble? Just cry out, "Jesus, save my marriage." He's Hosanna. Save now.

"Jesus, save my friend who doesn't know you. Save now. Save my children and grandchildren who aren't walking with you. Hosanna. Save now."

That word **save** means deliver, rescue. We cry it out one time for salvation, when he comes into our lives, sets us apart, forgives our sins, and brings us into a right relationship. But every single day, we wake up and welcome Jesus into our lives. We run out to meet him.

When we wake up, we get out of our beds, and we run to meet him and be in his presence.

That's one way you can respond on Palm Sunday: You can welcome Jesus.

Celebrate Jesus

Secondly, celebrate Jesus.

What's the right response? Celebrate. That's what the palm branches are all about. That's what them laying their garments on the road is all about.

Remember the scene? This is from Matthew's account:

Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

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!"

— Matthew 21:8-9

This is a celebratory moment. They're taking off their cloaks and laying them on the ground, like red-carpet treatment, if you will. They're waving palm branches, a sign of royalty, and they're crying out, "Son of David!" This is the Messiah.

Do you know where they get this song, "Hosanna, save now"? They get it from Psalm 118, where we get the verse:

*This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

— Psalm 118:24

Do you know the context of Psalm 118 and Psalm 24, which we'll see in just a moment? They're Messianic Psalms. The context of Psalm 118 - do you want to know when it was written? When the Ark of the Covenant was being brought back to Jerusalem, and David danced with all of his might.

He celebrated with all of his might that the Ark of the Covenant - the symbolized presence of God - was back where it belonged.

The people see Jesus coming in, and they say, "This is the Messiah!" So they start celebrating.

"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice. Our Messiah is here!"

They celebrate. God has come to rescue and deliver his people.

Isn't it interesting that when the Ark comes back, David celebrates? The presence of God symbolized is back where it belongs. Now we have not the shadow or the symbol, but the real thing.

If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the presence of God isn't in a box of acacia wood. It's in you. How much more should we celebrate?

I mean, somebody celebrate Jesus today! This is what today is all about.

The Bible says if you remain quiet, the rocks are going to cry out. So, like the crowd, we wave our palm branches. Like the crowd, we shout our praise. Like the crowd, we take off our cloaks and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This leads me to the third way that we respond rightly on Palm Sunday. We welcome Jesus. We celebrate Jesus.

Surrender to Jesus

Third and finally, we surrender to Jesus. He is the King of glory.

Psalm 24 is another Messianic Psalm. It was written in that same context, when the Ark of the Covenant, the presence of God, was being brought back into Jerusalem.

Psalm 24 poses an amazing question:

*Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?*

— Psalm 24:3

That's the question of all questions. The question is this: Who gets to be in the presence of God?

Listen to the answer:

*He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.*

— Psalm 24:4

That's who can be in the presence of God.

Now, I read that list about who can be in the presence of God, and it's like my twins when they were little. They were sitting in their high chairs, and I can remember this. They'd get food right here, get their food with their hands, and stick it out over the floor. Then they'd look at you.

I'd look at them. I mean, death stare: "Don't you do it."

Do you know what those little girls did? They'd let it fall. Then they'd look at you and say, "Uh-oh."

I'm like, "Uh-oh is right."

I read this list about who can be in the presence of God - "He who has clean hands and a pure heart" - and I go, "Uh-oh. I can't be in the presence of God. I don't have clean hands and a pure heart. I lift up my soul to what is false. Uh-oh. Swear deceitfully? Uh-oh."

Left to ourselves, it's all "uh-oh."

We will never have clean hands and a pure heart. On our own, we'll never get into the presence of God. This

is why Palm Sunday matters so much. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, went to that cross, and shed his blood to do for us what we could never do for ourselves so that we can enter into his presence.

I remind you, what happened when Jesus died? The veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom.

What does that represent? The presence of God is no longer hidden. You no longer have to have special access to the presence of God. All you've got to do is surrender your life to him, and you get the presence of God to live in you every single day.

Judson Van DeVenter was a musician and artist. He wanted to be known as a great artist. That was his passion in life.

But God had been speaking to him about being an evangelist, a preacher, and giving his all - giving up his dream and doing what God was telling him to do. He was in a revival, and he heard the preacher preaching. He was just miserable because he knew he needed to go all in with the Lord.

After that revival in 1896, he sat down and said, "God, I'm going with you."

In his journal, he said, "At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life."

Then he penned the lyrics to this song: "All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give. I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live."

That's the mega-theme of Scripture.

Let's have a right response to Palm Sunday. Let's welcome Jesus. Let's celebrate Jesus. And let's surrender our all to Jesus.

Amen.