

A Palm Sunday Reflection

Matthew 21:1-11

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I don't know about you, but I absolutely love this week that leads up to Easter...what we call Resurrection Sunday! As Christians, we say that our very lives revolve around the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ...and it does! This good news...this gospel:

- is the reason for our hope...
- it is the source of our strength and joy...
- it's what we place our confidence and faith in...

And it's THIS week...the week of Easter...that we laser focus both personally and as a Church on these historic events that took place during the Passion week of Christ that literally changed the world forever.

I really want to encourage you to set aside time each day this week to read about and pray over and contemplate the last week of Jesus's life. If there was ever week to really REFLECT – and that's what this message is about today.

I'm calling this sermon today: **A Palm Sunday Reflection**

If there was ever a week to slow down and really reflect on the implications of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, this is the week!

Illus. Devotionals – Our team has actually written and compiled an eight-day devotional series that started this morning that will run through Easter morning. We wrote these devotionals on the different names of Jesus. Jesus would often reveal himself – his work...his nature by his names.

If you did not get an email all you have to do to subscribe is text “devo” to 77069 and we'll get you set up and ready to go.

These devotionals are meant to help enlarge your heart! I'm a firm believer that reflection done right...which here is my equation for “right reflection”. It's:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{uninterrupted time} \\ + \\ \text{unhurried devotion} \\ = \\ \text{uninhibited worship} \end{array}$$

I want to help us begin our journey toward Easter by looking together and reflecting on what took place on that first day of the last week in Jesus's life and let's see if we can't foster a heart of reflection that leads to worship.

Matt. 21:1-11 – “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?” ¹¹ And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

This picture of Jesus riding into Jerusalem has captured me. First of all, the setting and time in which all this is taking place is rich in meaning – it’s NOT just the last week of Jesus’s physical life on earth, it’s also Passover week – NOT a coincidence!

Thousands and thousands of Jewish pilgrims have made their way to the city of Jerusalem to worship and celebrate this annual event. Of all the celebrations and “holy convocations” instituted in Israel’s history, THIS was the most sacred...THIS was the most important.

It was rooted in the historical event of Moses leading the Israelites out of the bondage and slavery of Egypt and it signified the divine deliverance of God’s people via the blood of a sacrificial lamb.

You remember the story. Pharaoh would not let the Israelite people go! God had sent Moses to talk to him and had performed numerous signs through Moses to warn him. But in the end, Pharaoh’s heart simply wouldn’t change...the bible says that his heart “hardened”.

And finally, after a number of plagues...and you can read this story in its entirety in the book of Exodus - God tells Moses he is sending one more plague to set the Israelites freedom in motion, and that plague is that death is coming to the firstborn of every family in the land.

The only way to escape is for each Israelite family to take a lamb...it was to be a spotless lamb...there was to be no blemish upon that lamb...it was to be “innocent” if you will.

After a number of days, it was to be slaughtered and in an act of faith, the family was to take some of the lamb’s blood and put it on the doorposts of the home.

God would then pass through the land of Egypt and if there was not blood from the slain lamb on the doorposts of the homes, the first born in that family died. On the other hand, if God saw the blood of the lamb on the doorframes of the house he “PASSED OVER” (i.e. Passover) that home and the plague of death didn’t touch that family.

God then commanded the people of Israel to mark the day this event took place and according to:

Exodus 12:14 – “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.”

And so, this is exactly what the people are celebrating. God wanted to ingrain in the people of Israel this idea of rescue and deliverance – it’s a BIG deal and Jerusalem at the time of the Triumphal entry is packed with pilgrims that have made their way to the holy city to celebrate this holy day.

Don’t let this picture of the real Passover Lamb, Jesus - marching into Jerusalem on Passover...don’t let this picture leave your mind Again, this is NOT a coincidence! This is divinely planned.!

Recall when John the Baptist first saw Jesus for the first time on the bank of the Jordan River and by divine inspiration cried out:

John 1:29 – “...Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

In this moment, the Passover Lamb, Jesus ON Passover was entering the city to fulfill the very thing he was sent to accomplish – to rescue and deliver his people from death.

What we see when Jesus marches into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday:

- Is prophetic...
- It’s beautiful...
- It’s incredibly powerful to think about...

And only as God could arrange and set up, as we have already noted, this is profoundly symbolic. And this begins our points of reflection on this Palm Sunday. Let’s begin and:

1. Reflect on the sovereignty of Jesus

Think on this! Jesus knew exactly what was taking place and what would be taking place as he made his way into Jerusalem.

In fact, on FOUR different occasions – count them - Jesus told his disciples what was going to take place as he made his way to Jerusalem.

Matt. 16:21- (context: Caesarea Philippi) **“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”**

A second time, in **Matt. 17:22-23** (this is right after the episode on the Mount of Transfiguration and it’s recorded in Mark 9 as well) – **“As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to**

them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.”

Matt. 20:17-19 – (This is sometime between leaving Jericho and arriving in Jerusalem) **“And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them,¹⁸ “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”**

He would say this a fourth time right after the Olivet Discourse...this would be on the Tuesday prior to his crucifixion:

Matt. 26:1-2 – **“When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,² “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”**

What’s the point of all of this? The point is, NOTHING that is taking place or that will take place in Jesus’s life is taking him by surprise.

As he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, no one saw him as the Passover Lamb ready to give himself and shed his blood to deliver his people from the slavery of sin – but let me tell you who it wasn’t lost on! JESUS.

He knew everything that was going to take place! He had told his followers repeatedly what was going to happen, and a matter of a week – to the disciples – things are going to appear as if everything was spinning completely out of control!

- Jesus, their master will be betrayed...
- Jesus will be delivered over...
- Jesus will be mocked, beaten, and put to death...

Their plans to be “large and in charge with Jesus”...the disciples plans to rule with him and establish Israel as a national power - I mean they could taste it! Snd the scene around them on Palm Sunday was certainly alluding to it!

- The people were spreading out their cloaks out for Jesus (a sign of honor – red carpet)...
- The people were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (a shout of praise and a declaration that Jesus is the promised Messiah)...

They are having a great time on Palm Sunday, but by Good Friday, they are scattered...they are in hiding...they are fearful for their lives.

Their entire life was about to feel like it was spinning out of control, but what we learn from reflecting on what was really taking place that day it that Jesus was totally in control.

He is sovereign. He is in control of the big picture...the large aspects of life. He knows what he will experience and yet is willingly going to Jerusalem, and he will WILLINGLY lay his life down.

It's happening according to his plan down to the smallest of details! The scripture records:

Matt. 21:1b-6 – "...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. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴This 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.'" ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them."

Luke records this event writing in **Luke 19:32 – "So those who were sent away and found it just as he had told them."**

Now, I don't know if Jesus had arranged this unbroken colt to be there prior to this or not...I don't think he did! I think this is Jesus exercising his sovereignty. He's into the details and he is very aware of the prophecy from Zechariah that was made 500 years previous to this.

Zechariah 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."

We'll unpack some of this here a bit later in the message, but the fact that:

- Jesus chooses this colt...
- knows exactly where it will be...
- that his disciples will be asked by the owners why are they taking his donkey...
- AND that he comes into Jerusalem FROM the Mount of Olives is just more and more proof of his sovereignty and involvement in the details.

See, Zechariah predicted Israel's king would come riding on a colt (9:9). He also predicted in (14:4) that the "day of the Lord" – you'll know it's arrived when the Messiah's feet stand on the Mount of Olives.

Now, we know this alludes to his second coming, but don't think for a minute that Jesus wasn't aware of the symbolism AND the prophecy of him coming into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

Everything he is doing is purposeful! Reflect on his sovereignty this Palm Sunday. And if you rightly reflect on this (uninterrupted time and unhurried devotion, it will lead to uninhibited worship!)

Test it! Reflect on the fact that there is NOTHING that is taking place in your life that is taking God by surprise OR that is outside of his control. NOTHING!

- No cancer...
- No sickness...
- No miscarriage...
- No broken relationship...
- No loss of job...
- No matter the trial...

There is NOTHING taking place in your life that God is surprised by or is outside of his control - this is his divine sovereignty. Nothing happens to the child of God without first filtering through his holy hands.

This doesn't mean that we don't have the freedom to make a choices or that what we do doesn't matter. What it means is that God is bigger than the choices we make, not limited by the choices we make, and ultimately while we play checkers, God is playing chess.

Reflecting on his sovereignty should bring a great amount of peace and comfort to your soul. I was reading an article online this week written by a Pastor in Atlanta, Texas. Listen to what he wrote as he reflected on the sovereignty of God.

James Williams – “The sovereignty of God isn't some abstract theological idea that has little meaning in our lives. Rather, it's endless fuel for the worship of God even in the midst of uncertainty and despair. It doesn't make life easy, but it does give hope. Realizing my lack of control doesn't have to paralyze me with fear. Instead, it fixes my eyes on the Almighty Creator. Knowing that a wise and loving God is orchestrating the events in my life brings comfort to my weary soul. When fear of the unknown begins to grip your heart, dwell on the comforting truth of God's sovereignty.”

1. Reflect on the sovereignty of Jesus
2. **Reflect on the royalty of Jesus**

This entire passage of scripture screams of royalty. The picture is of a royal procession. Jesus rides into the city. The people are spreading their cloaks on the ground and shouting, “Hosannas”...according to John's gospel they are waiving Palm branches.

This is Israel's king! Going back to the to the prophecy of Zechariah that Matthew records. This is **Matt. 21:5 – “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.’”**

Jesus is king! He is royalty. He is the “Son of David!” – That's a messianic term! He receives the shouts of “Hosanna” which is a combination of two words that means to “Save us, please”...or “Save us, we pray”!

This is a phrase that is taken from **Psalm 118:25-26 – “Save us, we pray, O LORD! (translated into the Greek from the Hebrew, this is “Hosanna”) O LORD, we pray, give us success!**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.”

The crowds welcoming Jesus at the triumphal entry knew that this was a special occasion! Now, they had no idea how special...and in no way could they have ever perceived HOW their cry for salvation was going to be answered - they are worshipping though!

Psalm 118 is a psalm of worship and joy! Just read it! It celebrates God’s steadfast love, and it revels in how God delivers and comes through – how he RESCUES his people! There’s this relief of being able to go into the temple (“from the house of the LORD) and give praise to God for who he is and what he’s done.

Now ,with that in mind, can I take you somewhere just for a moment...talk about reflection.

Illus. Robert Morgan – he’ll be teaching at our “Let’s Talk Preaching Conference in Oct. If the average sermon was 20% deeper, our churches would be 50% stronger. Here’s my attempt at going a bit deeper today!

Matthew quotes Zechariah. The setting of Zechariah is Israel is trying to rebuild...they’ve been through hundred years of apostasy. Their city has been destroyed along with the Temple (i..e the presence of God has departed!). They’ve been exiled for 70 years and they are trying to rebuild, but it’s just not going that well.

It's a dark day...it’s a discouraging time...and Zechariah...look back at the quote in full.

Zechariah 9:9 – (Matthew leaves this first part out!) **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! (Rejoice? What on earth for?) Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! (this is a reference to the inhabitants of Jerusalem...they are to shout? Why? BECAUSE...), 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.”**

If you were to continue reading the Zechariah prophecy, the King would come and save the people of Israel and protect them and they will experience his goodness and his beauty and there will be peace and prosperity (v. 14-17).

So, put Psalm 118 and Zechariah 9 together. The King is here, and he is here for one reason – to save...to rescue! So, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna! Please save, now...Save us, we pray!

And do you know what’s MORE amazing than their worship in this moment? The fact that Jesus receives it! He welcomes it! He doesn’t shy away from it!

Remember in his earthly ministry, he would perform a miracle or do a great work and say, “don’t say anything...just go perform your sacrifice...or just go tell your family and friends what’s been done.” He had Kingdom work to do and knew people would try to push him forward sooner than it was his time.

Well, he doesn't do that now! NO...Jesus welcomes and receives the worship of the people. It's his time!

Luke tells us in his account that there were some Pharisee's around that day and they saw the crowd and heard the crowd worshipping Jesus and told him:

Luke 19:39-40 – “And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

Jesus was accepting their worship BECAUSE he is royalty and BECAUSE he is a King that has come to save! And because he is king is worthy of worship!

Reflect on his royalty, this holy week. Jesus is King. We just came out of our Kingdom Project series...the whole idea was if he is king, we are his subjects. He rules and reign and we are to live under that rule and reign. Are you?

- Are your relationships under the rule and reign of King Jesus?
- Is your marriage or dating life, singles – under the rule and reign of Christ?
- How you spend your time and how you interact with others – does it offer up proof that you are a citizen of the Kingdom?
- What about your worship? Do you come in ready to worship the King? Eager to bring your offering? Honored to be in his presence?

Reflect on his royalty this week. The people were right to worship him. And if you will give yourself to uninterrupted time and unhurried devotion, it will result in worship.

Jesus is our King that came to save...his salvation just was NOT in the way they thought. And this leads me to a third point of reflection on this Palm Sunday.

1. Reflect on the sovereignty of Jesus.
2. Reflect on the royalty of Jesus.
3. **Reflect on the humility of Jesus**

Jesus is different. He came on a donkey, NOT a horse made ready for battle. He came in peace, NOT with a demonstration of power. He came to assume a crown, but instead of containing jewels, it contained thorns.

A humble king – exactly as Zechariah predicted (v. 5) – “humble and mounted on a donkey.”

From the very beginning of his life, Jesus exemplified humility. Born in an obscure barn to a peasant girl on the backside of nowhere. 80% of his life and ministry centered around the backwoods of Galilee. His whole life was one of humility.

This is who Jesus was! He exemplified humility and it always came out in his service to others. In fact, did you know the favorite title for Jesus to use to describe himself was the messianic term, “Son of Man” – his next favorite description was that of “servant”.

Just think about it in reference to Holy Week. Here we are at Palm Sunday and we’re on our way to Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, but let’s not forget the lesson he taught on Thursday...he gathered his disciples in the upper room and he washed their feet!

He explains his actions in **John 13:12-15** – **“When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”**

What’s he telling them to do? To serve. But we will NEVER serve out of a prideful posture...it only comes via humility. This is why Jesus was the greatest servant leader to ever live – because he was the most humble man to ever live.

Listen to how Paul puts it in **Phil. 2:3-8** – **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

As we reflect on the humility of Jesus, consider what Paul just wrote.

- Jesus is God and left the confines of heaven. He emptied himself of divine rights and privileges...
- He humbled himself – God incarnate wrapping himself in flesh and living amongst us...
- And here was a man that was perfect. Never had a bad thought. Never had a bad motive. Never an impure deed.
- And he is put to death. Spit upon. Mocked. Beaten. Crucified.

The humility of Christ! I don’t know about you, but as I reflect on his humility, it embarrasses me how prideful I often am. As I reflect on his humility and his service to us, it convicts me that I often live especially at home as if people should serve me!

What am I thinking? What am doing?

You know what I'm resolved to do this week. I'm resolved to reflect on the humility of Jesus because – I don't know that's this is fact, but I'm determined to find out. I bet if I focus on the humility of Jesus, it will be darn near impossible to focus on self at the same time!

And isn't this where a lot of trouble and pain are coming from? We have become a people fixated on self, and I'm calling you this Holy Week to:

- slow down long enough to reflect on the humility of Christ and see if it won't move you to repentance...
- Slow down long enough to reflect on the humility of Jesus and see if it won't move you to service to others...
- Slow down and let's see if this isn't true!

uninterrupted time
+
unhurried devotion
=
uninhibited worship

This has been a Palm Sunday reflection. And as we make our way to Easter, reflect on what we've talked about today:

- The sovereignty of Jesus.
- The royalty of Jesus.
- The humility of Jesus.

Reflection will lead to worship, and it will prepare you to come ready for Easter next week.

Let's pray.

Invitation/Next week:

Matt. 21:10-11– “And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?”¹¹ And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.