

A Right Response to Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40

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This is Passion Week, and I really want to encourage you to set aside some time this week in your devotional to follow along in the scripture and read each day what was taking place in the last week of Jesus's physical life on this earth.

It will really help focus your mind and heart as we look to Resurrection Sunday. I assure you if you read the gospels this week and day by day track the activity and conversations that Jesus was having...we'll meet back here on Good Friday, and then there is Silent Saturday and then there is Resurrection Sunday – and if you follow along and journey with Jesus recounting each day of the Passion week, I can promise you...you will be ready to worship next Sunday morning!

That last week of his life starts with a text we are going to look at today. I am entitling the message: **A Right Response to Palm Sunday**

I have chosen this title because as we will see in this passage today there are some that don't respond in the right way to what was going on all those years ago when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the back of a donkey.

And so, what I want is to look at this old, familiar story with fresh eyes. I want us to take a step back and allow the God's Spirit to reveal his truth to us and show us the significance of Palm Sunday BECAUSE...if we can really grasp what was taking place, I think it will inevitably lead to a right response...and we'll talk about what that right response is as we close out our time together this morning.

So, let's get after it.

Luke 19:28-40 – “And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. (Luke 9-19 is what takes place as Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Most recently he has raised Lazarus from the dead. He had ministered to Zacchaeus in Jericho and changed his life. He has healed blind Bartimaeus and taught his disciples about what proper stewardship of life and faithfulness looks like. He has foretold on numerous occasions – FOUR to be exact that when he gets to Jerusalem, he'll be handed over to the authorities, killed and will be raised on the third day. Now, the disciples don't get this and we shouldn't expect them to, but I highlight all this just to emphasize that Jesus KNEW exactly what he was walking into – betrayal, death by crucifixion and went anyway – this is the love of Jesus on display!)²⁹ **When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples,³⁰ 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.³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’”³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them.³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?”³⁴ And they said, “The Lord has need of it.”³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they**

set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ 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, ³⁸ saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” ³⁹ 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.”

Illus. God’s Relational Presence – I have had a book on my bedside for a number of months that I have slowly been working through. It was written by some of my college professors. It’s called, *God’s Relational Presence*

They outline in their introduction what their basic thesis of the book is...and I want to read it to you because it sets the table for where I want us to go in our time together today.

“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 the garden (Genesis) and ends with God’s presence relating to his people in the garden (Revelation)...This “megatheme” (the presence of God being central to ALL of 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) cohesive center of biblical theology.”

Now, in college...I thought these professors were wrong a time or two – especially about HOW they graded my papers. But with this...I think they hit the nail on the head.

The central theme of the Bible – what they refer to as the “megatheme” is the relational presence of God.

From the beginning, God has desired to be in a relationship with his people...he desires people to experience his presence, and yet at the same time, it’s a story of people rejecting this incredible gift he offers.

It starts in Genesis 1. He creates man and woman in his image and walks and talks with them in the Garden of Eden. Then the Enemy comes and deceives the man and woman and they sin against God...and the scripture says:

Gen. 3:8 – “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day (there was fellowship and relationship – they experienced the presence of God – his ultimate aim and desire for them – BUT...because of sin!), and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

They ran from his presence. They hid. And you can trace that pattern all the way through the pages of the Bible. God pursues his people. He wants them to experience his presence, and yet time and again they reject him.

What was the point of the Tabernacle? And then later the Temple in Jerusalem? Was it not so the people could experience and live the presence of God?

When the people wandered in the wilderness. The tribes would camp, with the opening of their tent facing toward the tabernacle in the middle. And in the Holy of Holies was a single piece of furniture called, “the ark of the covenant”.

It contained the tablets on which God’s own finger had inscribed the Ten Commandments. It contained Aaron’s rod that budded, and a jar of manna. It was covered by the mercy seat and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies - and he could only go in once a year to make atonement on behalf of the people.

Now, get this...the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament represented the very presence of God! Wherever the ark was, God was. The ark led them in the wilderness...it went before them in battle...as long as they had the ark – i.e., the presence of God...they had all they needed!

But, again...what’s the story of Israel? They continually rejected God and his presence...they presumed on his presence. They treated the presence of God causally, like it wasn’t a big deal...and as a result God judged them.

One example of this is in 1 Samuel 4. The Israelites are battling the Philistines and losing. So, they send for the ark to come to the battlefield, thinking if they bring the presence of God via the Ark, then victory is guaranteed.

The only problem is, the Priest, Eli...he had two sons – Hophni and Phinehas – and they were WORTHLESS.

They made a mockery of God...they didn’t choose to live holy lives and yet they are the ones bringing the ark of the covenant to the battlefield. And when they arrive, Israel erupts! They go crazy...God is here, victory is ours!

But they made a fatal mistake. They presumed upon God. They thought they could do whatever they wanted and still have God on their side...and he showed them in this moment otherwise.

The Philistines won the battle that day...they defeated Israel – 30,000 soldiers killed and the ark was captured! Eli’s two sons died that day. Eli himself died that day. And Phinehas’s wife, was in labor...when she heard the news that her husband and father-in-law had died, she named her bay...get this:

1 Sam. 4:21a – “And she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the ark of God had been captured...”

God was teaching his people in this that you did not treat the presence of God in a casual way...you don't presume on the presence of God. His presence is not something that can be deployed at a time of your choosing...it is a gift that is to be revered...honored...feared...

Wee it again and again in scripture. God's desire for us to be in his presence. Our constant and continual rejection of it.

Ezekiel's vision of the presence of God departing the Temple is one of the most haunting visions in scripture. The people of God have not honored his presence...they have spit in his face by worshipping false gods, doing evil, having no concern at all for matters that are important for God.

In Ezekiel 9, God shows the prophet all the abominations that are being practiced INSIDE the temple courts. He shows them the idol worship that is taking place as well as people who have their backs to the temple of the LORD – it's a vivid picture of people who have literally turned their back on God.

And so, the glory of God begins to move. In Ezekiel 10-11, we see the presence of God lift from the Holy of Holies and move slowly toward the door of the temple...and then to the east gate...and then: Listen to:

Ezekiel 11:23 – “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.”

What's the east side of the city? That's the Mount of Olives!

Notice: God doesn't abandon Jerusalem in a single dramatic exit. The glory of God departs in stages – it's as if God is giving people every opportunity to cry out, repent, and return to him...BUT...no one does. And the presence of God withdraws to the east.

Now, here is where it gets remarkable...never even considered this until studying it this week! If we continue reading Ezekiel, we discover that God promises his presence will return.

And do you want to guess where he returns from? The east! The same direction he left from.

Ezekiel 43:1,2, 4a-5, 7 – “Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. ² 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... As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, ⁵ the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple... 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.”

Israel's history was one of hope – it was one of longing...longing to be in the presence of God forever and ever...and yet they had continually rejected his presence in how they lived.

Now, think about this as it relates to Palm Sunday...talk about significant...talk about meaningful!

Where does Jesus come from on Palm Sunday? He comes from the east! He descends from the Mount of Olives...the very mountain where the glory of God stood before it departed in Ezekiel's vision.

You read the Palm Sunday passages in the Bible and you can see why the people shouted "Hosanna" – "Save us, please...save us now..."

In their mind, the Messiah was the one that would ultimately usher in the glory of God...his presence finally returning to Israel and God would once and for all dwell with his people, at his Temple, in his holy city forever and ever.

We can see why on that Sunday when Jesus rides into the city some people welcome and receive him with worship and adulation and praise – they thought this prophecy was being fulfilled...this is it!

They thought this promise...this prophecy was being fulfilled as Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem. And they were right...just not in the way they expected!

Looking back...we know they were off on their expectation! They thought the Messiah was a political savior – and when he didn't lead a fight against the Roman occupation, but instead "laid down his life", they washed their hands of him and joined with the others who scorned and ridiculed him. "Crucify" they shouted.

They didn't understand they were falling into the same trap they always had – God sending his presence to them – this time it wasn't in a box of acacia wood and gold, but in flesh and blood.

This wasn't the ark, the presence of God symbolized...this was Jesus, the presence of God realized!

And what do the people do?

Ultimately, what they've always done. They reject the presence of God. This is the exact opposite of what is a "right response" to Palm Sunday.

Illus. Where's Waldo – Do you remember those *Where's Waldo* books? They came out when I was in elementary school and whenever our school had a book fair, they always had the newest one being released. I loved those books!

Here's the idea. You have Waldo who looks like this and you have to find him in a picture that looks like this!

It takes a minute to find him because so much is going on, but once you see him, you can't unsee him! You could turn to this page the next day or the next week and you can go right to him.

Well, once you realize what is happening on Palm Sunday – the presence of God that departed from the Mount of Olives in Ezekiel’s vision, is now descending back into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives in the person of Jesus – once you see it, you can NEVER unsee it!!!

Jesus is the presence of God...and he is riding into the city to do what none of us could ever do for ourselves!

Palm Sunday is the relentless commitment of God to ensure that even when we reject his presence, he is committed to us and will do whatever it takes for us to live in his presence forever and ever.

Listen: We don’t get (Rev. 21:3) without (Luke 19:28-40).

Rev. 21:3 – (This is the Garden of Eden restored! The new heavens and the new earth at the end of time!) **“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.”**

The Bible begins with God walking with his people in a garden. It ends with God dwelling with his people forever. Palm Sunday...it’s the hinge between the two gardens. And the road from Palm Sunday leads straight through a cross and empty tomb to secure us a place there.

Illus. appetizers - See, Palm Sunday is like an appetizer. Who doesn’t like a good appetizer?! You sit down at your table; you look at the menu...you’ve got a great meal coming up and the appetizer just gets you going!

Well, Jesus’ riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday...it’s like an appetizer. It’s good, but the main course is coming! The first time he came humble...on a borrowed donkey! The second time he comes, the scripture says it’s going to look a little different!

Rev. 19:11-16 – (This is the Day of the Lord...his Second Coming – notice the differences between the first coming and the second. In the first, he’s humble, riding a donkey. In the second?) – **“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. ¹² 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. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”**

And check this...the prophet Zechariah...the same one that makes the prophecy concerning him coming into the city on a donkey in his first coming, tells us where his feet will touch down in the second coming!

It shows us the “megatheme” of scripture. God desires to be with his people...God with man forever and ever. He will fulfill prophecy and he will lay his life down in order to make living with us forever a reality.

And the main course to come? It looks an awful lot like Palm Sunday with some slight variation. Let me read it to you from scripture. I'll choose two passages. One from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament.

Zech. 14:4a – “On that day (the day of the Lord! His second coming!) his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east...”

AMAZING! The same mountain! The presence and glory of God departs from the Mount of Olives in Ezekiel. King Jesus descends from the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday. And then he returns to the Mount of Olives at his Second Coming.

You can't make this stuff up! God is initiating his plan and he WILL see it through!

So, what's the right response to Palm Sunday? I see three to lift straight from our Luke 19 text today.

First, we must: **Welcome Jesus**

The crowd that day, while they didn't understand the fullness of what was taking place, when they heard Jesus was coming, they moved! John's gospel tells us in:

John 12:12-13 – “The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

That phrase, “went out to meet him” it refers to active movement. They didn't wait for Jesus to get to Jerusalem, they went to him on the other side of the Kidron Valley to greet him and welcome him!

Do you remember Adam and Eve in the garden when they heard the presence of God? They moved, but went the opposite way of God! They ran and hid in the other direction.

And listen: that's the natural inclination of sinful people. We don't want to be in the presence of God...so, we run from him in sin and we sit in our shame.

But, a right response to Palm Sunday and understanding what is taking place is to be like the crowd...to go out and meet him! Run toward him!

Jesus is the presence of God and he is Savior of the world. Save us, now...Save us, please – this is Hosanna. To welcome Jesus, is to say with this crowd, “Save me, Jesus.” It’s welcoming him into our lives. It’s saying:

- “Jesus, save my marriage.”
- “Jesus, save my children.”
- “Jesus, save those at my work place.”
- “Jesus, deliver...rescue...this is what the word “save” means...

Welcoming Jesus is running to him and crying out, “Save...deliver...rescue.”

And welcoming him isn’t just a one-time decision...this is where it starts...and I’ll just ask right here, “Have you welcomed Jesus into your life?”

This is the FIRST and BEST response.

We’ve been talking in NEXT about bringing God your “first and best” offering. Well, before it’s anything financial, your first and best is your life...that’s actually what the financial should represent. “God, you get it all. I welcome you into my life.”

And then after that decision, it’s the DAILY decision we make to run to Christ, NOT away from him. We welcome him every day to come and allow his presence to infiltrate ALL of who we are.

The second response is, we must: **Celebrate Jesus**

This is what the palm branches are about...the laying out of the garments on the road. Remember this scene?

Matthew’s account of Palm Sunday informs us:

Matt. 21:8-9 – “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!”

This was a celebratory moment! Putting their cloaks on the road was a sign of honor. It’s like rolling out a red carpet! They took off their outer garments and put them in the dirt! Their celebration was costly AND it was public! They were NOT celebrating him in hiding.

This cry, “Hosanna to the Son of David (he’s the Messiah) Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” – this is taken from Psalm 118.

Read Psalm 118 this week in your private quiet time. It's a psalm of worship and joy. Psalm 118 celebrates God's steadfast love, and it revels in how God delivers and comes through – how he RESCUES his people!

It's interesting...many people put the context of Psalm 118 with Psalm 24 – BOTH messianic psalms and both having to do with the return of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.

David brings the ark of the covenant back into the city of Jerusalem and do you remember the scene?

2 Sam. 6:1-3a, 5, 14-15 – “David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim.

³ And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill... And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals...And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.”

It is EPIC joy...it is celebration! The presence of God is back where it belongs! It's been returned to its proper place and the people couldn't contain themselves!

(Ps. 118:24 – this is the day the Lord has made we will rejoice and be glad in it!)

Here's the connection though that should leave us in awe! If singing and dancing and rejoicing was the right response to the ark – the presence of God symbolized entering the city...how much MORE should we be singing and dancing and rejoicing...i.e. CELEBRATING Jesus because he is the realized presence of God entering the city on Palm Sunday to ultimately go to the cross for us.

If a golden box containing the tablets of the law was worth that kind of uninhibited, costly, public celebration... how much more is the One who fulfilled the law, who went to the cross, who conquered death and rose again?

A right response to Palm Sunday is to celebrate Jesus – who he is and ALL that he has done. You can't remain quiet on Palm Sunday – if you do the very rocks will cry out!

Why? Because Jesus is the Messiah. He is the one who gave his life and was raised from the dead and is coming again. He IS as the scripture states, “the one who WAS, and IS, and IS to come.

Someone celebrate Jesus today!

- Like the crowd, we wave our palm branches – Jesus is royalty...
- Like the crowd, we shout our praise – “Jesus, save now.”
- Like the crowd, we take off our cloaks and submit to the king....

This leads to a third and final right response to Palm Sunday, and that is we must: **Surrender to Jesus**

Jesus is the King of glory. I mentioned Psalm 24 earlier. It’s a messianic psalm and it’s one that for years the church historically has read on Palm Sunday.

Again, the context is the return of the presence of God (the ark of the covenant) to Jerusalem. It begins by asking the question of all questions:

Ps. 24:3-4 – “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? (The question being asked his, who can be in God’s presence? Listen to the answer!) ⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”

This is a problem here! Because if this is the criteria for getting into the presence of God NONE of us are making it! (uh-oh!)

Left to ourselves we are sinners...we don’t have clean hands...we don’t have a pure heart. And on our own, we will NEVER get into the presence of God...and THIS is why Palm Sunday matters so much!

Because Jesus rode into Jerusalem knowing he was going to do what none of us could. He was going to give us clean hands. He was going to give us a pure heart. And he sheds his blood on the cross...the curtain of the temple tears from top to bottom...and the presence of God is no longer hidden behind a veil. It is available to everyone who watch this: surrenders to him.

And Ps 24 turns to the King who makes all of this possible:

Ps. 24:7-10 – “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! ⁹Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!”

See why it has historically been read on Palm Sunday? Open wide the gates! The King is coming in.

The right and proper response to ANY king is submission...it’s surrender. He’s the king. And Jesus...he’s no ordinary king...he is the “king of Glory”. And so, we submit to him...to his lordship.

Have you done this? Are you doing this?

See...this crowd.... they welcomed Jesus...but it was on their own terms. They even celebrated Jesus...but it was based on their own expectations. When he didn't deliver as they expected him to, their cheer turned to cries of "Crucify" they NEVER surrendered to him!

One of my favorite songs is the hymn, *I Surrender All*. The story behind it is beautiful. It was written in 1896 by a man named Judson Van DeVenter.

He was an art teacher, a musician and over the years really struggled with a call to ministry. He wanted to be known for his art, and really wrestled with going into full time evangelism. He went to a revival one day and sensed the spirit of God speaking to him to finally and fully surrender his life...and he did!

He reflected on that moment of a revival that he "surrendered all" to the Lord and he wrote: **"At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life."**

And then he penned these lyrics writing the song, *I Surrender All*

**All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.**

**I surrender all, I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.**

"In his presence daily live." – that's the whole story of the Bible! It's the "megatheme" of scripture...God's relentless pursuit of us so that we can live with him forever.

Let's make sure we have right response to Palm Sunday.

Let's welcome Jesus into our lives...let's celebrate Jesus and what it means that his presence is in us by the Holy Spirit and let's surrender to Jesus because as King, he is worthy of it all and we get to live with him forever.

Will you pray with me?

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.