

## PALM SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**Scripture:** John 12: 12-28

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*On the next day, when the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." These things His disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. For this reason, also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. so the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.*

*Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."*

I'm going to stop here, but we are going to be looking at the rest of the planned scripture in the message that I believe God has laid upon my heart, but I'll bring it out as we go along. Shall we pause and invite God's leaning upon us?

Loving Heavenly Father, saturate us with your Holy Spirit as we look at these details about Your Son, the words that He spoke at that time. Let it not lie in the pages of antiquity, but Lord, bring them to our understanding today. We pray that even as we engage with it, that Your Holy Spirit would lead us Lord, not just to understand it, but to apply it in our very own hearts and in our own lives and in our own situations. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Though I read from the gospel according to John, the other gospels also carry this story. All of them have things that we can add together – a kind of harmony of the gospels. But I want to place before you the salient points about this whole episode of Jesus coming to Jerusalem.

First, Jesus returns to Jerusalem. We noticed when we were together on Wednesday, as we looked at Lazarus, that things had got a little difficult in Judea, and that He had left, and then He was planning to come back to Bethany where Lazarus had died. The disciples told Him, "Listen! They're trying to kill You. So why are You going back?" But it seems like now Jesus says, "It's time to go back." In fact, He says that in vs. 23, "The hour has come."

I think this is an important point for us to hold on to, as we look through the rest of this passage. The hour has come. And so, Jesus returns to Jerusalem. How does He return to Jerusalem? He rides in on a donkey, and we'll see why. He accepts the adulation of the crowds. Hitherto, every time He had done a miracle, and people had gone gaga over Him, He stopped and He went away from there. He didn't want it. But here, He allows it. He allows them to throw their cloaks on the ground, to wave their palm leaves and all of that, and He enters Jerusalem in that manner. Then we see the Pharisees' negative response to all of this. They say, "Tell Your disciples to stop this. Can You hear what they are saying?" And Jesus' response was, "If they don't cry out, the stones will cry out."

Then He goes into the temple and He throws out the money-changers, and tells them, "My house is a house of prayer." One can see that there's a kind of an urgency to what Jesus is doing. He's now confronting the people. He's in their face, speaking things that till now, they have been talking and arguing with Him. But now it's getting to a point where He is saying, "This is the hour. There's no more time. Now is the time for everything to get fulfilled."

How is it different from earlier behavior? You remember that crowds would be there when He would teach. We often looked and said, "My goodness! A preacher today, when he sees a good crowd, he wants to come back the next day, and the next day, and the next, because the crowd is so good. But Jesus would just go away. He'd go away to another place and then He often told people who He touched with His miracles not to go and talk to people but just show themselves to the priest. It was very quiet and understated, and He always moved away from the crowds that were following Him, looking for a quiet place to spend time with the Father. Then He would always say, "My time has not come. This is not the time yet." You remember the wedding at Cana itself when He told His mother, "My time hasn't come."

That was Jesus then. Suddenly now, He's making His way into Jerusalem and we see a different Jesus, as we see in John 12:23. He says, "Now the time has come for the Son of man to enter into His glory." So now He openly showcases and proclaims by His actions and words that He is indeed the Messiah.

### How was Jesus proclaiming He was the Messiah?

#### 1. He rides in on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Why was this important?

- **He was fulfilling prophecy.** Zechariah 9:9 says, Rejoice, O people of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!  
Look, your King is coming to you.  
He is righteous and victorious,  
yet He is humble, riding on a donkey –  
riding on a donkey's colt.
- **He indicated that He was coming in peace, not to start a war.** In ancient biblical times, the leader rode on a horse if he was coming in war, and a donkey to signify peace.

So Jesus brings these two paths as He comes in proclaiming that He is the Messiah.

#### 2. He aggressively asserts His oneness with God. How? By throwing out the money changers because they were exploiting the poor, and proclaiming, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.'"

How was He bring this oneness with the Father together? In effect, He was actually quoting two scriptures – Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Isaiah 56:7 It is God who says, "*these (talking of faithful foreigners) I will bring to My holy mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*"

Calling everybody; and this was the time of the feast. People from all over the world were coming. These money changers were exploiting these people who were coming from afar because they didn't have the local currency, and so, they were making money hand-over-foot by exploiting these people. And Jesus' anger is against them because God had said, "These people are welcome in My house because it will be called the house of prayer."

Then in Jeremiah 7:11 where God says, "*Has this house, which bears My Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!*" declares the Lord.

Jesus is saying, "For it is written – My house shall be called a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of thieves.

He's taken these two sayings from Isaiah and Jeremiah, and then He's made it into one statement that He is now owning and saying, "The Father and I are indeed One."

- 3. He didn't stop the people from celebrating His return to Jerusalem.** They waved palm branches; He didn't stop it. They shouted, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," He didn't tell them to be quiet. They put their cloaks on the way for Him to ride on, and He rode. For the time had come. This was the time for the Son of man to be glorified, on that Palm Sunday many, many years ago.

#### **Yet, many didn't believe.**

However, as we pick up this narrative in John's gospel, we see that many didn't believe in spite of the miracles, in spite of all that had happened. Many believed, but kept quiet out of fear, and it says that they loved human praise more than the praise of God. Many didn't believe, but many believed but wouldn't talk about their belief openly because they were more concerned about what the people would say than what God would. They wanted the praise of people rather than the praise of God.

We need to ask ourselves this disquieting question: What kind of believers are we? Ones who believe, trust and are not afraid to be called followers of Jesus? Or are we 'closet Christians' hiding our faith in our places of work because we value the opinion of the world more than the praise of God?

As we read the concluding chapters of the four gospels, especially in John, we see how intent Jesus was in teaching important truths, knowing that His time on earth was drawing to a close. I just want us to adopt an open mindset, today and then through the week that we call Holy Week, as we meet together on Wednesday and then on Thursday and Friday and then on Sunday. Let's not be in a hurry to go through this week and reach Resurrection Day so we can celebrate.

There are important things that we can see as we look through these Passion narratives which take about 13 or 14 chapters in all of these gospels. These are the words that Jesus decided He's got to say before He left this world, words that are so important. Now is not the time to walk around and meet people and chat with them, maybe go to their homes. Now it's time to place truths and principles down for His disciples at that time, and for you and me at this time. Important truths. So let's ask the question: What can we find in the remainder of this chapter that Jesus wants you and me to understand?

#### **IMPORTANT TRUTHS FROM THE PASSION GOSPELS**

- 1. Death produces life.**

In vs 24, He says, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. but its death will produce many new kernels – a plentiful harvest of new lives."

A seed by itself is of no value; it must be planted and give up being a seed for it to then have life. Jesus is saying, in other words, "If you love this world and the things of this world so much that you're unwilling to die to these things that we've grown to love, or the things of the flesh, we cannot be productive. There will not be a harvest of good fruit. He further goes on to say that if we want to follow Him, we must be where He is. Makes sense! If we are following Jesus, we can't stay here and watch Jesus walk off in the distance; we have to be behind Him. This was Jesus' conversation prior to the cross.

But Jesus gave His life so millions and millions of people, the world actually, may have eternal life. today He is on this side of the cross, and we must be there as well. But that can only come from moving away from holding on to life, to giving it up; dying to self, so that, as Paul would later say, "We may live in Christ and serve Him." Jesus ends by saying, "And those who serve Jesus will be honored by God."

## **2. Embrace difficult circumstances.**

In vs. 27 Jesus says, "Now My soul has become troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour." And then He says, "Father, glorify Your name."

Embrace those difficult circumstances. Jesus says, "My heart is troubled; I'm uneasy, a little wary of what's going on, not sure about it. So should I pray, 'Father, please take away this circumstance?'" and you can see His mind working. He said, "How can I? because it's for this very purpose that I'm here. So how can I say, 'Father, take it away?' I can't. I've got to embrace it. Instead, I must say, 'Father, glorify Yourself through this.'"

The principle I think that He leaves with us is that there are going to be times when following the will of God may not be easy, may not be comfortable; it may take us out of our comfort zones. But we need to embrace it so that God can be glorified. And again, for those of you who were there on Wednesday, we talked about this. God is often glorified through the difficult circumstances which He takes us through. So, He wants us to embrace those circumstances.

## **3. Trust the 'Light'; Trust Jesus.**

Jesus says, "I am the light." And then He says, "For a little while longer, the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness will not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light so that you may become sons of Light."

What can we learn from this? That He was going to be here on earth for only a limited time, and what He was saying was, "Trust the Light. Trust Me, because if you trust Me, then you'll be able to walk in the light and not go into darkness." As a follower of Jesus, if Jesus is the Light, where He is, you too will be in the light and you can escape being in the darkness. In other words, follow Him and He will lead you down a lighted path.

People who trust Jesus are His children. Are you a child, a son of God, a daughter of God? Do you trust Jesus with your life? the hymn writer says, "I know whom I have believed." Do you know? Have you yielded yourself to Him? Are you trusting Him implicitly?

#### **4. The lifted-up Jesus.**

All of you are familiar with this phrase; it's been the cornerstone, the foundation for what CAP is. "And I, if I'm lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself."

What was Jesus talking about? He was talking about His death, of being lifted up on the cross, and that, through the lifting up of Jesus on the cross, people would be drawn to Him. Why? Because His death has paid the penalty for our sins and given anyone who believes in Him to have everlasting life. So He has the potential to draw people; I say potential because it rests on people to come to Him and accept this gift that He is giving. Certain death – the bible says that the wages of sin is death – to guaranteed life. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. The lifted-up Jesus can move us from certain death to guaranteed eternal life. just like when the Israelites were bitten by snakes – Jesus referenced this incident from Numbers 21. The people of Israel were suffering from a self-inflicted plague and could only be saved by looking up at the bronze serpent held up on a pole. When they looked at the bronze snake, they went from death to life.

Certain death to guaranteed life. The lifted-up Jesus. Faith in Him will save.

#### **5. Jesus is Savior now, but will be Judge on the last Judgment Day.**

He says, "Anyone hears My saying and does not keep them, I do not judge him, for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings has One who judges him. The word I spoke is what will judge him on the last day, for I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak."

So those who hear Him and don't obey Him, won't be judged right now because this is the time, the period of grace that we have, a time to come to Him as Savior. He offers the lifeline through His 'lifted-upness' on the cross, offering His death as a sacrifice and penalty for your sin and mine. This is the time to get to know Him as Savior. But one day you will be judged, and judged by the message that Jesus is giving today which wasn't accepted.

And then, Jesus ends this discourse by saying that He is speaking on behalf of the Father and these words lead to eternal life. Savior or judge – that is the question.

So, as we think about Jesus on this Palm Sunday, entering Jerusalem to shouts of 'Hosanna', speaking final words of wisdom and hope, we too must take note of Jesus' words and see what principles we can glean and how we can appropriate them in our own lives. as I give you these five principles, I pray that you would make a note of them and allow these questions to churn in your heart, not only through today, but through the days of this week. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak and see if there are things that need to be changed in our lives.

#### **QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO THE FIVE PRINCIPLES.**

##### **1. What in us needs to die so that life can flow?**

Maybe you're saying: I'm already a Christian. I've died to my old self and I'm a new creation. But, is there something in you that you're holding onto and saying, "This thing I will hold." And that thing has no productivity in your life, is not bearing fruit, and the Holy Spirit has been talking to you about that area and saying that you've got to die to that area. I wonder whether today is the day for you to place it on the altar and say, "Lord, I yield. I want life to

flow that that area of my heart. Will You take it, Master? I put it down on the ground. Let it now, under Your anointing, change into something of life and fruit and productivity.”

**2. What difficult circumstances are you facing?**

You know you have to go through them, but you are praying, “Lord, save me from this thing.” You know it’s the will of God and yet you’re saying, “Lord, take it away.” I wonder today whether you’ve been inspired by Jesus, wonder today whether you were inspired on Wednesday as well, and you’re willing to say, “Lord, I am so unsure. I feel so inadequate, so unprepared or ill-prepared. I don’t know how I’m going to go forward, but Lord, Your word says: Walk and embrace it. Today Lord, I want to.” Maybe, as I’ve told you before, the famous F. B. Meyer’s prayer says: Lord, I’m not willing, but I’m willing to be made willing. Maybe that’s your position as well. I would encourage you to pray it.

**3. Are we trusting Jesus?**

Are we walking in the light? Are you trusting Him completely in every aspect of your life? are you trusting Him or is there some area of your life that you want to be in charge of? You feel you know what you are doing. But you’re not doing too well. I wonder whether you need to yield to Him.

**4. Have we looked at Jesus in faith and passed from death to life?**

Have you looked at Him? Have you appropriated the finished work of Calvary? Do you know Him as Savior? And my prayer, beloved, is if you don’t, that you wouldn’t let a moment pass and accept Him as your Savior today. Tell Him, “Lord Jesus, I have sinned. The bible tells me that the wages of sin is death, but You have given the gift of life, and I believe in You. I accept that penalty that You paid. Lord, make me Your son/daughter today.” Would you make that prayer if you’ve never seen the lifted-up Jesus in your life?

**5. Make sure that you get to know Him as Savior, rather than as Judge.**

If you don’t know Him as Savior, then when He comes as Judge, He will say: You had the message; you didn’t accept it and now I can’t help you. The time has gone. That window is over, now it’s Judgment day.

Shall we pray together?

Lord Jesus, we come to You. This has been all about You, and the incredible things You have done. Lord, we pray, if there are areas where we need to realign, that You would help us. Lord, go over to every home where there are ones listening, where there are willing hearts, move in, take charge, take control, take our hands and move us into the place where we ought to be. for we have chosen to walk this journey Lord, allowing You to work and remold us, if necessary, break us if we need to be broken. But Lord, do a work today. Save us Lord, we cried. If we are not seeing what You can see, open our eyes that we may, so that today Heaven and earth will come together in our lives and we will be able to say that Your will has been done. We want that dearly, Lord Jesus. In Your beautiful name we pray. Amen.