

Palm Sunday: Above and Beyond

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 24th, 2004. Our Good Friday service is being held, ironically, this Friday. So don't forget, 11 a.m. on Friday.

My name is Kent Dixon. It is my joy to be the pastor here. So through this series, Come Alive, we'll be exploring all that the Easter story means to us. And whether you have heard this story half a dozen times, or in my case, 53 times, perhaps, this is a story that is impactful for us as followers of Jesus.

It's a story that is important not just this time of year. As I said about Christmas, Christmas is a story that echoes throughout our year. And the same is true of Easter.

It echoes throughout our lives here on earth, our time here on earth, but also into eternity. So today is Palm Sunday. More than 2,000 years ago, God's plan of redemption changed the world forever. The power of sin and death was broken through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ that first Easter. Death was defeated, my friends.

[1 : 14] True spiritual life.

Today is Palm Sunday. So we start coming alive to the life of Jesus, which was above and beyond our human understanding. And then on Good Friday, we'll look down in fear, not in fear or defeat, but hold our heads high as we look to the cross.

And we come alive to the sacrifice that Jesus made. And then on Easter Sunday, we will celebrate together Jesus' resurrection as we come alive to his power to change our lives.

The life Jesus offers to you and to all of us is reason to celebrate. Do you celebrate that this morning? It's reason to respond to God's open arms.

His arms are open to us. And he is extending that invitation to draw near to him. And I'm so glad you're all here this morning. As we experience the life-giving truth of Holy Week and of God's power to transform each one of us into a new creation.

[2 : 51] Our sermon this morning is titled Palm Sunday Above and Beyond. Sounds exciting, doesn't it? The events of Palm Sunday often are referred to as Jesus.

You've heard this before. Jesus' triumphal or triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And they're recorded in all four of the Gospels. And as I've said before, when the Bible repeats things multiple times or stories are told over and over again, that's a flag, by the way.

And that's a sure sign that these events are important. It marks what we think of as the beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross. But that journey actually began long before Palm Sunday.

That journey began before he began his public ministry. It began even before he arrived here on earth in the manger in Bethlehem. God's plan extends far, far back.

Jesus' purpose was much of a far bigger plan that was established before the creation of the world. Have you ever thought of that? This idea God had from the beginning.

[4 : 04] It went far above and beyond what the people on that original Palm Sunday would have known. You see, Jesus' journey and his purpose on earth wasn't just about the immediate circumstances.

Do we get bogged down in the immediate circumstances in our lives? Show of hands. Yeah, absolutely. But these events of this first Palm Sunday and this first Holy Week echoed into eternity. They still do. They resonate with all of us. And this journey wasn't just about earthly events that took place on the dusty streets of Jerusalem that day. The true significance of this day, this journey that Jesus was on, actually took place in the spiritual realm.

So while today marked a very real and historical triumphal entry, this is an historical event. No question. Jesus' journey wasn't about human approval or human recognition.

It was one of obedience to his father and, oh, by the way, your father, and fulfillment of his plan for redeeming the world.

[5 : 19] That's what this was about. So as we look at the events of Palm Sunday, we're going to look at three things. And I've said this before. Pastors are all about the three things.

Three tips. Three ideas. Three things I want you to remember. So here's three things we're going to look at this morning. Bite-sized junks. So as we look at the events that happened on that day in Jerusalem, we're going to consider these three symbols to help us remember the lessons of Palm Sunday.

A donkey, a palm branch, and rocks. So these are all pretty common items, right? But they remind us of the uncommon journey of Jesus.

They represent the ways that he went above and beyond our understanding or abilities so that we can come alive to his life.

So take a look at this animal. What do you think of when you see a donkey? Anyone? Stubborn? Adorable. Nice. Well, you knew that a donkey would be represented because he always shows up on Palm Sunday.

[6 : 30] So there's certainly something that donkeys are known for, right? And maybe stubbornness is one of your qualities, perhaps. Maybe it's one of your spiritual gifts, stubbornness.

Or maybe you prefer the sanitized version of determined or focused. So when we think of Jesus making a triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Jewish holy city, this was a big deal.

I think it's definitely logical for us to wonder, why a donkey? Have you ever thought of that? Have you ever thought of, well, if it was now, Jesus would have come in a Maserati or something, right? Like a prestige kind of mode of transportation. So why a donkey? Well, it's probably not what we would have chosen for him, right? I've thought of this ever since I was little.

Jesus came on a, really? Like that feels kind of anticlimactic. The Messiah's mode of transportation. Weird. Weird. So at first glance, it might seem that Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was maybe just a practical thing, right?

[7 : 36] He walked a lot. They walked everywhere, by the way, no Ubers in the first century. He was tired of walking. That makes sense. And there was a donkey available nearby.

Maybe that was it. There were no horses. All the camels had been reserved in advance. So a donkey was all that was left, maybe. Maybe. I don't know. But I think we need to burrow into this a little more.

The meaning of Jesus riding on a donkey went above and beyond the immediate or the practical. We need to recognize that. And so even in this detail, this lowly animal that we see here was part of God's bigger plan.

Absolutely. Because way back in Zechariah 9, verse 9 in the Old Testament, there was a prophecy, and you can look it up, that the Messiah would come riding on a young donkey.

And Matthew quoted Zechariah when he wrote about Palm Sunday. Matthew 21, verses 1 to 7. You can look it up. I'm reading from the NIV. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her.

[8 : 54] Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.

Here's the quote from Zechariah. Say to daughter Zion, See, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the foal of a donkey.

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.

So Jesus specifically wanted a donkey. And what might seem to us, and I think probably has over time, if you think about it, seems like a plan B, right?

It seems like a practical solution, making the best of an immediate situation. But it was actually the specific fulfillment of a thousand years of promise.

[9 : 55] Back to this little dude. So take another look at this donkey. You have to admit, he is pretty cute. But any suggestion of him being majestic or royal, does it feel like a little bit of a stretch?

So the highest ranking elite Roman soldiers of Jesus' day rode on big, powerful, fancy, majestic horses. That wore colors and armor and all sorts of things.

Those animals would have been a statement of power and prestige. No question. A stallion would have declared power and strength and authority.

And the donkey? Well, maybe not so much. Unexpected, right? But while the donkey can represent Jesus' humility, the ironic twist of the story is that riding on this donkey, Jesus was also proclaiming that he was the Messiah, the King.

This was a prophecy that he was fulfilling. The dedicated Jews that were gathered in Jerusalem at that time for the celebration of the Passover, they would have known this Old Testament prophecy all too well.

[11 : 17] So this simple act demonstrated a connection to the past by fulfilling this prophecy. And it also pointed to the future of Jesus as King.

And not an earthly King, as so many people imagined he would be, the Messiah would be, but as the true King who would reign forever in God's story.

God's story of love and forgiveness and grace and redemption. This act declared Jesus to be the Messiah.

There was no question here. The person that the Jews had been waiting for for centuries to recognize and acknowledge him. And here he came riding on a donkey.

Now let's talk about the palm branch. Have you ever been excited for something, really excited and anticipating what it might be like? We played a joke on our kids when they were little.

[12 : 21] Most of you know we're Disney fans and we like to try and go whenever we can. So one year, Michelle and I devised a devious plan to suggest to our kids that I was going on a business trip and that they might see me there and we might connect and we might go out for dinner maybe.

And then I gradually transitioned to or we could go for dinner maybe at Disneyland after spending the day there. And actually it is on YouTube, this video of their reaction and it's pretty funny.

So they were shocked, right? They had an expectation and then the reality of what their circumstances were going to be was mind-blowing for them.

So when you've anticipated something, have you thought about how much you might enjoy it? How much you were looking forward to it? But how many of us, when we plan something and look forward to something, well, expectations somehow don't wind up being there.

Maybe it doesn't work out the way you planned. Maybe it doesn't work out the way you hoped it would. Maybe your expectations were set so high for an Oilers game that you were just disappointed.

[13 : 34] You expected something to happen and the opposite happened and you cried a little. So we've all experienced situations like this, feelings like this, I believe, right?

So there's quite a bit of nodding. And I think this can help us better understand, you know, when you grab onto your own memories of things, to understand and empathize with what Jesus and his followers might have experienced on that Palm Sunday.

It's like, yeah, the Messiah, woo, I can't wait. He's going to be this and this and this and this. And he's the rabbi from Nazareth, of all places, on a donkey.

Oh dear. They thought their king had arrived, right? This was the expectation they had. And they could almost taste that victory, right? They were thinking that he would show up and this would be it.

This would be the big win. Turn to Matthew 28, verses 8 to 11. Again, the NIV. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

[14 : 45] The crowds went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, if you're looking at your Bible, shouted, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he, no audience participation, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest heaven. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this? The crowds answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. So the crowds waved palm branches. We read about it in scripture. These were a traditional symbol of, do you know? Victory.

This is where we get the name Palm Sunday, right? It's literally where it comes from. Maybe you couldn't put your finger on it. If not, I thought I'd give you a hand.

So the people spread their cloaks on the road for their new king and they were likely almost giddy with a sense of the freedom they were convinced this Messiah would bring.

[15:52] Finally, finally, their Messiah, their rescuer had come. Finally, he was going to kick the Romans' butts and overthrow their oppressors and set up the perfect kingdom for the Jews.

Right? Not exactly. The crowd would soon discover that this king wasn't exactly what they expected. He wasn't here to set up an earthly political kingdom.

Instead, he went above and beyond what the people imagined because he was a spiritual king, not an earthly one. And his victory, the ultimate victory over sin and death, would mean far more than just freedom from their current oppression.

Right? They had that very narrow mindset and perspective. Jesus as the Messiah would be the victory that restored all of creation.

That would make a way for every person in that time and for all eternity to be restored into a healthy relationship with God. Because this Messiah would throw off and defeat the oppression of their souls.

[17:12] So we can recognize that there were lots of people at that time who approved of Jesus. Right? Approved of him when he rode into Jerusalem.

They were the ones who were cheering. They were excited. And then there were many who did not approve of Jesus, including the Pharisees, other religious leaders, political people who were threatened by Jesus' popularity.

Humanity and human insecurity is easily threatened by someone who has more, is bigger, is tougher, is more powerful. We're shaken by that.

But none of those people who weren't fans of Jesus, and even the ones who were, didn't truly understand the magnitude of what Jesus was preparing to do.

Even Jesus' disciples didn't get it. And John 12, verse 16 says, at first, his disciples didn't understand all of this.

[18:19] Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. Perspective so often comes after the fact.

And as I've said many times over the years, I think sometimes we look at the followers of Jesus in the first century who were here when he was here and say, oh, I can't believe he was right in front of their face.

Like, how did they not understand the friend's perspective? 2,000 years of perspective, we need to give them a break. And I think we ourselves miss it sometimes, all too often.

So what about you? What do you expect from Jesus this Easter? Are you prepared for and open to his power and his victory?

Are you open to him exceeding your expectations? This next slide rocks. Palm Sunday is really a snapshot of all that represents Jesus' life.

[19:22] His love, his sacrifice, his commitment to a greater story and ultimately to God's greatest plan. So when he rode into Jerusalem, it wasn't to raise more support or gain more approval.

This wasn't a campaign rally where he tried to make sure enough people heard him and knew him and liked him to get him somehow into a position of power.

That wasn't his goal, not even remotely. And Jesus knew all too well what was coming. He knew that in the coming days he would die on a cross.

So only days later that same crowd that was shouting Hosanna would shout crucify him. And yet it didn't change Jesus' perspective or his actions.

And that should be astounding to us. Jesus' purpose was not dependent on human approval or praise. And frankly it's still not. Jesus made this clear as it's recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

[20:30] So if you turn to Luke 19 verses 37 to 40. When he came near the place where the road goes down to the Mount of Olives the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Does that echo to you the words of the angels when Jesus was born?

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus teacher rebuke your disciples. I tell you he replied if they keep quiet the stones will cry out.

Now I don't know about you but I've seen painted rocks. I've been to the mountains you know I love the mountains. I've even had a child who had a pet rock which I still don't understand but there you go.

But I've never heard stones actually cry out. In fact that's why I go to the mountains to avoid things being loud and intense. And that seems impossible right?

[21 : 41] Doesn't it? Unless it's a volcanic eruption. But that sounds like something you wouldn't take for granted. But that was Jesus' point. The importance of the day wasn't about who sang praises or who kept quiet.

That wasn't the point. It was about all creation which needed to be redeemed. All creation which was held under the curse of sin and death.

All creation which would ultimately praise God as its creator was at work to lift a curse. Make a way for the ultimate good he had created to be restored.

Jesus' purpose wasn't to be liked by a majority of people. It was actually to offer the ultimate sacrifice to pay the ultimate price.

His own life. So that everyone and all of creation could worship God in both freedom and in truth. So whether the people approved or disapproved recognized what was happening or had no idea Jesus' purpose never wavered.

[22 : 58] His path never changed. It was above and beyond earthly understanding. and as I touched on a minute or two ago today we have the privilege of both hindsight and perspective.

So we can see now what the disciples didn't what they couldn't see and we know the end of the story. And so as we watch the events of Holy Week begin to unfold we come alive to his life which was dedicated to God's ways.

ways that are above so far above and beyond our own. God's ways were above and are still above and beyond when Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday that first Palm Sunday and they still are today.

So there is no doubt that God is above and beyond us in every way and we've talked about the characteristics of God over time and so let's hope we recognize that.

but from above and beyond God sent his son to earth in a way we would have never imagined or would have planned or would have chosen Jesus came to us in humility he lived among us in solidarity and he sacrificed everything in obedience to his father.

[24 : 25] Perhaps the most well-known verse of all tells us for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

You've heard me say it before John 3.16 is the gospel in a nutshell. It's the entire gospel condensed into 16 unless my counting is wrong I think it's 16 words depending on the translation Jesus' life purpose was to bring God's love and life to the world.

His life his love bridged the gap provided a way for us to cross over into the holy presence of the God of the universe and not only to cross into his presence but to know him intimately and relate to him personally.

as Paul wrote in Ephesians 3.12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Who's them? Jesus. If you're here today wondering what this journey of holy week means for you don't miss God's invitation.

[25 : 52] He loves each one of us and invites us on this journey through holy week and into deeper relationship with him. The story that we're considering I said to someone the other night the story that we're considering this Easter is the same story as last Easter.

It'll be the same story as next Easter but the truth of it the power of it the significance of it friends will never change. It may be an unexpected journey for you may even be a surprising journey.

Consider Easter through different eyes this year if you can. What was once impossible because we were separated from God by sin and death is now possible when we come alive to the life of Jesus. Because of what he did we can respond as the writer of Hebrews directed Hebrews 4 16 let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Today we come alive to Jesus life and as we continue in our journey this holy week prepare to come alive through his sacrifice his death on Good Friday and to celebrate Jesus power through his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

[27 : 31] But just as Jesus entered that bustling city thousands of years ago and entered into the final stages of his work on earth let's invite him to enter into our hearts and lives right where we are.

He has no expectations for you. The standards I've said this many times the standards you set for yourself that you're trying to attain don't come from him.

Let's sow praises of Hosanna for the Messiah King that he is but let's also join him in humility and obedience with our eyes open and our hearts full of gratitude let's join Jesus in God's ultimate work of restoration healing and true life.

Amen.