

Jesus enters Jerusalem

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[0:00] On that background there, did you work out in the end where it was? Yeah, okay, that's Preston Circus.

I've got a different background this time for today, and you have to work out what it is. It might take you a while to work it out. Here is some questions that I think we could have as we come to this text.

Who is Jesus? Who is he exactly? The text gives us answers to this question. What did he come to do? What was it, if anything, that controlled his life?

Was he a man of purpose? Was he a man who had a purpose to his life which he followed through? And having thought about that and listened to what the Bible tells us, is there a response that we are to make?

Can we just go away having read these things, thought about them and say, well, that doesn't affect me at all? Or is there, in fact, a response that if we are to listen to these things with any sort of seriousness, it means that we have to react.

[1:21] We have to respond. And we are going to go through that whole text that I read. And the guidance for people doing sermons is there should really be one fundamental point.

But if you look at the form of this text, it seems to be lots of little incidents and lots of disconnected sayings. And the question, is there one main point, which is also tied up with the question, what is the background, what is visually the graphics about this week?

So you have to, I mean, it might take you quite a while to work out what that shape is. But keep working on it and we'll see whether it makes sense in the end. So we're going to follow through the story.

And we begin in verses 12 to 16 with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Now, it is Palm Sunday. So coming to this, I was really looking to get a whole lot out of this text.

But it's not very helpful because it's a very short account. So if I'd gone to some of the other Gospels, I would have had a lot more verses. There's just two verses, really.

[2:32] The next day, the great crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches, went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed is the King of Israel. Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. As it is written, do not be afraid. O daughter of Zion, see your king is coming. Seated on a donkey's colt.

Luke's Gospel has got 16 verses. John has only got two. So I spent quite a little while trying to work out how I could get 16 verses worth of sermon out of two verses.

And we had a discussion. We had a study session on this. I'm indebted to Ben who pointed out that this omits, this text omits most things, actually.

It omits the geography. Where did Jesus start off from? Which hill did he come down? It omits anything about how he got hold of the donkey. The other stories tell us about that.

[3:32] It doesn't say anything about cloaks being spread. I don't think that's a big part of the other stories. It doesn't say anything about how right it was. Some of the other stories do that.

It doesn't say the criticism of the Pharisees. Tell your disciples to be quiet. And Jesus saying, if I tell them to be quiet, the stones will cry out. It doesn't say anything about Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, which the other stories do.

And it doesn't say much about coming. It just mentions that once, verse 15, your king is coming. But it doesn't say much. So that's a little bit unsatisfactory on Palm Sunday.

I've only got two verses worth. And they don't contain a lot of the details that are interesting. And having thought, it takes a long time to think about these things.

I think maybe John deliberately doesn't give us much. Because he has something else to tell us instead. He has, as we would say, he has other fish to fry.

[4:34] And he doesn't spend a long time on the actual entry of Jesus. Let's work out what he does say. So the next day, a great crowd that had come for the feast.

So we have the feast, which is the Passover. So as we said the other day, the Passover is the national day of Israel. So any Swiss people here this time?

No? Okay. Swiss national day. A big day for Switzerland. We don't really have an English national day, do we? Have St. George's Day when you get Morris men.

But, I mean, that's pretty... Anyway, there we go. So we have the Passover. And I've put the temple there.

Because the temple is going to be the central focus of the Passover. And all the sacrifice of lambs. We have a great crowd. And it says that when they heard Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, they took palm branches and went out to meet him.

[5:39] So there they are with palm branches. And they've come out to meet Jesus. And they're shouting. The palm branches would have been a national symbol. A bit like a Union Jack.

So we're thinking about Israel. We're thinking triumph. We're thinking independence. When our children went to Greek school to learn Greek, here in Brighton, they had an open day.

And all the children performed various things. Sort of Greek dancing, Greek songs. And in the end, they said... What did they say? Eleptheria? Eleptheria elada.

Which means... Freedom of Greece! Freedom of Greece! Yes. And for Cypriots, that's... This is what's going on here.

It's freedom! Palm branches! Kings! That sort of thing going on. And they sing... Or they say, Hosanna! Which is a quote from the first song that we sang.

[6:44] Psalm 118. Save now! And so there they are saying these things. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And the psalm... Psalm 118 is about the... Well, one of the things it's about is the king coming triumphantly into his city and taking his place at the center of everything.

And they're saying, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. So it could be the pilgrims they're thinking about. Or it could be the king they're thinking about. And they do explicitly...

This is not a quote from the psalm, but this is what they say. Blessed is the king of Israel. So they see Jesus. Blessed is the king of Israel! He's the king.

And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it. So bring the donkey in. Because the donkey only comes in right at the end of this account, doesn't it? You wondered what that figure was doing.

[7:42] But here's the donkey. Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. And the writer of the gospel gives us the quote from Zechariah, which is what I began with.

Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion. See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.

It's not a full quote. It's a sort of summary. The fuller quote says... Well, it says all sorts of things. But it says that he's gentle and riding on a donkey.

He'll proclaim peace to the nations. And it says that he will bend Judah as I bend my bow. I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.

And the original quote is a curious mixture of peace and war. And I think you could say that it describes the war to end war.

[8:45] Was that the First World War of which that was said? It didn't end war, did it? It was a war to bring peace. But this king, as he's described in the ancient texts, has something about this about him, that he powerfully defeats his enemies so as to bring peace.

He brings the day or the war to end war. And that's what's quoted by the gospel writer. And that is about as much as he says about the entry into Jerusalem.

And he adds this in verse 16, that they didn't make sense of it. Verse 16. At first his disciples did not understand all this.

Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him. And that they had done these things to him.

So the disciples did not understand. And there are the disciples not understanding. And there was a crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to bear witness, to spread the word.

[9:59] Many people, because they had heard he had given this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees say, This is getting us nowhere.

This is all going wrong. The whole world is going after him. Now I think they're probably exaggerating. But there's a truth there, isn't it?

The whole world, not just meaning our nation, but internationally, the whole world is going after him. So the Pharisees are there.

I put them with funny hats to describe the Pharisees. They're saying, No, we don't want this. So that's the scene of the coming in of Jesus into Jerusalem. That's what's described to us.

And just put that scene on one side. And what do we get from it? Well, we get that Jesus had been cautious previously. He'd been hiding himself.

[10:57] It says in, did I give a verse? Verse 1154. Yes, it says, Jesus no longer moved publicly among the Jews.

Instead, he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. So Jesus tactically had withdrawn from public gaze. He'd been sort of cautiously making himself scarce.

But this is very public. So he's moving to a sort of public statement, like a confrontation. And we also get from this that the time and place is incendiary with king, kingdom, victory ideas.

Incendiary meaning ready to catch fire. Yes? That's what I mean by incendiary. I hope it's the right word. But everybody's really excited.

Freedom! King! That's what they were thinking. And everybody's filled with these thoughts. The crowd pick up on this. And Jesus, who gets the donkey, he must have known that they'd put two and two together.

[12:09] This is like Zechariah's prophecy. And John, who gives us the commentary, says, yeah, that is correct. Zechariah's prophecy. He is the king. But John does not push this button any further at this point because the question this raises is, okay, he's king.

Have we got the right idea about what sort of king he is? So rather than just go king, king, king, let's just hold on a minute. What sort of king?

What are we to expect of this king? What is this king's career going to be? And it's easy to make a mistake on this because verse 16, it says, the disciples themselves did not understand this.

They did not understand this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they know, realize, understand these things had been written about him and they'd done these things to him.

They only put it all together rightly after Jesus was glorified. And I want to pause on this word glorified because it's going to come up and ask, what does glorified mean?

[13:31] What does John mean by glorified? What does he understand by this? So I put three question marks because glory is going to mean something particular which we'll see in a moment.

Okay, you with me so far? You worked out what that thing is yet? Don't tell anybody. But there's something that sort of casts a shadow over the whole of this story.

Don't tell anybody. I don't want any clues or anything like that. And we could also say that for some people, the Pharisees, this is really the last straw.

This is the trigger for rejection of Jesus. And I wouldn't want to be so naive as to think that everybody sitting here is thinking, this is all wonderful.

I agree totally with everything. Because in your heart, you might be thinking, I'm hearing this story. I'm hearing this church this morning. But I'm not convinced by this. In fact, the more I hear, the more I don't like it.

[14:35] If one of these Pharisees had been sitting here, that's exactly what they'd be thinking. The more I hear about this, the less I like it.

And the more I reject Jesus.

For some people, it was the trigger for rejecting Jesus. So that's what I'm going to say about the Palm Sunday bit. I want to go on in the text and see what happens now. So in verse 20, I can't see why I put 20 to 17.

I think I might have put 20 to 27. Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee.

So this would have been, I'm thinking, a Greek-speaking area. Or at least they would also speak Greek. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request.

Sir, they said, we want to see Jesus. We desire to see Jesus. So they come, and they go on to Andrew, and Andrew and Philip in turn tell Jesus.

[15:39] So, little sequence of events there. And Jesus responds to this in verse 23 with a statement about the significance of this time.

So the time marker in verse 23 is the hour. Okay? There is a time marker. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

So the alarm clock that hadn't been ringing is now ringing. The hour has come, but for what? For the Son of Man to be glorified. What does he mean by glorified? What is going to happen now that the alarm clock has gone off? What event does this trigger?

And he explains it. He didn't actually tell us as such, but he explains it with another picture of a seed. And he says, it's like a seed.

[16:49] Unless a grain of wheat, he begins it by saying, Amen, Amen. I tell you the truth. So, solemn statement now. Here is a profound statement. Like a grain of wheat, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone.

Unless it falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. only a single seed. But if it dies, if it dies, it produces much fruit, many seeds.

That's the truth in agriculture, isn't it? Farmers would be completely out of work if that didn't happen. You sow one seed, you get harvest of many seeds. And he says, this is a key to understanding the glory that's going to happen.

It's a key to understanding what happens at this hour. And his story is about one seed. That instead of saying, I want to stay a seed, I want to stay in this nice packet, I want to stay on this nice shelf here in this gardening shed.

and the seed said, okay, I'll die. Put me in the ground, put me in the earth, and I'll die. That's what the seed says.

[18:13] And it raises this question, what does Jesus mean? What is the hour? What is the glory that produces this fruit? The seed dies in the earth.

So what is Jesus referring to? So I put half the answer. He is referring to death on the cross.

You think on the cross. Yeah, let's hold that thought. Is this what he's talking about here when he says the hour has come? The Son of Man will be glorified.

Is he actually referring to his death on the cross? Let's move on. He goes on to say, the man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

So Jesus is referring to himself here, isn't he? First of all, he's saying, I'm like this seed. And here is the thinking behind this. If somebody clings to their own life, like the seed saying, I want to stay in this packet, it's nice here in this packet, I want to stay on the shelf here.

[19:30] If somebody says, I want my life to stay secure, I don't want anybody messing about with my life, if somebody says that, the man who loves his life, Jesus says the truth of the universe is that you lose your life by saying that.

God's love. But Jesus says the way is to reject, to hate his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

So just do the word hate here, it's not so much a degree of emotion, so much as a choice between two opposite things. you either cling to your life and say, I'm not going to have this messed about by anybody, let alone God, or you say, okay, I will offer my life.

I will put second my life in this world to God's purpose eternally. And he says, if somebody does that, then they gain, what does he say, will keep it for eternal life.

And Jesus is saying this is the principle and this is what he's doing like the seed, but this is what he's doing in terms of death on the cross.

[21:13] Which will sort of make a bit of sense. I don't know, anybody getting a clue what that might be? But anyway, don't just think about that. So Jesus says, this is the principle that's guiding me.

And by extension, it's a principle that my followers ought to have. And then he says, verse 26, whoever serves me must follow me.

So anybody who wanted to serve Jesus Christ would have to follow the same pattern of thinking, the same pattern of action. And then he says, if you follow me, you are where I am.

Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. So I take that to be a statement from Jesus that here is a way to have the presence of Jesus or to be in the presence of Jesus.

For Christians, that's a very desirable outcome. How can I be living in the presence of Jesus? How can I be in the presence of Jesus Christ?

[22:38] And interesting that the answer he gives is not actually find a quiet space and read your Bible and pray, which is a good way of finding the presence of Jesus. But what he actually says is the way to find the presence of Jesus is to follow me in your lifestyle, in your attitude toward your life and towards service, to say, I'm not going to say to God, no, you're not touching this, but rather to embrace a sacrificial life, I'm putting that the right way, and he says to follow Jesus in this, and if you follow me in this, you'll be where I am.

that's quite a radical thought actually. And then he goes on to say, if you serve me, my father will honor the one who serves me, that if we so serve, we will be honored by the father, which is a remarkable thing, for the father to say of such and such a person, they are worthy people, I esteem these people, I rate highly these people.

And he says, what's the key to that? The key to that is following Jesus in this exact point of not clinging on to our life in this world, but being prepared to lose our lives in following Jesus.

So that's quite a radical thought, and you might think, well, that's a bit of philosophy. I think we could say it's actually much more than philosophy.

So I think we've got something here which is a model for Christian living. So I've put those three question marks.

[24:49] What did we say the three question marks, Wills? Did we? Death on three question marks. The cross.

I think actually all of this is about the cross. And I think he's saying here is the cross as the very pattern for Christian living.

And you might say, well, I don't really quite know how that works out. well, let's try and spin that out a little bit further. He's saying that this is a lifestyle in which one is not protecting oneself all the time, but if you like, forgetting oneself all the time.

Not holding on to life in this world, but being prepared to lose that in following Jesus.

So I suppose you could say if a Christian has to be a martyr, you could say it would be a very clear example of following Jesus in the cross.

[25:58] martyrdom happens to some Christians in some places, but this is for all Christians everywhere. So let me give you an example.

In marriage, for example, so if you're a married person, you're married every day of your life, and every moment of that. Sorry, every day of your married life, and every moment of that. And there's a way in which in Christian living, there's a very practical way, a very practical situation in which to say, it's not me first all the time.

I have to live sacrificially. life. And there's a very down-to-earth example of how the cross can impact on our lifestyle.

So just in daily life, Jesus is saying, if you serve me, you'll follow me.

You'll follow me in this. This will mark the whole of your approach to life. And if you follow me in this, you'll be in my presence.

[27:18] And if you serve me in this way, you'll be honoured by the Father. So there's a very, very radical and powerful application of what

Jesus is saying.

Let's move on. Now what does Jesus think about this hour, verse 27? Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour. No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name. So we're still talking about the hour, and the hour is the hour of this shape here.

That's what he's thinking about. The subject hasn't changed. And what does Jesus think about this hour? He says, should I pray, Father, save me from this hour?

So Jesus has just come into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, everybody's been cheering on him, victory, freedom, nationalism, and Jesus can see this thing looming ahead.

[28:31] He says, shall I ask God to change the plan, to save me from this hour? Because he says, this hour that I'm thinking of is a deeply troubling hour.

Verse 27, now my heart is troubled. We get this in the Garden of Gethsemane and the other accounts, don't we?

Jesus saying, Jesus was a very brave man. he wasn't just anxious about nonsense like we so often are, but here's Jesus saying, what I see ahead of me is deeply, deeply troubling.

Deeply troubling. So troubling that I am tempted to say, Father, change the plan, change the direction, because that is just not bearable.

Jesus says, no, I'm not going to pray that. What I'm going to pray is something different, because I have come heading towards this hour.

[29:43] That's why I've come to go to this place here. That is the specific reason that I came. And what I will pray is, Father, glorify your name.

And just remind ourselves what happens in this hour. It's the hour of the cross. But he says, I will ask that the Father glorifies his own name in this hour.

This hour will be an hour of glory. This event will be glorious with the Father's glory. And the Father, it's fascinating, isn't it, that the Father gives a concrete, specific answer to that prayer.

Yes, I will. I have glorified my name and I will glorify it again with a voice like thunder. And we might ask the question, where is the Father most, I put in the word most, I think that is a correct word there to put, but where is the Father glorified?

glorified? And the answer is, in the thing that we've been talking about all the way through, which is this thing. Yes, the cross. Where is the Father, I put in the word most, I think it's correct, where is the Father most glorified?

[31:14] Mount Sinai? I would say, I don't know, run out of thoughts on this, on Mount Carmel, where you had the fire coming down, and I'm going to say that according to John's gospel, the place where you most see the glory of God, the glory of the Father, is there where a man dies on the cross?

Let's move on. Verse 30, no, I've done verse 30, no, I haven't done verse 30, this voice was for your benefit, not mine.

Now, so now Jesus uses the word now, he doesn't talk about the hour, he's talking about the now, now, you know, in these next, doesn't mean now this exact second, but now in the next turn of events, or the turn of events that we've already started, now, well, what is going to happen now?

He says, now is the judgment on this world. When Jesus does this, that's judgment on this world.

What is happening when this man is nailed to that piece of wood for those hours? And he's saying that the actions that happen at the end of the world are brought forward into time and space to that hill outside the city of Jerusalem.

[32:58] What is happening is the judgment of this world. What will happen at the end of the world? Well, the answer is that sin gets what it deserves.

In a nutshell, that's what will happen at the end of the world. Sin gets what it deserves. Judgment. And what's happening on the cross is exactly that. Where does it happen?

On the cross. What's happening as Jesus dies on the cross? The same thing that happens at the end of the world, brought forward into time, and focused on one person, so that his people might go free.

Now, is judgment on this world, says Jesus. And now, verse 31, the prince of this world is driven out. This is the moment when, I think it's our hymn, says, the accuser's power is taken away. Because the accuser, Satan, the prince of this world, says, see those Christians, see what failures they are, see how inconsistent they are, see what sins they commit.

[34:17] They are not fit to be the people of God. I accuse them, get rid of them, that's what the adversary says.

And when Jesus dies on the cross, the accuser's power to say that is taken away and is cast out. Because Jesus says, the reason is, I have suffered for those people.

I have borne in myself, in my personal body on the tree. I've taken their sins. And your power to accuse them is now rubbish.

And where does it happen? At the cross. And he also says, verse 32, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all, he doesn't say men, it just says all, to myself.

He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. Lifted up from the earth, he said this to show the kind of death he was going to do, that's crucifixion, the lifting up thing.

[35:28] but it has the other side too, doesn't it, of lifting up as exalting. And he says, when I'm lifted up, when I die on the cross, this action will have a totally remarkable drawing power.

power. When I'm lifted up, I will draw all sorts of people to me. What a remarkable statement to Jesus.

What has the most drawing power to bring people to God? There's lots of things that have attractive power, maybe your winsome smile, maybe your testimony to a friend or family member, maybe the social track record of the church or something like that.

But he says, actually, the real thing is this, the cross of Jesus Christ, when people are told about that, when they, as it were, see that all over again, the king on the cross, dying for our sins, that is the most attractive thing.

And when that happens, I will draw people to myself who are Jews and Romans and Greeks and Italians and everybody. Well, let's move on to the end.

[37:08] The crowd have an objection, which Jesus doesn't really deal with, but he now says, you are going to have the light a little while longer.

Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.

And when he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. So here is a remarkable appeal from Jesus. People are objecting and they're getting stuck and going around in circles and Jesus says, you don't have much longer.

Here I am, this is my public ministry, I'm here walking your streets, I'm here and you can see me and I'm going to die on the cross.

You will not have me much longer. I'm here at the moment. This is about to come to an end. And he says, this is light, you are going to have the light just a little while longer.

[38:15] He provided light for them. And he could even say that the cross is the brightest shining of that light. And he says, this is my appeal, walk while you have the light.

If it's dark and you have a torch, you can walk in the light of the torch, can't you? before the torch battery runs out, walk, move, walk in that light.

And maybe there's somebody here this morning who is thinking, what am I going to do about Jesus? And Jesus says, walk.

Take what I've given you, take what I've shown you, walk in the light of it, do the next step, and the step after that, walk in the light. While you've got it, you might not always have that opportunity.

Walk in the light. And he says, trust in the light, put your trust in the light, verse 36, put your trust in the light while you have it. It's a call to faith. Walking by a torchlight does require some faith, doesn't it?

[39:32] Because you don't know what's just outside the torchlight. You can see some things and you can see some things to avoid. And you need to trust that and put your next foot forward as it were.

And Jesus is saying something like that, isn't he? Trust. Trust me. Walk with me. Go take the next step in faith.

And he says, and so become sons of light. And I think a son of light is probably probably somebody who is so part of the family of light that they too have become little lights themselves.

Little Miss Sunshines. So here's a question for us to close with. So this does demand a response from us.

It's saying which way are you now going to step? Are you going to walk into the light or into the darkness? darkness? Shall we trust the light of Jesus or shall we mistrust that?

[40:43] And say I'm not going to take any steps. I'm not really quite confident of what I'm seeing. Shall we trust or mistrust? And according to the way Jesus puts it, if we do so, we become light people.

See what I mean? People from whom the light of Jesus shines in some sense. So I say little Miss Sunshine, Mr.

Sunshine, Miss Sunshine, Mrs. Sunshine, Miss Sunshine, if you're into Ms. But the light of Christ shining, that's what he's talking about.

And that's, we've gone through the text, it is all about the cross, that was what the background was, it was there all the time, that was the total theme of everything, that unified the whole passage, it's all about the cross, and it's different aspects, and it ends up with this challenge to walk in the light of the cross.

Let's sing together, because we may not always have the chance, is the last bit. So in a moment we shall sing Ride On in Majesty, and the song talks about the waving palm branches, and the fact that there is a triumph, and there is a sacrifice, and the father is waiting to exalt the son, and that the son goes through pain to power and reign.

[42:32] That's what it says in the last verse. So I have remembered, and I will stop for a moment. It would be wonderful if somebody or one or two people might like to turn our thoughts from this passage into prayer and praise before we close by singing.